

WRITTEN NARRATIVES AS AN AVENUE FOR SWAZI WOMEN TO DEBATE
MARGINALIZATION AND INCONSISTENCIES OF PATRIARCHY

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

Swazi women face numerous socio-economic challenges as a result of patriarchal customs like polygamy, forced or arranged marriage, levirate marriage, and bride price. Marginalizing cultural norms push Swazi women to the periphery of decision-making, and this exposes them to sexual abuse, physical abuse, poverty, and HIV infection. Nonetheless, the place of Swazi women seems more complicated than just subservient wives or victims of patriarchy. Swazi women are at the center of the traditional education system. They shoulder the responsibility of educating the youth and instilling Swazi values through folktales. The women exclusively compose traditional oral narratives, and remain the key storytellers. Despite the pervasive patriarchal ideology that essentializes Swazi women as inferior, I argue that oral narratives (folktales) and modern written narratives indicate the fluidity of Swazi women's status. I show how Swazi oral narratives and written narratives present the inconsistencies of patriarchy. This includes outlining the dissonance and similarity between the portrayal of gender roles in Swazi folktales and Swazi modern stories written by women. Beyond that, I indicate that although women compose oral narratives, Swazi patriarchal norms influence and control the storyline, which creates an uncomfortable space for storytellers to adequately critique gender inequalities. Swazi written narratives, however, are a comfortable space in which women debate or even challenge their thoughts and feelings about their place in Swazi society. Therefore, I hypothesize that the portrayal of Swazi women's gendered problems is more nuanced in written narratives than in traditional oral narratives. That is, written narratives allow Swazi women to redefine their status and unravel more inconsistencies within patriarchy.

To elucidate the shift of gender roles, I focus on narratives composed by Swazi women but set in different time periods. I discuss two folktales, "The Woman and the Monster" and

“Dumba,” both set in ancient Swaziland (Kamera, *Swazi*). The modern works are a novel, *The Amaryllis*, set in the early 1970s, and a short story, “Dirt to Dirt,” set in the 2000s, both written by Lucy Z. Dlamini. I ground my research in feminist and deconstructive theoretical approaches. This study will contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the gender stereotypes etched in the minds of Swazi society and Swazi women in particular. By giving preference to written narratives, I hope to motivate oralists to allow Swazi oral narratives to develop beyond the canon of traditional folktales and style. Women composers may have to compose new tales that articulate contemporary problems through innovative methods. I hope that the constructive criticism from this study will incite the growth of both Swazi oral and written narratives.

To my sister,

Cebile P. Mkhathwa:

a strong and courageous young woman.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Swazi women face numerous socio-economic challenges as a result of patriarchal customs like polygamy, forced or arranged marriage, levirate marriage, and bride price. Marginalizing cultural norms push Swazi women to the periphery of decision-making, and this exposes them to sexual abuse, physical abuse, poverty, and HIV infection (Women and Law, *Family*). Currently, Swaziland has the highest prevalence of HIV in the world, and women have an infection rate of thirty-one percent, compared to men at twenty percent (World Bank). Nonetheless, the place of Swazi women seems more complicated than just subservient wives or victims of patriarchy. Swaziland has the highest rate of female-headed households in Sub-Saharan Africa (FAO United Nations). Both single and married women find themselves vacillating between motherhood and fatherhood because polygamous men usually abandon their wives for younger women.

Beyond that, Swazi women are at the center of the traditional education system. They shoulder the responsibility of educating the youth and instilling Swazi values through oral narrative (folktales). The women exclusively compose folktales, and remain the key storytellers. Today, Swazi women adopt oral literature and writing to contend the place of women and debate gender inequalities in Swaziland, which raises several questions for the study of contemporary Swazi literature. To what extent do Swazi men control Swazi women? Are Swazi women gradually breaking free from patriarchal norms? How have narratives, both traditional oral and modern written narratives influenced and portrayed the changing gender roles of Swazi women?

Despite the pervasive patriarchal ideology that essentializes Swazi women as inferior, I argue that oral narratives and modern written narratives indicate the fluidity of Swazi women's status. Contrary to common belief that Swazi women's independence or individuality emanates from the advent of modernity, I show that ancient Swazi traditions

hint at the fluidity of Swazi womanhood. Swazi folktales indicate the contradictory gender roles patriarchal Swazis expected and continue to require from Swazi women. Thus, I compare how Swazi oral narratives and narratives written by Swazi women represent gender roles. This includes outlining the dissonance and similarity between the portrayal of gender roles in Swazi folktales and Swazi modern stories written by women. I also show how written Swazi narratives, as opposed to traditional oral narratives, create a comfortable space in which women discuss or even challenge their thoughts, feelings, and place in Swazi society. I hypothesize that the portrayal of Swazi women's gendered problems is more nuanced in written narratives than in traditional oral narratives. Thus, writing allows Swazi women to redefine their status and unravel more inconsistencies within patriarchy.

To elucidate the shift of gender roles, I focus on narratives composed by Swazi women but set in different time periods. I discuss two folktales, "The Woman and the Monster" and "Dumba," both set in ancient Swaziland (Kamera, *Swazi*). I selected these tales because they represent the wider pattern of plot structure and gender stereotypes that runs through most traditional Swazi narratives. Also, the thematic concerns in these narratives are similar to the themes of the written works I analyze. Thus, comparing these tales to the written works will highlight how the oral and written narratives handle similar themes in dissimilar approaches. This will help us evaluate how each approach enhances or impedes Swazi women from expressing their feelings. The modern works are a novel, *The Amaryllis*, set in the early 1970s, and a short story, "Dirt to Dirt," set in the 2000s, both written by Lucy Z. Dlamini. I focus on literature written by Swazi women to establish common ground among the works I study, and because women almost exclusively compose Swazi oral narratives. However, I hypothesize that though women compose traditional oral tales, cultural norms seem to mediate or silence women more in folktales than in written narratives. Thus, I show

how written narratives allow Swazi women to express themselves more freely, as opposed to oral narratives.

There is a significant amount of research on the aesthetics of Swazi traditional literature (songs, narratives, poems, proverbs, etc.), and these studies do a commendable job in valorizing Swazi oral literature (G. Mamba; N. Mamba). Some research looks at the role of Swazi women in oral literature and how oral literature serves as a mouthpiece for Swazi women (N. Dlamini; S.R. Dlamini; Mkhonza). Most of these studies (Kamera, “Trickster Heroines”), however, amalgamate Swazi women into one body, a figure with monolithic views and values. A few scholars like Ackson M. Kanduza and Sibusiso C. Ndlangamandla discuss the inconsistencies of women’s perceptions about patriarchy or the contradictions within Swazi patriarchal structures.

Although numerous studies discuss the general differences between oral and written literature (Finnegan; Okpewho), I have not found criticism that simultaneously studies oral and written narratives with the aim of mapping out the unpredictability and shift of gender relations in Swaziland. Since oral narratives sit at the centre of Swazi cultural values, it seems fundamental to study how they influenced the place of women. It is equally important to study how written narratives continue to change Swazi women’s status. Other female Swazi writers like Thoko Mgabhi in her siSwati novel, *Itawuphuma Ehlatsini*, capture the plight of Swazi women, but Dlamini stands out for nuanced and varying styles as she addresses the shift in gender roles. Also, Dlamini’s written works incorporate Swazi oral literature, and this will allow me to compare traditional oral literature to the modern version of oral literature. I aim to show how Swazi written narratives reshape and challenges gender ideologies prescribed by patriarchal Swazis.

While researchers conduct numerous studies of Swazi oral literature, research on Swazi literature written in English seems minimal. Literary scholars have not adequately

critiqued the written pieces of literature that I plan to analyze. In the only article I know of that attempts to analyze *The Amaryllis*, Francis Mogu argues that *The Amaryllis* advocates for social change in the way that the novel invalidates stereotypes about Swazi women's disposition. Mogu, however, does not describe the predominant social and cultural values in Swaziland during the 1960s-1970s, yet contextualizing the novel could provide ground for investigating the shift in gender roles. So far as I know, there is no criticism that discusses "Dirt to Dirt." This dearth of research on written Swazi literature underscores the need for analyzing these works. Though Dlamini's works have received little critical attention, *The Amaryllis* and "Dirt to Dirt" remain popular in Swaziland. The Swazi Ministry of Education currently prescribes both Dlamini's works in secondary schools. University professors teach *The Amaryllis* in most English classes.

I ground my research in feminist and deconstructive theoretical approaches. Although feminism is broad and varies, in general feminism seeks to change and challenge social behaviors that negatively impact women (Andersen). This study will contribute to the ongoing dialogue about the gender stereotypes etched in the minds of Swazi society and Swazi women in particular. It aims to contribute in the continuing reconfiguration of Swazi women's status. By giving preference to written narratives, I hope to motivate oralists to allow Swazi oral narratives to develop beyond the canon of traditional folktales and style. Women composers may have to compose new tales that articulate contemporary problems through innovative methods. I hope that the constructive criticism from this study will incite the growth of both Swazi oral and written narratives.

CHAPTER 2: SWAZI ORAL NARRATIVES

In this section I analyze the portrayal of Swazi women's status in two traditional Swazi folktales, "The Woman and the Monster" and "Dumba." I identify the gender stereotypes as well as the inconsistencies of patriarchy suggested by the tales. I focus on how thematic perspective and stylistic choices may devalue Swazi women's problems or contribute to the silencing of Swazi women.

2.1 Gender Stereotypes in Oral Narratives

Swazi tales avoid critiquing traditional customs like polygamy, and they blame individuals for failing to survive within the "good" traditional structure. "The Woman and the Monster" centers on polygamy and motherhood. It criticizes a polygamous man for loving one wife over the other. To punish the husband for favoritism, the favorite wife gives birth to crows, while the disliked wife has human children. Out of jealousy, the favorite wife conspires with her husband and they kill all the human children of the disliked wife. Later on, the disliked wife gives birth to a beautiful daughter, and she asks a sea monster to raise her daughter to protect the child from her husband and co-wife. Traditionally, a polygamous man should love all his wives equally and protect his children. The tale criticizes the husband for favoritism and failure to manage his polygamous household. As a result, he foregoes the right to raise his daughter, and an inhumane character, the monster, gets this opportunity. The juxtaposition of the monster and the husband dehumanizes the girl's father as he acquires a brutish character. The monster shows love and compassion towards the disliked woman and her daughter, which indicts the father for his cruelty. Through juxtaposition, the folktale castigates irresponsible fathers and husbands who fail to protect their children and "manage" their wives. Rather than critiquing polygamy, the story uses this man's bad example to prescribe how polygamous men should behave in order to avoid this man's punishment.

Ironically, the comparison of the monster and the girl's father unsettles human behavior, and may hint at the futility of the tale's efforts to reinforce behavioral stereotypes such as the stereotype that Swazi men protect and love their wives and children.

Similarly, "Dumba" addresses themes of obedience, wooing, and courtship in Swaziland. Nonetheless, the tale avoids critically evaluating traditional courtship procedures and instead blames Dumba for disobedience. A young man called Dumba travels a long distance to visit his girlfriend and in-laws. Upon his departure, Dumba's mother instructs Dumba to refrain from eating wild fruits along the way, but she does not tell him the repercussions. However, the nice smell of the wild fruit tempts Dumba such that he defies his mother, and eats wild fruit. Immediately after eating the fruit, he has a desire to relieve himself. After he defecates, his excreta persistently sing behind him "Ngimele ngimele Dumba" (Wait for me, wait for me Dumba) to the point that Dumba hides the excreta in his pocket. Worse, when Dumba arrives at his in-laws' homestead and they dish him some jugo beans, the excreta ask for some beans. Dumba ignores the excreta, and thus they eventually jump into the pot!

The metaphorical image of excreta concretizes Dumba's disobedience. Swazis, like many people, associate feces with filth. Feces are excreted from the body as waste, and once excreted, they produce a bad odor; as a result, no one wants to be at close range with them. This olfactory image conjures up the idea of total disregard. The tale uses this metaphorical image to denounce disobedience. It suggests that people, especially children, should avoid disobedience regardless of the fact that it is inherent to all human beings. By disobeying his mother, Dumba feels embarrassed in front of his in-laws. After the excreta jump into the pot, the child sitting in the same hut with Dumba shouts for the parents to tell them that Dumba has talking excreta with him. Out of shame "Dumba took his faeces, put them in his pocket and ran back home" (189). Swazis associate human excreta with witchcraft. It is a bad omen

for a person to see human excreta, let alone to carry talking and mobile excreta in one's pocket. Dumba's humiliation leads to him losing his girlfriend. In Swazi custom, a man is judged by the number of women he can woo. The jilting of a young and virile man brings shame on him. The excreta try to control Dumba's behavior by embarrassing him for disobeying his mother. In this way, the excreta become traditional society's mouthpiece, advocating for obedience. As opposed to objectively critiquing the notion of obedience, the traditional courtship practices in Swaziland, and the traditional stereotypes about wooing, the tale renders Dumba a failure.

Like many Swazi tales, "The Women and the Monster" and "Dumba" hide the feelings and inner thoughts of the female narrator or female characters. Although, women narrate the tales and their audience is mainly female, the stories remain alienated from Swazi women because even when the narrative directly discusses challenges of womanhood or societal expectations for women, it refrains from depicting the female character's explicit thoughts. "The Woman and the Monster" does not elaborate on how the women in the polygamous marriage feel about polygamy. The disliked wife seems frustrated by the death of her children, not necessarily by the favoritism that accompanies polygamy. Also, the narrator focalizes on the women throughout the narrative, which contributes to their objectification and devalues their plight. Unless the disliked wife speaks for herself or the narrator portrays a woman's perspective, voicing dissenting views, the audience might not discern the scope and variance of Swazi women's feelings about polygamy from this story. This runs the risk of compromising the plight of Swazi women.

Dumba's girlfriend seems insignificant, yet she should have a say on her future with Dumba. Throughout the narrative, we do not see or hear the girlfriend's reaction towards the talking excreta. The story does not even mention her name. Her family and the predominant societal norms of how a suitor should behave when visiting his in-laws supersede her feelings

or individuality. Ironically, the excreta have more freedom of expression and agency than Dumba's girlfriend. Though inanimate, excreta talk, sing, and jump; it is virtually impossible for Dumba to ignore them. Juxtaposing the excreta's freedom with the marginalization of Dumba's girlfriend dramatizes the imbalance of power relations between traditional society and women. Though Swazi women are an integral part of society, traditional values like obedience confine them to the margins of society. The repression of women persists in contemporary Swaziland. Although the constitution now advocates for the empowerment of women, it does not set up practical structures to ensure that Swazi women can realize their freedoms (*Women and Law, Swazi Women*). At the same time, the silencing of Swazi women implies the women's potential to disrupt patriarchal authority. The mere presence of Dumba's girlfriend, even without saying anything points to the cracks of patriarchy. That is, patriarchy thrives on suppressing women who threaten male authority.

The marriage directly involves Dumba's girlfriend, but her family undermines her opinion about what she wants in a marriage partner. As opposed to Dumba's girlfriend, the children at Dumba's in-laws spend time with Dumba. When Dumba eats his meal the children sit with him and see the excreta jumping into the pot. The juxtaposition of Dumba's closeness to children and his alienation from his prospective future wife foreshadow and symbolize the communication barriers that plague most traditional marriages. One cannot help wondering how the story could turn out if Dumba's girlfriend had the opportunity to castigate or forgive Dumba for his disobedience. The silencing of women is prevalent in traditional Swazi tales, and this raises a question: If Swazi girls listen to these stories from infancy throughout childhood, how do the stories shape the girls' perception of themselves and their behavior as adult women?

At face value, Dumba's mother tries to control Dumba's fate. She instructs him not to eat wild fruit, and retains her control by withholding information on the repercussions of

eating wild fruits. At the end of the story, Dumba's mother shows omniscient power. When she sees Dumba return home early, she "concluded that he must have eaten the fruits" (189). Her omniscience and authority seems to suggest that the narrative empowers women within patriarchal structures. However, Dumba's mother and Dumba operate within a power structure of mother and son, as opposed to girlfriend and boyfriend. As a mother, Dumba's mother has authority over Dumba, regardless of his gender. Also, age mediates his mother's authority. Traditionally, when sons grow into men, they acquire more power than their mothers. According to Swazi customary law a widow is not entitled to her husband's property, but the male heir inherits everything (Shili). In some cases, greedy sons even evict their widowed mothers from the traditional homestead. The idealized relationship between Dumba and his mother blurs the underlying power conflicts between mothers and sons in Swaziland.

Traditional Swazi tales tend to exonerate male characters, which also perpetuates male dominance and unaccountability. "The Woman and the Monster" presents the flawed husband as a penitent figure who learns from his mistakes. The favorite wife takes more blame than her husband for murdering the disliked wife's children. At the end, the husband reconciles with the disliked wife, while the favorite wife languishes in loneliness. Worse, he murders the favorite wife's crows, and for the first time, she feels "the pain of being childless" (184). The tale brands the favorite wife as the villain. As such, she suffers the most. The folktale also exculpates the man by associating the favorite wife with witchcraft. The favorite wife gives birth to crows, which is a bad omen in Swazi culture. Swazis associate these black birds with evil, death, or witchcraft. The crows concretize the favorite wife's vile ways. It is a common belief that children resemble their parents; therefore, by giving birth to crows the tale presents the favorite wife as the mother of "evil." This implies

that the favorite wife's supernatural powers cause her husband's evil actions, rendering the husband a victim of circumstances, rather than an accountable father figure.

Beyond that, the story lacks empathy for the favorite wife's problems. The story does not attempt to explain her behavior. Why does she kill her co-wife's children? How does she feel about giving birth to crows? What are the pressures that polygamy exerts on women as they compete for their husband's attention? Though the tale indicates that some women commit heinous crimes to get their husband's attention, it disregards the gendered problems associated with polygamy by omitting the interiority of the favorite wife. Rather than presenting the favorite wife's feelings and the challenges she faces in a polygamous marriage, the tale seems unsympathetic towards her. This lack of sympathy obscures the gendered tragedy of polygamy. Sociologist Margaret L. Andersen argues that what might seem like women's personal troubles is often a reflection of bigger public and social problems (11). Thus, by focusing on the personal shortcomings of the favorite wife, the tale erases the impact of the patriarchal environment on Swazi women.

Similarly, "Dumba" suggests that Dumba makes an honest mistake by disobeying his mother. At the end he reconciles with his mother, apologizes, and his mother merely laughs at him. The ending trivializes Dumba's disobedience by attributing it to immaturity. Also, the tale elaborates on the dialogue between Dumba and the children at his in laws' homestead.

The children saw him and went to greet him. They said, "Hello, brother in-law!" He responded and the small voice responded after him. The children again said, "How are you?" He responded and the small voice also responded after him. The children laughed at the voice especially when they saw Dumba pressing hard on his pocket with a sad face. (189)

The closeness between Dumba and the children at his in-laws' homestead infantilizes him. Though Dumba's "sad face" may evoke sympathy from the audience, the repetition in the dialogue resembles a children's game. The children enjoy hearing Dumba's voice together with the excreta's voice from the pocket. Dumba's audience (children) and the implied age commonality between the children, Dumba, and feces minimize Dumba's humiliation. Also, while the tale directly quotes Dumba and the kids, it goes on to say "When the in-laws also came, the small voice did the same" (189). The omission of the dialogue between Dumba and his older in-laws further downplays Dumba's embarrassment.

The prevailing humorous and childish tone reduces Dumba to an innocent childlike youth who makes a genuine mistake. The audience may conclude that Dumba, as "a handsome young man" (189), will get another chance at love. The valorization of Dumba's physical attractiveness perpetuates male chauvinism, especially since the girl remains an undefined figure without any physical attributes. Dumba, on the other hand, seems like an object of desire. The tale ends on an optimistic note for Dumba, but erases young women by disregarding the girlfriend. Moreover, the friendly tone between Dumba and his mother suggests that he feels more ashamed for losing his girlfriend than disobeying his mother. In this way, the tale encourages the commodification of Swazi girls, because Dumba values the girl for the prestige and respect she brings to him as a successful suitor. Worse, the story endorses the commodification of women rather than criticizing it. Giving Dumba's girlfriend agency might have mitigated her commodification and objectification.

2.2 Inconsistencies of Patriarchy in Oral Narratives

While Swazi folktales re-inscribe male authority through traditional ideology, they also reveal the instability of male domination. In "The Woman and the Monster" the husband's authority falls under scrutiny because he does not meet the traditional expectations

of a polygamous family head. He allows his favorite wife to coax him into killing his own children, yet he later regrets murdering his human children. The man offers cattle to the monster as a token of appreciation, highlighting his remorse. He regrets his inhumane act to the point that when he gets home, he kills all the favorite wife's crows. His earlier misjudgment and lack of insight put his leadership skills in question. His favorite wife deceives him and controls his decisions. The favorite wife has a strong hold on him, as he realizes her manipulative power only at the end of the story, when he decides to kill the crows. The husband's flaws threaten the traditional stereotype of an all knowing and ever right husband. At the same time, his imperfections humanize him, further destabilizing the stereotype of omniscient Swazi males.

Despite Hilder Kuper's observation that traditionally Swazis see a husband as a man "superior in strength and law" (26), both wives in the tale defy societal expectations by challenging their husband's authority. The disliked wife's shrewdness shows how Swazi women maneuver through patriarchal spaces. The disliked wife devises a plan to protect her daughter, and when the crows repeatedly question her about her child's whereabouts, she says, "the baby went where her other children went" (184). She dupes her husband and co-wife for years before they find out that her daughter lives with a sea monster. Also, the favorite wife has her husband eating off her palm when she convinces him to kill his own children. Children are a man's wealth in Swazi custom, because when daughters get married the man accumulates cattle, and sons continue the family name, but the husband chooses to forego those benefits to please his favorite wife.

The tales challenge the patriarchal ideology that Swazi women are inherently and homogeneously submissive. In the two stories, the women perceive and react to patriarchy differently, depending on their age, status, and social environment. In "The Woman and the Monster" the disliked wife starts off succumbing to patriarchal pressure. She allows her

husband to kill her children without her complaining or revolting. She stays in her marriage for years, and does not even contemplate leaving her husband. Though frustrated, she continues to fulfill societal expectations by having sexual relations with her husband and conceiving babies. She knows that her husband will murder her children once she gives birth, but she keeps trying for babies. Her optimism or denial hints at the valorization of motherhood by Swazi society. Despite the disliked woman's initial docility and vulnerability, she decides to give away her daughter without her husband's consent, and this suggests a strong sense of individuality. One could also read this as an indication of how oppression strengthens women's personalities by requiring them to devise defense mechanisms. The variance of her personality does not end with the defiance of her husband. At the end of the story, she decides to forgive her husband and they reconcile. Her decision shows the complexity of gender relations because, on one hand, she appears to succumb to patriarchal pressure by staying in an abusive relationship just to save face. On the other hand, she chooses to forgive her husband. The disliked wife opts to maneuver through the fragmentations of patriarchy at a very high cost: her children's lives.

On the other hand, the favorite wife in "The Woman and the Monster" asserts her individuality by manipulating patriarchal structures to satisfy her selfish needs. She gets into a polygamous marriage, yet she cannot handle sharing her husband. As a defense mechanism, she controls her husband through witchcraft and convinces him to murder his own children. The favorite wife's evil ways subvert patriarchal oppression at the expense of her co-wife's happiness. The tale suggests that patriarchy enables animosity and competition between women as they seek to survive within the system.

In "Dumba," Dumba's mother sees patriarchal structures differently from the women in "The Woman and the Monster." Dumba's mother is the custodian of patriarchal values in this tale. She inculcates the traditional values in Dumba and punishes Dumba for failure to

adhere to societal requirements for a male suitor. As the main educator, Dumba's mother has authority over the young Dumba. The tale reveals the irony of patriarchal oppression, since women propagate repressive values to their detriment. The patriarchal society levies false autonomy over Swazi mothers who find themselves reproducing traditional ideologies. On the other hand, Dumba's mother holds a position that allows her to disrupt patriarchy by teaching Dumba subversive values. That is what the favorite wife does in "The Woman and the Monster," she trains her children (crows) to support her. The crows spy on the disliked wife to find out where her only human daughter lives. The crows are central to the tale's climax because they tell their father about the disliked wife's visits to the river, which leads to the discovery of the daughter. Unlike Dumba's mother, the favorite wife uses her role for individual gain rather than advancing societal interests.

Dumba's girlfriend faces a different set of problems from the two wives in "The Woman and the Monster" and Dumba's mother. The girl's family decides on the future of her courtship with Dumba. As a young and single woman Dumba's girlfriend has less agency compared to the older and married women in the tales. Her erasure from the story highlights the silencing of young women in Swaziland. This marginalization exposes young Swazi women to forced marriages, early pregnancies, illiteracy, and HIV/AIDS. Swaziland currently faces the feminization of HIV/AIDS where young women have a high prevalence of HIV compared to young men (UNICEF). Although the story does not show how Dumba's girlfriend responds to patriarchal oppression, her silencing hints at her possible rejection of patriarchal norms.

CHAPTER 3: SWAZI WRITTEN NARRATIVES

In this section I analyze *The Amaryllis* and “Dirt to Dirt” to contrast the portrayal of gender relations in Swazi oral tales and literature written by Swazi women. Flora Nwapa argues that African female writers tend to see women from a different vantage point, as opposed to male African writers. Nwapa asserts that most male African writers portrayed women as the weaker sex, while female African writers redefined themselves by focusing on the power of women. Thus, I discuss how Swazi women writers redefine the place of Swazi women or reinscribe gender biases. Written narratives often create a comfortable space for women to envision themselves, but I question who the composers of traditional oral narratives are. Even though they are women, could they represent male dominance or even compose through ideologies that resemble the ideologies of Swazi male writers?

3.1 Gender Inequalities in Swazi Written Narratives

While Swazi folktales ignore and trivialize the characters’ interiority, written modern stories portray the inner thoughts of the characters through first-person point of view and dialogue. Though both male and female writers use these techniques, the use of first-person narrative helps Swazi women writers depict the plight of women, and break the silencing of women in Swazi traditional narratives. In “Dirt to Dirt” the narrator gives a first-person account of her sister’s life, the main character, Hleziphi. Hleziphi grows up in a polygamous family. Her father has six wives. Hleziphi excels in primary school; she is the first student to get a merit (A average) in Fozi primary school. Despite a promising future, poverty forces Hleziphi to drop out of school. Her now widowed mother fails to raise E500 (\$50) to pay for Hleziphi’s high school education. Around the age of thirteen, Hleziphi ventures into domestic work. She hopes to save money and go back to school the following year. However, her boss’s husband repeatedly rapes her until she falls pregnant. The pregnancy causes more

despondency because Hleziphi returns to her rural home in Mayiwane. Her uncles and brothers feel infuriated by her pregnancy, and thus, they force her to marry an old man, Maphosa. Maphosa marries Hleziphi as his fifth wife, and he abuses her emotionally and physically to the point of killing her.

As a first-person narrative, the story highlights Hleziphi and her sister's plight. The narrator starts telling the story while standing before Hleziphi's grave: "Before me is the grave of my sister Hleziphi. It is a month now since my sister died and was buried" (51). She repeats the idea of death through the words "grave," "died," and "buried" to convince herself of Hleziphi's death. This also shows her innocence and immaturity because, as a young child, she struggles to process and accept death. The narrator's sad tone evokes a somber mood from the onset. Ironically, the graveyard provides a private space for her to let her "thoughts run their course" (52). She cannot think straight around the crowd at Hleziphi's cleansing ceremony. She goes to the graveyard where trees "free" her "from the fear of being espied by revelers" at the cleansing ceremony (52). The words "free" and "fear" imply that the people at the cleansing ceremony and, by extension, the society which enabled Hleziphi and other poor girls' suffering, suffocate the narrator. She feels anxious about her future as a woman. The word "revelers" indicts the Swazi society for ignoring and indirectly celebrating the marginalization of women. Speaking candidly about Hleziphi's problems helps the narrator to heal from the pain of losing her older sister, and provokes awareness about the abuse of women. The story is not a gender-insensitive narration about Swazi customs. Rather, revealing the characters' interiority provides more room to critically evaluate the effects of traditional customs like polygamy, arranged marriages, and bride prize on poor girls.

Although Dlamini writes *The Amaryllis* in the third-person voice, the novel uses dialogue, speech, and monologue to reveal the characters' interiority and conflicting feelings. Traditional tales use these techniques minimally, which runs the risk of essentializing

characters, and suggesting a false unity across different characters. Zakhe seems like a problem child because she disobeys her parents, has an abortion, drops out of school, and runs off with an old Portuguese man (Vasco). But Zakhe opens up to her older sister, Tana, and says, “Let’s face it, you and I are different. You love books, and being a good girl comes easily to you” (36). Zakhe blames her wayward behavior on her “natural inability to do good,” and this shows her unwillingness to accept responsibility for her actions. Zakhe’s statement also seems like a mechanism she uses to accept her academic failures and immorality. At the same time, Zakhe wishes to emulate Tana’s good behavior. The words “Let’s face it” imply that Zakhe has difficulty accepting that she does not pass in school, and thus she tries to augment dissimilarities between her and Tana. The dialogue indicates Zakhe’s insecurities, fears and maybe aspirations, which shed light on why she behaves in what might seem like an abnormal way. Zakhe’s statement evokes sympathy because her low self-esteem makes her undervalue her abilities.

Beyond revealing women’s feelings, Swazi women writers depict the social relations between women which oral narratives normally obscure or essentialize. Feminist writers like Dlamini valorize sisterhood. In *The Amaryllis* women of different ages form strong bonds and help each other face male domination. Lomashayina establishes a close relationship with her first-born daughter, Tana. They talk about everything, even problems we would expect Lomashayina to discuss with her friends or her husband. When Tana’s father (Mpisana) beats Lomashayina, she confides in Tana. After Zakhe goes missing, Lomashayina opens up to Tana about the pain and frustration she feels because of her husband’s indifference. Decrying her husband’s insensitivity Lomashayina says, “Oh, for the person who calls himself a parent but knows nothing about carrying a child for nine months or the birth pangs” (52). Lomashayina feminizes sensitivity by expecting Tana to empathize with her more as a

female, who will probably experience motherhood one day. Lomashayina and Tana's relationship develops into a friendship which helps both women face their challenges.

Lomashayina and the older Sis Toy (ex-girlfriend to Tana's father) have a connection despite having dated the same man. Both women orient Tana's father to formal education and modern life. Sis Toy acquaints Tana's father with Johannesburg and the city life while Lomashayina teaches him how to run his bus business. Fearing that Sis Toy has aged and may need financial assistance, Lomashayina agrees to go with Mpisana to Johannesburg and provide Sis Toy with financial and moral support. Conversely, in "The Woman and the Monster," the wives never socialize with each other, though they live in the same homestead. The disliked wife only talks to the crows that harass her about her daughter's whereabouts. The tale ends with the wives at odds, while the disliked wife reconciles with her husband. The favorite wife's flat character contributes to the women's static relationship. This is a simplistic perception of women in polygamous marriages because, even when they have great differences, they usually communicate with each other and might even have moments of alliance. By omitting this crucial part of women's relations, the tale undermines women's interpersonal skills and solidarity.

The Amaryllis also hints at the fragmentation of Swazi women's solidarity. Tana and her university friends establish close bonds, but the degree of closeness, as well as their educational background and social background, mediate the girls' loyalty to each other. As Tana's close friends, Julie and Patience feel compelled to tell Tana that Reuben is cheating on her. They condemn Reuben's infidelity. Julie and Patience, however, also participate in illicit relationships. Patience has an affair with Tsembani's boyfriend, Goitsimang. Tana feels Patience should show loyalty towards Tsembani. She asks Patience "But as ex-Mzana girls, shouldn't we show solidarity towards one another?" (105). Tana thinks Patience should not cheat with Goitsimang because they went to the same high school with Tsembani, but

Patience feels unaccountable for Tsembani's heartache. Defending her relationship with Goitsimang, Patience asserts, "Half the time you have to bulldoze your way in these things. Either that or you get bulldozed" (106). Patience's desperation for a boyfriend and happiness makes her insensitive to Tsembani's feelings. Patience views the women's world as a dog-eat-dog environment. Her competitiveness and individualism suggest the predominant behavior patterns in Swaziland, where women bulldoze their way into polygamous marriages. Dlamini indicates how some Swazi women support patriarchal norms at the expense of other women. By unsettling women's solidarity, Dlamini presents a credible and objective picture of women's relations.

Class and economic status creates another rift between Swazi women. Lomashayina clashes with poor women in her community because she refuses to sell ingredients for brewing beer at her store. Lomashayina claims that beer houses sell alcohol to underage children, but LaMaseko (shebeen queen) retorts, "If you feel you've already made your fortune and you begin to discriminate against some of your customers, better give your licence to someone else" (114). LaMaseko's financial needs compromise her moral standards or concern for young people. She seems concerned about surviving each day and providing for her immediate family, as opposed to worrying about the youth in her community. Class also widens the gap between Tana and Sylvia. When Tana hears that Reuben is cheating on her with Sylvia, she says "I could not reconcile myself with his choice. It was like adding insult to injury, rubbing salt into an open wound. Why go for a girl whom no self-respecting young man would want to be seen with" (95). Though Tana feels hurt by Reuben's infidelity, she seems more baffled by Reuben's choice of girl than the cheating. Tana internalizes male promiscuity and prefers it to the degradation she assumes comes with being lowered to Sylvia's class. Sylvia is a rural, low-class, and immoral girl. Tana fears Reuben's choice reflects on her or maybe threatens her established reputation as a well mannered girl. The

various dissimilarities in Swazi women's personalities destabilize the women's solidarity and debunk the homogenous view normally portrayed and advocated by traditional tales.

Stories written by Swazi women show multiple thematic perspectives as opposed to traditional folktales. Rather than blaming individuals for failing to meet societal expectations, the stories suggest reasons for those "failures" or the characters' behavior. Other than showing the favorite wife's jealousy, "The Woman and the Monster" does not give other possible reasons that make the favorite wife murder the disliked wife's children. Unlike the folktale which merely rebukes the favorite wife and her husband for killing the disliked wife's children, "Dirt to Dirt" goes beyond surface behavior and presents the underlying reasons that lead to murder, unhappy marriages, and abuse. The narrator laments that Hleziphi's "husband began beating her and setting her to do the heavier tasks such as holding the plough during the ploughing season" (56). The narrator attributes Hleziphi's miscarriages to stress, physical immaturity, domestic violence, and the tough manual work she does in the fields. On the other hand, Hleziphi's abusive husband, and by extension the patriarchal society, label her an "unyielding field" because of her miscarriages. This metaphor reveals the husband's perception of women and child bearing. Maphosa internalizes patriarchal norms to the point that he thinks women, like fields, should produce children regardless of the emotional, physical, and psychological abuse they face. This perception matches Hilda Kuper's observation that "the bearing of children is the essential consummation of wifedom" in Swazi tradition (22). "Dirt to Dirt" shows a different perspective from the traditional view. Dlamini condemns the over valorization of motherhood by indicating that teenage wives suffer the shame of bareness, yet male dominance creates an uncondusive environment for successful pregnancies.

3.2 How Traditional Norms Marginalize Swazi Women

“Dirt to Dirt” also laments the financial problems of women in polygamous marriages. Hleziphi’s father cannot provide for all his six wives. The burden to pay for Hleziphi’s primary school education lies on her mother, LaMavundla. Hleziphi’s mother sells nuts and melons to pay for Hleziphi’s primary school, but her small-scale business does not allow her to raise the E500 she needs for Hleziphi’s high school fees. After Hleziphi’s father dies, the family forces Hleziphi’s mother into a levirate marriage. But her new husband fails to provide for all his brother’s wives and children. As a result, Hleziphi drops out of school, regardless of her outstanding academic performance. Hleziphi inherits poverty from LaMavundla, and Hleziphi passes it onto her unborn child. When Hleziphi’s brothers force her to marry the old and prosperous Maphosa, the narrator, though young and immature, feels skeptical about Maphosa’s wealth. She notes that Maphosa is “prosperous by our rural standards” (55), and this implies that Maphosa may not adequately provide for Hleziphi’s needs, especially since he has four other wives and numerous children to maintain. In her critique of polygamy and levirate marriages Dlamini addresses cyclical poverty by showing how these traditional customs are a breeding ground for women’s economic oppression. Unless these traditional customs are reviewed by policy makers from the perspective of Swazi women of different ages, social status, geographic location and educational backgrounds, the economic status of Swazi women will remain stagnant or even deteriorate.

The impracticality of polygamy comes up in *The Amaryllis* where Dlamini juxtaposes Mpisana’s childhood with his children’s childhood. Mpisana grows up in a polygamous set up while Tana and her siblings grow up in a nuclear family. He loses his mother at birth and “is brought up by his father’s most senior wife, a cruel, mean, spiteful woman” (6). Growing up in a huge family, Mpisana suffers from malnutrition and neglect. As a result, he yearns for familial affection and love, especially from his father. When Tana’s father leaves

Lushikishini (his home area), none of his family members worries about his disappearance. Dlamini indicates that polygamous families present a façade of unity. Despite the huge family number, orphaned children within polygamous families suffer because of neglect. At the same time, we cannot entirely blame the senior wife for her spite, because she might not approve of the traditional custom that requires the senior wife to raise her husband's orphaned children. Her cruelty may be a defense mechanism against the imposition of inconsiderate patriarchal norms.

Contrary to his upbringing, Mpisana establishes his own family, a nuclear family. His family supports, loves, and accommodates each other. Though Zakhe is a wayward child, they try their best to help her change. On Christmas they have a special lunch together and share gifts. Tana's father and Lomashayina share their childhood experiences with their children. Through contemporary storytelling, they strive to break communication barriers. As opposed to the hostility in polygamous families, Tana and her siblings feel their parents' love.

The Amaryllis also indicates that bride prize places unwarranted pressure on women to produce male children. The expectation of male children reveals the double standards of Swazi men who assume that women should shoulder the blame or supposed shame of bearing female children. Although the novel otherwise portrays Mpisana as the ideal husband, he stoops to the level of insensitive men and “grumbled unceasingly about having paid eighteen head of cattle as *lobola*,” yet Tana's mother takes her time to give birth to a boy (1). Lomashayina's delay in bearing boys devalues her in her husband's eyes; she seems lower than the value of the eighteen cattle he pays for bride prize. Mpisana's dissatisfaction with Lomashayina exposes the falsity of the traditional ideology that bride prize unites the groom's and bride's family as opposed to commodifying Swazi women. Elaborating on the gender biases of bride prize Siphso Simelane notes, “The assumption that *kulobola* has internal protective devices for women remains theoretical. The payment of *emalobolo* has

very little to do with the security of women, but more to do with the desire for accumulation by fathers and the dominance of husbands over their wives” (499).

Worse, Mpisana asserts that he wants a boy child who will be an heir to the business. Ironically, Lomashayina, a woman, helped him start and run his bus business. Reflecting on the help he gets from Sis Toy in Johannesburg, Mpisana says, “I sometimes wonder why we men refuse to let women teach us” (22). He seems aware of the influential role women played in his life, but he internalizes patriarchy, since he distrusts his daughters’ capabilities to run the family business. Mpisana does not realize that the failure or success of his daughters in running the bus business may reflect the success or failure of his parenting skills. The novel indicates how patriarchal expectations encourage favoritism or the preference of male children over girls. By contrast, “The Woman and the Monster” condemns favoritism without showing how polygamy and bride prize enable favoritism.

Beyond that, Dlamini presents a nuanced picture of the complexity of gendered problems in Swaziland. That is, Swazi women of different ages, social status, geographic areas, and educational backgrounds face varying forms of marginalization. After Hleziphi’s defiler gives her uncles twelve cattle as atonement for raping and impregnating Hleziphi, Hleziphi’s uncles forgive him unreservedly. The uncles ignore the psychological, emotional, and physical effects of the pregnancy on teenage Hleziphi. Worse, her uncles offer Hleziphi as a second wife to her defiler without her consent. To their disappointment, the man refuses to marry a second wife. However, Hleziphi’s uncles do not demur. They force her to marry the old Maphosa. The writer indicates that marriage in Swaziland is a homosocial institution between men, as described by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, where men exchange women between themselves as a means to buttress patriarchy and ensure control. Contrary to Gary P. Ferraro’s observation that in Swaziland “The most pronounced change related to marital roles in recent years has occurred in the area of mate selection, for most young people (men and

women alike) today accept the idea of mate selection based on mutual affection” (120), the writer indicates that poor, uneducated, and orphaned girls still must succumb to arranged marriages. These are the contemporary gendered problems that folktales rarely address in depth.

Worse, the narrator notes that Hleziphi’s uncles feel grateful that Maphosa is “kind enough to make do with damaged goods” by marrying Hleziphi (55). Hleziphi first learns of her prospective husband when her brother orders her to go to Maphosa’s hut. Her brother adds, "And you are to sleep there. And mind this, I want no nonsense from you, you hear! Remember, you are no girl anymore" (56). Bride prize makes women vulnerable to verbal and sexual abuse as well as forced marriages. Hleziphi’s virginity or lack of virginity functions as a yardstick for measuring her value, more so because her duty is to satisfy her husband sexually and bear children. The narrator’s sarcasm towards her brothers reveals the perverse mentality of Swazi males, who exchange women as goods and have the audacity to label them “damaged” when they are the ones who exploit women sexually. This concurs with Luce Irigaray’s observation that men pass on women as commodities from one male to another in a “competitive exchange” (262).

After Hleziphi’s death her brothers take action to avenge her suffering. Nonetheless, they seem unconcerned about Hleziphi’s death. They see her death as an opportunity to acquire more riches. Upon reaching Maphosa's home they “headed straight for the cattle byre, emptying it of all forty plus herd of cattle,” but they do not even touch Maphosa for killing their sister. Hleziphi’s brothers “looked marvelous with their tall anger-stiffened torsos,” but remain “mute with anger” after getting Maphosa’s cattle (57). Though Hleziphi’s brothers have the agility and physical might to attack and defeat Maphosa, they refrain from beating him but opt for the cattle. The writer’s sarcastic tone shows her discomfort with the commodification of Swazi women even at death. Not that I condone violence, but Hleziphi’s

brothers could have beaten Maphosa and then taken his cattle. Their choice also indicates the gendering of physical abuse. Earlier on in the story, Hleziphi's brothers promptly beat Hleziphi to elicit answers about the name of her defiler. However, when they get to the defiler's homestead, they do not attack him but they stay for the weekend at his place, and return home with "meat, live goat, a couple of live chickens and bags and bags of farm produce, all piled at the back of the Landover!" (56). It seems more acceptable for men to beat a woman than to beat another man.

3.3 The Diversity of Swazi Women's Problems

In *The Amaryllis* Dlamini de-amalgamates gendered problems, which is a different approach from "Dirt to Dirt." Though *The Amaryllis* is set in the 1970s, its female characters seem more liberated than Hleziphi in the early 2000s because they get better education and live in a semi-urban area. Dlamini indicates the various factors that contribute to the success of the Swazi girl child. Lomashayina marries Mpisana out of free will. As a nurse and economically independent woman, Lomashayina has the option to choose her future husband, unlike the poor and uneducated Hleziphi. Mpisana and Lomashayina have a degree of relative autonomy in their relationship. Their marriage involves the two of them, and not Lomashayina's uncles or brothers. Lomashayina's education status changes the power dynamics in her relationship with Mpisana. Mpisana is the one who tries to impress Lomashayina by wearing fancy clothes, showering her with gifts and working in Johannesburg to earn bride prize money. Unlike in traditional relationships, Lomashayina takes the lead in her courtship with Mpisana. She teaches Mpisana how to read and write, and later helps him start his bus business. On the other hand, Hleziphi's lack of education and her young age make her vulnerable to male chauvinism. Her brothers order her to cook for Maphosa, bring him warm water, and sleep with him. Despite the improvement of women's

livelihoods in urban areas, Swazi women in rural areas continue to face acute emotional, physical, and psychological abuse.

While education empowers Lomashayina in her relationship with Mpisana, education does not do the same for some of her peers. Lomashayina notes that some of her colleagues languish in patriarchal oppression because “they’ve either been relegated to the status of first wives or have been abandoned altogether” (6). The word “relegated” debunks the traditional stereotype that the first wife is the most powerful and respected wife, especially because first wives helplessly watch their husbands acquire younger wives. Education does not protect Lomashayina’s colleagues from imposed polygamy; rather some women’s higher education status drives their husbands away. The husbands run to other women who do not seem to threaten their superiority. Dlamini presents the agony of modern and educated women who still find themselves stuck within patriarchal structures. Lomashayina’s independence also seems questionable because, after marrying Mpisana, she forgoes her individuality and quits her job to support her husband’s business. Though she is a passionate nurse, she chooses the life of a housewife and keeps herself busy by managing the grocery store they own.

Also, Lomashayina’s response to physical abuse puts her independence under scrutiny. When Mpisana hits Lomashayina for the first time after nineteen years of marriage, she blames Zakhe for her husband’s violent behavior. Lomashayina claims that her husband beat her because he feels frustrated by Zakhe’s disappearance or running away from home. Beyond that, Lomashayina seems worried about saving face. She asks Tana, “Won’t our neighbours dance for joy at this” (53). She internalizes domestic violence as a norm, and does not show any concern for herself as a victim of physical abuse, but wants to maintain a picture-perfect marriage at her expense. Worse, she forgives Mpisana for beating her without even discussing the issue with him. Her behavior portrays the prevalence of domestic abuse in Swaziland and how women easily rationalize abuse. At the same time, Dlamini shows how

patriarchy pressures Swazi women to present a façade of happy marriages, while men do not share that burden. Lomashayina, like many Swazi women, behaves in a contradictory way; she wants freedom but also continues to adhere to patriarchal norms to avoid alienating herself from her social environment (Women and the Law, Family). Lomashayina has the agency to leave Mpisana, lay charges against him or at least confront him for beating her, but she does not. Lomashayina is more liberated than Hleziphi because Lomashayina has the option to choose to accept or reject physical abuse, while socio-economic problems force Hleziphi to succumb to domestic abuse. At the same time, patriarchal norms limit Lomashayina's options. Dlamini presents a common version of an independent contemporary Swazi woman: one who expresses individuality or independence but within the boundaries of male domination.

Tana imitates her mother's behavior. As an academically driven young woman, Tana challenges educational and cultural stereotypes. Nonetheless, Tana holds fast to Swazi traditional expectations for wives. When they watch a movie with Reuben, Tana feels disgusted by the main character's "childishness." The main character is a bored and lonely housewife who resorts to drinking alcohol. Tana seems baffled by the woman's "silliness." Tana wonders why the woman does not bear children to occupy herself while her husband is at work. This woman may be suffering from depression as she drinks heavily throughout the day, neglects house chores, and eventually cheats on her husband. But Tana concludes, "All I can say is that he married a harlot" (85). Rather than reading the woman's behavior as a cry for attention or help, Tana resorts to labeling her a whore. Tana internalizes the reductive ideology of women's homogeneity such that she fails to envision a woman with different needs from those prescribed by the Swazi society. Ironically, Reuben, a male, tries to reason with Tana by suggesting that the woman feels lonely. Zakhe, on the other hand, refuses to succumb to societal expectations of chastity. She asserts, "What I want most in life is to be

left alone to come and go as I please” (46). She engages in risky sexual practices from a young age, has a clandestine abortion, and runs off to Botswana with an old Portuguese man. Her sexual escapades defy the generational gap as she dates young and old men (government ministers and businessmen). Zakhe shows the instability of Swazi womanhood in a more radical way than Tana and Lomashayina.

The juxtaposition of the three orphans in “Dirt to Dirt” and *The Amaryllis*–Hleziphi, Lomashayina, and Mpisana–highlights that Swazi women face varying and different challenges from men. Though both Lomashayina and Mpisana are orphans, Lomashayina’s hope lies in formal education, while Mpisana, as a young male, may choose from a variety of opportunities. Though uneducated, Mpisana succeeds because he “earns real money” as a gold miner in Johannesburg (19). He uses the money he makes in Johannesburg as capital for his bus business. The pervasive assumption that women lack the physical strength required in mining and other industries limits women’s job opportunities. Thus, women rely on their male counterparts for financial support. Such gendering of jobs reinforces male dominance. Fortunately for Lomashayina, education protects her from the unfair gendering in low-income jobs. Hleziphi, on the other hand, is an uneducated poor female orphan, which limits her employment opportunities more than Lomashayina’s. After she drops out of school, domestic work seems like the next best thing for her. As informal labor, domestic work exposes Hleziphi to various forms of abuse, which entraps her in a lifelong cycle of poverty.

Hleziphi and Zakhe react differently to teenage pregnancy and sexual abuse. The fast city life in Manzini exposes Zakhe to premature sex and clandestine abortions, while Hleziphi’s ignorance about sexual reproductive health makes her vulnerable to rape and a miscarriage. Hleziphi’s first pregnancy and miscarriage indicts the Swazi government for failing to decentralize health facilities and provide knowledge about sexual reproductive health to rural areas. When Hleziphi’s boss’s husband rapes her, Hleziphi convinces herself

that she can carry this burden alone. She withholds the name of her defiler to “protect her boss,” which emphasizes Hleziphi’s naivety and lack of self-awareness. Prior knowledge about social services provided to rape victims could make Hleziphi feel comfortable, as a poor rural girl, to speak out about the rape. Perhaps reporting the rape earlier could prevent the pregnancy. After Hleziphi’s brothers beat her for refusing to tell them name of her impregnator, she walks for five miles to get medical assistance at Mayiwane dispensary. She miscarries after this incident. Ignorance, remoteness or lack of sexual reproductive health information, fear of losing her job, and trauma from repeated rape silence Hleziphi.

On the other hand, Zakhe’s social environment gives her some degree of agency. Older men (government ministers in Zakhe’s case) sexually abuse Zakhe and Hleziphi, but Zakhe decides to run off with Vasco, while Hleziphi, like an outsider, watches her brothers decide her fate. Tana, as Zakhe’s foil, brings another dimension. Tana refuses to “sacrifice her girlhood to a skunk” (37). The metaphor of a skunk captures Tana’s disgust towards males who exploit girls sexually. Tana is mature, chaste, and academically driven. Zakhe and Tana come from the same geographical environments and social backgrounds, but their lives turn out differently. Ironically, Lomashayina says she got educated so that her children may live a better life than hers, but Zakhe chooses to be a low-life. These women defy the traditional stereotype of the homogeneity of Swazi women, usually portrayed in traditional narratives.

In *The Amaryllis* Dlamini suggests that a generational gap between the younger and older generations sets conflicting sexual and moral standards for Swazi women. The older generation sets unfair moral expectations for women. Some Swazi men expect women to remain chaste until marriage while the men have the liberty to go gallivanting around with numerous women. Mpisana prides himself in marrying a sexually moral woman. He brags that when he married Lomashayina “she had no knowledge of a man” (25). Lomashayina’s

virginity boosts her husband's ego, yet Lomashayina does not get the opportunity to brag about Mpisana's virginity. By the time Mpisana marries Lomashayina, he has lived in Johannesburg with his lover, Sis Toy. He does not even regret losing his virginity. Worse, Mpisana commits adultery with a woman from Piet Retief, and Lomashayina easily forgives him because "It was his only slip. A brief one too, before sanity returned" (148).

Lomashayina's perception shows that men have the option to "slip" before and during marriage, but women do not share the same privilege. This indicates the older males' double standards on sexual expectations and how some older women enable the unfair sexual and moral expectations in Swaziland.

The younger male generation, however, does not expect girls to remain virgins. When Tana starts studying at the University of Swaziland, her boyfriend, Reuben, pressures her to have sexual relations with him. Tana, on the other hand, feels strongly about chastity and refuses to have sex before marriage. In response, Reuben cheats with Sylvia. Worse, Tana's friend Julie tells Tana, "Reuben loves you, and I've not the slightest doubt that if you revised your stand on certain expectations in a relationship between two people who love each other, he would dump" Sylvia (94). Though Julie seems infuriated by Reuben's infidelity, she enables and promotes male domination by encouraging Tana to yield to Reuben's sexual demands just to save their relationship. Dlamini indicates that young Swazi women like Tana face a different form of pressure than the older generation of women who had to remain chaste. Society expects these young women to succumb to men's sexual desires, and such an imbalance of power exposes girls to HIV and AIDS and rape more than males. Aaron G. Buseh notes that, currently, Swazi teenage girls face more sexual coercion than boys. 17.7 percent of teenage girls reported sexual coercion on their first sexual intercourse compared to the 7.7 percent of boys (363). Though the moral and sexual expectations change, women are still on the receiving end. They need to meet men's sexual demands.

Dlamini uses the generational gap to suggest that the more gender relations change in Swaziland, the more they stay the same. Tana seems bolder than her mother. Tana grills Lomashayina for agreeing to travel to Johannesburg with Mpisana to visit his former girlfriend, Sis Toy. Tana objects, “People will laugh at you, Ma” (113). Tana’s assertiveness implies that if she were to face a similar challenge, she would oppose male domination. However, when Tana has to decide whether to forgive Reuben for infidelity, we sense confusion. After Bhembe tells Tana that Reuben plans to ask for forgiveness and her hand in marriage, Tana says, “My conversation with Bhembe left me in turmoil. Reuben wishing to marry me and professing to be still in love with me! Should I believe that?” (130). Tana contemplates forgiving Reuben, although Reuben and Sylvia are expecting their first child together. Her internal conflict suggests that she finds herself trapped in a patriarchal structure where, if you cannot beat them, you join them. Sylvia tells Tana that Tana’s main problem is that she wants Reuben on her own terms. Sylvia blames Tana for Reuben’s infidelity and indicates that women do not have the liberty to set standards in relationships. This speaks to the internal fragmentation of Swazi women and how the stifling environment reinforces patriarchal structures from one generation to another. As part of the “independent” generation, Sylvia and Tana find themselves confronting the same problems as the older generation of Swazi women.

3.4 Stylistic Techniques that Underscore Swazi Women’s Problems

Written narratives allow writers to present a consistent narrator, which increases the credibility or believability of the story. Oral tales, on the other hand, have infinite and ever changing narrators/storytellers for the same story. (In the terms I use here, the narrator and storyteller are synonymous, while the writer is synonymous to the composer.) The constantly changing narrators might aide or hamper the tale’s thematic concerns. When the storyteller

changes, the audience might not empathize with the characters or contextualize the tale. The tale could seem like a farfetched myth, which is how some Swazi youth view folktales today. The specific information about the narrator in “Dirt to Dirt” makes the story appeal to a wide audience. The narrator is a sad young girl who has lost her sister because of patriarchal norms. The narrator’s young age indicts adults (both male and female) for silently watching or directly contributing to Hleziphi’s death. If random or multiple narrators, other than Hleziphi’s sister, would narrate “Dirt to Dirt,” the audience would not identify Hleziphi’s plight as a particular person’s reality. If a young boy or a granny would narrate this story, the tone and mood might change and the tale might seem alienated from the young Swazi girls it targets. The consistent narrator helps Swazi women writers to personalize their stories and make them credible. This draws the reader’s interest and provokes the audience to introspection as they identify with the narrator.

The varying and innovative techniques explored by modern Swazi writers enhance the depiction of women’s challenges. “Dirt to Dirt” starts with a flashback (a style hardly used in Swazi traditional tales) at Hleziphi’s cleansing ceremony. A month after a person dies family members hold this ceremony to take off the black clothes worn during the mourning period. Hleziphi’s cleansing ceremony symbolizes the ephemerality of human life, especially the insignificance of the life of poor Swazi women. During the ceremony, no one else mourns Hleziphi’s death except her young sister, who laments that she now stands alone gazing at Hleziphi’s grave while “The rest of the people are now being served with boiled and salted chunks of meat, samp, and home-brewed beer” (52). The narrator’s sarcastic tone underscores the irony of the cleansing ritual where people celebrate death under the guise of cleansing themselves of bad luck. The flashback presents the effect of male domination before stating the cause, which augments Hleziphi’s plight and captures the audience’s

attention. Through the flashback, the narrator puts across her criticism and invites the audience to criticize these customs from the beginning of the story.

The ending of the story reinforces this critical view because the narrator concludes: “That is how I come to be standing here at my family graveyard, concealed by merciful trees, and gazing at my sister’s one month-old grave” (58). The narrator seems suicidal at this point; she yearns for the ground to conceal her as it has concealed Hleziphi. Desperation makes the narrator appreciate the favor and mercy of the trees that hide her from her insensitive society. The ending highlights the feelings and internal conflicts that poor Swazi women struggle with. The narrator, like any human being, wants to live a happy life, but poverty and cruel patriarchal norms make her wish for death. Also, the wording of the ending is similar to the beginning; the narrator uses a circular plot to hint at the futile life of poor rural girls. Despite their efforts to improve their lives, these girls find themselves right where they started: poverty-stricken.

Dlamini uses the character’s names to suggest some of the patriarchal gender expectations and stereotypes. Zakhe’s full name is Nkhomotakhe, which means “She who brings cattle to her father’s kraal” (1). Zakhe’s name suggests that her family expects her to get married, and she must marry a man who affords to pay bride prize. The commodification of the Swazi girl child comes up again. Also, the cattle do not belong to both parents but they belong to the father. Zakhe’s name points to the gender inequalities, because though Lomashayina gives birth and takes care of Zakhe, Lomashayina does not get a stake in the bride prize. Conversely, Mpisana names his son Mzingaye, which means our home has become a real home through him or we have a home through him. Mpisana values his son as an heir. He expects Mzingaye to continue the family name through his children. This implies that Mzingaye, as a male child, has no option but to have children. Only, Mzingaye may inherit Mpisana’s wealth because he will keep the riches in the family. Dlamini uses the

names to unsettle these stereotypes as Zakhe never gets bride prize. Rather, she runs off with Vasco who beats her up and neglects his three kids. After Vasco dies in a car accident, Zakhe returns to her family in Swaziland. As a widow with three children, Zakhe is a liability rather than an asset, according to traditional standards.

Dlamini also explores and combines dissimilar techniques that advance the novel's thematic concerns. *The Amaryllis* draws from the art of oral storytelling. Tana's parents narrate their youth experiences in a storytelling session. On Christmas day, Tana's family sits around the table, and in a flashback, their father narrates how he met his wife. Another time, Lomashayina narrates her childhood trials to her daughters. She uses storytelling to reach out to Zakhe, who seems distant. The storytelling sessions establish warmth in the Mdluli household, the same warmth felt in a traditional homestead when the grandmother narrates a tale. Dlamini also embeds the "Mother Toad" tale in her novel when mocking Mzingaye's fascination with his expanding chest, as he grows into a man. In "Dirt to Dirt" Dlamini uses a song to mock Hleziphi's brothers' determination to avenge her death. Upon hearing about Hleziphi's death, her brothers put on full traditional regalia and sing,

Nase kufike tsine	<i>Once you encounter us</i>
Kwafika Mjiji	<i>In regiment formation</i>
Vele kusho kona	<i>It means the return of life</i>
Kuvuka kwaMazuza.	<i>Of our father Mazuza.</i>
Kusho kufa kuwe. (57)	<i>It means death to you.</i>

The song says that the brothers seek revenge to satisfy their male egos and vindicate their dead father's name. They see the murder of Hleziphi as a challenge to their physical might. Ironically, they seem determined to kill Maphosa, but when they arrive at his homestead they vie for his cattle. They fail Hleziphi. Dlamini uses the traditional song to criticize the brothers' greed and insensitivity towards domestic violence. Dlamini's incorporation of oral

literature suggests that there is some good that modern Swazi society can salvage from tradition. The use of oral literature and modern written literature indicates that Swazi storytellers need to make their stories relevant to their modern society. As opposed to repeatedly narrating canonized traditional tales, the women composers need to tell stories, their stories, not only tales that freeze them in the past.

At the same time, Dlamini uses newspaper clippings to capture modernity and the educational transformations in Swaziland during the 1970s. The newspapers show the excitement that Swaziland felt upon hearing that King Sobhuza II offered land to build the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland (UBLS) campus in Matsapha, Swaziland. Putting in the newspaper clippings bridges the generational and spacial gap between the 2000s audience (for a novel published in 2004) and the book's setting of the 1970s. Also, Dlamini alludes to other works in both English and Swazi literature. As a literature student, Tana studies and role plays Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders*. Assigning this novel reveals the predominance of English literature in English classes in Swaziland during the 1970s. The mixture of techniques celebrates the changes Swazi students have witnessed in the study of literature.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Narratives, whether written or oral, sit at the heart of Swazi women's lives. Notably, oral narratives reach a wide audience of poor and illiterate Swazi women, but the younger generation has lost interest in traditional oral narratives. In my brief experience (three years) as a high school teacher, I noticed that students enjoy debating and critiquing Swazi written narratives more than oral tales. Different reasons may account for that, but the main reason for the disinterest seems to be that the stories seem farfetched and irrelevant to contemporary issues. Even school text books reproduce the same canonized tales, without seeking modern narratives. On the other hand, oral poetry and drama seem popular among Swazi youth and adults, especially because these genres go beyond the canonized forms to encompass new and contemporary works. Thus, I argue that for Swazi oral tales to regain popularity and relevance, composers need to create new contemporary stories, stories that challenge the status quo of "true Swazi folktales."

This work has shown that though oral tales have value, the traditional tales inadequately address gender inequalities. In "Dirt to Dirt" and *The Amaryllis* the varying thematic perspectives and innovative stylistic approaches give nuanced descriptions of the plight of Swazi women. The agency of the writer in written narratives suggests that though women compose traditional oral narratives, patriarchal norms influence and control the storyline. This reduces the storyteller to a transmitter, not necessarily a free composer. My intention is not to devalue the idiosyncrasy of the storyteller as a performer, but to acknowledge how traditional norms create an uncomfortable space for women storytellers to critique gender inequalities. Swazi women may mitigate these challenges by using private settings (kitchen, weaving area-*liguma*) to tell *their* stories, stories about *their* current lives and challenges. This will benefit and interest children and help confront the vicious cycle of

male domination. I hope this work motivates oral artists to compose contemporary Swazi oral stories to debate issues that modern day Swazi society grapples with.

The prevalence of storytelling and its connection with gender debates in Swaziland warrants the attention of those who develop gender policies. The stories debunk some of the predominant gender ideologies: the homogeneity of Swazi women and women's inherent submissiveness. Critics and scholars of gender may benefit from using these narratives as part of their research in trying to understand the gender inequalities in Swaziland. Thus, these narratives have social implications and have the potential to help curb the marginalization of Swazi women.

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