

Exploring culture, womanism, and gendered power in forced and forbidden love: IsiZulu Kungenxa Kabani and Kungavuka AbaNguni

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Abstract: Culture profoundly shapes identities, values, and social relations, yet it can perpetuate inequality, particularly through patriarchal norms. Forced and forbidden love in IsiZulu literature exemplifies how cultural practices marginalize women. Despite scholarship on gender in African literature, gaps remain in womanist perspectives, onomastic analysis, and psychoanalytic exploration, particularly regarding the psychological consequences of these practices on both women and men. This study examines gender inequality, cultural coercion, and psychological impacts in IsiZulu novels through a womanist lens. This article is grounded in womanism as the primary theoretical framework, supplemented by literary onomastics and psychoanalysis to explore gender, cultural identity, and psychological dimensions in literature. This descriptive literature review aimed to examine selected IsiZulu novels, *Kungenxa Kabani* and *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, using textual analysis to interpret gender roles, cultural norms, and relational dynamics. The study analysed characterisation, narrative structure, language, and onomastics to reveal implicit cultural messages and psychological effects of forced and forbidden love. Psychoanalytic insights elucidated emotional and behavioural responses within traditional Zulu society, providing a multidimensional understanding of the texts. Analysis revealed that male characters in both novels exert authority, while female characters are portrayed as passive, obedient, and socially constrained. Names reinforce gendered expectations, with male names implying dominance and female names signalling submission. Forced and forbidden love provokes conflict, psychological distress, and emotional trauma, reflecting the tension between individual desires and societal norms. While *Bhekokwakhe* and *Nomusa* resist parental authority, women's limited autonomy underscores enduring patriarchal structures in literature and society. This study highlights the intersection of culture, gender, and psychology in IsiZulu literature, advocating for womanist-informed literary critique to challenge patriarchal narratives and empower representation of African women.

Keywords: *Culture, gendered power, forced love, forbidden love, isiZulu literature*

Résumé : La culture façonne profondément les identités, les valeurs et les relations sociales, mais elle peut aussi perpétuer les inégalités, notamment par le biais des normes patriarcales. L'amour forcé et interdit dans la littérature isiZulu illustre comment les pratiques culturelles marginalisent les femmes. Malgré les travaux de recherche sur le genre dans la littérature africaine, des lacunes subsistent dans les perspectives féministes noires, l'analyse onomastique et l'exploration psychanalytique, en particulier concernant les conséquences psychologiques de ces pratiques sur les femmes comme sur les hommes. Cette étude examine les inégalités de genre, la coercition culturelle et leurs impacts psychologiques dans les romans isiZulu à travers le prisme du féminisme noir. Cet article s'appuie sur le féminisme noir comme cadre théorique principal, complété par l'ononastique littéraire et la psychanalyse pour explorer les dimensions de genre, d'identité culturelle et psychologiques dans la littérature. Cette revue de littérature descriptive visait à examiner les romans isiZulu *Kungenxa Kabani* et *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, en utilisant l'analyse textuelle pour interpréter les rôles de genre, les normes culturelles et les dynamiques relationnelles. Cette étude analyse la caractérisation, la structure narrative, le langage et l'ononastique afin de révéler les messages culturels implicites et les effets psychologiques de l'amour forcé et interdit. Des perspectives psychanalytiques éclairent les réponses émotionnelles et comportementales au sein de la société zouloue traditionnelle, offrant une compréhension

multidimensionnelle des textes. L'analyse révèle que les personnages masculins des deux romans exercent une autorité, tandis que les personnages féminins sont dépeints comme passifs, obéissants et soumis aux contraintes sociales. Les noms renforcent les attentes liées au genre : les noms masculins impliquent la domination et les noms féminins, la soumission. L'amour forcé et interdit provoque des conflits, une détresse psychologique et des traumatismes émotionnels, reflétant la tension entre les désirs individuels et les normes sociales. Si Bhekokwakhe et Nomusa résistent à l'autorité parentale, l'autonomie limitée des femmes souligne la persistance des structures patriarcales dans la littérature et la société. Cette étude met en lumière l'intersection de la culture, du genre et de la psychologie dans la littérature isiZulu, et plaide pour une critique littéraire féministe afin de remettre en question les récits patriarcaux et de valoriser la représentation des femmes africaines.

Mots-clés: Culture, pouvoir lié au genre, amour forcé, amour interdit, littérature isiZulu

Introduction (and Background)

It is essential to foreground this section by acknowledging that anthropological scholarship consistently affirms that culture is an inescapable dimension of human existence. As scholars such as Biehl and Locke (2017), Lewis (1976), and Salazar (2023) observe, there has never been a human being who exists outside of culture. Culture does not merely function as an external system of practices and beliefs; rather, it actively shapes identities, values, and social relations. Human beings simultaneously produce and are produced by culture (Schwartz, 2014). They transmit traditions across generations, reinterpret meanings within evolving contexts, and are themselves moulded by the environments in which they live (Masuku, 2009; Nkumane, 1999). Even within rapidly transforming and technologically driven societies, culture remains central in structuring behaviour, social interactions, and systems of meaning. In this regard, culture serves as both a stabilising force that provides continuity and a dynamic framework that allows for adaptation and transformation over time. This perspective is further reinforced by Tri (2023:123), who emphasises the historical and social embeddedness of culture:

Culture is not only socially situated but also historically situated. This aspect of culture reminds us that cultural practices and discourse communities evolve. Historical events, societal changes, and shifts in thinking all play crucial roles in developing and transforming discourse communities and the culture they create. For example, the feminist discourse community has evolved over the years, shaped by historical events such as the suffrage movement, women's liberation movements, and legal changes affecting gender equality. These historical factors have significantly impacted the community's values, language, goals, and, as a result, the broader cultural discourse surrounding gender and equality.

This insight underscores that culture is not static or immutable. Instead, it evolves through historical developments, ideological contestations, and social transformations. Cultural practices are continuously renegotiated within discourse communities as societies respond to shifting political, economic, and intellectual conditions (Masuku, 2009; Nkumane, 1999). What is often perceived as "tradition" is, in many cases, the outcome of long-standing historical processes that have shaped collective consciousness. This dynamic nature of culture reveals it as a site of both continuity and contestation, where different values and power structures intersect.

However, while culture can foster identity and social cohesion, it can also function as a mechanism of control. Nkumane (1999) argues that culture may penetrate deeply into

human consciousness, regulating desire, creativity, and social roles. In such instances, cultural norms define what is acceptable and limit alternative forms of expression. Munzhelele et al. (2023:123) similarly caution that while cultural practices contribute to social cohesion and collective identity, some practices, particularly those affecting women, have resulted in the infringement of fundamental human rights. These practices are often justified as necessary for maintaining moral order, cultural heritage, or social stability, even when they perpetuate inequality. This dual nature of culture highlights an important tension: culture operates both as a source of identity and as a potential site of oppression. In many patriarchal societies, cultural traditions have been used to legitimise gender inequality, reinforcing male authority and limiting women's autonomy (Hlatshwayo et al., 2022; Korte and Singh, 2023). This article is situated within this tension and focuses specifically on traditional marital practices such as forced, arranged, preferential, and forbidden marriages as represented in selected IsiZulu novels. These practices are examined not as neutral cultural customs but as socially constructed systems that have historically shaped and, in many cases, constrained individual agency, particularly that of women.

Scholarly engagement with gender representation in African literature has a long and significant history. Feminist literary criticism has been instrumental in exposing how literature often reproduces patriarchal ideologies and reinforces gender stereotypes (Masuku, 2009; Nkumane, 1999; Shamase, 2014). For instance, Makhambeni's (1988) study identifies forced and forbidden love as recurring themes rooted in parental authority and traditional social structures. Her findings reveal how cultural norms historically sanctioned parental control over daughters' marital choices, thereby limiting their autonomy and reinforcing male-dominated decision-making within families.

Similarly, Mtuze's (1994) doctoral study on Xhosa literature demonstrates that the portrayal of women as submissive and dependent has been a persistent feature across different periods. His work shows that both male and female authors have contributed to the reproduction of gender stereotypes, suggesting that patriarchal norms are deeply embedded within broader cultural and literary traditions. Mawela's (1994) study of Venda novels further supports this view, highlighting how female characters are often depicted negatively, reinforcing societal attitudes that marginalise women and restrict their participation in public life. In contrast, Dlamini's (1996) research on Swati women's folk songs illustrates how oral literature can serve as a space for resistance and self-expression. Through song, metaphor, and performance, women articulate their grievances and challenge patriarchal expectations, often in subtle but powerful ways. Masuku's (2009) work complicates the assumption that female authors necessarily present more empowering representations of women, demonstrating that women writers may also reproduce patriarchal ideologies. Collectively, these studies reveal that literature has historically functioned as both a mirror of society and a mechanism for reinforcing existing power relations.

Despite this rich body of scholarship, several gaps remain. Much of the existing research relies heavily on Western feminist frameworks, which, while valuable, do not always fully capture the complexities of African cultural contexts. These frameworks may overlook

communal value systems and the interconnected nature of individual and collective identities within African societies, leaving certain dimensions of gender relations insufficiently explored in local literary traditions.

One significant gap is the limited application of womanism within African-language literary studies, particularly in IsiZulu literature (Mzoneli-Makhwaza, 2016; Nkosi, 2020). Womanism offers an alternative framework that centres African women's lived experiences while emphasising the importance of family, community, and social harmony. Another gap lies in the limited use of literary onomastics as an analytical tool, despite the cultural significance of names in shaping identity and social expectations. Furthermore, insufficient attention has been given to the psychological dimensions of forced and forbidden love in literature, particularly how cultural expectations shape emotional conflict and internalised oppression.

Against this background, this article adopts a multidisciplinary approach that integrates womanism, literary onomastics, and psychoanalysis. It examines how forced and forbidden love are represented in selected IsiZulu novels to expose embedded gender inequalities. Ultimately, the study argues that literature is not only a reflection of society but also a powerful tool for critique and transformation, capable of challenging oppressive cultural norms and contributing to more equitable social relations.

1. Theoretical framework

This study adopts an eclectic analytical framework combining womanism, literary onomastics, and psychoanalysis to enable a multidimensional reading of the selected novels. The integration of these theories is grounded in Eagleton's (1983: viii) assertion that literary study is inherently theoretical, as theory inevitably shapes interpretation and meaning. Similarly, Sone (2018) emphasises that rigorous theoretical grounding is essential in African literary studies because it promotes critical engagement and deeper textual interrogation. In this study, theory is not treated as background information; rather, it functions as an active interpretive lens that directly informs the close reading of characters, themes, and narrative structures.

Womanism constitutes the primary framework for analysing gender representation and power relations. Emerging from the African-American intellectual tradition through the work of Alice Walker, womanism responds to the marginalisation of Black women within mainstream feminist discourse (Chapai, 2025; Rodgers, 2017). It affirms Black womanhood, cultural identity, and communal responsibility while addressing intersecting forms of oppression, including gender and race (Gafour, 2024). Within the South African context, womanism provides a critical lens for examining how female characters negotiate authority, resist marginalisation, and assert agency. Literary onomastics complements this approach by analysing the symbolic meanings embedded in character names, demonstrating how naming practices encode identity, authority, and gender expectations within the text. Psychoanalysis further strengthens the framework by interpreting unconscious desire, repression, and internal conflict, particularly in narratives of forced or

forbidden love. Together, these frameworks ensure a coherent link between theory and textual interpretation, with each guiding a specific dimension of analysis.

3. Methodology

This study employs textual analysis as the primary research method, explicitly aligned with the theoretical framework outlined above. Textual analysis serves as the practical mechanism through which womanism, literary onomastics, and psychoanalysis are applied to the novels' language, symbolism, characterisation, and narrative structure. McKee (2003) explains that textual analysis is central to qualitative research because it enables scholars to interpret how meaning is produced within specific historical and cultural contexts. In this study, textual analysis operationalises theory by translating abstract principles into systematic close reading.

Hawkins (2017) further argues that textual analysis involves examining language, symbols, and images to understand how meaning is constructed. She emphasises that texts both reflect and shape broader social structures. This perspective strengthens the link between theory and method, as the study reads the novels as culturally embedded representations rather than isolated fictional narratives. Consequently, womanist principles are applied directly to textual evidence, particularly in scenes involving marriage negotiations, gender authority, and communal expectations. Each interpretive claim is grounded in close examination of dialogue, narrative description, and character interaction.

Literary onomastics is integrated methodologically by analysing character names as meaningful textual elements. Names are examined alongside narrative context to determine how they reinforce or challenge gender hierarchies. This ensures that onomastic theory is not discussed in isolation but applied concretely within textual analysis. Similarly, psychoanalytic concepts guide the interpretation of emotional tension, repression, and conflict between desire and obligation. These interpretations are based on explicit textual indicators, including character behaviour, internal monologue, and narrative framing.

The novels *Kungenxa Kabani* and *Kungavuka AbaNguni* were selected because they engage directly with themes of authority, marriage, morality, and social structure within Zulu society. Their thematic focus provides appropriate textual material for applying the combined theoretical framework.

Through this integrated approach, textual analysis functions as the bridge between theory and evidence. The framework determines what is examined and how it is interpreted, ensuring that conclusions about gender representation and cultural norms remain firmly grounded in the literary text. This alignment enhances coherence, strengthens analytical clarity, and improves overall readability.

4. Gender Stereotypes in the Novels Under Scrutiny

Deirdre Lapin asserts that, "When society does not grant women the power to make choices, women must summon the courage to claim that right for themselves" (in Hay & Stichter, 1995:159). This chapter focuses on the deconstruction of gender in selected IsiZulu novels, examining characters in terms of gender roles and stereotyping. Showalter highlights that feminist and womanist literary critics should, with caution "consider questions of masculinity and be willing to focus on male texts, not as documents of sexism and misogyny, but as inscriptions of gender and renditions of sexual difference" (Rabinowitz & Richlin, 1993:75-76). The analysis traces phallogocentric logic in male-authored texts and uses close reading to uncover the "blind spots" in representation, particularly the silences and desires that society restricts.

Gender stereotypes are socially constructed and rooted in societal perceptions. Sheila Ruth defines a stereotype as "a picture in our heads...an over generalisation of characteristics that may or may not have been observed in fact...often containing a kernel of truth that is partial and thus misleading" (Ruth, 1980:18). Language in literature reflects societal norms, with sexism embedded not in language itself but in social structures (Fromkin & Rodman, 1983:270). Kenneth Little notes that women in male-authored African novels often fall into predictable categories: "girlfriends or good-time girls, workers such as secretaries or clerks, wives and other male appendages, and prostitutes or courtesans" (Frank in Jones & Palmer, 1987:15), reinforcing gendered expectations. Ngcanga asserts that literary characters reflect the cultural perceptions of the times: "Character studies in literature often depict the way people perceive their culture from time to time and as such, writers form images in response to their culture" (Mtuzze, 1994:7).

4.1 Kungavuka AbaNguni by I.S. Kubheka

In *Kungavuka AbaNguni* (Kubheka), women are largely depicted as passive and dependent. Nomusa's mother, MaNkosi, is naive and reliant on her husband for guidance. Gumede reminds her, "Angazi-ke noma usazothi ngithule yini uma ngithi kawuwenzi umsebenzi wakho, wani? Wobuzali. Mina wakwaGumede sengiphuze sengikholiwe" (Kubheka, 6), reaffirming women's domestic roles and maternal responsibilities. MaNkosi's indecisiveness demonstrates the stereotypical portrayal of women as incapable of independent reasoning. Rimmon-Kenan notes that "Flat characters...are constructed around a single idea or quality...do not develop in the course of the action" (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983:40), which aptly describes MaNkosi.

Grandmothers, such as MaCele, play a traditional advisory role but are similarly indecisive. She comments, "Ngivele ngazi ukuthi uzophendula usho njalo...engekho amaqhikiza lapho ezikoleni kuthiwa kazitshelwe ngubani amaqiniso ngobuzona?" (Kubheka, 69), highlighting the failure of tradition to provide guidance in a modern context. Church women, including the minister's wife, are dependent on their husband's status, reflecting the limited autonomy of female characters: "Ntombi yomuntu, uma ngikutshela iqiniso elimsulwa ukuthi nje nami kungime emphinjeni ukuthi ngingase ngithathe ini ngihlanganise nani ukuze ngiphume kulobubunzima engikubo" (Kubheka, 96).

Overall, Kubheka presents women as passive and marginalised, especially in critical decisions such as marriage negotiations. The narratives reinforce the stereotype of women as subordinate, dependent, and constrained by societal expectations, while men retain authority. Literature, as shown here, mirrors both the cultural context and the gender inequalities embedded in Zulu society, emphasising that gender roles are socially constructed and perpetuated through narrative, language, and tradition.

4.2. *Kungenxa Kabani* by S.S. Gcumisa

The novel *Kungenxa Kabani* by S.S. Gcumisa explores entrenched gender stereotypes within traditional Zulu society, focusing on arranged marriages and the subjugation of women in familial and marital decision-making. The story follows Bhekokwakhe, a young teacher whose father, Cele, decides that it is time for him to marry. Although Bhekokwakhe prefers Lungile, an educated girlfriend, Cele selects Ntombiyethemba Sikhakhane, an illiterate and traditionally oriented girl considered suitable for rural domestic responsibilities. This generational conflict reflects differing views on marriage: Bhekokwakhe values companionship and intellectual compatibility, whereas his father prioritises obedience, tradition, and social conformity. The unilateral decision to arrange the marriage without consulting the son demonstrates patriarchal authority within the family structure. The consequences of this imposed union are severe, leading to unhappiness, alcoholism, tragedy, and the eventual deaths of both women, while Bhekokwakhe suffers paralysis and psychological decline. Through this narrative development, Gcumisa illustrates how rigid gender expectations and authoritarian decision-making destabilise family life and produce destructive outcomes.

Female characters in the novel are largely portrayed within traditional stereotypes that emphasise subordination and dependence on men. MaXimba, Bhekokwakhe's mother, embodies the archetype of the supportive wife who aligns fully with her husband's authority. When her son resists the arranged marriage, she advises compliance, saying: "Nami kodwa mntanami ingane kaSikhakhane bengiyithanda kabi. Bengithi iyoke idishazele lapha kwami exhibeni. Hamba uyolala mntanami uphumule ucabange kahle" (Gcumisa:7). ("I too, my child, also like Sikhakhane's child very much. I thought she would walk into my kitchen. Go to sleep my child, rest and think well about this"). Her response reinforces the expectation that women support male decisions and prioritise family harmony over individual preference. MaXimba further instructs her son to accept his father's authority: "Wo mntanami, ezinye izinto zasekhaya kuye kudingeke umntwana uma ezalwa ekhaya azibekezelele nje. Uyihlo uhlose ukukusiza akulobolele yena umkakho" (Gcumisa:7). ("Oh my child, as you are born into this family you are supposed to tolerate in some matters. Your father wants to help you by paying the bride price for your wife"). Similarly, Bongiwe reinforces paternal dominance, advising submission: "Wo, mntakamama, mina ngibona ukuthi kungcono usale usuwenza nje nanxa kade ungakahlosi ukuganwa. Isimo sasekhaya uyazibonela nawe ukuthi sinjani...mina ngikweluleka ukuba usale usuvuma ukuba kulotsholwe yona lena yaseMbekambazo" (Gcumisa:13). ("Oh, my mother's child, I think it is better that you should just do it even if you were not prepared to get married... I would advise you to agree that the bride price be paid for the one of eMbekambazo").

Ntombiyethemba's mother, MaNzuza, also participates in sustaining patriarchal expectations by collaborating with Cele and consulting a witchdoctor to secure her daughter's marital acceptance. This reflects the belief that marriage defines female destiny: "Like their daughters' suitors and husbands, these mothers want to see their daughters securely married and perpetually pregnant. They cannot imagine a destiny for their daughters other than the one they have endured... A woman may gain the whole world but she would have lost her soul if she doesn't become a male's extension or somebody's mother" (Frank in Jones & Palmer, 1987:16). Through these portrayals, the novel exposes how women may unconsciously reinforce the very system that marginalises them, ultimately illustrating the harmful consequences of rigid gender hierarchies within traditional society.

5. Literary Onomastics and Gender Roles

This section analyses the names of main characters affected by the culture of forced and forbidden love. Names convey attributes that distinguish male and female characters, reflecting socially assigned roles. Because this study addresses gender inequality, it examines how naming practices reinforce expectations about sexuality, authority, and behaviour. As noted earlier, traditional naming was predominantly undertaken by men. Nuessel (1992:3) states that "those who give names are usually in positions of power and authority. Consequently, the act of naming implies that the naming group has a measure of control." This suggests that naming is not neutral; it is an exercise of authority that shapes identity and social positioning.

Bosmajian (1974a, in Nuessel, 1992:3) further observes: "The power that comes from names and naming is related directly to the power to define others individuals, races, sexes, ethnic groups. Our identities, who and what we are, how others see us, are greatly affected by the names we are called and the words with which we are labelled." This statement underscores the psychological and social influence of names. Personal names shape self-perception and influence how individuals are viewed within their communities. Names are therefore closely connected to identity formation and ego development. Being named by someone in authority symbolically reflects control over existence and social meaning. As Nuessel explains, "from this perspective, it may be said that you are what you are named." Names function as meaningful labels that distinguish individuals and contribute to their uniqueness while simultaneously reflecting cultural values and power relations within society.

5.1. Names in *Kungavuka AbaNguni*

Like parents, writers give names to characters with purpose. In *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, Nomusa, the heroine, and Thamsanqa are central to the story. Nomusa, meaning "mother of kindness" or "kindness," is an emotion-related name reflecting MaNkosi's situation during pregnancy:

"Kwathi kusathiwa hhawu waze wamuhle umakoti webantu, wabe esemuhle ngempela. Wazibula ngentombi abayetha igama bathi nguNomusa, abaNguni bebonga umusa kanina" (Kubheka:8).

Nomusa's name aligns with her nature as a kind-hearted person who shows empathy toward the poor, especially Thamsanqa:

“Uyabona Mama ngothi uma sengikhulile sengifuna ukugana ngihambe ngizithuntuthele uThamsanqa ngiziganele yena. Akeve elungile umntanabantu. Angazi ukuthi yini uma ngimbuka ngivele ngizwe ngimdabukela nje” (Kubheka:76).

Her name suggests feminine virtue, devoid of masculine or aggressive qualities. Nomusa submits to her father's authority, giving him her monthly salary as he commands:

“Cha angizimisele mpela ukuba ngiyeke ukujabula uma ingane yami yenza intando yami...” (Kubheka:193).

Thamsanqa, whose name means “blessing,” reflects parental hope and expectation. Ironically, he is unemployed, failing to fulfill his name's promise:

“Kwaba mnyama amehlo ngenxa yezinyembezi. Indoda ikhala ngoba kushona ilanga ngempela” (Kubheka:210).

Although kind and respectful, Thamsanqa remains a flat character, serving primarily to advance the plot of forbidden love.

5.2. Names in Kungenxa Kabani

In this novel, Bhekokwakhe, Ntombiyethemba, and Lungile exemplify how names denote attributes. Ntombiyethemba, meaning “girl of hope,” epitomises submissiveness and parental control. She marries a man who does not love her but remains obedient to her in-laws:

“Naphezu izinto zingimele kabi kangaka, angizothi nyaka. Ngizomhlalela, uyoze unembeza umudle, abone ukuthi ngiyintombi enesimilo” (Gcumisa:44).

Bhekokwakhe, meaning “looking after one's things,” signifies self-interest and masculine assertiveness. He defies his father, seeking to marry Lungile, who represents modern education and moral virtue:

“Nanxa ngibona kahle ukuthi uzogcagcelwa yilentombi yakho olotsholelwa yona, kepha mina ngisazimisele ukuba umkakho nami ngeyami indlela” (Gcumisa:68).

Lungile, meaning “the kind one,” embodies righteousness and selflessness. She challenges cultural restrictions through education and moral integrity, guiding Bhekokwakhe away from destructive habits:

“Ukuyizwa nokuyibona kwakho akusho lutho Bheki uma ungangethembisi noma ungenze ngiqiniseke ukuthi uzokwenza konke okusemandleni akho ukuthola indawo engconywana kunalena ukuze wehlukane nanotshwala” (Gcumisa:69).

Gcumisa's characters demonstrate how names encode cultural, gendered, and moral expectations. Male names convey assertiveness and autonomy, while female names

often reinforce virtue, obedience, and nurturing roles. Through onomastics, the novels reflect the interplay of traditional and modern gender roles in Zulu society, illustrating how naming both shapes and mirrors the dynamics of power and submission.

6. Violation of stereotypes

This section examines the origins of personality traits, behaviour, and psychoanalytic responses in literary characters, treating them as individuals navigating culturally structured realities. It focuses on forced and forbidden love, demonstrating how cultural norms generate profound conflicts between parents and children, often resulting in emotional distress and psychological tension. As Ernst Kris, quoted by Arlow (in Corsini and Wedding, 1989:19), states, “psychoanalysis may be defined as human nature seen from vantage point of conflict.” From this perspective, the human mind is shaped by ongoing internal struggles between competing forces, making psychoanalysis an appropriate framework for interpreting the tensions represented in the selected novels.

Within cultural systems, behaviour is shaped by social norms that Freud associates with the superego. The superego represents internalised parental authority and moral codes acquired through socialisation. When individuals attempt to resist these norms, they may encounter sanctions from communities that defend tradition through shared values and expectations. This interaction highlights the relationship between personality and environment, demonstrating that psychological development and cultural context are interdependent rather than separate domains. Odetola (1983:4) emphasises that in many African societies, personality formation is closely linked to cultural processes, particularly during early childhood socialisation when gender roles and responsibilities become defined. Through family structures, especially the extended family, children internalise communal values, leadership expectations, and respect for authority. As Odetola (1983:7) explains, personality develops through emotional responses from significant others, whose approval or disapproval shapes self-image. In the novels, conflicts between parents and children reflect the tension between the id, superego, and ego, illustrating how literature represents the psychological negotiation between personal desire and collective norms.

6.1. Violation of stereotypes in *Kungavuka AbaNguni*

Parental authority can provoke violent behaviour and disrupt societal norms. In *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, the conflict between Nomusa and her father, Gumede, stems from his prohibition of her amorous relationship with Thamsanqa. Gumede punishes Nomusa for a love she has not yet committed:

“Usho bona ngizobalungisa” (Kubheka:81).

Nomusa’s anger motivates her to act contrary to her parents’ wishes. Kubheka explains her frustration:

“Iqiniso ngukuthi uNomusa wayecasukile ngoba naku eloku ekhathazelwa ukuthi udle inyama kodwa yena ebe azi ukuthi akayidlanga. Imbewu yase itshalekile. Itshalwa

ngukuthi akanalo ithuba lokuphendulana nabazali bakhe abanelise ukuthi lento abamcabangela yona ayikho ngoba ingekho” (Kubheka:102).

Her decision to love Thamsanqa reflects the conscious choice to listen to her id and violate the superego. Nomusa’s parents neither consult nor give her a chance to explain, characteristic of a traditional household where children have no say. MaNkosi also believes she has an intimate relationship with Thamsanqa:

“Kanti kuliqiniso ukuthi uthanda lolova wakwaKhumalo? Khuluma phela ngizwe, uthanda yena?” (Kubheka:136).

Nomusa’s response illustrates her innocence and anger, as well as her rebellion against parental autocracy:

“Ngifuna ukuba ningizwe kahle. Ngithi lomfana wakwaKhumalo enlokhu ningizindlela ngaye ngizosuke ngivele ngizikhethela yena nje bese ngibona-ke ukuthi niyojabula yini. Futhi ukuba ngizoziqokela yena, nginithandele yena, ngizonijabulisa impela. Sekuyangicacela Mama ukuthi kanti nobaba ungiqandula ngempama nje ucabanga ukuthi ngithanda lomfana. Hhayi-ke ngiyabonga ngoba nobabili ningikhethela umkhwenyana” (Kubheka:138).

Despite Gumede forbidding her marriage to Thamsanqa, Nomusa persists in her love, ultimately leading to a tragic accident. Freud underscores the importance of sexual love in youth:

“Sexual love is undoubtedly one of the chief things in life, and the union of mental and bodily satisfaction in the enjoyment of love is one of its culminating peaks. ... Again, when a woman sues for love, to reject and refuse is a distressing part for a man to play; and, in spite of neurosis and resistance, there is an incomparable fascination in a woman of high principles who confesses her passion” (Malcolm, 1981:9).

Parents are also affected. Gumede violates cultural norms by demanding to see the groom himself, disregarding his own father’s authority:

“Wasuke uGumede wabhekana nomfowabo kaKhumalo, engaphenduli nalokhu okuxoxwayo, amtshela nje ukuthi akahambe aye ekhaya ngoba akukude ayobiza uyise womfana ufuna ukubonana naye mehlo, luyakhulunywa loludaba naye ukhona angezwa ngenzwabethi. Liphenduke ibandla elikhona limbukisise uGumede. Kutholakale ukuthi lento ayishoyo ulindele ukuthi mayenziwe” (Kubheka:255).

He further asserts:

“Kungabayini ukuba ngidedele ingane yami iye lapho ngingathandi ukuba iye khona kuyavela okuvelayo sengiyaxakwa nokuthi ngiya kanjani ukuyolekelela ingane yami? Phakathwayo kungavuka abaNguni bahambe emabaleni kunokuba ingane yami ingaya kwaKhumalo. Ngiyaphela lapho kangisenalo eledlula lelo” (Kubheka:262).

Gumede’s obstinacy demonstrates how men often fail to conform to the norms they impose on their children.

6.2. Defiance of stereotypes in *Kungenxa Kabani*

Bhekokwakhe resists his father's forced marriage plans. Narcissistic and self-important, he prioritises his love for Lungile over parental instruction:

"Wena dade ngivele ngabona nje ukuthi lendaba uyazi ukusuka nokuhlala...intombi okufanele ibe umkami" (Gcumisa:12).

In Zulu society, respect is reciprocal ("Kuhlonishwa kabili"), but when respect is one-sided, it becomes oppressive, provoking Bhekokwakhe's defiance. His unconscious rebellion manifests in slips of the tongue, showing repression:

"Mntanami uthi umphile nje imadlana umkakho?" "Konke niyokuthola kubaba, Mama" (Gcumisa:86-87).

He transfers his anger toward his father onto Ntombiyethemba, criticising her behaviour:

"Kungabe kambe ukuphela kwendlela lena okungalungiswa ngayo umbhede?" (Gcumisa:90).

Conflict is exacerbated by differences in education and background, causing psychological distress. Bhekokwakhe becomes neurotic, drinking excessively to escape reality:

"Uma eke walucabanga wayeze aphathwe yikhanda...ayebhekene naso" (Gcumisa:60).

Friend Mzimela consoles him:

"Ungethuki Bheki ndoda yamadoda...ngisazi kahle...?" (Gcumisa:62).

Lungile intervenes, supporting Bhekokwakhe to overcome alcohol abuse. Despite social expectations, Lungile continues her relationship with Bhekokwakhe:

"Bheki ubukhona bami lapha bungubufakazi...Angizothi nyaka" (Gcumisa:68).

Ntombiyethemba reacts violently upon discovering Lungile, demonstrating hysteria as a product of patriarchal oppression:

"Wena ntombazane ufunani lapha endodeni yami?" (Gcumisa:169).

Gcumisa portrays women's lives as being deeply influenced by jealousy and passion, showing how their emotions and actions are shaped by the social and cultural environments in which they live. The narratives reveal that women often navigate complex interpersonal and familial pressures, especially within patriarchal structures, where societal expectations, forced marriages, and cultural norms constrain their choices. Through these depictions, the author illustrates how external circumstances and ingrained social values profoundly affect women's behaviour, decisions, and emotional responses, often leading to conflict and resistance.

Bhekokwakhe resists his father's plan for a forced marriage, prioritising his love for Lungile. Narcissistic and self-important, he declares:

“Wena dade ngivele ngabona nje ukuthi lendaba uyazi ukusuka nokuhlala. Sengike ngayibona. Mina engikwalayo ukuba ngikhethelwe intombi okufanele ibe umkami” (Gcumisa:12).

In Zulu culture, respect is expected to be reciprocal (“Kuhlonishwa kabili”), but one-sided respect becomes oppressive, provoking Bhekokwakhe's defiance. His unconscious rebellion is revealed through slips of the tongue:

“Mntanami uthi umphile nje imadlana umkakho?” “Konke niyokuthola kubaba, Mama” (Gcumisa:86-87).

He transfers his anger toward his father onto Ntombiyethemba:

“Kungabe kambe ukuphela kwendlela lena okungalungiswa ngayo umbhede?” (Gcumisa:90).

Conflict and frustration lead to alcohol abuse:

“Uma eke walucabanga wayeze aphathwe yikhanda kuthi aliqhume lisakazeke. Wayeze aphunyuzwe ukuthola isithongwana. Ngenxa yokuphithana kwengqondo ngenxa yalesisimo ayekusona wagcina elingekile waqhabula etshwaleni besilungu. Wayethi wenzela ukuba athi ukuswakama ukuze akhohlwe yilesisimo ayebhekene naso” (Gcumisa:60).

Mzimela consoles him:

“Ungethuki Bheki ndoda yamadoda. Ungethuswa yini nje uma kwazi mina ukuthi usuphuza kanye nathi? Kungethi isimo okusona ngisazi kahle ...?” (Gcumisa:62).

Lungile intervenes, continuing her love despite cultural norms:

“Bheki ubukhona bami lapha bungubufakazi bothando olumsulwa nolujulileyo enginalo ngawe. Kumele ukuba usubonile ukuthi yize usuganiwe enye intombi, yalotsholwa, anginyakazi. Futhi angizothi nyaka” (Gcumisa:68).

Ntombiyethemba attacks Lungile:

“Wena ntombazane ufunani lapha endodeni yami?” (Gcumisa:169).

This highlights the complex interplay of emotional, patriarchal, and social pressures that shape women's behaviour, demonstrating how societal expectations and family dynamics influence their decisions and emotional responses. The narrative underscores the powerful role of the environment in forming personality traits, revealing how women navigate constraints imposed by culture and tradition. At the same time, these portrayals reinforce longstanding stereotypes about female jealousy and irrationality, showing how

external pressures can provoke conflict, resistance, and emotional intensity in women's lives.

7. Themes of forced and forbidden love

This section explores the themes of forced and forbidden love as central to the novels under study, aiming to critically examine these themes while revealing the secondary themes inherent in them. As Fisher (1980:1) observes, a writer's theme emerges from deeply felt experiences and becomes an extension of their mind and character, shaping the literary work. While a text may present a central theme, it often communicates multiple meanings, reflecting complex human experiences and social realities (Finnegan, 1976:377). Belsey (in Warhol & Herndl, 1993:601) emphasises the reader's role in producing meaning, highlighting the text's plurality, while Benstock (1987:18) notes that language continually transcends intended interpretations. African writers, as Jones and Palmer (1987:1) and Manyaka (1995:133) contend, serve as observers and conscience of society, using literature to expose societal issues and invite reflection. In the novels, love manifests as forced or forbidden, producing sub-themes of oppression, submissiveness, child marriage, protest, and the futility of coerced love, revealing the dilemmas faced by young women in traditional and patriarchal contexts.

7.1. Major Themes

The themes of forced love and arranged marriages in the novels highlight the centrality of marriage in African societies, suggesting that an individual is often not regarded as complete or socially fulfilled if unmarried. Both forced and forbidden love underscore the cultural and social importance of romantic relationships and matrimonial unions. Marriage remains a pivotal institution deeply embedded in communal life, shaping identity, social status, lineage continuity, and moral responsibility. Through these narratives, the novels demonstrate how marital practices are not merely private arrangements but socially regulated structures that influence personal destiny and community cohesion. Mbiti (1969:133) encapsulates this perspective:

For African peoples, marriage is the focus of existence. It is the point where all the members of a given community meet: the departed, the living and those yet to be born. ... Marriage is a drama in which everyone becomes an actor or actress and not just a spectator. Therefore, marriage is a duty, a requirement from the corporate society, and a rhythm of life in which everyone must participate. Otherwise, he who does not participate in it is a curse to the community, he is a rebel and a lawbreaker, he is not only abnormal but 'under-human.'

This statement emphasises that marriage is viewed as a collective obligation rather than a purely individual decision. Within this framework, unmarried persons may experience social pressure, stigma, or exclusion, while married individuals gain recognition and legitimacy. The novels reflect these expectations by portraying characters whose lives are shaped, restricted, or disrupted by communal demands. Forced and forbidden love therefore become narrative spaces where personal desire conflicts with societal norms, revealing tensions between individual autonomy and collective responsibility.

7.2. Forced and Forbidden Love

Forbidden love encompasses relationships deemed socially or economically unacceptable. Cultural and socio-economic factors frequently dictate the denial of marriage. Hay and Stichter (1995:85) note:

In other situations, the man or his family was deemed unsuitable because they were poor, came from a group with low social standing, or had a reputation of witchcraft, infertility, or other problems. Sometimes it was her family that objected; sometimes the woman herself decided against the marriage.

Odetola (1983:35) further explains the role of endogamy marriage within one's social group and exogamy in restricting marital possibilities, with factors such as ethnicity, religion, proximity, and social status influencing decisions.

In *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, Themba Gumede forbids his daughter, Nomusa, from marrying Thamsanqa Khumalo due to his poor social standing. Despite pleas from both families, Gumede remains adamant:

“Uthi wena uma ngiphilile ngingasuka nginikele ngomntanami athathwe yizinja nje izinto ezingenalutho? Ungafa uvuke angeke ukubone loko” (Kubheka:32).

Mathanda, Gumede's brother, warns of potential disaster, invoking the historical resistance of the Ingcugce girls' regiment under King Cetshwayo:

“Angazi ukuthi kukuhlupha ngani ukuthi ingane yakho iqome kwabani ... Kungathi kwehluleka uCetshwayo ethi uphoqa izintombi zeNgcugce ngomkhonto ukuthi aziqome lapho zingathandi khona ...” (Kubheka:201).

Nomusa's frustration ultimately leads to a tragic accident that leaves her paraplegic, demonstrating the devastating consequences of parental obstinacy (Kubheka:263).

Similarly, in *Kungenxa Kabani*, Cele forces Bhekokwakhe to marry Ntombiyethemba, rejecting Lungile due to unfamiliarity. His rigid adherence to tradition and distrust of outsiders triggers a series of tragic events, culminating in the deaths of both women and the paralysis of Bhekokwakhe (Gcumisa:171–172). These narratives reveal that forced and forbidden love inflict suffering not only on the young couple but also on parents, who endure emotional, psychological, and societal repercussions.

The themes of forced and forbidden love in these novels highlight the complex interplay between individual desires, societal expectations, and cultural traditions. The narratives underscore the destructive consequences of denying agency in matters of the heart, emphasising the enduring tension between personal freedom and communal norms.

7.3. Theme of Oppression

The theme of oppression in these novels highlights the denial of individual rights to those considered subordinate or inferior, reflecting male supremacy and the absolute authority

of men over women and children. Patriarchy, often cloaked in tradition, manipulates social privileges to the detriment of women and children. The novels under scrutiny critically examine the misuse of power within socio-cultural contexts where men hold disproportionate authority. Msimang (1994:121) emphasises the entrenched nature of this inequality in IsiZulu culture:

“In this culture [Zulu culture] my forebears maintained that a woman is a child: a perpetual minor whether before or after marriage. Thus, a man with 1 wife and 4 children would claim that he has 5 children.”

This perspective situates women and children as perpetual minors, legally and socially subordinate to men. Writers, as Ntuli (1984:133) notes, often respond to societal injustices:

“Throughout the ages writers have been found to express their displeasure about certain conditions or practices... when the poet [writer] exposes the evils or irregularities, he notes around him, he wants to arouse in his readers a state of disquietude which will lead to some kind of reform” (1984:134).

Oppression in these novels is closely linked to forced and forbidden marriages, reflecting deep-seated gender power imbalances. Fathers often assume absolute authority over their children’s choices, prioritising social norms, wealth, or family reputation over individual desires. In *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, Gumede dismisses his educated daughter Nomusa’s opinions, asserting:

“You see,” he said, pointing a finger at MaNkosi, “even if Nomusa could be as educated as a doctor, she will never have more knowledge than me because I gave birth to her” (Kubheka:20).

Similarly, Gumede insists women remain submissive:

“You see Dlamini that is the best thing that a woman should do. A woman should keep quiet and listen to what a man says” (Kubheka:171).

These portrayals emphasise the autocratic, authoritarian control exercised by men, with figures like Gumede and Cele depicted as despots whose decisions cannot be challenged. Cele is described as *indlovu-kayiphendulwa*, “an elephant that never needs a reply” (Gcumisa:13), symbolising the rigid enforcement of patriarchal authority. The novels thus foreground oppression as both a social and familial mechanism, illustrating how systemic inequality limits freedom, choice, and agency, particularly for women.

8. A Cross-Cultural Survey of Forced and Forbidden Love

The concept of culture encompasses both an individual’s inner world and the collective practices of a society, shaping the ways people make sense of their shared experiences (Williams, in Davis & Schleifer, 1991:36). This chapter examines how forced and forbidden love manifests across diverse African literatures, including works in IsiSwati, IsiXhosa,

Sepedi, TshiVenda, and novels by Mariama Bâ (*So Long a Letter*) and Flora Nwapa (*One is Enough*), as well as IsiZulu dramas and short stories. Central to these narratives is parental control over courtship and marriage, highlighting the traditional practice of arranging marriages and, at times, enforcing them against the wishes of the young. Mbiti (1969:136) notes that even when children resist, force or pressure may be applied to secure parental choices. While modern urban societies allow greater self-selection of spouses, parents and relatives remain integral to marriage negotiations, reflecting the communal nature of African life. Some scholars argue that literature addressing these themes reflects Western influence or Christian education, challenging oppressive traditions (Makhambeni, 1988; Mafela, 1999). Yet, as Miller (1990:247) observes, literature often breaks silence on societal issues, revealing voices previously unheard. Examining forced and forbidden love from a womanist perspective affirms women's agency, creativity, and capacity to challenge traditional constraints, portraying them as fully human and equal to men.

8.1. Forms of Courtship in Forced and Forbidden Marriages

In IsiZulu novels *Kungenxa Kabani* (S.S. Gcumisa) and *Kungavuka AbaNguni* (I.S. Kubheka), courtship is central to understanding forced and forbidden marriages. Traditional practices, including *ukukhuzela* (expressing love openly) and *ukushaya inyoka endleleni* (group-based partner selection), allowed youth to express affection, gain pride, and build social skills. However, forced, arranged, preferential, and forbidden marriages denied this freedom, as elders dictated partners, bride price, and weddings. Customs like levirate, sororate, bride abduction, and elopement emphasise family or communal interests over individual choice. These novels critique how cultural norms constrained emotional agency, highlighting the tension between love, tradition, and the rights of young men and women.

In IsiZulu novels like *Kungenxa Kabani* (S.S. Gcumisa) and *Kungavuka AbaNguni* (I.S. Kubheka), symbols of male and female roles highlight traditional marriage systems and gender expectations. Male figures often embody authority, decision-making, and patrilineal power, while female characters represent obedience, familial duty, and vulnerability to forced marriages. Preferential marriages honor grandparents' clans, strengthening kinship, while forbidden unions protect against incest. Levirate and sororate customs compel women to bear children for male relatives. These novels critique forced and forbidden love, showing women resisting imposed marriages, asserting choice, and highlighting tensions between tradition, love, and personal agency.

Conclusion

The exploration of forced, arranged, preferential, and forbidden marriages in IsiZulu literature reveals the deep entanglement of culture, tradition, and gender, demonstrating how these customs have historically shaped the lives of both women and men. While parental involvement in marriage arrangements may be intended to preserve family stability, social cohesion, and cultural continuity, such practices often limit the autonomy of young people. The denial of individual choice creates tension between personal desires

and communal expectations, resulting in emotional, psychological, and social conflict. As illustrated in *Kungenxa Kabani* and *Kungavuka AbaNguni*, these tensions frequently culminate in rebellion, distress, or tragic outcomes, exposing the human cost of rigid cultural prescriptions. Through a womanist lens, the study foregrounds the lived experiences of women, revealing how patriarchal systems marginalise their voices and restrict their agency. Female characters such as Nomusa and Ntombiyethemba embody the struggle for self-determination within oppressive structures, highlighting the need to challenge inherited norms. Psychoanalytic insights further illuminate the internal conflicts experienced by characters, as the tension between desire and duty produces trauma and resistance. Additionally, onomastic analysis demonstrates how names encode cultural expectations and reinforce gendered identities. Ultimately, these novels affirm that literature serves as both a reflection of society and a site of transformation. By interrogating cultural practices and amplifying marginalised voices, IsiZulu literature opens possibilities for reimagining relationships grounded in equality, dignity, and personal freedom.

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