TEXTUAL CONSTRUCTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: EXAMPLES FROM KISWAHILI NOVELS

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Abstract

This article discusses dominant discourses in the field of violence against women[1] as articulated in Kiswahili novel. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis, the article illustrates the discursive strategies employed by Kiswahili novelists to explain the problem of violence against women. It reveals that the novelists foregrounded dominant discourses which exonerate abusive men from responsibility while placing responsibility on women. The author argues that this perspective plays a vital role in resisting feminist efforts to situate the social problem in patriarchal framework and strategically holds back efforts for ending violence against women in Tanzanian society. The main implication of this perspective is to normalize violence against women and the patriarchal system that sustain the abuse.

1.0 Introduction

A growing awareness of violence against women as a significant social problem has been attributed to the consciousness raised by the women's movement and subsequent feminist initiatives that have shifted the discussion of violence against women out of the private realm (Richie, 2005). Not surprisingly, violence against women in Tanzania has received increased attention from media, feminist groups and NGOs, prompting related formal research, educational material seminars and workshop (McCloskey, Williams & Larsen, 2005). Despite these efforts violence against women remains a significant problem in Tanzania (Tanzania National Bureau of Statistic, 2011; WHO, 2006). This article however, is not about the direct exposure to violence against women, rather it is about violence against women that has a physical and/or sexual manifestation, psychological and financial abuse as discursively constructed and represented in selected Kiswahili fiction[2]. For this study, violence against women is defined as any act of violence against women that results in, or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion

[1] In this paper domestic violence has the same meaning as violence against women.

[2] Kiswahili fiction in this study refers to novels written by Tanzanians about Tanzanian society using Kiswahili language.

or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life (United Nations, 1993).

This focus on fictional representations may seem surprising; however, research shows that fictional and non-fictional works about social problems have the same influence on readers' perceptions (Strange & Leung, 1999), as factual and fictional information is not automatically processed in a different mental category (Gerrig, 1993). Thus, works of fiction, particularly novels, are used to understand social issues (Cosbey, 1997) and to ascertain the relationship between the individual and society (Cosbey, 1997; Fitzgerald, 1992). According to Cosbey, novels provide the opportunity for readers to understand characters' behaviour and the reasons for their actions in detail, which widens their understanding about people's behaviour. Additionally, the ability of fiction to address both personal and societal problems from different angles, enables readers to comprehend societal problems from different perspectives (Cohen, 1998). Cohen describes fiction as "a source of important truth that is generally hidden from ourselves and the society we live in" (Cohen, 1998, p. 172). Park (1982) concurs with this view, yet suggests that fiction reveals truthful realities which cannot be disclosed in scientific or philosophical discourses. According to Gold (1988), the truth coded in experiences found in novels provides awareness to individuals about what is happening in a society. This suggests that through novels, we can learn about the complex nature of violence against women as a social problem and ascertain its diverse manifestations and multilayered nature.

2.0 Theoretical Perspective for the Analysis of the Selected Novels

Although there are various ways of looking at societal problems, our analysis of the selected novels is guided by feminist poststructuralist theory, developed by Weedon (1997) as an expansion of Foucault's work (1989), which considers language as a discursive practice. Feminist poststructuralist theory shows how power and social relations are constructed through discourses and maintained in a society, and offers alternative ways of deconstructing these constructions (Davies & Gannon, 2005; Weedon, 1997). St. Pierre explains that through discourse, "language does not simply point to pre-existing things and ideas but rather helps to construct them and by extension, the world as we know it" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 483). Foucault asserts that our identities, experiences, thoughts, and feelings are socially constructed and that the primary site of such construction is in the discursive exchanges that occur between people using the discourses that are culturally available (Burr, 1995; McNay, 1992). Consequently, discourse is where social structures and ways of thinking are modelled and patriarchal interests are maintained (Weedon, 1997). Subsequently, when particular discourse achieve dominance is taken as a natural way of thinking and acting in the world (Weedon, 1997). Therefore, analysing the

dominant discourses which sustain violence against women is particularly essential, as individuals draw on these discourses when constructing their understandings of, and responses to, violence against women in their own lives and in their communities.

This article is guided by O'Neill's (1998) work which identifies five distinct predominant discourses underlying various theories in the field of domestic violence scholarship within the social sciences. These are the discourses of Medical Pathology, Romantic Expressive Tension, Liberal Humanist Instrumentalism, Tabula Rasa Learning, and Socio-Systemic Discourse.

Within the medical pathology discourse, domestic violence is constructed as being an abnormal phenomenon explained through pathological causes of behaviour, of which violence against women is considered to be one symptom (O'Neill, 1998). In this discourse the perpetrator is not to be responsible for the violence and can only manage his symptoms to the best of his ability. Among the reasons for violence cited in the research are mental disturbance and personality disorders thought to generate difficulty in controlling anger (O'Neill, 1998) and alcoholism and drug abuse (Gelles & Straus, 1988). Thus, perpetrators of violence are discursively positioned as sick individuals who need help.

The discourse of romantic expressive tension, constructs domestic violence as a loss of control due to a high degree of inner tension or personal frustration caused by factors such as unemployment, problems at work, lack of life skills or education and relationship conflict (Michelle & Weaver, 2003). This discourse positions the offender as being subject to powerful forces, over which he has little control.

In contrast to romantic expressive tension discourse, liberal humanist instrumentalism discourse constructs domestic violence as an intentional means to exert authority and control over women, and also as a goal directed behaviour exercised by conscious rational agents to obtain a particular end (O'Neill, 1998). Consequently, men consciously use violence as a powerful technique to enforce male domination and female subordination. Social-systemic discourse asserts that domestic violence is the product of cultural norms, values and institutional practices in the society (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; O'Neill, 1998). In terms of this discourse, beliefs and values surrounding masculinity and femininity within the culture and learned very early in life, shape and constitute the problem of violence against women (O'Neill, 1998).

The discourse of tabula rasa learning is mainly based on social-psychological theories of social learning (Bandura, 1977) which describe violent behaviour as learned through observation, experience and conditioning (O'Neill, 1998). From this perspective violent men are viewed as relatively passive agents, located within the powerful forces of cultural norms and beliefs, or as being products of their learning experience which place the violent incidents outside the individual's responsibility.

These dominant discourses comprise the framework through which I have approached the analysis of how domestic violence is constructed in Kiswahili novels. In order to understand how the authors depict violence against women in the novels, I approached each text as a "whole"; that is, the authors' illustrations of violence against women within a text were examined for ambiguities, contradictions and tensions conveyed explicitly and implicitly. In this way it was possible to make visible discursive strategies employed by the authors in articulating causes and consequences of violence against women and uncover which discourses are privileged, marginalized as well as highlighting the potential effects of these textual negotiations. I argue that analysing the dominant discourses which sustain violence against women is particularly essential, as individuals draw on these discourses when constructing their understandings of, and responses to, violence against women in their own lives and in their communities.

3.0 Method

To understand the construction of violence against women as articulated in Kiswahili novels, I used Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA). FDA is concerned with how dominant discourses are organised, regulated and administered in social life, particularly in terms of governing what people can do or say (Wiggins & Riley, 2010). It looked at the specific details of the discursive practices which constitute dominant discourses in order to uncover the particular regime of power and knowledge at work in the wider society (Weedon, 1997). In this article I used FDA to uncover the author's techniques and patterns in constructing violence against women in the novels, particularly where responsibility is assigned for the causes and consequences to different actors and strategies used to foreground and/or marginalize discourses within the field of violence against women.

This paper is based on representative sample of 5 novels, cutting across the three decades from 1975 to 2004. This was the period when feminist groups in developing countries began to explore the nature of violence against women to reveal the underlying causes of sexual harassment and domestic violence (Duff, 1995; Kilpatrick, 2004). A total of 45 novels with different themes relating to violence against women were included in the population sample. Then, a stratified

random sampling technique was used to select 5 of these novels to be analysed in this paper. To do this, the 45 selected novels were divided into three homogeneous subgroups based on publication dates: 1975 - 1984, 1985 - 1994, and 1995 - 2004. Then, two novels from the first cluster and one novel form the second and third cluster were selected randomly, making a total of 4 novels. In the sample, two novels were selected from the first cluster (1975 - 1984) because in the sample there were many novels with different types of violence against women. The next section focuses on the depiction of various forms of domestic violence in Kiswahili novels.

4.0 Construction of Violence against Women in Selected Novels

Individual and societal factors have been documented in research as the "causes"[3] of domestic violence. Kiswahili novelists depict domestic violence as emanating from individual factors, such as the use of alcohol, infidelity, and jealousy, and societal factors including poverty, gender socialisation and men's power. In their constructions, discourses of medical pathology and romantic expressive tension, as well as socio-systemic discourses, dominate the narratives, while liberal humanist discourse features only in a few cases.

Drawing on discourses of medical pathology and romantic expressive tension, Balisidya (1975), for example, constructs wife battering as being "caused" by poverty, which manifests itself in the excessive use of alcohol. In the novel for example, Balisidya describes Machupa's excessive use of alcohol after being unable to take care of his family as the cause of wife battering and taking his wife's money by force, as the following extract illustrates:

> His wife and children joined him. Life became tough, as there were twice as many to support. He couldn't afford it. Consequently, Machupa started drinking excessively. … When he finished his salary he quarrelled with his wife, beating her and forcefully taking all her money (Balisidya, 1975, p. 61).

Balisidya describes the consequences of abuse in Machupa's marriage as family breakdown - "divorce." However, this has more effect on the mother because she

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[3] Few studies on violence against women suggest direct "causes," but more often indentify "associations" between variables. Nonetheless, in terms of how that research comes to be understood and rearticulated within the wider public, "causality" is often attributed to factors associated with domestic violence. Discourse analysis in this study thus seeks to identify such causes.

has the responsibility for the children. Generally, in many of African societies including Tanzania, family breakdown creates more problems for a woman as she may have insufficient resources to take care of the children. Later on, the novelist describes how Machupa blames his wife for the separation, as she allowed herself to have many children:

> "My problem," ... Machupa said "... is the children. The problem was children, too many children. I decided to divorce her with her daily problems [children]. If she was alone, Oh! My lovely wife, I love her a lot, we would live together and enjoy. But, Oh! She had been a prostitute. Let her go to hell, who cares?" (Balisidya, 1975, p. 62).

Having too many children, which contributes to his life's hardship, is implicitly depicted as another cause of wife battering in this novel. This depiction is consistent with McCloskey et al.'s (2005) study of the power imbalance in Tanzanian families, which reported that women who had had five or more children were at a high risk of violence. These authors argue that life adversity, which manifests itself in economic dependency, is the main factor for domestic violence.

Elaborating on economic and social abuse of women, Mohamed (1980) in *Utengano* features the story of a man, Maksuudi, who abuses his first wife, Mwanasururu, by beating and confining her to the house because he wants to control his wife's wealth. The author explains that Mwanasururu has properties, which she inherited from her father before marrying Maksuudi. However, Maksuudi becomes unhappy seeing his wife controlling the properties. Consequently, he uses his power to get hold of the properties for himself. Maksuudi reveals this as Kabi (Mwanasururu's son) tells his girlfriend (Maimuna) what happened to his mother:

> "This man [Maksuudi] was a greedy person … he [Maksuudi] abused my mother by beating her and confining her to the house. My mother has a little wealth. It was not a lot; she inherited twenty cows from her father and a small cashew farm. Besides that, she had golden ornaments and six thousand Tanzanian shillings in the bank. Then, her husband tried to persuade her to give him her wealth, but when he failed he used brute power. Right after getting her wealth he divorced my mother". (Mohamed, 1980, p. 164).

Feminist researchers have long argued that violence against women is a means of accomplishing a certain goal (Dobash & Dobash, 1992). This is apparent in the narration, as Maksuudi's desire to gain his wife's properties is achieved through

violence. He abuses his wife physically by beating her, socially by isolating her from the public sphere and economically by taking her wealth. After accomplishing his goal, Maksuudi divorces his first wife. Explicitly, the author positions the perpetrator as being fully responsible for his abusive actions. As a consequence of wife-battering and economic abuse, Mwanasururu is shown to endure suffering throughout her life. She becomes an alcoholic and a prostitute. She becomes pregnant and has a son (Kabi). As a result of her excessive drinking, Mwanasururu becomes mentally unstable and one day she tries to rape her son. He runs away and is hit by a car. Badly injured, one of his legs has to be amputated. Finally, Mwanasururu dies because of depression. According to the narration, nothing occurred to Maksuudi after he accomplished his goal. Discussing violence against women in Africa, Kimani (2007) asserts that men's notion of using violence to get what they want from women is maintained by the culture. She argues that violence against women is rooted in the culture and norms which privilege men and devalue women. Therefore, it is not surprising when the author leaves Maksuudi unpunished, as he lives according to cultural norms.

As noted by various authors (see for example Dauer & Gomez, 2006) abusive men control women, particularly wives, by preventing them from participating in economic and social activities and by restricting their ability to fight for change, while themselves enjoying all these with their friends and/or with other women. This is apparent in *Utengano*, as Mohamed explains how Maksuudi controls his second wife, Tamima. He confines his wife and his daughter to the house while having an extramarital affair with another woman, Kazija. The author explains that when Maksuudi's daughter becomes tired of living in seclusion she decides to escape a few hours after her mother has had a new baby. Learning that his daughter has run away, Maksuudi punishes his wife:

> "You … spiteful woman, you deceitful woman"… "Truly today I will beat you, to death."… "Will you explain or not?" "I will punish you severely," … "Where is Maimuna, I'm asking, what happened? … You had planned for my daughter to leave...? Where is Maimuna?" Using his walking stick, Maksuudi beat Tamima on her head. Tamima cried loudly and fell down. … Blood was flowing where she had been beaten by the walking stick (Mohamed, 1980, p. 47).

In this example, Mohamed depicts violence against women as an expression of men's power and women's subordinate position in society. Research has shown that violence against women in African societies is viewed as an acceptable way for men to punish women for perceived disobedience (Kim & Motsei, 2002; Wood,

2004). Failure to fulfil the traditional female role of taking care of children is used to rationalise wife battering. Wood's (2004, p. 563) study reveals that men think "it is a man's right to use violence to discipline and control women." This behaviour of disciplining a woman, is supported and normalised by society, and a man who manages to punish his wife for not meeting the required traditional role is praised as a good man who is "keeping order in his home" (Kim & Motsei, 2002, p. 1246). According to the narrative, Tamima does not know where her daughter is because she disappeared a few minutes after Tamima had given birth to a new baby. Yet, her husband punishes her for not taking sufficient care of her daughter and accuses her of having aided her escape.

Later in the narration, Mohamed details how Maksuudi is challenged by his former mistress, Kazija, in a community meeting while contesting community leadership. Kazija describes what he did to his wives, as well as his infidelity. She also explains his misconduct when he was a district commissioner and argues that he will not be a good leader. People become very upset and want to beat him. He gets arrested by the police and taken into custody. Subsequently, he is jailed for two years. Although it is not clear if he is jailed because of domestic violence, the author's depiction of Maksuudi's abusive actions toward his wives seems to challenge the dominant view that violence against women is a private matter.

Feminist studies demonstrate that inequality between the roles assigned to men and women within the family cause injustice and often violence against women. Women's subordinate position in the family and the gendered division of labour causes women to be dependent, and this increases their vulnerability to violence. This is apparent in *Ua la Faraja*, as Mkufya (2004) describes how Ngoma uses his power to abuse his wife economically, as he is the only one who earns money and is the decision maker in the family. His wife – Tabu and their children suffer while her husband uses his money for drinking and conducting extramarital affairs. When his wife challenges his behaviour, he abuses her verbally and threatens to divorce her. Here, his son Juma narrates the story to his uncle:

> "My father did not care for my mother, even to bother to give her money for food or other expenses for the family. … When he gets money it is for drinking and having sexual affairs with other women ... Every day he quarreled with my mother because of his unfaithful behaviour. My father has four commuter buses. When my mother asks him where all the money goes, my father says he wants to buy another commuter bus. ...When my mother questions the value of all the wealth when the children have no clothes to wear, they are going just with ragged clothing, he chastises my mother that she does not know what development is. He threatens her that

> he will marry another woman who knows how to find money... (Mkufya, 2004, p. 140) ".

The author states clearly that Ngoma deliberately abuses his wife, by exercising control over financial decisions, and is therefore culpable for his actions.

As noted by Weedon (1997) and Boonzaier (2006), the available discourses and subject positions offered shape the way women interpret different types of violence in their lives. These discourses open up different subject positions through which women justify staying or leaving the abusive partner. This is apparent in the following extracts, as Tabu, a victim of verbal and economic abuse, has internalised gendered discourses in her justification for continuing to live with her abusive husband. Tabu decides to stay, justifying her decision based on her socialisation, culture and religion:

> [Tabu] gave justification for not leaving as her father, mother and relatives blaming her for breaking her marriage with Ngoma. Also she was afraid that society would blame her for leaving her husband to prostitutes and her children to suffer because of their parents' separation. Furthermore, she was afraid that God would condemn her for breaking her marriage oath, which she took on the day of their wedding. These excuses encouraged Tabu to stay with her abusive husband (Mkufya, 2004, p. 127).

The meaning of experiences is not automatically reflected in language, but it is through language that we can communicate to others how we feel and think (Parker, 1999; Weedon, 1997). In this extract, the author describes Tabu's life experiences through traditional gendered discourses of culture and religion, which depict a woman as being responsible for the survival of her marriage and the well-being of the children. Failure to achieve, this means she brings shame to the community and will not be respected as a complete woman (Wood, 2004). Furthermore, the author uses religion to rationalise Tabu staying in an abusive relationship. As Tabu relies on traditional gendered discourses, she legitimises and tolerates the abusive marriage. Feminist scholars have argued that discourses have "produced certain knowledge and truth about women that have become 'natural' and self-evident" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 499). Hence, for Tabu, the traditional discourses that assert women are born to undergo suffering in the service of family and community seem to her to be the "truth." Research on violence against women has noted that women who accept traditional gender discourses that link their worth to having a husband are at risk of believing that they are responsible for sustaining their marriage, even if the husband is violent (Cavanagh, 2003; Wood, 2001). Indeed, Mkufya's depiction is

similar to Kim and Motsei's (2002) study which reveals that parents and relatives insist a woman stay in her marriage and that "she should die at her husband's place" (p. 1247). These discourses allow women to rationalise what is happening in their marital life and to tolerate the violence.

However, when Tabu realises that she has been infected with HIV/AIDS by her husband, she regrets upholding the traditional gender discourses. She also blames society for encouraging women to tolerate an abusive relationship that has put her in a vulnerable situation, as the following extract illustrates:

> When she realised that she had endured more suffering because of her tolerance of the abusive relationship, she cried a lot. She regretted and was unable to forgive herself for her stupidity. She condemned society's justification that encouraged her to stay in the abusive relationship. More importantly, she condemned the slavery, oppression, and unfaithfulness which are hidden in the marriage institution (Mkufya, 2004, pp. 127-128).

Surprisingly, while in the above extract the author appears to implicitly challenge the wider social structure for encouraging women to stay in abusive relationship, in the previous extract and through the same character the author frames the idea of leaving abusive husbands in a way that suggests disapproval. Arguably, this may reflect the contradictory discourses and subject positions that are available for women in Tanzanian society. Indeed, different discursive positions offered to women in relation to the dominant discourse have effects on women's understanding and decision-making, as every discourse claims to be the truth (Burr, 2005). For an individual to accept a particular positioning as right or not depends on what is assured in the positioning (St. Pierre, 2000). Tabu, for example, in the earlier extracts, abides by the traditional gender discourses and tolerates violence in her marriage without knowing the consequences.

Somewhat differently, societal expectations and attitudes are described by Kiswahili novelists as reasons for men to abuse women. Mapalala (1992), in *Kwaheri Iselamagazi*, for example, relates the story of a woman, Isamba, who endures psychological and physical violence because her husband, Matumula, is not living according to standard societal norms. In his novel, Mapalala reveals that Matumula loves his wife, Isamba, and their son. However, according to society's expectations, Matumula is expected to have many wives and many children. Having only one wife and one child is perceived by others as an insult to Matumula. In the narrative, although Matumula is happy, the elders and his relatives are not, and force Matumula to have another wife so that he can have many children.

According to the narrative, Matumula does not take the elders' advice as he is happy having one wife and had promised her he would not take another wife, in spite of having only one child. Additionally, the author explains that Matumula was hardworking and an intelligent man. Because of his good qualities, the elders appoint him to be a leader. However, Matumula refuses the position, as he is not interested in leadership. This is understood by the elders and his relatives as the consequence of being bewitched by his wife Isamba, and so they decide to have a meeting to advise him, as the following extract demonstrates:

> "We have appointed you to be a leader but you have refused. That shows how unwise you are. And this is because of your wife who has bewitched you. Your wife is a witch and a prostitute. ... Your wife is a witch; she is the one who is causing all the problems. We [his relatives] must tell you (Mapalala, 1992, p. 36) ".

In this extract, community elders and Matumula's relatives blame Matumula's wife for what is happening to her husband's life, and they try to force Matumula to take action against his wife. After the meeting with the community elders and relatives, the author explains that Matumula consults a witch doctor, because he does not believe what the elders said about his wife. The witch doctor also insists that his wife is the problem and the ancestors want him to marry other wives in order to have many children:

> "The problem is your wife who is cunning and greedy. … The ancestral spirits say you need to have more wives who will bear you children, as now you have no child[4]. … The ancestral spirits say you must decide - to comply or to refuse (Mapalala, 1992, pp. 41-42) ".

Graham (1999) notes that in African societies, the ancestral "spirits" are believed to play a vital role in solving problems. Drawing on this knowledge, the author positions Matumula as a victim of the ancestral spirits following his consultation with the witch doctor, after which he changes dramatically and starts behaving differently toward his wife and his son. Changes in Matumula's behaviour affect his wife emotionally and psychologically. She becomes unhappy and unable to continue doing her daily work. Furthermore, the author narrates that the community elders order his family to be isolated as a punishment for Isamba

[4] Matumula has one child. However, as an important man in society he is considered by his relatives and the witchdoctor as he has no child.

bewitching her husband and for her husband not respecting the elders' and relatives' advice. According to the narration, Isamba is strongly affected by what is going on, and hears people gossiping about her behaviour. His son suggests that she leaves the place, as he sees his mother's health deteriorating day after day. However, his mother refuses to leave her non-abusive husband for fear of retribution from her family who are already angry at her for leaving and marry a foreigner:

> "My son, you have to know that I cannot go back to my parents because I disobeyed my tradition and married a foreigner. Consequently, if I go back I will be killed immediately (Mapalala, 1992, p. 47) ".

As the narration continues, the author reveals that Matumula becomes very confused, stressed and full of anger but is unable to tell his wife or his son what has happened. When his wife asks him why he behaves differently, her question exacerbates his anger, as the following extracts demonstrate:

> "Matumula, my husband, nowadays you don't greet me. Are you possessed with an evil spirit?" "I'm possessed with the evil spirit?" "It is not that you are possessed by an evil spirit my husband, but the way you are behaving nowadays is not good." "Woman, you have decided to insult me?" "I have not insulted you." "When you said, 'I am possessed with the evil spirit' what did you mean?"..."Woman, listen," he scolded, "You have been arrogant because I haven't beaten you. But if you dare to say a word, I tell you I will hurt you."

> "Matumula beat me! I tell you beat me today in front of your son. I will know for sure you are doing it purposely." Matumula did not wait, he slapped her face hard and blood flew from her mouth. ... "My husband it is true that you have been a beast!" Matumula strongly slapped her again in her face and she fell down. When Isamba stood up she had swelling (Mapalala, 1992, pp. 47-49).

In these extracts the author depicts Matumula's abusive actions as the consequence of losing control when his wife provoked him. Furthermore, the reader is already informed that he was angry and under considerable stress because of what he was told by the community elders, his relatives and the ancestral spirits about his wife's behaviour. Although the author earlier described how societal expectations and attitudes contributed to Matumula's reactions, here he appears to position Isamba as more immediately responsible for provoking her husband, and hence as potentially blameworthy. Isamba's blameworthiness for her victimisation is reinforced when she later regrets not listening to her mother's advice before marrying Matumula, as the following extracts illustrate:

> "My daughter don't entrust your life to a man. Men are untrustworthy my daughter. All are fools and gossipers (Mapalala, 1992, p. 46) ".

> "Now I am paying. This is my mother's blessing. I wish I had listened to her (Mapalala, 1992, p. 48) ".

In these extracts, Isamba describes her suffering as a punishment for not listening to her mother's advice. This is made explicit in the narrative as she states, "I wish I had listened to her." Matumula's violent action is subsequently praised by his neighbours and relatives as evidence that he has properly disciplined his wife:

> "Matumula, today you have done a good job. A woman must be disciplined," said one neighbour. "My brother you are too gentle. If only you had disciplined her like that from the beginning, she would not be arrogant as she is now", said Ms. Ndende [Matumula's sister] (Mapalala, 1992, p. 49).

Studies have found that men who abuse their wives identify with the accepted cultural norms which promote men's dominance and control (Kim & Motsei, 2002; Wood, 2004). Building on this, Matumula's sister and the neighbour view violence against women as a socially acceptable way of disciplining women.

Among the strategies employed by women for dealing with abuse is suicide (Chang, 1989). In this novel, Mapalala presents the consequences of wife beating as suicide: Isamba commits suicide the second day after being beaten by her husband and hearing her neighbour's and sister-in-law's responses. Mapalala also details what happened to Matumula after his wife's death. He reveals how different people - elders, relatives and friends had expected Matumula to take another wife. However, Matumula refuses to marry, as he has a deep binding to his first wife's love:

> Isamba's death taught Matumula a lesson. He knew for sure he could not love anyone else other than his late wife. He didn't dare to take another wife, as he thought it would be an unforgivable sin. Always he was occupied with his wife's statement, "My husband it is true that you have been a beast (Mapalala, 1992, p. 59) ".

Everyone is shocked by his attit+ude, as they had thought that his wife was the problem. The witch doctor concludes that he is not a normal person as he has refused to obey the ancestral spirits by marrying other wives. Matumula's health

deteriorates as he is always thinking about what he had done to his wife; subsequently he dies.

I presume this illustration suggests how societal pressure on individuals can become a source of violence against women in a community. Arguably, when addressing domestic violence, we need to know the nuances of cultural and societal expectations in order to take appropriate measures to intervene in domestic violence. It is by changing societal expectations that we can enable people to think differently (Bent-Goodley, 2005).

5.0 Conclusion

As articulated in Kiswahili novels, violence against women is a complex phenomenon shaped by forces from different levels – individual, community and the wider society. In the narratives they create, Kiswahili novelists reveal the factors that promote violence against women, such as excessive use of alcohol, poverty, men's jealousy, men's power and social norms. Some of the authors emphasise these factors in ways that seem to exonerate perpetrators from their abusive actions towards women. Foregrounding these factors may serve to minimise the role of men's power and control in violence against women. Furthermore, a number of authors uncritically depict traditional feminine roles which emphasise women's responsibility to respect, obey and serve men, and which affirm men's rights in ways that position the victims of violence as blameworthy and responsible for their victimisation. In this way, these authors reflect the excesses of the patriarchal system but do so uncritically, and subsequently privilege discourses that minimise the role of the abuser and society in perpetrating violence against women. Moreover, several authors merely reflect existing social norms and uncritically rearticulate and reproduce dominant discourses of violence against women. This is problematic because unchallenged representations of violence against women have the potential to promote and even cement the attitude and/or belief that violence against women is a "normal" part of women's lives in Tanzanian society, and an inevitable result of their inferior status. In addition, by privileging dominant discourses and marginalising alternative viewpoints, these novels negate the possibility that readers might assume new discourses that are more conducive to challenging and changing beliefs and attitudes that sustain violence against women. Instead, readers may come to believe that, what is depicted in the novels is the way the society is meant to be and always will be.

Somewhat differently, a few authors do critique the social system and cultural norms which oppress women by introducing new discourses as they describe violence against women. However, these new discourses are often silenced or marginalised within the narrative. While it is not clear whether this silencing is

deliberately intended, it is significant to note that in all of these cases, the alternative discourses and the subject positions they offer are later negated. Thus, the ultimately unfavourable narrative outcome may encourage the view that it is not possible to challenge the "fabric" of society.

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