



Exploring Elements of Gender Stereotypes and Stereotyping in some Zulu Wedding Songs

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Publication History: Received: 31st July, 2024 | Accepted: 19th November, 2024 | Published online: 29th November, 2024

ABSTRACT

The Zulu people constitute an ethnic group of related people with the same culture and traditions and predominantly inhabit the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa. The Zulu's are rooted in their culture and, therefore, are cultured people who embrace most, if not all, of their cultural beliefs. Songs are one of the tools and an integral part of the Zulu people's folklore deployed to transmit information about cultural experiences, practices and traditions from one generation to another. This qualitative study aimed to explore gender stereotyping as portrayed in selected Zulu wedding songs. The study focuses on female gender stereotypes and stereotyping. The researchers analysed seven (n=7) purposively selected songs. Utilising critical discourse analysis, the study analysed the data collected from the lyrics of the seven selected wedding songs. The data was collected through direct observation which was done on three different wedding ceremonies that were attended by the researchers in KwaZulu-Natal in UMkhanyakude District. The songs were recorded, transcribed, and arranged in accordance with the generated themes. The study employed the Nego- Feminist Theory as the core analytical tool that framed this study. The research findings have, in essence, shown that songs among the Zulu people are reflective of gender stereotypes being upheld mainly owing to the patriarchal nature of the Zulu society. Therefore, the findings of the study further confirmed the notion that Zulu traditional wedding songs perpetuate social and gender inequalities rather than challenge the several stereotypes and stereotyping that promote gender inequality, injustice, and the typical gendered roles existing in Zulu society.

Keywords: Zulu Culture, Wedding Songs, Gender Inequality, Stereotype, Stereotyping, Patriarchy

IQQQA

Isizwe samaZulu singezinye zezinhlanga ezakhele izwe laseNingizimu Afrika, iningi laso litholakala esifundazweni saKwaZulu-Natali. Abantu abangamaZulu bakholelwa kakhulu emasikweni, futhi bayawagcina. Umculo ngenye yezindlela AmaZulu ayisebenzisela ukudlulisa umyalezo kanye nolwazi ngamasiko. Leli phepha lihlose ukuhlola ngokucindezeleka kwabantu besifazane okumumethwe ngamaculo emishado yesiZulu. Ukuqoqa ulwazi kulolu cwaningo kusetshenziswe indlela yekhwalthethivu. Lapha kwahlaziywa amaculo ayisikhombisa emishado yesiZulu akhethwe ngenhloso. Kusetshenziswe uhloziyongxoxo olunzulu, lapha kwahlaziywa imininingo eyaqoqwa emaculweni ayisikhombisa ayezwakale eculwa, esifundeni saseMkhanyakude KwaZulu-Natal. Imininingo iqoqwe ngokuqaphela okwakwenzeka emishadweni emithathu eyahlukene abacwaningi abayethamela. Amaculo aqoshiwe, acutshungulwa ase ehlelwa ngokwezigaba. Lolu cwaningo lwenganywe injulalwazi yokucindezelwa kwabesifazane i-Feminism njengethuluzi elisemqoka ukuhlaziya ulwazi. Okwatholakala kulolu cwaningo kwaqinisekisa ukuthi amaculo omshado wesiZulu agqugquzela ukungalingani ngokobulili, ukungenzeki kobulungiswa kanye nokucindezelwa kwabantu besifazane.

Amagama asemqoka: Amasiko esiNtu, amaculo omshado, ukungalingani ngokobulili, ukucindezelwa kwabesifazane, ukubukelwa phansi kwabesifazane.

INTRODUCTION

Music provides a platform through which Africans express their concerns, anxieties, fears, losses and aspirations. In Africa, music is largely a politically effective tool because it is expected to be like that by both the rulers and their subjects. Therefore, African musicians are consistently obliged to employ their artistic prowess in their criticism of society's socio-political establishment, including its wrongdoing where necessary.¹ Music often effectively exposes concealed issues that hound communities.² Thus, artists use music to effectively castigate society's socio-political and economic ills. Essentially, music affords individuals adequate space for varied personal interpretations, thus allowing people with different views and attitudes to be able to work collaboratively, sharing personal experiences simultaneously shunning irresponsible issues.³ Apparently, music thus plays a critical role in enhancing social mobilisation in the context of modern-day Africa, as it continues to mirror the cultural antecedents that are representative of the ancient world.⁴ Music is among the most fascinating genres of Africa's oral traditions. Thus, songs are both sociologically and historically significant to their respective African cultural milieus, as they are strongly influenced and informed by the cultural context underpinning their production. As observed, music is a universal language that constitutes part of humanity's code of chronicles.⁵ The genre has also been instrumentalised and harnessed to foster social mobilisation. Resultantly, Nigerian musicians, such as Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, Sony Okosun, Onyeka Onwenu, Christie Essien Igbokwe, Dan Maraya Jos, Femi Kuti, Bisade Ologunde (Lagbaja), have, in several circumstances, employed the music genre to mobilise citizens towards social change. This sentiment is aptly summarised in the following expressions:

*“Ukucula lokhu kusemithanjeni yomuntu ongumZulu. Empeleni leli yiqiniso elingephikwe futhi aligcini kumaZuluodwa; bonke abayinzalo yase-Afrika bazalwa naso lesi siphivo esibaluleke kangaka. Uma kujiwe huyahutshwa, uma kujajiwekuyahlatshelwa, kubhiyozwe; uma kuyimikhosi kuyahaywa kugidwe, uma kusetshenza kunamalima umculo kawusaleli ngemuva, uma kwenziwa noma yini ongase uyicabange leyo nto iphelezela umculo.”*⁶

(Singing is engrained in a Zulu person. In fact, this is an unquestionable truth and does not end with the Zulu people; but all descendants of Africa are born with this wonderful talent. ..If there is death, songs are sung, if people are happy, they sing and dance, whenever there are ceremonies songs will be sung, when people are engaged in any kind of work such as working in the fields, music will be there; in fact, whatever the occasion is, music will be part of it).

Some wedding songs typify gender stereotyping, a phenomenon that manifests in most communities underpinned and shaped by cultural and traditional values. Being patriarchal and hierarchal in nature, the Zulu society still embodies prominent sex differences, with gender roles being considered established cultural norms and a way of assessing gender performances. The word ‘patriarchy’ was traditionally used to refer to kinship systems where descent, title, and property could be inherited following the male line. Such systems exist among social groups that generally afford greater power to men than women. Thus,

¹ Lara Allen, “Music and Politics in Africa,” *Social Dynamics* 30, no. 2 (June 2004): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02533950408628682>.

² Siphon Albert Ntombela, “Maskandi : A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indigenous IsiZulu Songs,” *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies* 34, no. 2 (June 30, 2016): 109–20, <https://doi.org/10.2989/16073614.2016.1194219>.

³ Tal-Chen Rabinowitch, “The Potential of Music to Effect Social Change,” *Music & Science* 3 (January 1, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059204320939772>.

⁴ Remi Chukwudi Okeke, “Politics, Music and Social Mobilization in Africa: The Nigeria Narrative and Extant Tendencies,” *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences* 86 (March 2019): 28–41, <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ILSHS.86.28>.

⁵ Joseph Olusegun Adebayo, “‘Vote Not Fight’: Examining Music’s Role in Fostering Non-Violent Elections in Nigeria,” *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* 17, no. 1 (2017): 55–77.

⁶ C. T. Msimang, *Kusadliwa Ngoludala* (Shuter & Shooter, 1975), <https://books.google.com.gh/books?id=9N9BAAAAYAAJ>.

the term broadly encompasses any society in which men collectively hold greater power and authority than women as well as children.⁷

In many societies, gender roles are ingrained in individuals via training and everyday practice, resulting in women being suppressed, which is tantamount to gender inequality. An individual's ability to perform different gender-related roles is disarticulated by society's pre-conditions that keep individuals within certain defined and restrictive boundaries.⁸ In this study, Zulu wedding songs, as they manifest in the Zulu culture, are not merely viewed as utterances or performances, but also as texts meant to express and convey certain cultural beliefs, values and norms to future generations. The notion of considering Zulu wedding songs as texts that are reflective of a certain discourse has been posited by Scott, who averred that texts are not restricted to the written discourse, but can also refer to "utterances of any kind and in any medium, including cultural practices".⁹ Similarly, this study views Zulu wedding songs as utterances that are capable of providing valuable insights into the Zulu people's worldview, beliefs, customs and traditions. Some Zulu wedding songs portray marriage as a 'death sentence' and an irreversible farewell for the bride. The argument being advanced in this paper is that marriage is a formal and legal union entered into by two people. It is a voluntary and personal romantic relationship or union involving a man and a woman possessing equal powers. Music replicates other cultural artefacts in that it mirrors and entrenches a society's customary, belief, and value systems, in addition to the creation or contribution to social transformation as well as novel and radical thinking patterns.¹⁰

Globally, wedding songs have been studied from a diversity of perspectives.¹¹ A study that discussed women's imagery in Rajput's folk wedding songs revealed that such songs express the bride's sentiments and expectations towards her parents and in-laws, expressions which she, perhaps, would hardly utter through other means. The aforementioned research study also depicts the centrality of folk wedding songs in perpetuating the stereotypical roles played by women and men in society. In addition, folk wedding songs enable women, including brides, to express their feelings and emotions in a verbal way in relation to their kinship.

In the same manner, studies have examined the challenges confronting the Ndebele people in matrimonial settings as depicted in classic wedding songs.¹² The current study has established that a significant rise in the rate of marital failure points to glaring weaknesses in the foundations of matrimony, a reality prompting the need to strengthen counselling mechanisms within the marriage institution itself.¹³ Apparently, in as much as the Ndebele society continues adapting to the new world order dictated by globalisation, the marriage institutions would also continue to grapple with challenges. Thus, African societies ought to transform their strategies for dealing with the multifarious challenges bedeviling the marriage institution in a changing environment. Such challenges need serious intellectual attention if there is going to be a positive reconsideration of society's efforts toward ensuring marital success.

It was further observed that wedding ceremonies should provide realistic learning opportunities for young prospective couples who are still contemplating marriage.¹⁴ They should serve as revival platforms for already married couples. Hence, wedding ceremonies should be considered vital endeavours capable of complementing ongoing social and national efforts dedicated to the promotion of the stability and success of the marriage.¹⁵ Ndebele found that Swazi women employ *umtsimba* (wedding) songs to comment on, question and disapprove of gendered power relations existing in their societies as these

⁷ Nompumelelo Bernadette Zondi, "Resurrecting the 'Black Archives': Revisiting Benedict Wallet Vilakazi with a Focus on the Utility and Meaning of African Languages and Literatures in Higher Education," *Education as Change* 24 (April 8, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.25159/1947-9417/4626>.

⁸ Syeda Bushra Zaidi, "Gender Roles in Pakistani-Urdu Wedding Song," *JEELS (Journal of English Education and Linguistics Studies)* 3, no. 1 (May 11, 2022): 1–27, <https://doi.org/10.30762/jeels.v3i1.171>.

⁹ Joan W Scott, "Deconstructing Equality-versus-Difference: Or, the Uses of Poststructuralist Theory for Feminism," in *Theorizing Feminism* (Routledge, 2018), 254–70.

¹⁰ Carl R Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship in the Facilitation of Learning," *Supporting Lifelong Learning* 1 (2001): 25.

¹¹ Lickel Ndebele, "Negotiating Marital Challenges through Classic Wedding Songs: A Case of the Ndebele in Zimbabwe," *South African Journal of African Languages* 42, no. 3 (2022): 272–82; Atifa Nasir and Aqleem Fatimah, "03 Women Imagery in Folk Wedding Songs: An Ethnographic Study of Rajput Folksongs," *Journal of Gender and Social Issues* 16, no. 2 (2017): 25–46.

¹² Ndebele, "Negotiating Marital Challenges through Classic Wedding Songs: A Case of the Ndebele in Zimbabwe."

¹³ Michael John Nel, "The Ancestors and Zulu Family Transitions: A Bowen Theory and Practical Theological Interpretation" (University of South Africa Pretoria, 2007).

¹⁴ Nasir and Fatimah, "03 Women Imagery in Folk Wedding Songs: An Ethnographic Study of Rajput Folksongs."

¹⁵ Nasir and Fatimah, "03 Women Imagery in Folk Wedding Songs: An Ethnographic Study of Rajput Folksongs."

relations are symbolic and representative of their daily experiences.¹⁶ Another study interrogated the essence and function of cultural values being expressed by *jangwa* wedding songs composed and sung by the Manyika people of Zimbabwe.¹⁷ While most of these *jangwa* wedding songs express positive messages and encouragement for newly wedded couples, other songs assume a more critical stance, warning of the possible pitfalls bedevilling the marriage institution. The study further noted that most of the *jangwa* wedding songs are centred on the central role played by brides and married women in the Manyika society. The study also discovered waning participation by the Manyika in indigenous musical arts, which signifies the need for a concerted effort to ensure the revival of *jangwa* wedding music and the documentation thereof for use by future generations.

Evidently, African wedding songs express diverse and outstanding values underpinning African indigenous societies. African women use songs to express their thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and aspirations.¹⁸ In the context of marital affairs, women protest against injustice perpetrated by their husbands, co-wives, and parents-in-law through songs.¹⁹

The Zulu people

The descendants of the Zulu people can be traced to the Nguni-speaking people of Southern Africa. The bulk of the history of the Zulu people and their culture has been orally passed on through generations, in spite of written history being traceable back to the 14th century. In 1850 when the Norwegian missionary, Hans Schreuder published the first grammar book Zulu language, which was subsequently followed by the Zulu Bible in 1883. The early 19th century saw Shaka, a young Zulu prince, coming onto the political scene, resulting in more than 300 Nguni tribes being integrated into the powerful Zulu Kingdom under Shaka himself whose reign stretched from 1816 to 1828 when his brothers, Dingane and Mhlangana, assassinated him. Shaka conscripted young men from the various parts of the kingdom. He trained them in his own way and equipped them with new warrior tactics of his own making. He defeated rival armies and assimilated their people into his own, thus establishing an extensive and cosmopolitan Zulu nation. Within the twelve years of his rule, Shaka established one of the strongest empires in Africa.²⁰

The late 19th century saw the British army invading the Zulu territory. Zululand was partitioned into thirteen chiefdoms and in the mid-1900s, the Zulu people were ruled by different White governments comprising the British in the initial phase and later the Afrikaner Government took over. Despite having lost political independence prior to South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, the Zulu people managed to survive as a nation located mainly in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN).²¹ This historical background illustrates that the Zulus constituted a nation that hailed from the diverse Nguni ethnic groups that were integrated into the Zulu nation by King Shaka. In addition, the Zulus people's resultant subjugation by the British and Afrikaner governments had huge negative implications for the Zulu culture and traditional values.

Marriage practices among the Zulu people

The Zulu culture dictated that an individual's life is the responsibility of the family and the entire society. Marriage was, and is still an invaluable institution. Therefore, the Zulu society, like any other society, ensures that young men and women choose the right lifelong sexual partners and the society in question has in place certain matrimonial practices that ensure this process occurs.²² Culture can be defined as a

¹⁶ Shepherd Mlambo, Joshua Ebere Chukwuere, and Clever Ndebele, "Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers on the Use of ICTs for Instructional Purposes," *Journal of Gender, Information and Development in Africa (JGIDA)* 7, no. 2 (2018): 77–101.

¹⁷ Mlambo, Chukwuere, and Ndebele, "Perceptions of Pre-Service Teachers on the Use of ICTs for Instructional Purposes."

¹⁸ Bongephiwe Dlamini-Myeni and Samkelisiwe Diligence Mbokazi, "Ubuciko Bomlomo: Wedding Songs as an Effective Means of Communication and Education among The Zulu People.," *E-BANGI Journal* 21, no. 1 (2024).

¹⁹ Dlamini-Myeni and Mbokazi, "Ubuciko Bomlomo: Wedding Songs as an Effective Means of Communication and Education among The Zulu People."

²⁰ Nel, "The Ancestors and Zulu Family Transitions: A Bowen Theory and Practical Theological Interpretation"; Rajendran Thangavelu Govender, "The Rhythmo-Melodic Geste as Agent of Spiritual Communion and/or Affirmation of Identity: An Investigation into the Performance of Selected Tamil and Zulu Marriage Rituals and Ceremonies in South Africa." (2002).

²¹ Sindisiwe Precious Ngobese, "Contemporary Partnership Patterns among the Zulu Population: Perceptions of University of KwaZulu-Natal Students." (2019).

²² Hebert Sihle Ntuli Ntuli, "The Role of Women in Shaping and Sustaining the Zulu Monarchy in the Late 18th and 19th Centuries," *Gender and Behaviour* 18, no. 1 (2020): 14885–96; Celani Lucky Zwane, "The Physical Features and Importance of Women That Is Depicted on Zulu Clan Praise Names," *English Linguistics Research* 9, no. 4 (2020): 32–41.

people's way of life in its totality. It consists of well-defined elements that are inclusive of the ideological or organising principles that enhance the way individuals view reality around them.²³ A people's culture encompasses their thinking patterns, feelings, belief system, and behaviour, art forms, symbols, language, aesthetic values, et cetera. It can also be viewed as a system that describes people's conceptualisation of the world, including their interpretation and expression of reality.²⁴ This conceptualisation of culture underpinned this study, as marriage is believed to be one of the cultural practices embedded in Zulu society.

According to studies, the Zulu people, like several other African ethnic groups, have a holistic view of life.²⁵ In the traditional Zulu culture, an individual's life was metaphorically perceived as an earthly journey that they had to travel while still alive. This metaphorical journey, which comprises different rites of passage and phases, commences at and coincides with an individual's birth and comes to an end at the end of an individual's life. The different developmental stages are; infancy, childhood, puberty (adolescence), youth, adulthood, old age, and finally death.²⁶ It is at the youth phase that individuals become ready for marriage, which is a "rite of passage" into manhood and womanhood for young men and women. This observation has rightly been summarised as follows:

*"Ukugana nokuganwa kungukuphelela kwalawo mabanga okukhula. Ongaganiwe kakapheleli ebuntwini, ngesiko owesilisa waziwa ngokuthi ungumfana kungakhathaleki noma useneminyaka emingaki yobudala, futhi ngeke ahlala ebandla aphenkulane namadoda ngisho angaze abe mpunga ekhanda. Ngokunjalo owesifazane ongendanga uyintombazane aze afe, angeke ahlale esithebeni namakhosikazi, ngeke asike ivenge kanye nawo ...izinsuku zomuntu ezibalulekile zintathu vo empilweni yakhe; olokuqala usuku azalwa ngalo, olwesibili usuku agana noma aganwa ngalo, olwesithathu usuku afa ngalo."*²⁷

(Marriage is the fulfilment of the stages of growth in a person's life. An unmarried man is like a boy and culturally he forever remains a boy no matter how old he may be in terms of age. He may not sit in important gatherings with other men and deliberate on matters of men. Likewise, an unmarried female forever remains a girl; she may not eat from the same meat bowl and share a piece of meat with married women. Basically, there are three important dates at a person's developmental stages in life: first, it is the birth date; second, the marriage date; and third the death date).

Studies have further established that the traditional wedding in the Zulu culture undergoes stages before the day of the actual wedding arrives. These stages include *lobola*-related negotiations (this involves the fixing of the bride price); *umembeso*, which involves the groom's family giving gifts to the bride's family; *umbondo*, which involves the bride's family giving gifts to the groom's family; *umshado* (wedding), which occurs on the actual wedding day, and *umabo*, an event where the bride's family offers gifts to the groom's family following the conclusion of the wedding ceremony. The Zulu culture places emphasis on these stages as they are considered as foundational as they are important in bringing couples into one unitary entity.²⁸

In the Zulu custom, the community regards the bride married through other ceremonies which are not the traditional Zulu ceremony as a girl and hence would hardly be accorded the respect that a married woman deserves. Conversely, the groom may resultantly experience certain misfortunes, for example,

²³ Catherine Marshall, "Africa's Answer to Militant Feminism," *Eureka Street* 23, no. 4 (2013): 4–6.

²⁴ James Nkansah-Obrempong, "The Contemporary Theological Situation in Africa: An Overview," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 31, no. 2 (2007).

²⁵ Ntuli, "The Role of Women in Shaping and Sustaining the Zulu Monarchy in the Late 18th and 19th Centuries"; Zwane, "The Physical Features and Importance of Women That Is Depicted on Zulu Clan Praise Names."

²⁶ Sibusiso Nyembezi and O E H Nxumalo, "Inqolobane Yesizwe (The Storehouse of the Nation)," *Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter*, 1989; Msimang, *Kusadliwa Ngoludala*.

²⁷ Nyembezi and Nxumalo, "Inqolobane Yesizwe (The Storehouse of the Nation)."

²⁸ Thenjiwe S C Magwaza, "Orality and Its Cultural Expression in Some Zulu Traditional Ceremonies." (1993).

losing a job. In this case, couples are obliged to go through the Zulu traditional marriage ceremony, in spite of having chosen to get married through the Christian or Western marriage ceremony.²⁹

The traditional Zulu wedding rituals and activities are held at the homes of both the bride and groom. The marriage processes commence at the beginning of the week and proceeds until Sunday. As some authors explain, the real marriage ceremony lasts between two and four days.³⁰ Preparations start roughly three months before the day of the day. This occurs when the bride has visited all her reachable relatives soliciting gifts, a process that is termed *ukucimela*, which refers to 'requesting for gifts, mainly from her relatives'.

Senior family members play an important oratory role in most traditional Zulu ceremonies, including marriage practices. The head of the family or the eldest family member addresses the guests and the ancestors, at a gathering place known called *isigcawu*, furnishing them with the purpose of the occasion. Failure to formally invoke the ancestors would result in them being wronged, which may cause certain misfortunes to befall the bride. As explained, the main crucial purpose of the *ukuthemeleza* (oratory) function is to inform the ancestors about the marriage ceremony, inviting them to be involved in the celebration and asking for their blessings.³¹ Therefore, the orations are done in a dignified language as great care and thought should determine the speakers' choice of words. The speakers employ poetic, formulaic and unique language that is peculiar to ancestral reverence. A lot happens prior to, during, and after the traditional wedding ceremony. Nonetheless, in the context of this article, just a few of these phenomena are mentioned only to provide a background of the nature of the traditional wedding ceremony in the context of the Zulu culture.

Nego-Feminism Theory

The Nego-Feminist Theory was propounded by an African feminist called Nnaemeka. The theorist focuses on different fields of knowledge, including Black female writers, feminist theory, transitional feminism, Francophone literature, the oral and written works produced by Africans in Africa and in the diaspora, as well as gender and human rights issues. Zongo observes that the power characterising Nnaemeka's work is embedded in her clear vision, superb intellect, excellent linguistic competence, good sense of humour, and in-depth understanding of the African landscape.³²

Nego-feminism primarily focuses on concepts such as family and complementarity, as opposed to individual interest.³³ In the Zulu culture, men are accorded a very domineering position, while women are subject to oppression. The man always occupies the helm of society, with women being relegated to the position of a silent passive observer. According to Arrey-Ngang the African view of men in the context of the patriarchal society is partly responsible for the violence taking place in Africa.³⁴ Boys are socialised into believing that they are superior to their girl counterparts: they are made to play around while the girls do the cooking; they are made responsible for doing most of the gruelling jobs such as splitting logs into firewood and tapping palm wine. On the other hand, girls are responsible for taking care of children, cooking for the entire family, doing laundry, shopping, fetching water, maintaining the home and, above all, attending to men's needs.³⁵

Therefore, gender manifests as a social construct. Similarly, marriage customs involve socially constructed cultural practices. It is imperative that a study's theoretical underpinnings should recognise the manner in which social constructions, power relations, and subjectivity influence gender relations and the way individuals identify and perform their various roles. This replicates the way the Zulu people perceive themselves and their roles in their various communities. Firstly, Nego-feminism has been viewed

²⁹ Govender, "The Rhythmo-Melodic Geste as Agent of Spiritual Communion and/or Affirmation of Identity: An Investigation into the Performance of Selected Tamil and Zulu Marriage Rituals and Ceremonies in South Africa."; Alice Pearl Sedziafa, Eric Y Tenkorang, and Adobea Y Owusu, "Kinship and Intimate Partner Violence against Married Women in Ghana: A Qualitative Exploration," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 33, no. 14 (2018): 2197–2224.

³⁰ Magwaza, "Orality and Its Cultural Expression in Some Zulu Traditional Ceremonies."

³¹ Magwaza, "Orality and Its Cultural Expression in Some Zulu Traditional Ceremonies."

³² Opportune Zongo, "Rethinking African Literary Criticism: Obioma Nnaemeka," *Research in African Literatures* 27, no.2(1996):178–84.

³³ Marshall, "Africa's Answer to Militant Feminism."

³⁴ Taku Catherine Arrey-Ngang, "The Changing Perception of the African Woman towards Patriarchy and Masculinity," *International Journal of Scientific Research and Management* 8 (2020): 1489–97.

³⁵ Hellen Nomusa Thabede, "Rituals as Cultural Coffins? Towards Reintegrating Divorced Women into Society: A Pastoral Theological Study" (Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University, 2020).

as the feminism of negotiation; secondly, as representing “no ego” feminism.³⁶ Nego-feminist theories basically problematise gender-based inequalities, the marginalisation of females and advancement in the transformation of structural, systematic and cultural practices existing in Africa.

This paper interrogates and explores the relationship that exists between human rights and a society’s culture. This has been prompted by the fact that females are still suffering the brunt of systematic exclusion from mainstream society and are deprived of their fundamental freedoms within African cultural systems. This paper employed the Nego-Feminist Theory in analysing selected Zulu wedding songs that are reflective of gender stereotypes. This theoretical standpoint is based on the popular view that women are inclined towards articulating the aspect of marginalisation that pervades the socio-cultural spaces in the Zulu community. The Nego-Feminist Theory helped in critiquing and challenging the chosen Zulu wedding songs, depending on how marriage is depicted to women. Wedding songs are primarily composed and sung for reasons bordering on entertainment and other purposes; nonetheless, a critical analysis of the message being conveyed in some of them reveals implied meanings. Owing to cultural sanctions, women have come to accept some of the innuendos embedded in those songs, notwithstanding the fact that they bar them from fully participating in their lives. The Nego-Feminist Theory suggests that in typically patriarchal cultures women should exercise their right to challenge those songs that undermine their self-worth.

The fundamental condition for the attainment of gender equality is that females should enjoy the same rights as their male counterparts; however, this has resulted in tension tearing the patriarchal society apart.³⁷ Feminist writers are grossly concerned about the plight of African women who are still bearing the brunt of abuse in their matrimonial unions due to the social values and norms engendered patriarchal system.³⁸ Scholars have advocated for gender transformation which is based on the view that even though the Zulu culture and tradition may be perceived as largely repressive to females, the assertion that there is a need for being hopeful that the transformation of men is feasible remains true.³⁹ In the same vein, women should not forego their roles in spite of how socially transformed they might appear; instead, they should educate these men about their role in the attainment of gender equality and thus gainfully use them as agents of positive change in terms of gender equality.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study mainly aimed to analyse, interpret and understand the Zulu wedding lyrics, specifically focusing on the gendered discourse being conveyed in these songs. Therefore, the qualitative research approach was the necessary methodology for this study, as it provided an interpretive analysis suitable for this study. Located within the interpretivist paradigm, the qualitative research approach made it possible for the researchers to critically analyse the songs chosen for this study. The six-step approach proposed by O’Connor and Gibson was adopted to analyse data collected for this qualitative study.⁴⁰ The six steps that were utilised included: (i) organising collected data; (ii) finding and organising ideas and concepts; (iii) building over-arching themes manifesting in the data; (iv) ensuring reliability and validity in the analysis of data; (v) ensuring reliability and validity in the findings; and (vi) finding possible and plausible explanations for the findings. In spite of the problems inherent in the translations, a language expert was roped in to ensure that meaning was not lost in the process of translating the chosen songs. Since

³⁶ Benjamin Mudzanire and Albert Mufanechiya, “The Articulation and Projection of Gender Identities in Post Colonial Popular Music in Zimbabwe,” *Zimbabwe International Journal of Languages and Culture (Gweru)* 1, no. 2 (2010): 88–100; Nasiru Umar Muhammad et al., “Establishing the Female Voice in Contemporary Nigerian Narrative through Nego-Feminism: A Study of Abubakar Gimba’s Sacred Apples,” *Language & Communication* 3, no. 2 (2016): 195–202; Ifeoma Ezinne Odinye, “African Feminism: An Overview,” *Nigerian Journal Of Arts And Humanities (NJAHA)* 2, no. 1 (2022).

³⁷ Tholakele Henrietta Chiliza and Mfundo Mandla Masuku, “Manifestation of Gender Inequality in Some Zulu Proverbs That Reflect Patriarchal Domination of Women (by Men) within the Zulu Cultural Context,” *Indilinga African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems* 19, no. 1 (2020): 58–69.

³⁸ Sedziafa, Tenkorang, and Owusu, “Kinship and Intimate Partner Violence against Married Women in Ghana: A Qualitative Exploration”; W Ndlovu et al., “Demystifying Femicide in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa,” *Gender and Behaviour* 18, no. 1 (2020): 15118–35.

³⁹ Nhlahlhla Mathonsi and Zethembe Mpungose, “Perceived Gender Inequality Reflected in Zulu Proverbs: A Feminist Approach,” *Southern African Journal for Folklore Studies* 25, no. 2 (2015): 30–42.

⁴⁰ Nancy Gibson and Helene O’Connor, “A Step-by-Step Guide to Qualitative Data Analysis,” *A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 1, no. 1 (2003): 62–90.

qualitative research is basically interpretive, the findings are eventually a result of the researcher's interpretation of the collected data.⁴¹ The selection of the songs was based on the purposive sampling method due to the fact that the focus was on the songs portraying gender stereotyping.

Research Instruments

The researchers ensured the validity of data through the use of documentary analysis and observation schedules during the data collection process. Each instrument was determined by the interpretive design chosen for this study. Prior to the study, the first author had attended three Zulu wedding ceremonies. The first wedding ceremony the first author attended was held at Hluhluwe on the 16th of June 2023. The second one was held on the 26th of August 2023 at Pietermaritzburg. The last one was held on the 27th of August 2023 at Mtubatuba, which is located North Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The last Zulu wedding ceremony involved the first author's family member. Therefore, the data collection process made it easy to understand the meanings embedded in the songs. Data were collected through a cell phone-based video recorder and camera.

According to some scholars, the Zulu people vary in their "practices from area to area, clan to clan, nuclear family to the next", though some aspects are common features that characterise all the Zulu marriage ceremonies.⁴² Although data were collected using different instruments, the methods played a complementary role. For example, the camera was used to capture the non-verbal cues missed by the video. As a family member, the researcher missed some of the wedding rituals but collected them using a video a week later with the help of the photographer. These video recordings were so flexible that they could be 're-played', until all the details had been grasped. The rituals, songs, and audience participation enabled the researchers to easily analyse and interpret the wedding ceremonies.

The second researcher then took some notes during the second wedding ceremony as she was merely an invited guest, thus there was no room for being deeply involved in the wedding proceedings. The researcher took notes of the audience's reactions to each wedding song, including the private conversations they held. For instance, they would say: "*Yazi angive ngivele ngiyidabukele nje intombazane esencane uma iyogana ngoba ave sekuwumdlalo nalo mshado wakhona*" (I feel pity for a young woman who is getting married because marriage has become a play).

An Analytical Approach

The study adopted the critical discourse analysis (CDA) technique to, analyse, explore and interpret the meanings in the chosen songs.⁴³ CDA unpacks the manner in which language promotes the ideology of influential people in society via institutionalised social practices. On the other hand, CDA refrains from seeing power as a fixed entity, as it can be resisted and challenged, thus leading to social change. CDA perceives discourses (such as language) as semiotic methods of mirroring social life. Discourses comprise ideas that are expressed linguistically. The researchers then transcribed and analysed data a week after attending the final wedding. Five themes were generated from the transcribed and coded data.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Speeches, chants and songs are an effective medium of expression in traditional Zulu marriage ceremonies. They are accompanied by gestures that reinforce the meanings being expressed by the various marital rituals.⁴⁴ Through wedding songs, society's various socio-cultural norms are expressed. Wedding ceremonies are graced by various songs which mostly express what the society expects from a couple in a marriage union.

⁴¹ Zoltan Dornyei, *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (Oxford university press, 2007).

⁴² Zondi, "Resurrecting the 'Black Archives': Revisiting Benedict Wallet Vilakazi with a Focus on the Utility and Meaning of African Languages and Literatures in Higher Education"; Ndebele, "Negotiating Marital Challenges through Classic Wedding Songs: A Case of the Ndebele in Zimbabwe."

⁴³ Kemist Shumba and Anna Meyer-Weitz, "Addressing the Socio-Cultural Drivers of HIV/AIDS through Indigenous Music: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Songs by Maskandi Group, Izingane Zoma.," *African Renaissance (1744-2532)* 16, no. 4 (2019).

⁴⁴ Govender, "The Rhythmo-Melodic Geste as Agent of Spiritual Communion and/or Affirmation of Identity: An Investigation into the Performance of Selected Tamil and Zulu Marriage Rituals and Ceremonies in South Africa."

Most songs serve a didactic purpose, imparting values that are culturally and socially acceptable in terms of marriage institutions.⁴⁵ The findings collected through observations point to four themes being generated, namely; marriage is a death sentence, marriage is the bride's farewell, songs portray ambivalent sexism, and marriage expresses a sense of commitment or oppression of one another (which results in gender-based violence).

Marriage as a death sentence

The findings of this study indicate that the Zulu society is typically patriarchal and androcentric in nature and is underpinned by oppressive traditional cultural practices that largely suppress women's fundamental rights and freedoms. Precisely, weddings in the context of modern Zulu society are metaphorically perceived as funerals or burials for the majority of Zulu women. This is due to the symbolic 'Kist' the women assume to the families into which they marry, thus symbolising the transition they undergo from their fathers' houses to their husbands' families.⁴⁶ These findings show that the Zulu culture has to undergo a radical change. Thus, such a change can only be feasible if society rejects perceptions of marriage as a compulsory undertaking for women who are regarded as not fully human if they are not in marriage. The Zulu culture regards the woman as a mere object capable of being coerced into a marriage union with a man and being obedient to the culturally established rules without being afforded an opportunity to air her opinions regarding her own life.

The Zulu culture advocates the philosophy that holds that the only safe space for both women and men is the marriage institution; nonetheless, this way of 'solving' societal issues is hampered by a number of gender-related problems, which include gendered roles and power relations obtaining in the existing subcultures.⁴⁷ It has been posited that indigenous wedding songs constitute part of the heritage of a people.⁴⁸ Although the chosen wedding songs can be a source of entertainment to the audience, they provide a strong criticism for the social injustices degrading women. This notion is reflected in the lyrics of the song cited below:

*Um'uyintombazane
Ayikh' into ongayenza
Noma kulukhuni mama uzofel'emendweni
UZOFEL'EMENDWENI.*

*Bayok'hlabel'inkomo, bekuthele ngenyongo
Bethi hamba kahle mama
UZOFEL'EMENDWENI.*

*Hamb'ongana mntanami
Hamba ntombazane
Ithuna lakh'alikho lapha
UZOFEL'EMENDWENI.*

If you are a girl
There's nothing you can do,
Even if it's difficult, your end of marriage should be your death.
YOUR END OF MARRIAGE SHOULD BE YOUR DEATH.

They will slaughter the cows and pour bile on you.
Saying farewell girl, you die in marriage.

⁴⁵ Rosaleen Oabona Brankie Nhlekisana, *Wedding Songs in Botswana: A Reflection of the Dynamics of Marriage, Gender Relations and Familial Conflicts* (Indiana University, 2005).

⁴⁶ Ndlovu et al., "Demystifying Femicide in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa."

⁴⁷ Thabede, "Rituals as Cultural Coffins? Towards Reintegrating Divorced Women into Society: A Pastoral Theological Study."

⁴⁸ Mudzanire and Mufanechiya, "The Articulation and Projection of Gender Identities in Post Colonial Popular Music in Zimbabwe."

YOUR END OF MARRIAGE SHOULD BE YOUR DEATH.

Go to your marriage my child.

Go girl.

Your grave is not here.

YOUR END OF MARRIAGE SHOULD BE YOUR DEATH.

The main message being conveyed here is that in the Zulu culture, girls are coerced into marriage. The song expresses the notion that a married woman ceases to be part of her biological father's family which is not ready to accept her back once she has broken away from her husband and her in-laws' family. No matter the misfortunes that befall her marriage, the married woman must persevere stoically as her newly-acquired family is where she will be buried. In concurrence with this view, Masuku asserts that a woman is married once and forever; thus, she is buried in the graveyard of her husband's family.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the married woman is no longer regarded as an important individual who cannot do anything on her own or for herself. This situation is worsened by the very fact that even the bride's family approves of cultural expectations through wedding songs, which makes it complex for the bride in terms of expressing her frustrations about marriage, as this would be regarded as a disgrace to her family.

In the Zulu culture, the view that "*Um'uyintombazane ayikho into ongayenza, noma kulukhuni mama uzofel'emendweni*" (If you are a girl, there is nothing you can do, even if it's difficult, the end of your marriage should be your death) is reflective of the oppressiveness of the Zulu traditional wedding songs. This explicitly means that divorce can never be contemplated even in situations where marriage has become dysfunctional. This tends to reinforce the function of *ilobolo* (bride price), a cultural practice that exacerbates the vulnerability of women, as "men develop a feeling of ownership of women."⁵⁰ The expression "*um'uyintombazane*" (if you are a girl) ascribes the circumstance that accompanies being a girl and not a boy. The song affords a negative portrayal of *umshado* (marriage) for younger girls even prior to their marriageable age. This seems to rule out the fact that not all marriages turn nasty. Lyrics such as "*Uzofel'emendweni*" instigate gender-based violence and poisonous masculinity.

Critics averred that women are devoid of their own voice, as men decide for women and enjoy a degree of rights, ultimately "violating females and their bodies."⁵¹ Thus, marriage should not be regarded as a death sentence. Women should reject the notion that once they become married, they naturally get enslaved by their husbands. Regrettably, such lyrics as *Uzofel'emendweni* (You will die in your marriage) openly suggest that a married woman is turned into an object in the service of her husband. Observers comment that the older men refer to their wives as 'their children', which overtly suggests that females are victims of oppression perpetrated by men, as they are considered individuals bereft of wisdom and trapped in eternal childhood and immaturity.⁵² The portrayal of marriage as a death sentence manifests in another song titled "*Umendo siwupheny'emenyweni*" (We are looking for marriage even in a non-conducive relationship).

Marriage as farewell to the bride

The findings further reveal that a day prior to the wedding day, the Zulu culture dictates that the bride's family holds a petty occasion to bid the bride farewell, an occasion attended by the groom and his bride at the bride's residence. The occasion is designed to facilitate the bride's departure to her husband. The negotiators pave the way, allowing the groom to bear the 'Kist', which is symbolic of the death of the bride in her home and the preparation for her entry into a new home. The bride's guardians are also encouraged to start preparations for the bride's departure to the groom's house at midnight. As the family *ihubo* (song) is being sung, the father takes the bride by hand and leads her to the cattle kraal in a sacred manner. The

⁴⁹ Norma Masuku, "Perceived Oppression of Women in Zulu Folklore: Feminist Critique" (University of South Africa Pretoria, South Africa, 2005).

⁵⁰ Ndlovu et al., "Demystifying Femicide in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa."

⁵¹ Kgomotso Pearl Bosilong, Paulin Mbecke, and Kalunta-Crumpton, "A Snubbed Tragedy in South Africa," *Violence against Women of African Descent: Global Perspectives*, 2019, 117.

⁵² Siphamandla Zondi, "Xenophobic Attacks: Towards an Understanding of Violence against African Immigrants in South Africa," *Africa Insight* 38, no. 2 (2008): 26–35.

duo encircles the kraal in a clockwise direction. As they perform this task, the head of the family invokes ancestors' protection.⁵³

Thereafter, the bride is afforded an opportunity to sing her goodbye songs. More importantly, the way in which the ritual is executed negatively portrays marriage. The solemn emotions surrounding the farewell ceremony, which should be a celebrated occasion, exacerbate the negativity that characterise marriage. The marriage songs that are sung on this occasion carry overtones of sorrow. This observation is replicated in the lyrics of the song cited below:

*Umendo siwupheny' emenyweni,
umbhantshi udliwa yinhliziyoy!
Ohhhhh okwami bakithi ngiqondwe ukufa!*

WAVUME AMABHEKA AZOLOBOLA WENA!

X2

*Inhliziyoy yam' ingilahlile,
umbhantshi udl'iwa inhliziyoy!
Ohhhhh okwami bakithi ngiqondwe ukufa!*
WAVUME AMABHEKA AZOLOBOLA WENA!
X2

I choose the wrong person because of heart.
Because of love I committed myself!
Oh my God! I'm facing death in this relationship!
YOU ACCEPTED LOBOLA TO BE PAID ON YOUR BEHALF!

X2

Who can leave her siblings in her home?
Because of love I committed myself!
Oh my God! I'm facing death in this relationship!
YOU ACCEPTED LOBOLA TO BE PAID ON YOUR BEHALF!

This *Maskandi* song was sung by Dr Buselaphi Gxowa, a South African awards-winning artist and a well-known and leading female *masikandi* artist. Nevertheless, its applicability to the marriage set-up makes people sing it at wedding ceremonies. The song is often sung by the bride at *esigcawini* during Zulu traditional wedding ceremonies. It is often sung by the bride as she bids an emotional and tearful farewell to the entire family. The tearful bride eventually sings the song, as her voice expresses an agonising tone. It is believed that if the bride does not cry at her departure, she should be considered so immature that her stay in her marriage will be short-lived. The song is sung more slowly, with some singers even singing in melancholic voices that depict pain. The song's words and tone invoke the feeling that the bride is made to feel compelled to get into the marriage since her family has already received a dowry, which is referred to as *amabheka* in every line of each stanza. This song makes the bride feel that she is no longer welcome in her parents' home.

In the song, a line that says, "*Ohhhhh okwami bakithi ngiqondwe ukufa!*" (Oh my God! I'm facing death in this relationship!), means that the marriage life she has ventured into is akin to a death sentence. This song is sung by the bride's family, bearing a 'Kist', walking around but inside the kraal in a gesture that symbolises burying the bride and handing her over to her husband's family which becomes her new abode. In spite of her tough experiences, the bride is expected to adapt and adjust to her new environment and way of life. The reason for this is that traditionally, this phase marked the severing of the bride's rights while in her biological family. For the bride venturing into marriage is tantamount to throwing oneself away as no one has knowledge about what life will be like at her destination. She hardly knows what awaits her; thus, getting married manifests as a risky undertaking for the bride. Although the bridegroom

⁵³ Govender, "The Rhythmo-Melodic Geste as Agent of Spiritual Communion and/or Affirmation of Identity: An Investigation into the Performance of Selected Tamil and Zulu Marriage Rituals and Ceremonies in South Africa."

is equally liable to the same risk, his vulnerability is minimal in comparison with that of the bride who dares to leave her family and risks her life by joining a new and unknown family.

Although marriage is often perceived as a wonderful and glittering experience, it is sometimes accompanied by unpredictable challenges for the married woman. The woman enters into a marriage even though she is uncertain about what awaits her, a notion depicted in the line “*Ohhhh okwami bakithi ngiqondwe ukufa!*” Apparently, marriage is associated with the fear of the unknown. It is further argued that “since Zulu families are patrilineal, the bride leaves her birth family to become a member of her husband’s family.⁵⁴ She not only leaves her family home but also the family relationships, her place of belonging and security”. The bride even commits herself to a violent, unsupportive and not-so-romantic husband in order to satisfy her parents’ wishes and expectations.

Evidence from the wedding songs shows that, in the Zulu culture, women are compelled to marry abusive husbands to please their parents, resulting in them falling victim to gender-based violence (GBV). It has been posited that GBV is widely perceived as affecting women more than it does to men. Men and boy children are often exposed to GBV through sexual violation, emotional violence, and physical abuse. In the lyrics “*inhliziyo ingilahlile*” the meaning is that the bride blames herself for marrying her husband, but since there is no choice, she has to continue, thus; “*Wavuma’amabhek’azolobola wena!*” *Wavum’amabhek’azolobola wena*. Since the bride’s parents accepted *amabheka* (bride price), she is under compulsion to marry the man who paid the bride price. *Ubani ongadelabakwabo?* (I chose the wrong person because of my heart). The bride is expressing her unwillingness to get married but is forced to do so by the Zulu norms which bar her from revoking marriage oaths.

Songs as a way of portraying ambivalent sexism

Some Zulu cultural practices pose implicit questions to both married and unmarried women. Most women hardly enjoy sexual intercourse to the maximum, but only have sex to attain their husbands’ sexual gratification. These women feign happiness when it comes to issues around sexual intercourse. The song titled “*Dali phenduka*” (Darling turn around) typifies women’s sexual dissatisfaction. This finding is further articulated in the song’s lyrics cited below:

<i>Dali phenduka</i>	Darling turn around
<i>Ngiphenduke kanjani,</i>	How should I turn around?
<i>We Yise wabantabami</i>	Father of my kids,
<i>ngoba ngiyazigulela nje.</i>	Because I am sick
<i>Ngafa yiqolo</i>	I have pains on my back
<i>Mina angazi ngizolala kanjani</i>	I don’t know how I’m going to sleep.
<i>ngoba mina ngiyazigulela nje.</i>	Because I’m sick

The song cited above depicts women’s voices in Zulu practices with regard to their sexual and marriage lives. This song professes that married women even fake illness as a way of evading having sexual intercourse with their unromantic husbands. In this song, it emerges that a husband only goes to his wife to have sex. In response, the wife rejects the sex overture, claiming that she is too unwell to have sex. This issue is explored in another song titled “*Wena uthi angilale kanjani*” (How do you say I must sleep). This aspect is further dealt with in the lyrics of the song, as presented below:

<i>Wena uthi angilale kanjani</i>	<i>How do you say I must sleep</i>
<i>Njengenkomo beyihlinza</i>	Like a cow that’s being slaughtered
<i>Wen’uth’angimis’ amadolo</i>	You say I must kneel up
<i>Njengenkomo beyihlinza</i>	<i>Like a cow that’s being slaughtered</i>
<i>Lo muthi owulande eGoli</i>	This <i>muthi</i> which you fetched in Gauteng
<i>Ubewugayele bani?</i>	For whom was it grinded?

This song explores the bride’s disapproval of her husband’s decision to obtain *muthi* (aphrodisiac) in Gauteng to enhance his sexual virility. The husband is depicted as demanding more sex following the sex-enhancing medicine he has taken, and the wife is depicted as unhappy with this circumstance. The

⁵⁴ Ntuli, “The Role of Women in Shaping and Sustaining the Zulu Monarchy in the Late 18th and 19th Centuries.”

wife also expresses annoyance regarding the sexual posture her husband prefers in bed. The bride is captured as blaming her husband for resorting to medicines that boost his sexual performance, which does not lure her sexual interest. The Zulu culture discourages couples from discussing sexual issues, resulting in women resorting to songs to express their feelings and opinions.⁵⁵ Clearly, Zulu brides only have sex to satisfy their husband's enjoyment, simultaneously neglecting theirs. This finding concurs with other scholars' view that gender-based inequalities characterise today's society, with women often being relegated to the position of second-class citizens.

At some point, men use some traditional herbs to boost their libido, without discussing that with their wives, which makes them more active thus demanding unlimited sex, an aspect expressed in the line "*Lo muthi owulande eGoli, Ubewugayele bani?*" The researchers contend that husbands should discuss all sexual issues with their female partners so that they both employ measures that improve their sexual power. Studies found that men resort to sexual violence to oppress their wives.⁵⁶ Of the songs that depict paradoxical sexism, there is a song "*Laze labuhlungu iqolo lami* (My back is so painful), "*Iqolo lami selinenkinga sengizodlala kanjani*" ("My back has problem now how I'm going to play?"). This song portrays sexual oppression as directed towards women by Zulu men. Even though women feel pains in their backs, they are expected to have sexual intercourse. According to this song, there are challenges that women face in the traditional marriage setup. Men subject their brides to sexual enslavement after paying *lobola*. This concurs with the findings of other researchers who established that *lobola* gives men a skewed or misconstrued belief that they can own and exploit women to their advantage.⁵⁷

Sense of Commitment

The marriage institution thrives when both the groom and bride commit themselves to each other in this matrimonial union. It seems only women commit themselves fully in marriage, whilst their partners remain not committed. The society also contributes to this sense of commitment as it imposes certain rules on how the woman should behave, with very little being done to dictate how the groom should behave. This aspect is backed by the following lyrics extracted from one of the songs:

<i>Themba lami sengikhona</i>	<i>My love I'm now here.</i>
<i>Ngeke ngiwushiye lo muzi</i>	<i>I will not leave this house.</i>
<i>Sengizowakha ngenkani.</i>	<i>I'll now build it by force.</i>
<i>Noma ngingadliwa yizinja</i>	<i>Even if I'm eaten by the dogs</i>
<i>Ngingaphethe amatshe.</i>	<i>And not having stones</i>
<i>Ngeke ngiwushiye lo muzi</i>	<i>I'll never leave this house</i>
<i>Sengizowakha ngenkani.</i>	<i>I'll now build it by force.</i>
<i>Themba lami sengikhona</i>	<i>My love I'm now here</i>
<i>Ngeke ngiwushiye lo muzi</i>	<i>I'll never leave this house</i>
<i>Sengizowakha ngenkani</i>	<i>I'll now build it by force</i>
<i>Noma ngingadliwa.</i>	<i>Even if I'm eaten by the dogs.</i>

The findings show that the bride often sings *inkondlo* as a song of approval. The song is sung for the first and last time and while singing, she brandishes a spear to demonstrate having triumphed over all the other girlfriends vying for the groom's love. The song referred to here is titled *Inkondlo KaMakoti*, which many a bride sings when handing over a small mat to the traditional marriage officer (*Iphoyisa leNkosi*). The bride is expected to remain silent for a moment. The questioning is done repeatedly soliciting the bride's response, which is not done verbally but through the handing of a small mat to the traditional marriage officer (*iphoyisa leNkosi*). This event is called *isicephu* and it symbolises approval. The sense of commitment pervades this song. The ritual implies the bride's willingness to remain around, building the

⁵⁵ Nompumelelo Zondi, *Bahlabelelani—Why Do They Sing?: Gender and Power in Contemporary Women's Songs* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).

⁵⁶ Floretta Boonzaier, "If the Man Says You Must Sit, Then You Must Sit": The Relational Construction of Woman Abuse: Gender, Subjectivity and Violence," *Feminism & Psychology* 18, no. 2 (May 1, 2008): 183–206, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0959353507088266>.

⁵⁷ Christine Ricardo and Gary Barker, "Men, Masculinities, Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Violence," 2008.

groom's family in spite of the gravity of the challenges she is likely to encounter. The bride is expected to stay on regardless of how nasty the situation in her marriage could be.

This is a common ideology among the Zulu traditional practices. The married woman is not expected to return to her parents' residence. She is expected to die at her husband's residence. She is expected to conform to social roles, depicting a way of thinking, expectations and stereotyping that are embedded in Zulu norms and values. Men's minds function as repositories of hegemonic constructions that are scripted as appropriate ways of living.⁵⁸ Following, the bride's handing over of the mat, the groom sings and dances forwards, while his relations recite his personal praises (*izibongo/izihayo*), moving eagerly and simultaneously beating his shield to accentuate his prominent position and overflowing delight. He also sings a song that expresses his readiness to allow the bride into his family. This view is emphasised in the lyrics of the song cited below:

<i>Uz'ungangigadi mkami angikh'ejele</i>	<i>Do not guard me, my wife, I'm not in prison</i>
<i>Mshado akulona ijele</i>	<i>Marriage is not a prison</i>
<i>Noma ngashada ngiyobe ngingekh'ejele</i>	<i>Even if I get married, I'm not in prison</i>
<i>Mshado akulona ijele</i>	<i>Marriage is not a prison</i>

This song is often sung by the groom responding to the bride's promises. The song explicitly denotes that the wife should not guard him because marriage is not a prison and that even if he got married, he is not in prison. This way, the groom indirectly reminds his bride that he should not be restricted from living his life independently, while the bride is expected to completely transform the way she behaves in public as a married woman. The song which says *Uzungangigadi mkami angikh'ejele, Umshado akulon'ijele, Noma ngingashada ngobe ngingekh'ejele* (Please don't guard me my husband because, I'm not in prison, marriage is not a prison, even if I marry you, I wouldn't be in prison), is ingrained in Zulu traditional practices and values. The Zulu culture sanctions that it is the bride's responsibility to oversee everything after she gets married. Conversely, the husband is exempt from being responsible for anything, apart from socialising with his friends and acquaintances. This song draws the audience to gender consciousness. It protests about the reality of gender inequality and stereotypes existing in marriage. While the bride is expected to inform the groom about all her moves, the latter is not obligated to do so. The married woman is also obliged to accomplish all the domestic chores and other outdoor responsibilities without being assisted by her husband. This status quo is embedded in the Zulu practices.

This finding replicates extant literature which posits that young males are socialised to understand and maintain their social standing as heads of households.⁵⁹ On the other hand, women are expected to remain inert and submissive. Precisely, Zulu females are restricted from reporting the oppression they experience at the hands of their husbands. In the first line of the song titled *Themba lami* (My love), the bride is committed to enslavement by her husband despite the prevailing circumstances. Studies attest to the fact that culture is a dynamic phenomenon. As such, gender stereotyping involving women ought to undergo radical changes as well, particularly in relation to the Zulu culture.⁶⁰ Such radical changes can best be effected through deliberate education in schools, at home and in various cultural events. From the feminist perspective, traditional culture impedes females' attainment of gender equality. Even though women's performance and actions are equal to those of men, the interpretative lenses are shifted and they are evaluated using the parameters of the cultural paradigm.

CONCLUSION

This paper analysed selected Zulu wedding songs to demonstrate how they are employed to involve the audience in the discourse centred on women's oppression and gender stereotyping. Through this study, the researchers created a springboard for advocacy and activism with regard to women's rights, thus

⁵⁸ Petula Sik Ying Ho, Stevi Jackson, and Jun Rene Lam, "Talking Politics, Performing Masculinities: Stories of Hong Kong Men Before and After the Umbrella Movement," *Sex Roles* 79, no. 9–10 (November 15, 2018): 533–48, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-017-0887-z>.

⁵⁹ Boonzaier, "If the Man Says You Must Sit, Then You Must Sit': The Relational Construction of Woman Abuse: Gender, Subjectivity and Violence."

⁶⁰ Thenjiwe Magwaza, "Private Transgressions: The Visual Voice of Zulu Women," *Agenda* 16, no. 49 (January 1, 2001): 25–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2001.9675969>.

building resistance against oppression and gender stereotyping, as the chosen songs depict women's lived experiences that are characterised by the pain they have to endure through oppression and stereotyping. The article unveiled and articulated the gender-based stereotypes and inequalities as mirrored in the Zulu wedding songs chosen for this study. Music forms a central part of the Zulu folklore, as they are employed in conveying cultural practices and traditions through generations. The findings of this study have confirmed that men occupy a prominent position in Zulu society. This obtains at the expense of women who suffer the brunt of oppression and denigration, while the significance of the traditional Zulu wedding songs and their purpose cannot be challenged. The selected Zulu traditional wedding songs have helped define the fundamental nature of the Zulu nation, and hence their value ought to be affirmed and appreciated as well. However, the study has emphasised the point that some of the selected songs also propagate the same gender stereotypes, inequalities, and patriarchal systems that facilitate the oppression of females among the Zulu people.

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