



Gender-based Violence against Men through the lens of Molefe's *Ke Nako ya ka*

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ABSTRACT

Gender-based Violence (GBV) is a vexing malady that marginalises the social development sphere of the entire globe. It has become an overriding global concern, with many reports suggesting that women are extremely victimised agents. Consequently, this has engendered robust scholarly attention on issues of violence against women whilst also occasioning a gap in the GBV discourse by virtue of affording little attention to the other gender, men's issues concerning violence. This noted, whereas the paper states that GBV against women is a global pandemic that menaces human life, it aims to point out the missing link in the GBV engagements and bring to the limelight the seemingly muted cry of men. This study utilised qualitative and textual analysis methods to investigate the extent to which men are also victimised by GBV through the lens of a literary text that mirrors the struggles of men in silence. Molefe's novel, *Ke nako ya ka*, is found to be germane to the focal theme of the study and has been utilised to advance the paper's argument about the forsaking of men in the discussions of GBV. The study's findings, *inter alia*, unveil that the institutionalised traditional perceptions of femininity and masculinity subject men to a fallacious immunity against GBV as they are culturally perceived as stronger vessels and women as weaker ones. The study makes a valuable contribution to the ongoing discourse on the pretexts of GBV-related issues in society.

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INTRODUCTION

The entire global arena in the present day is antagonised by a villainous nemesis denominated Gender-based Violence (GBV). It is this GBV that encompasses some extent of violence meted upon an individual, either physically, emotionally, psychologically or sexually, as a consequence of gender inequality and power struggles. This pandemic has subjected many lives to penury due to the menace it poses to their social and psychological well-being.¹ Virtually on a daily basis, a case relating to GBV is reported somewhere around the world, and this vindicates the height of this global problem and its detestable impacts. Furthermore, the current discourse on GBV appears to have institutionalised female individuals as sufferers, victims and survivors of GBV, whereas their male counterparts are imagined as perpetrators. The available statistical data lends validation to the above claim that women are the most victimised

¹ Juliet Ramohai and Rhoda Patrick, "Creating Spaces for Gender-Based Violence Conversations for Male Students in South African Higher Education," *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 2024, 1–17.

gender group and men are often the culprits in the cases of GBV.² Nevertheless, these identities assigned to men as perpetrators and women as victims engender a knowledge gap in the GBV discourse where there is a lack of conscientization to the reality that a significant portion of men are also victims of GBV. Noting this, there are inadequate scholarly inputs that probe into the experiences and voices of men who also go through GBV. This occasions the objective of this study, which is to unveil the degree of hardships that men endure due to GBV in the same fashion that their women counterparts do. The study will hinge on various themes under the umbrella of GBV to capture missing links on the side of men, such as gender roles, verbal abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse and sexual abuse. These themes imagine the victimisation of men, notwithstanding their masculine nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the olden days, gender roles hinged on traditional assumptions that sometimes perceived men as authoritative figures and women as subservient agents. Thus, traditionally, when one utters the phrase, domestic violence, what comes to mind is a picture of a ‘male, large, brutish and aggressive’ person who misuses his power and strength to oppress, harass and batter a ‘female, small, and timid’ person who does not have the muscle and the will to defend herself.³ It is this traditional standpoint that blinds us and makes us susceptible to gender stereotypes. Historically, as Steinmetz and Lucca put it, “men have been given the right to control women and children, through abusive means if necessary.”⁴ The study is critical to the ongoing global combat against gender-based violence as it interrogates the ingrained gender stereotypical attitudes that have traditionally fostered deliberations on domestic abuse. By challenging traditional underpinnings that perceive male figures as culprits and females as victims, this study points to the density of GBV. Delving into this gap becomes significant as it nurtures an all-encompassing discourse that incorporates varied experiences, inclusive of male GBV victims and female GBV doers. Patriarchy, a social system whereby men are the primary and the only authority figures central to social organization, was the order of the day. Tracy makes the following observation:

“During this period of early modern feminism, the perspective developed that patriarchy, in any and all forms, is the ultimate cause of all abuse against women, for patriarchy is seen as the overarching social construct which ultimately engenders abuse.”⁵

Consequently, in South Africa, as elsewhere, most reports on domestic violence are biased towards women as if men are never victims of (domestic) abuse. ‘There is a tendency by men to underreport their own assaults’⁶ The media, newspapers’ headlines and magazines are simmering with women and children abuse as well as wife battering. It is just a handful of articles that are published on the abuse of men.

In South Africa, it looks like women and children are ‘more equal than’ the other species. The South African calendar days are scented with various political stereotypes, sliding from taking a girl-child to school week, through mothers’ and women’s days, to women’s month. Even the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children campaign, which is for a good cause, is biased towards one gender. To top them all, the Department of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, which caters for women and children, takes centre stage in government. It is one of the departments in the presidency, meaning it is being taken care of by, among others, the president himself. Nonetheless, the huge question remains unanswered: are women not abused during this month or any other day of the year?

Domestic violence is, in most cases, branded as a phenomenon whereby females are known to be victims and male attackers. Traditionally, as alluded to in the introductory paragraphs, men were regarded as the more aggressive of the two sexes. But, as Wisegeek rightly pronounces:

“... a surprising number of domestic violence episodes do involve women as the aggressors, creating a new category of victim known as the battered husband. An abused husband suffers the

² Sarah Dangar, Vanessa E Munro, and Lotte Young Andrade, “Learning Legacies: Better Understanding the Dynamics of Domestic Abuse Suicidality through Domestic Homicide Reviews,” *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, 2024, 1–17.

³ Alan Clarke, *The Handbook of School Governors* (Cape Town: Kate McCallum, 2009).

⁴ S. K. Steinmetz and J. S. Lucca, “Husband Battering,” in *Handbook of Family Violence*, ed. V. B. Van Hasselt et al. (New York: Springer Science-Business Media, 1988), 233–46.

⁵ Tracy Kidder, *Mountains beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Would Cure the World* (Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2009), 576.

⁶ D. R. Loseke, R. J. Gelles, and M. M. Cavanaugh, *Current Controversies on Family Violence* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 57.

same emotional, verbal and physical abuse as a battered wife, but is less likely to report these crimes to authorities."⁷

It is an incontrovertible fact that women and children are domestically and otherwise abused. To say that men, too, are ill-treated is an undeniable truth, though many are still reluctant to accept it. This is evident in the essay, 'Husband Battering: A Serious Problem.'⁸

"Billboards, radio, and TV ads across the country proclaim that 'every fifteen seconds a woman is beaten by a man.' Violence against women is clearly a problem of national importance, but has anyone ever asked how often men are beaten by women? The unfortunate fact is that men are the victims of domestic violence at least as often as women are. While the very idea of men being beaten by their wives runs contrary to many of our deeply ingrained beliefs about men and women, female violence against men is a well-documented phenomenon almost completely ignored by both the media and society."

Abused men (husbands) are, in general, either ignored or subjected to mockery. In an article titled 'Women hit men too ... And it's abuse', the author starts with these words:

*When I mentioned this topic last week, it was met with laughter. Phil said, "that man is a wuss."*⁹

That was after hearing the story of a man who was constantly being assaulted by his wife. The abuse started when they were still dating, and it followed them into their marriage. Every time he came home late, she would accuse him of cheating, and thus she would hit and slap him. Needless to say, he would end up with bruises, which he had to lie about when asked by friends and family. Like other African men, the South African men observe the rule of law: *monna ke nku o llela teng* (a man must bear his trouble unwearingly). Mvulane demonstrates that South African men, too, have a problem of blowing the whistle because they are afraid of being disparaged. Like a sheep in the above Northern Sotho adage, men do not make noise when they are slaughtered:

*"I was getting struck by this woman while I was holding my daughter. The funny thing is that I could not even call the police."*¹⁰

*"I could not even speak to any of my friends about it, writes a domestic violence victim on one of the growing numbers of websites that seem to be the only effective support for men suffering abuse at the hands of their partners."*¹¹

Domestic violence in Uganda, like in other African States, used to be associated with acts of physical violence against women in a marriage relationship. The tide is, however, changing. According to a recent survey, 4 out of 5 cases of domestic violence are being meted out on men. Ugandan women are turning the tide against the men, and a few men have started coming out to publicly make this problem known to the authorities.¹² Mendel concurs:

*"Though clinical reports of boy victims appeared as early as 1937, male sexual victimization remains a relatively unexplored topic for research. The past few years have seen an increase in studies on the prevalence and descriptive characteristics of abuse ..."*¹³

Molefe saw it coming, hence his inscription of a prolific Northern Sotho novel, *Ke nako ya ka* (It is my time).¹⁴ With this novel, he was trying to attend to Swahnberg et al.'s concern: 'Abuse against men,

⁷ L. WiseGeek, "Battered Man Syndrome," 2010, <https://www.bartleby.com/essay/Battered-Man-Syndrome-In-Men-Don-T-38A7CFF953DDFA05>.

⁸ Steinmetz and Lucca, "Husband Battering."

⁹ Clarke, *The Handbook of School Governors*.

¹⁰ Zama Mvulane, "Do Men Suffer Spousal Abuse?," IOL, 2008, <https://iol.co.za/news/south-africa/2008-11-25-do-men-suffer-spousal-abuse/>.

¹¹ Mvulane, "Do Men Suffer Spousal Abuse?"

¹² Nick Emmel, "Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research: A Realist Approach," 2013.

¹³ M. P. Mendel, *The Male Survivor: The Impact of Sexual Abuse* (California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1995).

¹⁴ S. Molefe and K. Ntshangase, "Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective," *Journal of Gender Studies* 25, no. 2 (2021): 141-57.

however, remains relatively under-researched and under-theorized and only limited knowledge exists on the prevalence of abusive experiences among men.¹⁵ Hines et al. recommend that “domestic violence needs to be viewed as a human problem, not a gender problem.”¹⁶

- Operational concepts: Essential concepts that are fundamental in the analysis of Molefe’s novelette, *Ke nako ya ka*, are examined, namely abuse, intimate relationships, domestic violence and husband battering.
- Abuse: Doyle explains the concept ‘abuse’ as follows:
*“As a noun, ‘abuse’ is defined by the OED as ‘improper use, perversion, a corrupt practice, deceit, violation, defilement’. The verb ‘to abuse’ is given as ‘to take bad advantage of, to violate.’”*¹⁷
 In simple terms, abuse means using something or someone inappropriately. It includes having power over someone else, that is, having control over that person. “In a relationship, when one person has power over another person, there is unequal power in the relationship. Unequal power in relationships has led to various forms of exploitation and abuse, such as discrimination against people of a particular gender, and rape.”¹⁸
- Intimate relationship: An intimate relationship is a relationship that involves physical and/or emotional intimacy. As Mouradian avers:
*“the term ‘intimate relationships’ is used here to be maximally inclusive of any romantic and/or sexual relationship between two non-biologically-related people, including dating or courtship relationships, relationships in which the romantic partners live together in the same household (cohabiting), relationships in which two people have children in common but are no longer formally romantically or sexually involved with one another, and marital relationships. Ideally, such relationships are loving and supportive, protective of and safe for each member of the couple.”*¹⁹
 When in a relationship, it is important to mutually respect one another (including opinions). Equal commitment of the parties involved is of utmost importance. It is assumed Dipherefere (Molefe’s main character in this novel, *Ke nako ya ka*, was a round character who fitted well in the Equality wheel before she (mis)interpreted the South African constitution on equality.
- Domestic violence: Domestic violence is a form of abuse which involves the exploitation by one person or another in an intimate relationship, such as marriage, cohabitation (*vat-en-sit*), dating or within the family itself. It is also referred to as domestic abuse, family violence, intimate partner violence, spousal abuse or just relationship abuse. It “is a pattern of assaultive, coercive, dominating and punishing behaviours perpetrated by one intimate partner to another.” This behaviour usually happens where and when there is an imbalance of power that can be exploited. An example of this would be in Molefe's novel, where Dipherefere, a lady who is the chair of the Women’s league, exploits the fact that her husband does not know or is just naive about the constitution of the Republic of South Africa.²⁰ Domestic violence/abuse is used for one purpose only: to gain and maintain absolute control over the abused/battered. To the abuser, fair play does not exist. Intimidation, guilt and fear are the tools used to monopolize the abused.
- Husband battering: A few online dictionaries consulted do not give a definition of husband battering, but instead define ‘domestic violence’. The reason might be that men are rarely abused; much more often, it is the woman who is the battered party, and as such, it is not that compelling for such dictionaries to define ‘husband battering’. Husband battering might be defined as a form

¹⁵ Katarina Swahnberg et al., “Men’s Experiences of Emotional, Physical, and Sexual Abuse and Abuse in Health Care: A Cross-Sectional Study of a Swedish Random Male Population Sample,” *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health* 40, no. 2 (2012): 191–202, 191

¹⁶ Denise A Hines, Jan Brown, and Edward Dunning, “Characteristics of Callers to the Domestic Abuse Helpline for Men,” *Journal of Family Violence* 22, no. 2 (2007): 63–72, p. 64.

¹⁷ C. Doyle, *Child Sexual Abuse: A Guide for Health Professionals* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1994), p. 7

¹⁸ M. Carstens et al., *Spot on: Life Orientation (Grade 10)* (Sandton: Heinemann (Pty) Ltd., 2008), p.142.

¹⁹ V.E. Mouradian, “Domestic Violence and Abuse,” 2008, <https://www.scribd.com/document/184427479/Domestic-Violence-and-Abuse>.

²⁰ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective.”

of abuse where a man who is married to a woman is physically abused by her, that is, she hits, smacks, kicks, or punches him. This abuse includes behaviour ranging from threats to physical or sexual assault. It may include emotional, verbal and financial actions that are harmful. A man is abused when a woman uses abuse or violence to gain power and control over him.

The myth that men are mostly, if not always, abusers in an abusive relationship should be counteracted. In her study on wife abuse in the Northern Province of South Africa, Makofane argues that women are mostly abused, and the abusers are their husbands. She continues to emphasize that the abuse affected these women physically, emotionally, economically and psychologically.²¹ The extent of the damage is irreparable. Nowhere in the study does she touch on men as the abused. This is also vindicated by Thusi and Mlambo, who argue that whereas GBV against women and children garners plenty of attention, men who also suffer from GBV are often ignored.²²

Mashao's research is about the abuse of women and children in selected Northern Sotho novels. The research concentrates on the causes as well as the consequences of the abuse of women and children.²³ As in Makofane's research, nothing is said of battered men. Contrary to popular belief, Russell acknowledges that men, too, are the objects of abuse by women:

*"Elizabeth Bates, a lecturer in applied psychology and the leader of the study, said this was a challenge to the received wisdom about domestic violence."*²⁴

This study found that women demonstrated a desire to control their partners and were more likely to use physical aggression than men, she said,

"This suggests that intimate partner violence may not be motivated by patriarchal values and needs to be studied within the context of other forms of aggression, which has potential implications for interventions."

As a result, researchers such as Anderson, Dienye and Gbenoel, and Tsui found an apt theme for investigating domestic violence: husband battering.²⁵ In his work, Anderson investigated fifteen men who suffered sexual abuse.²⁶ The abuse happened mainly in the prison cells. In the end, he appealed to the abused men in general to report if and when the case had happened. Dienye and Gbenoel started their research by scrutinizing domestic violence in general, before being specific on the abuse of men in a domestic circle.²⁷ They contended that in real life, men, like women, were abused. Their work revealed that generally, abuse of men is instigated by other men. In their investigation, Tsui et al. found that the 'respondents believe that abused men were typically unwilling to seek help and were facing many obstacles that blocked them from talking about their concern.'²⁸ Reporting the abuse was not an option. They listed five reasons for not seeking help: 'service target perception, shame and embarrassment, denial, stigmatization and fear.'²⁹

Forms of abuse: Domestic violence' in the DVA is defined as: physical abuse, sexual abuse, economic abuse, psychological or emotional abuse, verbal abuse, intimidation, stalking, harassment,

²¹ Mankwane D M Makofane, "The Dynamics and Prevalence of Wife Abuse in the Northern Province of South Africa: A Social Work Perspective," 1999.

²² Xolani Thusi and Victor H Mlambo, "South Africa's Gender-Based Violence: An Exploration of a Single Sided Account," *EUREKA: Social and Humanities*, no. 2 (2023): 73–80.

²³ Salome Raisibe Mashao, "An Appraisal of the Portrayal of Child and Woman Abuse with Special References to Selected Northern Sotho Novels" (University of the North, Sovenga, 2004).

²⁴ Russell J Skiba, Mariella I Arredondo, and Natasha T Williams, "More than a Metaphor: The Contribution of Exclusionary Discipline to a School-to-Prison Pipeline," *Equity & Excellence in Education* 47, no. 4 (2014): 546–64.

²⁵ Molly D. Anderson, "Rights-Based Food Systems and the Goals of Food Systems Reform," *Agriculture and Human Values* 25, no. 4 (December 15, 2008): 593–608, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10460-008-9151-z>; P P Dienye, "Domestic Violence against Men in Primary Healthcare in Nigeria," *University of Port Harcourt*, 2008; Anne S Tsui, "Responsible Research and Responsible Leadership Studies," *Academy of Management Discoveries* 7, no. 2 (2021): 166–70.

²⁶ Anderson, "Rights-Based Food Systems and the Goals of Food Systems Reform."

²⁷ Dienye, "Domestic Violence against Men in Primary Healthcare in Nigeria."

²⁸ Tsui, "Responsible Research and Responsible Leadership Studies," 772.

²⁹ A. Tsui et al., "Learning in School-University Partnership," *Sociocultural Perspectives*. NY: Routledge, 2009, 772.

damage to property, entry into the complainant's residence without consent (where the parties do not live together), as well as any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards the complainant."³⁰

Though there are several forms of domestic abuse as mentioned in Amien's definition, this research article concentrates only on those that are applicable to abuse as depicted in Molefe's novel, namely physical, emotional, verbal and sexual.³¹

- Physical abuse: Physical abuse is defined by Straus and Gelles as 'an act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person'.³² Physical abuse includes, among others, hitting, beating, pushing, spitting on, slapping, throwing objects, choking or strangling. The following are some of the signs and symptoms of physical abuse: open wounds, bruises, black eyes, etc. To sum it up, Davies et al. avow: *"Black eyes, bruised faces and bodies, broken bones, stitches, and wounds are the most visible and clearly identified risks to a battered woman. A batterer uses a wide range of physical attacks to control his partner. This might include shoving her, shaking her, pulling her by her hair, burning her, using items around the house to hit her, using weapons such as guns and knives to threaten or hurt her and trying to kill her."*³³
- Emotional Abuse: Emotional abuse, also called psychological abuse, is any abuse which is meant to control, hurt, or demean another person.³⁴ Emotional abuse typically includes saying things that hurt the feelings of another. This type of abuse is, according to Clitheroe et al., 'when someone tries to make you feel bad about yourself and that you are no good.'³⁵ Emotional abuse can make you feel guilty and think less of yourself. The symptoms of this form of abuse, according to the National Center on Elder Abuse (NCEA) include:
 - being emotionally upset or agitated.
 - being extremely withdrawn and non-communicative or non-responsive;
 - unusual behavior usually attributed to dementia (e.g., sucking, biting, rocking);
 - an elder's report of being verbally or emotionally mistreated.
- Verbal abuse: Verbal abuse is when one partner uses language which is designed to insult, degrade, humiliate, or embarrass the other partner. It is characterized by 'the use of verbal and nonverbal acts which symbolically hurt the other or the use of threats to hurt the other'.³⁶ This type of abuse takes the form of screaming, yelling, swearing, and shouting. Verbal abuse, according to Patricelli: *"... occurs when one person uses words and body language to inappropriately criticize another person. Verbal abuse often involves 'putdowns' and name-calling intended to make the victim feel they are not worthy of love or respect, and that they do not have the ability or talent ..."*³⁷
- Sexual abuse: One is sexually abused if one is coerced into a 'sexual act or behaviour motivated with the intention of obtaining power and control over the other. It includes forced sexual contact and contact that demeans, humiliates or instigates feelings of shame' (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV)). Refusing the intimate partner's conjugal rights is one form of sexual abuse. To augment this, Kilgore says sexual abuse includes: *'...withholding sex, criticizing you sexually, insisting on unwanted touching, assuming you would have sex with any available man'*.³⁸

³⁰ Republic of South Africa, *The White Paper on Local Government* (Pretoria: Government Printers, 1998).

³¹ Molefe and Ntshangase, "Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective," 467.

³² Leslie A White, "The Science of Culture, a Study of Man and Civilization.," 1949.

³³ J. Davies, E. Lyon, and D. Monti-Catania, *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 22.

³⁴ Emily Tilbrook, Alfred Allan, and Greg Dear, *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men* (Men's Advisory Network Perth, Western Australia, 2010).

³⁵ F Clitheroe, L. Dille, and B. Engelbrecht, *Oxford Successful Life Orientation* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33.

³⁶ White, "The Science of Culture, a Study of Man and Civilization."

³⁷ Patrice Rélouendé Zidouemba and Mustapha Sadni Jallab, "The African Continental Free Trade Area and the Trade Facilitation Agreement: Some Regional Macroeconomic Impacts," *International Journal of Trade and Global Markets* 14, no. 3 (2021): 325–37.

³⁸ N. Kilgore, *Source-Book for Working with Battered Women* (California: Volcano Press, 1992).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design used was qualitative, and the approach was phenomenological in nature because its goal is ‘to describe a “lived experience” of a phenomenon’.³⁹ The phenomenological nature of this study was occasioned by its reliance on the lived experience of the central character in the selected literary text for this study. This approach is all about an individual’s life experience. This is enhanced in Lester’s observation:⁴⁰

“Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based on a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity and emphasise the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people’s motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom.”

The study employed a closed reading approach through the aid of textual analysis to analyse, discuss and interpret the relevant themes in the novel. This comprised a profound probe of the story’s depiction of abusive engagements. The criteria used to assess the depiction of abuse in the novel are guided by the societal and cultural aspects of victimization, such as emotional, psychological, and physical factors that influence suffering. Furthermore, with the application of phenomenological tenets, the study sought to unravel the profound idiosyncratic hardships of the main character’s lived experiences, providing a nuanced version of the manner in which male abuse is framed in the selected literary text.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Dipherefere, the main character, is married to Boleta, the antagonist. They are blessed with two children, a boy and a girl, who are already at tertiary institutions. Dipherefere abuses her husband, grounding her abuse on the Constitution of South Africa. She is the chair of the women’s league, and this position makes her think she is the most powerful person in her village, more powerful than the menfolk. Her supporting slogan is *ke nako ya ka* (it is my time). She misuses her power, influencing other women to disobey their husbands, in her endeavour to fight for equal rights. Men and women are the same; as a result, everything should be equal. She is fond of using the phrase: fifty-fifty. Her attitude does not only affect her husband but also her children. In the end, she is separated from her husband and the family. Molefe’s depiction of the abusive nature of Dipherefere and her partner’s anguish controverts cultural assumptions about gender roles, which often point out men as always the abusers and women as victims. The character of Dipherefere is used to point out the degree of irony to which gender-based violence against men is paid less attention. Through this character, symbolization is used. For instance, her catchphrase, *ke nako ya ka* portrays the misrepresentation of feminist epitomes as well as power struggles that emerge when dominance and equality are conflated.

Abuse in *Ke nako ya ka* (2001)

Naming as a technique

The author has used the naming technique to reveal the message he has for his audience. He has chosen to name the main character, a woman, for that matter, Dipherefere, a name from an Afrikaans word ‘peper’ (chillies), which means chilli pepper. This character is fond of causing commotion and restlessness in the family. She is as hot as the red pepper. In his own words, the author describes Dipherefere’s haughtiness:

“Le a tseba, ge e le Dipherefere yena, ke re e be e no ba motho wa go phela a re haa! Sa go phula pelo maroba ke ka gobane o be a se na ka ganong. Ge e be a ka go begela mantšwana a mabedi a mararo, o be o tla nwa meetse wa kgolwa.”⁴¹

‘You know, Dipherefere is a rabble-rouser. What is nerve-wracking is her inability to be polite in speech. When she opens her mouth, what comes out of her mouth is always upsetting.’

³⁹ J. Waters, “Phenomenological Research Guidelines,” Capilano University, 2000, [https://www.capilanou.ca/psychology/student-resources/research-guidelines-Research-/Phenomenological Guidelines](https://www.capilanou.ca/psychology/student-resources/research-guidelines-Research-/Phenomenological%20Guidelines).

⁴⁰ S. Lester, *An Introduction to Phenomenological Research* (Taunton, UK: Stan Lester Developments, 1999), 1.

⁴¹ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 3.

On the other hand, Boleta (the soft one), the antagonist, is a soft-spoken man who can not even kill a fly. He is as gentle as a lamb. Even his family, children to be exact, know him as such. This is evidenced in Morongwa's words: *Tate sa pele ga se motho wa lešata* (Firstly, father is an outspoken person).⁴²

As demonstrated in the above paragraphs, this is a family of contrasting characters. It is because of these contrasting personalities that one character bullies the other. Dipherefere, a woman, torments and abuses Boleta, her husband. She abuses him emotionally, verbally, sexually and physically.

Emotional abuse

Dipherefere abuses her husband emotionally. She does what she likes, anytime she likes. She comes home at whatever time she deems fit, and when questioned, she answers: *Ke nako ya ka* (It is my time). And she continues with her explanation:

*“Ke re matšatši a ga e sa le a mohlamonene, ke a selehono. Le gona melao e tloga e fetogile go phala maloba le maabane. Ge eba o nyaka go bona sepoko sa mosegare, o tle o itire hlogo ya lapa le”.*⁴³

‘I am saying these are modern days, not the olden times. These days, the laws have changed for the better. If you want to see the ghost during the day, just make yourself the head of this house.’

As Wallace puts it, emotional abuse “promotes the feeling of helplessness within a spouse.” That is exactly what Dipherefere is trying to do.⁴⁴ How does one make the other ‘see the ghost during the day’? No wonder Boleta was psychologically troubled, defying the patriarchal credence, *monna ke nku, o llela teng* (a man does not show emotions by crying):

*“O rile go kgebiša pelo ka ‘llo seo sa bohloko, a nama a thoma go laodišetša Mokete ka kgotelele yeo a e gatilego ka lapeng la gagwe.”*⁴⁵

‘After calming down, he started unravelling his domestic problems.’

When alone, because of the actions of his wife, Boleta resorts to soliloquy, trying to calm down:

*“E ka ba mosadi yo o gopotše eng? Gona o gopotše go dirang? E ka ba ka ge bjale a lemogile ge bana ba godile a rata go ntšha ka hlogo? Goba o gahlane le masogana a a kgonago go lelekiša mmutla ka ge nna botšofe bo kokotile mojako o bona ke se sa le selo?”*⁴⁶

“What does this woman think? What does she intend doing? Does she want to file for divorce now that the kids have grown up? Or did she meet a horny young man, for I am now too old to perform my conjugal obligations?”

Boleta is not only worried about losing his children should Dipherefere consider filing for divorce, but is also worried about his age, for he cannot perform the nocturnal duties as he used to in his youth. All these are brought about by the attitude and actions of his wife. It is humane, traditionally, for a woman to take care of her husband's daily needs, including cooking for him. On the contrary, Dipherefere expects Boleta, her husband, without shame, to do the cooking:

‘Mmagwe, ebago dijo tša ka di kae tšona ka ge o le yo nke o itokišetša go leba malaong?’

*‘O a mpona nna, ga se be ke sware pitša. Nna ke tuteditše sethithi, mme ke lalela ka sona. Ge e ba o nyaka go ja, pitša ke tšeo, napa o di fiše marago’, gwa realo Dipherefere mme a re felelele ka phapošeng ya borobalelo.”*⁴⁷

⁴² Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 13.

⁴³ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 1.

⁴⁴ Robert C Gardner and Wallace E Lambert, “Attitudes and Motivation in Second-Language Learning,” 1972; Bridget Kenny, “The South African Labour Movement,” *Tempo Social* 32, no. 1 (April 15, 2020): 119–36, <https://doi.org/10.11606/0103-2070.ts.2020.166288>, 180.

⁴⁵ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 29.

⁴⁶ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 5.

⁴⁷ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 8.

“My wife, where is my food because it seems you are preparing to go to bed?”

“As you can see, I have not cooked. I warmed the cold porridge that would be my supper. If you want to eat, start cooking”, said Dipherefere, entering her bedroom.”

Boleta accepts the shameful answer, *fela ge e le pelo ya Boleta e be e rurugile ke a go anela. Ke re e be e tlotlorega khulwana ya madi*, but his heart was sore, full of red blood with pain.⁴⁸

Boleta's emotional abuse is aggravated by Dipherefere's fight for equal rights. It is expected of Boleta not only to cook, but also to do the laundry, the dishes, and other family obligations:

*O swanetše go apea bjalo ka ge o dirile, o hlatswe diaparo, dibjana, go hlwekiša eng kapa eng, ga ešita le tše dingwe. Goba o a rata goba ga o rate.*⁴⁹

‘You should have cooked like you did, and washed the clothes, dishes and everything else. Like it or not.’

And she continues to threaten him:

*“Ge eba o ka se apee, goba gona go dira tše dingwe tša tšona tšeo ke di boletšego, le nna nka se dire. Ge o swerwe ke tlala, o tla swanela go itirela buti! O ka re o fela o lebala monna tena.”*⁵⁰

“If you are not going to cook or do other house duties as instructed, I am also not going to do them. If you are hungry, you cook for yourself, brother! It seems you sometimes ignore your duties, you useless man.”

In emotional abuse, according to Tilbrook et.al., “men felt that they were disempowered by female partners who controlled them and their circumstances directly or indirectly.”⁵¹ This is evident in Boleta's remorse:

*“Go go begela therešo, moya wa ka o tlabotšwe ke boitshwaro bja Dipherefere. Ga ke tšwane le monna yo a sego a nyale”.*⁵²

“To tell you the truth, I am off balance because of Dipherefere's behaviour. I am like an unmarried man.”

The married Boleta is debilitated. He likens himself to a bachelor, all because of Dipherefere's abuse. Nothing is as embarrassing as a spouse insulting the other in front of other people. This is well revealed in Wallace's words:⁵³

“The spouse may be put down in front of friends, family and children. This type of abuse destroys the spouse's sense of self-worth and ability to resist further acts of control by the abuser.”

Dipherefere's words bear testimony to this. As an answer to Makuba, her friend, who wanted to know the whereabouts of her husband, she (Dipherefere) says: *Sis! O mpošša ka mpša yeo, naa ge e le mo o re ke selwana mang?* (Sis! Are you telling me about that dog? What is he anyway?)⁵⁴

To sum up this type of abuse, Kemp affirms that “emotional or psychological abuse is abuse that causes, or can cause, harm to the sense of self, self-esteem, or psychological or emotional being.” Boleta's sense of self-esteem is truly harmed.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 8.

⁴⁹ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 17.

⁵⁰ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 17.

⁵¹ Tilbrook, Allan, and Dear, *Intimate Partner Abuse of Men*, 18.

⁵² Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 28.

⁵³ Elizabeth Tilley et al., “Transitions for Older People with Intellectual Disabilities and Behaviours That Challenge Others: A Rapid Scoping Review,” *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities* 36, no. 2 (March 26, 2023): 207–29, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.13054>.

⁵⁴ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 9.

⁵⁵ A. Kemp, *Abuse in the Family: An Introduction* (Belmont: Brooks Publishing Company, 1998), 36.

Verbal abuse

Diphereferere seems not to have enough vocabulary for choosing words when talking to her husband. She would say all the insensible words to her husband, no matter the circumstances. She cannot differentiate a child from an adult when speaking:

*“O thomile go ikgapa o ikgoroša ka mo lapeng la ka monna tena”.*⁵⁶

“You have started to be uncontrollable in my house, you good-for-nothing man.”

Is that a way to talk to a fully grown person, in this case, one’s husband? Is this not abuse at its best? To add fuel to the fire, she refers to her husband as *monnanyana* (a small, useless and juiceless man):

*“Monnanyana yo o na le lenyatšo eye? O gopola gore o swanetše go tlo itaola ka mo lapeng le la ka. Ge eba o gopola gore ke hlogo ya lapa, le nna ke hlogo ya lapa. Ke nyaka go mmakolla gore a šale a rile thwii. O na lemolalana eye? ... Nka se tlo hlwa ke šišimošwa ke khwephane ya go etša yena le gatee.”*⁵⁷

“This useless man has no respect. He thinks he can do as he pleases in my house. If he thinks he is the head of this house, I, too, am the head of this family. I want to make him straight like a ruler. He is cheeky, nay? ... I am not going to be distressed by the skunk he is.”

Yelling, screaming, swearing, and name-calling are some of the signs of verbal abuse. Hoff emphasises this point by saying that ‘name-calling is one of the forms of “expressive aggression”, which includes acting angry in a way that seemed dangerous, name-calling and insulting remarks’.⁵⁸ In the above paragraph, Diphereferere does not only refer to her husband as useless, but she also likens him to a skunk, that animal that is loathed by all. He is being called *khwephane* (skunk) even in his presence. In short, yelling and name-calling have been Diphereferere’s tools for humiliating Boleta both emotionally and verbally. He is being referred to as *semathana* (p.8) (he who is sent from pillar to post), *monnana* (p.9) (useless man), *selwana* (p.9) (something useless), *monnanyana* (p.37) (good-for-nothing husband), *khwephane* (p.5) (skunk), *monna tena* (p.17) (useless man), *buti* (p.17) (brother), *mpša* (p.9) (dog); the list is endless.

As Patricelli puts it, “verbal abuse is dangerous because it is often not easily recognized as abuse, and therefore it can go on for extended periods, causing severe damage to the victim's self-esteem and self-worth.”⁵⁹ Boleta has lost his self-worth; he does not know what to do anymore. That is why Molefe, the author, sympathizes with him:

*“Ke mahlomola go boBoleta bana bešo gobane monna o tloga a eswa kgotelele mme a no meletša nke le go kwa ga a kwe selo etšwe bohloko bja ntshe bo tsetsemetša bokalena. Ke ge go ka thwego magagešo”.*⁶⁰

“It is heart breaking for Boleta and company because he is ill-treated. He acts as if nothing is happening when he, in actual fact, is suffering.”

Sexual abuse

One of the benefits of marriage, and the main one for that matter, is sex. Denying the other party the warmth of sharing sex amounts to sexual abuse. Boleta does not enjoy the warmth of his wife. He says:

*Ga ke tšwane le monna yo a sego a nyale... O ra gore ge mosadi a nkgana ka malao tekano ya kgwedi mohlomongwe le dibeke, o tla e gopola bjang?.*⁶¹

⁵⁶ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 8.

⁵⁷ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 53.

⁵⁸ Bert H Hoff, “US National Survey: More Men than Women Victims of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 4, no. 3 (2012): 155–63, 158.

⁵⁹ Ami Zusman, “Challenges Facing Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century,” in *American Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century: Social, Political, and Economic Challenges*, ed. Philip G. Altbach, Robert O. Berdahl, and Patricia J. Gumpert, 2nd ed. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 115–60.

⁶⁰ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 35.

⁶¹ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 28-29.

“I am like an unmarried man ...what do you think of a woman who denies me the connubial rights for a month and some weeks?”

Like any other man, Boleta needs a woman to appease his sexual desires. As said in the previous paragraph, Boleta likens himself to a *kgope* (a bachelor), a social outcast whose anus, in the African tradition, should be burnt during the burial for refusing to let the offspring be in abundance by not entering into a marital relationship. Instead of satisfying her husband sexually, Dipherefere starts practising adultery. In the words of Madikwa.⁶²:

“Some women are impolite to their husbands and this forces them to look for comfort elsewhere. This is apparent in marriages where the woman feels she is financially better off than the husband and he is not more deserving. This frustrates husbands...”

Dipherefere is seen kissing and fondling a boy the age of her son:

*Ke re ge lesogana le lengwe la bogolo bja Thoka, le le gare le mo forohlaforohla ka mafuri, le lona le le gare le laetša mefanyetšo le meragelo. Re rile ge re re bjale gona di kgokilwe matswa, ya be bjale Dipherefere o atlana le lesogana leo. Ke re bjale ba be ba bina ba lokologile go laetša ge bjale e ka ba nto e tee, ke ra gore ba ka nwešana meetse a mkgako molapong.*⁶³

“I say a young boy of Thoka’s age was busy massaging her buttocks, trying all styles available. To our surprise, we saw Dipherefere kissing this young boy. They were so relaxed in their dancing, no doubt they could engage in sexual intercourse anytime.”

A loving woman will not do such a thing. What raises the emotion even higher is the fact that Boleta, the husband, saw the whole drama himself.

*Ge a re mahlo iša, kudu thokong yeo go binwago o bona lesogana le bina le mosadiagwe le bile le mo forohlaforohla boka mafuri a bosadi. ...Gwa buša lesogana leo la ntshe, la mo itia ka tladimolongwana ya go fiša.*⁶⁴

“When he looked at the dancing place, he saw a young man dancing with his wife, even massaging her buttocks ... and that young boy gave her a hot kiss.”

That is torture at its best. *Pelo e be e boile ka maribana ...* (the heart was full to the brim).⁶⁵

Physical Abuse

A family is a place of security; a place of safety; a place members are supposed to run to when in danger. This is enhanced by Gelles and Cornell when they say, “typically, family life is thought to be warm, intimate, stress-reducing and the place that people flee for safety.”⁶⁶ In the case of Boleta’s family, safety is not guaranteed. In the heat of the moment, she sometimes pokes him with her finger. Poking someone with a finger is a form of physical abuse, which Hopper explains as “an injury resulting in a traumatic condition.”⁶⁷ It does not include the amount of force that is reasonable and necessary.”

*‘Boleta ga ke tšhošwe ke maru a go tla bo sele. Ke mohla ke tla go laetša mo phala di nwago meetse. Ke a bona ga o ntlhomphe eye? Ga o lemoge gore ke mosadi wa gago?’ Ke re ge a realo o be a be bile bjale a kgotlakgotla monna ka monwana mo phatleng.*⁶⁸

“Boleta, you do not scare me. I will show the real way. I am convinced that you have no respect for me. Can’t you realise that I am your wife?” She was saying so whilst poking her husband.”

⁶² Z. Madikwa, “Frustrated Men Help Themselves,” *Sowetan*, April 24, 2012, 11.

⁶³ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 31-32.

⁶⁴ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 32.

⁶⁵ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 32.

⁶⁶ R. J. Gelles and C. P. Cornell, *Intimate Violence in Families* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1990).

⁶⁷ J. Hopper, *Abused Children and Violence* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 63.

⁶⁸ Molefe and Ntshangase, “Barriers to Women’s Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective,” 17 – 18.

On page 39, Dipherefere goes a step further. She slaps her husband:

*Nakong ya ge bjale e sa tswetše mafahla ka go realo, Dipherefere ke go tabogela Boleta ka ntahle le bile a re: 'ke wena mpša o tšwago o nthapela lešaba le la gago.'*⁶⁹

"When things got out of control, Dipherefere spanked her husband and said: "you are the one who called these people"

In Boleta's family, physical abuse is prevalent. Boleta's household is truly summarized in Gelles and Cornell's avowal:⁷⁰

"People are more likely to be killed, physically assaulted, hit, beaten up, slapped or spanked in their own homes by other family members than anywhere else, or by anyone else, in our society."

The assertion above is a brilliant delineation of the underpinnings of Masculism that depict discrimination on the basis of gender as a nemesis that imperils both men and women, debunking the trickery that such bigotry only applies to women. Wood affirms that Masculism perceives both men and women as having diversified roles and rights that are subject to the integral differences between them, and men are often discriminated against and stripped of their rightful position as men.⁷¹ As demonstrated in the novel, there is some extent of neglect when it comes to issues of GBV concerning men, hence the emergence of masculism to point out this gap.

CONCLUSION

The paper has pointed out some degree of reluctance by the society to pay equal attention to men's victimhood in the same fashion as their women counterparts in the discourse of GBV. The overlook of victimised men highlights gender biases in the combat against GBV. The literary text, *Ke Nako Ya Ka* challenges this one-sided approach by pointing out the hardships that the neglected gender, males, also endure as a result of GBV.

As illustrated in this article, 'the first reaction upon hearing about the topic of battered men, for many people, is that of incredulity. Battered husbands are a topic for jokes. One researcher noted that wives were the perpetrators in 73% of the depictions of domestic violence in newspaper comics.⁷² As if to conclude and finalize the topic under discussion, Dipherefere, Boleta's wife, proclaims:

*"Basadi ba gešo, re phetše nako ye telele ka tlase ga kgatelelo ya banna. Mme basadi ba gešo ge re ka se eme ka dinao, ra tielela go laetša bosadi bja rena, ga gaborena e tlile go ba thabeng. Ke nako ya rena ya gore rena le banna ka kua malapeng re lekalekanele. Ga go mang yo a fetago yo mongwe. Ge eba monna ga a nyake go lekalekana le nna, goba wena o le mma, ga a tšwe ka motseng. Re na le ditokelo tša go dira seo re se ratago. Ge eba monna o tla re ke tsoša hlogo, a leka mathaithai a go go iša seatla, le wena ema senna, o mo rothothe gore marokgwana a šale nke a be a inetšwe ka meetseng. Goba ge a kgona a be a lahle mosogwana ka mo tsibaneng sa gagwe".*⁷³

"My womenfolk, we have lived for a long time under the men's oppression. If we do not do something, and show our womanship, we shall perish. It is time to demonstrate that there is equality between men and women within families. No one is more equal than the other. If a man thinks he is more equal, show him the door. We have the right to do what we like. If a man tries to be tricky and beats you, be bold and fight back, hit him hard until he wets himself. Or have him castrated!"

⁶⁹ Molefe and Ntshangase, "Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective," 39.

⁷⁰ Gelles and Cornell, *Intimate Violence in Families*.

⁷¹ Geoffrey Wood and Christine Bischoff, "Challenges and Progress in Integrating Knowledge: Cases from Clothing and Textiles in South Africa," *Journal of Knowledge Management* 24, no. 1 (July 29, 2019): 32–55, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-10-2018-0608>.

⁷² Saksit Saengboon, Panyaatisin Kosin, and Anuchit Toomanecjinda, "The Roles of Grammar in English Language Teaching: Local Viewpoints," *Pasaa* 63, no. 1 (2022): 179–204.

⁷³ Molefe and Ntshangase, "Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective," 15.

This undoubtedly shows how men, in Dipherefere's words, are being abused if not battered to death. Molefe's novel, *Ke nako ya ka*, bears testimony to the fact that men are, indeed, abused.⁷⁴

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⁷⁴ Molefe and Ntshangase, "Barriers to Women's Leadership in South Africa: A Socio-Cultural Perspective."

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