

# Stereotyping in the novel *Moelelwa*: The dichotomy between laziness and maternal duties

Mmamoyahabo Constance Makgabo<sup>1\*</sup> , Refilwe Morongwa Ramagoshi<sup>2</sup> & Nompumelelo Bernadette Zondi<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Department of Humanities Education, University of Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>2</sup>Department of African Languages, University of Pretoria, South Africa

\*Correspondence: [connie.makgabo@up.ac.za](mailto:connie.makgabo@up.ac.za)

Some Sepedi authors perceive women as having to be confined to the home to only perform maternal duties, and women are ridiculed for not being able to fulfill the responsibilities of womanhood. This perception extends to community members who criticise women for not living up to ethnic and cultural expectations. Some books which portray women negatively are still prescribed and read in schools and universities, thereby perpetuating these stereotypes among the youth. This article aims at establishing whether or not laziness is a hindrance to maternal duties and to compare it with modern society's expectations of married women. The ethnographic design and comparative analyses were used in which *Moelelwa*, as a character, served as a guide for understanding the issue of stereotyping women and laziness in the past and in the modern era. The cultural theory which discusses how cultural values and rituals play an important role in acculturation and enculturation processes has been employed for comparison between Sepedi, seSwati and modern cultural ways of being. The findings show that women in traditional settings are subjected to this labelling, whereas modern career women avoid this criticism by making use of helpers in their homes. The study illustrates that women are not necessarily lazy if they do not perform their domestic roles. The recommendation is that some of the Sepedi classics could be revived by being used in comparative studies as was done with *Moelelwa*.

## Introduction

African culture, in general, tends to consider the role of women as being in the house, taking care of the well-being of her family. According to Mwangi (1996) and Valls-Fernández and Martínez-Vicente (2007), the woman's portrayal as a mother is considered to be traditional and gender stereotypical. Agars (2004: 104) defines stereotyping as 'the unconscious or conscious application of accurate or inaccurate knowledge of a group in judging a member of the group'. Bryson and Davis (2010) state that a stereotype is a view held by one or more individuals, which can be or is applied to a group of individuals.

Many African societies generally expect women to behave in a certain way in their roles as girls, young ladies or as mothers at home. This is especially seen in marriages where there seems to be an adverse gender bias against career women. Being fictitious, novels such as the 1958 novel, *Moelelwa* by SehloDIMELA, act as a vehicle for understanding how women are perceived by society at present, which should enable people to ask questions to understand past and present behaviours and learn from them. This is supported by Zondi and Khuzwayo (2015: 1) who reiterate that '[p]eople are becoming increasingly detached from the corps of their traditional beliefs and practices, especially in the context of cities where they mingle with diverse cultures'. Therefore, certain cultural behaviours, though seen as important in the past, might not be seen as important today. There could also be a way to adapt to them.

The historic gender role in African societies has been

explored by reading literary texts. Findings in Mogapi (1991) indicate that traditional women are usually negatively portrayed in novels and short stories in contrast to modern women. To illustrate: when it came to the issue of marriages in Swati culture, the bride and groom were not consulted because decisions were made by the elders. Taking the current situation in society into consideration, the roles of young girls and women have evolved. Today, women have a choice whether or not they would like to do something, and they now have a voice. This enables them to use their acquired knowledge from various sources, such as the media, intercultural communication, as well as intercultural marriages and relationships, while at the same time appreciating their own culture and identity.

The purpose of this article is to identify and address the gender stereotypes of female characters among the Bapedi people, as portrayed by SehloDIMELA in *Moelelwa*. Using the same novel, it also attempts to assess how male authors in Sepedi literature were influenced by their cultural mindset when writing about gender, and hence through their writing, society is influenced in perpetuating the stereotypes. This study establishes whether or not laziness truly is a hindrance to maternal duties and compares it with modern society's expectations of women.

## Stereotyping

Stereotyping involves 'judgement' and it occurs when one individual or group is judged by another or others. This judgement is perceptual, in other words, it is based on

perceptions and, therefore, it may not be entirely factual. Stereotypes are shortcuts to perceptions. In essence, to make sense of and simplify our complex world, we generalise our observations about people, groups and places. Grobler et al. (2006: 77) explain that 'a stereotype is a fixed, distorted generalization about members of a group'. This is relevant to the characters Moelelwa and Mmanare (her mother), as depicted by SehloDIMELA. The community in which they lived also played a role in what Grobler et al. (2006) referred to as having a fixed and distorted generalisation about their societal expectations regarding their behaviour and conduct.

Although stereotypes can sometimes be unintentional, Operario and Fiske (2001: 56) state that 'even the most well-intentioned people are prone to stereotyping others, and targets of stereotypes may have no definitive grounds for suspecting bias'. Another key aspect, which is highlighted by the definitions above, is that in order to stereotype, one must selectively store information pertinent to that stereotype. Grobler et al. (2006: 77) explain that 'stereotypes require that the exaggerated beliefs about a group be sustained by selective perception and/or [the] selective forgetting of facts and experiences inconsistent with the stereotype'. Hooks (2000) maintains that when confronted with information about an external group member which is contradictory to stereotypes, people tend to see it as 'unique', rather than using it to question and discard their beliefs. Hooks (2000: 85) defines stereotyping as the 'over-generalizations of characteristics to large human groups'. The entire novel under study revolves around Moelelwa's and her mother Mmanare's laziness.

### **Moelelwa: A synopsis**

Since the focus of this article is on SehloDIMELA's novel, *Moelelwa*, which was written in 1958, it is befitting to start by giving a brief summary. SehloDIMELA starts by telling us about Moelelwa, who was a beautiful young lady who knew how to take good care of herself. She dressed well and she was good at using beads to enhance and beautify her outfits. Furthermore, she knew how to dance and beat drums. Owing to these talents, she was appointed the leader of a dance group. Moelelwa preferred not to clean and cook. She was very lazy and never keen to learn how to do household chores. Very often her mother was not at home; she would return home drunk in the evenings. She tried to encourage her daughter to learn how to cook and clean, but Moelelwa told her that she would learn about domesticity when she married.

Her beauty attracted a lot of men from her community, whom she rejected. Later on, she met and fell in love with a Swati man. They eloped to Swaziland where she received a warm welcome as a daughter-in-law. Later, her husband had to go to South Africa to look for a job and left her with their newly born son. While on her own, she neglected their home because of her laziness and everything was left untidy and filthy. Her in-laws were not impressed with her laziness. They informed her husband and advised him in writing to marry a wife from Swaziland and to send Moelelwa back home to Bopedi in South Africa. On his return, her husband was very upset to see the condition of their home. His anger led to

him beating her and sending her back home. On arriving at her home in South Africa, Moelelwa was very remorseful when she saw that her more domesticated and acculturated friends were married and settled in their homes.

### **Research methodology and theoretical framework**

A comparative method was used in this article. The aim is to make a comparison across different entities. A comparative research method seeks to contrast nations, cultures, societies and institutions. In order to succeed in this, we also made use of Hofstede's (1991) cultural theory which intensively and extensively discusses how cultural values, rituals, heroes and symbols play an important role in acculturation and enculturation processes. The focus in this regard is on the cultural values and rituals that influence perception and beliefs that all women must be hard workers. Boerma and Mgalla (2001) expand on this idea by stating that women are expected to reproduce and to add to the family by bearing children. This is evident in the fact that, according to African culture, in general, every married woman is expected to bear children. This is interpreted in the following manner by Zondi and Khuzwayo (2015), who argue that a woman was brought in through marriage as a kind of 'borrowing' to 'do the job' of creating children for the man and his clan. Those children please her husband and the in-laws as they consider them to be a reward for the *magadi/lobola* (bride price) that they had paid for her. Thus, in this setting, any woman who fails to bear children in a marriage does not gain respect and honour from the community, especially the husband and the in-laws. Moelelwa fulfilled this expectation because she had a son but she unfortunately neglected him due to her laziness and poor maternal skills.

In the discourse of this article, the perception is that '*bontlenyana bo seng nosi, bo sa loyeng, bo a rota*', a Setswana proverb meaning any beautiful woman is suspected of somehow having deviant behaviour of some sort, even before getting to know her. Some men and possibly some women support the proverb '*mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo*', implying that you can be as ugly as sin, but as long as you are a hard worker, then you are fit to be a married woman. The conflict between expected traditional behaviour and modernism is, therefore, growing. Nowadays, cohabitating without *magadi/lobola* is commonplace. It is our belief that culture is not static, but dynamic, and society must adapt to modernisation.

### **A stereotypical view of women in Moelelwa**

Society still views women from a stereotypical point of view. According to Brown and Jordanova (1982: 113), around the 1980s, 'women were stereotypically identified with the so-called caring professions of teaching, nursing, and social work. Therefore, women are naturally tireless models of motherhood'. During her era, Moelelwa was expected to put all the house chores at the top of her list of priorities, while dancing and beauty were regarded as a waste of time and childish. This is supported by the Sepedi idiom '*mosadi tšhwene o lewa mabogo*', meaning when choosing a wife, the focus is on her ability to do household chores and not

her looks. Therefore, Moelelwa struggled to fit into her own community and that of her in-laws because of her extreme laziness, as depicted by SehloDIMELA.

According to Agars (2004: 104), stereotyping is 'the unconscious or conscious application of accurate or inaccurate knowledge of a group in judging a member of the group'. Following Agars's definition, the people in Moelelwa's community had expectations that being a woman, she was supposed to learn and know how to do household chores as a way of preparing for womanhood. Although her mother was hardly ever at home, the members of her community expected every girl or young lady to learn from her home, friends or other members of society about cultural expectations. Since it is the perception of the Sepedi culture that children belong to the community, they are therefore raised by all members jointly. Therefore, in this 1958 fictitious novel, SehloDIMELA portrayed Moelelwa's community as being distant with regard to the communal responsibility of raising her.

The fact that Moelelwa was lazy and untidy might not have been her fault entirely. She could have been viewed by members of her community with those fixed and distorted perceptions and generalisations, which were pointed out by Grobler et al. (2006) earlier in this article. The drunkard mother, who was hardly ever at home, could also be blamed for not teaching her daughter how to do household chores.

#### **Mmanare (Moelelwa's mother)**

In some traditional cultures, women are seen as not possessing the necessary leadership attributes in the family. According to Astin and Leland (1991), women are believed to be submissive and have difficulty in making choices, while Vinicombe and Colwill (1995: 219) are of the opinion that 'women and men employ different leadership styles, with men seen to be more competitive, controlling, analytical and hierarchical'. Moelelwa's mother, Mmanare, fails to make the right choice of being a role model to her daughter. It was said that she was very often not home to lead and guide her, which can be regarded as irresponsible behaviour. In the Sepedi culture, Moelelwa's laziness will solely be put on her shoulders as a mother and mentor of girls. People could even remark by using the Sepedi proverb, '*leabela le a fetela*', meaning that when one inherits something from someone, it tends to be exaggerated. Moelelwa inherited her mother's laziness, but when this weakness was passed over to her (suggesting it is hereditary, which it is not), it became worse.

Not everything about Mmanare was bad. Even though she was lazy, she knew her moral obligations towards her daughter. When the two Swati men were dismissed from work and had nowhere to stay, Moelelwa provided them with accommodation without her mother's knowledge or permission. When Mmanare discovered this, she immediately chased the two men away from her house because, culturally, it was immoral for a son-in-law to look his future mother-in-law in the eye or to be in the same room as she was. What was even worse was that the future son-in-law's family had never sent his uncles to ask for *sego sa meetse* (a bride). The two men were, therefore, mere male strangers in her house.

Moelelwa's father is not mentioned in this novel. One can

assume that he is dead or away, working far from home, for example, in the mines in Johannesburg in South Africa. However, even though he is the head of the family and could make better decisions than Mmanare, his presence would not have changed the situation. In Sepedi culture, teaching a girl house chores was a woman's responsibility and men had no say in the running of the household.

Hooks (2000: 86) states that

women are presumed to be different since they are homogenized, and determined differently by stereotypes and oppressors. They ultimately perceive themselves as living in a specific female context, different from that of men, and they compartmentalise their cultural dimensions.

Women are usually dominated by the voices of men, even in leadership positions in the homes. This could resonate with Mmanare's situation where she seems helpless in controlling Moelelwa and because of the absent husband in her life to help intervene in this situation, even though culturally, it was outside of men's jurisdiction.

#### **Moelelwa**

Although Moelelwa is portrayed as someone who deserves the treatment she receives, especially from her husband and his family, and is blamed for her failed marriage, her situation is due to her upbringing. Despite the fact that there are some things that Moelelwa had done wrong in her life, she was not entirely to blame. It is acknowledged that she was lazy and was not prepared to do anything about it as she would often say that she would only learn when she was married and had her own family. This could be viewed as a selective point of view as there were things that she was good at, such as taking good care of herself, dancing and beating drums, which today can be compared with beauty pageants and artists who are professionals in those fields. Moelelwa's talent is confirmed by SehloDIMELA (1958: 6) when he says '*ka baka la bothakga go bineng, Moelelwa a kgethwa go ba mmamokgadi wa basetsana*'. This means that Moelelwa was chosen to be the leader of the girl's dance team as she was excellent in singing and dancing and had leadership skills, which impressed all her peers.

The argument that her conduct and laziness in the domestic space were not entirely her fault can be supported by the fact that Moelelwa's marriage did not start in a culturally acceptable manner. Owing to the fact that the couple eloped and decided to stay with her in-laws in another country, she was deprived of an opportunity to be paid *lobola* for, and in the process missed the privilege of cultural premarital counselling. According to Bekker (1989), a customary marriage is a relationship which concerns not only the husband and wife, but also the family groups to which they belonged before marriage. Moelelwa, being an in-law, now belonged to the other family that was supposed to embrace and accept her. Plaatjie (2009) states that marriage is not only the union of a man and wife, but that it unites two families as well. It is evident that Moelelwa's marriage did not follow the cultural norm of *lobola*, premarital counselling and uniting the two families.

According to Ellece (2011: 28), *magadi* or *lobola* in isiZulu, siSwati, isiXhosa and Northern and Southern isiNdebele is sometimes referred to as either 'bride wealth' or 'bride

price', and is property in cash or kind which a prospective husband or head of his family undertakes to give to the head of a prospective wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage. Furthermore, Ellece (2011) is of the opinion that premarital counselling is viewed as vital to inculcate values of perseverance, tolerance, patience and sacrifice in women entering into marriage. Therefore, Moelelwa could not benefit from premarital counselling as they had eloped.

Premarital counselling is referred to as '*go laya ngwetši*' in Sepedi and it is conducted either before, during or after a wedding ceremony. It can sometimes be viewed as a continuous process because the elders in the family usually take it upon themselves to continually counsel the bride-to-be, even before the actual date of the wedding. However, on the day of the wedding, before a bride is escorted to her in-laws' residence, her aunts and other married female members of the family take it upon themselves to counsel her. According to Ellece (2011) and Maundeni (2002), during the counselling, they explain to the bride how to behave like a married woman, regarding what to do and what not to do. In accordance with the African culture under discussion, this counselling lays the foundation for a solid and successful marriage owing to the nature of its content. Ellece (2011) explains that married elders in a family advise a bride during Bapedi premarital counselling not to leave her husband's home or divorce him, irrespective of the challenges she might be experiencing. Moelelwa, however, forfeited the privilege of premarital counselling in her marriage by eloping.

The narrative implies that Moelelwa left her home without essential guidance. This could have been the first contribution to her failed marriage because she entered it as a young girl with no knowledge of what the in-laws expected of her. She was deprived of the wealth of knowledge, including the proverbs that are used during marriage counselling, which she should have been exposed to. Sepedi has proverbs that are used to counsel brides and many of them respect the counselling ceremony and honour and adhere to its commands. The proverbs help to lay a good foundation for the marriage and they serve as a constant reminder to the bride about the commitments she has made, as well as the in-laws' expectations of her. One of the Sepedi proverbs is '*mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo*'. This proverb means that a woman is expected to work hard in the new household in order to satisfy the desires of her husband and her in-laws. This proverb also serves to encourage a woman to be determined, while demonstrating to them the abilities and skills that her family has taught her. Had Moelelwa been given the opportunity of counselling, she would have known about those expectations and could have endeavoured to meet them. Her eloping with her husband denied both of them the opportunity to receive counselling.

Although it may seem as though the bride is the only one who receives counselling, the truth of the matter is that she is not entering into marriage alone. This calls for the groom receiving counselling as well. An uncle or elder who is responsible for negotiating the *magadi* and the *sego sa meetse* (water calabash) for him counsels the groom. The groom is also counselled by all his uncles and other married male relatives. Serudu (1989) explains *sego sa meetse* as the term used in Sepedi by the groom's family when they approach the woman's family and asks for her hand in marriage.

SehloDIMELA (1958: 5) writes that '*Moelelwa o be a fela a ikgothatša ka la gore o tla thoma go šoma mola e le mosadi, a na le lapa la gagwe*'. This means Moelelwa usually consoled herself by saying that she would only start learning how to do the household chores when she was married and had her own family. The fact that she was not prepared to learn how to do the household chores was an indication of her floundering by procrastinating. Her procrastination could have been worsened by her mother. This fact is reinforced by SehloDIMELA (1958: 5) stating that '*Mmago Moelelwa e be e se motho wa go dubadubana le mešomo*' (Moelelwa's mother was not keen on doing household chores either).

Gorin and Arnold (1998) argue that the family is responsible for nurturing an individual. The family is important to every growing and developing child because it serves to educate him/her in morals and ethical and cultural values, as well as giving him/her an identity. The family members nurture the individual by establishing rules and norms. They also define responsibilities by being role players in the lives of growing children and young adults. These rules and norms guide and provide the young generation with decision-making skills. Young adults will be able to grow and develop into mature, responsible people who will be able to take good care of themselves and their families if they can carry their culture with pride. For this reason, the family plays a critical role in passing culture from one generation to the next.

Although Moelelwa was very happy to find someone who loves her, she finds that he fails her as a husband. Moelelwa's husband was responsible for leading the family by ensuring that she was properly enculturated into his own culture. It is acknowledged that her husband went to find work in order to support her and their son, however, it was still his responsibility as a husband to make an effort to know and understand the challenges she had during her upbringing regarding her culture. Embracing her and being a pillar of strength for her could have helped alleviate her problem.

According to Kirshner et al. (2004), enculturation is defined as the process of acquiring cultural dispositions through enmeshment in a cultural community. It can, therefore, be interpreted as inclinations to engage with people, problems, artefacts, or oneself in culturally particular ways. As Moelelwa was in a foreign country with foreign people, language, artefacts and cultural practices and beliefs, she needed someone to enculturate her, and her husband was the most appropriate person for that. The normal practice in Sepedi is that when the bride arrives at the in-laws' household, she is orientated in order to help her settle in and fulfil all their expectations. If Moelelwa had been orientated on arrival, perhaps she could have been made aware of what those expectations were. The fact that Moelelwa was in a foreign country with a new culture, raises a question as to why SehloDIMELA failed to make this point (Kirshner et al. 2004).

Although Swaziland is a different country to South Africa, the fact remains that among most African cultures, cleanliness in a home is regarded as a virtue. Moelelwa therefore had to contend with only one major acculturation, except siSwati traditional wear. Kirshner et al. (2004: 13) explains that a 'pure form of enculturation is possible in a unitary culture in which only a single dispositional variation is present'. Therefore, besides Sepedi cultural attire, which differs from Swati attire by design, the one form of

acculturation that Moelelwa had to undergo was learning to speak siSwati to be able to understand daily communication and understand the dissatisfactions of her in-laws. It was, therefore, expected of Moelelwa, as reiterated by Kirshner et al. (2004) when it was argued that one has to intentionally 'fit in' to a cultural milieu by emulating the cultural dispositions displayed therein. Moelelwa could have learnt siSwati to be able to make informed decisions, similar to how she did while still in Bopedi, in other words, that she would only learn household chores when she was married. In this sense, one could support her stance of not wanting to do any chores. The sentiment about *lobola* is expounded by Zondi and Khuzwayo (2015) when they state that this custom is sometimes a source of distress for women because men tend to consider them 'paid for' or 'brought commodities' to be treated as they please.

A cultural milieu is constituted of innumerable cultural dispositions, of which only a limited number can be consciously addressed through strategies of acculturation (Kirshner et al. 2004). Taking Moelelwa's situation into consideration, the husband's family judged her to the extent of putting pressure on their son to divorce her and send her back to her home without the kind consideration that she was in a new culture and new environment where she needed their love and support. They would have done well by lovingly accepting her into their family by teaching her their language and culture. It is deemed the husband's cultural responsibility to guard and protect his wife. According to Lauer (2013: 101), 'women are dependent and need men's protection'. In the case of Moelelwa, being far away from home and in a foreign country, she needed someone to embrace and protect her.

### Perceptions of women in the modern era

Although Moelelwa and her mother have been portrayed negatively, this is in contrast to today's modern women. The roles of young girls and women have evolved and they now have more of a voice. The women of today can use their free will and they are independent. Rudansky (1991) recognises career women in various fields, such as in education, medicine, as well as in offices in the corporate world. According to Hung and Li (2006), these women can be referred to as Chinese 'flower vases' because of their glamour, charm and beauty. They are professionals and have huge responsibilities in their career positions. They are the kind of women who celebrate their femininity by enhancing their physical beauty, using cosmetics, jewellery and different hairstyles. According to Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011), those women place a high value on their careers, but also on their families and children. They make choices along their career paths that are consistent with creating a boundaryless career by maximising their flexibility (Grant-Vallone and Ensher 2011).

Taking into consideration the different roles that are played by women in the modern world, things are different from the much earlier African traditional situation where women depended on men to lead, guide and protect them, and still be expected to work hard with a lot of dedication (Courtney and Lockeretz 1971). Mwangi (1996) and Valls-Fernández and Martínez-Vicente (2007) affirm this statement by

substantiating that in the traditional setting, women are still considered as housewives and mothers. It is owing to this limited generalisation of the community that every young lady should aspire to satisfy the community's expectations by being a mother and a housewife, as prescribed by the group. This is the perception that SehloDIMELA portrayed about Moelelwa and her mother, hence they were labelled as lazy without looking at some of the character traits that they possessed or even what could have been the contributing factors.

Defillippi and Arthur (1994) outline three competencies of boundaryless careers: knowing why, how and who. Knowing why is the competency that addresses the question of why we work. In this case, Moelelwa, similar to modern women, knew why she liked dancing and singing and not doing household chores. It was her choice. It relates to one's motivation to work, identification with work, as well as other interests and goals. The 'knowing how' competency reflects one's skills, specific expertise and the way daily work is performed. Moelelwa's daily work was to look beautiful and practise her moves and skills in dancing, which today is seen as important in order to stay ahead in your career. The 'knowing who' competency relates to the relationships that we develop, as well as our social capital derived from these relationships. Today, most artists, local and international, are supported by their fans. Fans are very powerful in that they can help your market and popularity grow if they like your music or dancing. If you do something they do not like, they can boycott you and stop buying your music.

The community around Moelelwa was not supportive of her, simply because of one flaw in the domestic space – laziness. Her family, friends, husband and in-laws should have tried to understand her weakness and given her a helper to help with her house chores if they really enjoyed being entertained by her. They all loved her dancing and singing. However, it seemed that everyone was waiting for her downfall because she was a beautiful woman.

Valentine (1988) concurs with Defillippi and Arthur (1994) that it is a woman's choice to pursue their careers instead of pursuing the maternal duty of having children. If children are necessary, the option of adoption can be considered. Valentine (1988) further states that modern women have a busy lifestyle and they are not always able to do household chores, such as cleaning and cooking. They spend time and resources focusing on their beauty and developing their careers. However, they are still appreciated by the community, as well as the people around them. The Miss South Africa beauty pageant, as an example, has even extended to the Mrs South Africa beauty pageant, which is indicative of how things have changed in homes and in the community.

These observations are further made by Bennetts (2007), Hirshman (2006) and Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2011), who all agree that professional women with children have different strategies that are effective in bringing balance in their work and personal lives. Bennetts (2007) and Hirshman (2006) further reiterate that women also manage to reap many rewards, including greater financial stability and success, happier marriages and, in general, greater life satisfaction. Although women are busy and career-oriented, they still become wives and mothers in their families. They are

mostly independent and able to make important decisions on their own without relying on their husbands. But gender stereotyping is one of the reasons why underrepresentation of women in the workplace and in leadership positions continues (Schein 2007; Booysen and Nkomo 2010).

### **The role of the community in the past and today**

Although the community has the joint responsibility of raising children, they still require a firm foundation from home before leaving and going out into society. Generally, the portrayal of a woman as a mother is considered to be a more traditional and gender-stereotypical depiction. As argued by Furnham (2001) and Valls-Fernández and Martínez-Vicente (2007), women are usually portrayed as housewives and mothers confined to the home. South African culture encourages ubuntu/*botho*, which roughly speaking means humanity. This ties in with the Sepedi saying '*motho ke motho ka batho*', which literally translates as everyone is defined by his or her community, in theory. This culture encourages working together towards the development and character-building of all the people in the community. As a result, everyone is a product of his or her society in all the good and bad that he or she does.

With regard to Moelelwa's community members, they had perceptions that led to her being judged harshly and that, in itself, does not agree with the above saying because the root cause of the problem was not taken into consideration. Ignoring or neglecting humane practice will lead to the destruction of African cultural practices and wealth. When Williams (1976) confirms the issue of losing one's culture, he argues that when people lose their history, they perish. The people from Moelelwa's community did not take into consideration the fact that every individual is a product of its community. It should, therefore, be noted that the community had the responsibility of providing support and encouragement to all individuals, such as Moelelwa and her mother, Mmanare. In their efforts to continue finding themselves, they would have benefitted from being embraced and guided, which is enough to give one a sense of belonging and confidence.

Furthermore, Hung and Li (2006) describe popular stereotypical advertising as the portrayal of the role of women as that of a mother or nurturer. This image depicts a woman who is domesticated, nurturing and soft. However, it is still evident that despite the above portrayal, women still make good and successful wives and mothers. This is made possible by the fact that women in the modern world are able to balance their careers, family lives and demands. This is made possible by the presence of the external assistance of domestic workers who are responsible for assisting with household chores, cooking and being childminders. This kind of assistance brings the kind of relief to career and professional women, who will ultimately not face the harsh judgement of community members as a failure in marriage.

### **Comparing the state of affairs in some communities today**

As African culture always focuses on moral behaviour and values, it is becoming extremely difficult for contemporary die-hard traditionalists to control the way society behaves.

As an example, *vat en sit* (cohabitation of a man and a woman) is thriving today, especially in the urban areas. Moelelwa, on the other hand, is perceived to have lost blessings, because she eloped with a boyfriend to Swaziland, and her cruel handling by her in-laws and her husband is blamed on the fact that the Swati man had not paid *magadi/lobola* for her. Couples who cohabit also do not get a chance to receive premarital counselling, which we as readers might view as possibly worsening Moelelwa's laziness. Some *vat en sit* couples seem to be happy, and they even have children together. Perhaps a study needs to be conducted to ascertain how many are victims of abuse simply because the man did not pay *magadi/lobola* for the woman. This is where informed decisions come into play and everyone is responsible for making their own choices.

Domestic servants are helpers and have now become a part of different family setups. They help relieve and balance the career and personal lives of professional women. However, it must be noted that they do not replace a mother. Moelelwa could have hired one if the situation and expectation from the cultural setting did not dictate differently. Moelelwa solely depended on her husband's salary, which he also controlled. It had to be used only for farming and nothing for Moelelwa to maintain her beauty and feed her child. These women's choices and approaches are important to understand as they are often a crucial source of organisational human capital (Lovejoy and Stone 2006). Single parenting is no longer shunned like in the past, where it was taboo. Single parenting is acceptable today. Mmanare being a single parent, therefore, does not make her a bad person. Moelelwa was assertive and knew what she wanted to do. Her choices, whether negative or positive, were hers to make and learn from.

Today, divorce is regarded as part of life and growing up. Moelelwa got divorced, beaten up and sent back to her home without any money. In South Africa today, in terms of the Domestic Violence Act, 1998 (Act No 116 of 1998), a woman has the right to have a husband, boyfriend or partner arrested for physical and/or emotional abuse. A husband or any man who has fathered a child is obliged to pay maintenance for the mother and the children. During Moelelwa's era, it seems that it was normal and acceptable for a woman to be beaten and sent back to her home without any remorse from the husband and who did not even pay *lobola* for her. No one could take Moelelwa's husband to task, especially the *bommaditsela*, the lobola negotiators, who could have been uncles from both sides. Today, it is evident that culture is dynamic.

### **Conclusion**

This article has highlighted the gender stereotyping of talented women who were regarded as 'lazy' in the past, as depicted in the novel *Moelelwa* by SehloDIMELA, which was written 60 years ago. Moelelwa was a beautiful, young, talented singer and dancer who was ostracised by her community as well as her Swati in-laws and her husband for being seen as 'extremely' lazy. Unfortunately, the novel ends with Moelelwa being beaten by her husband and being sent back to her home without any financial assistance to help support her and her child,

thereby upholding SehloDIMELA's belief that a beautiful, talented woman with a career is usually lazy and bound for a downfall. A lack of sympathy from SehloDIMELA leaves the reader with the assumption that laziness is an incurable disease which led to Moelelwa's unsuccessful marriage. It has been contended that owing to cultural dynamism, current studies show that professional women are appreciated and able to use different strategies such as using helpers in their homes to help them successfully balance their professional and personal lives. For society to move away from stereotypes, more Sepedi literature should portray women in modern and traditional settings, highlighting the different positions in both groups.

## ORCID iDs

Mmamoyahabo C Makgabo – <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7147-302X>  
 Nompumelelo B Zondi – <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4864-3032>

## References

- Agars MD. 2004. Reconsidering the impact of gender stereotypes on the advancement of women in organizations. *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 28(2): 103–111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00127.x>
- Astin HS, Leland C. 1991. *Women of influence, women of vision*. Oxford: Jossey-Bass Inc Pub.
- Bekker J. 1989. *Customary law in Southern Africa*. Johannesburg: Lexis Nexis.
- Bennetts L. 2007. *The feminine mistake: Are we giving up too much?* New York: Hachette Books.
- Boerma JT, Mgalla Z. 2001. *Women and infertility in sub-Saharan Africa: A multi-disciplinary perspective*. Amsterdam: KIT Publishers.
- Booyesen LA, Nkomo SM. 2010. Gender role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics: The case of South Africa. *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 25(4): 285–300. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17542411011048164>
- Brown P, Jordanova LJ. 1982. Oppressive dichotomies: the nature/culture debate. In: Whitelegg E, Arnot M, Beechey V, Birke L, Himmelwait S, Leonard D, Ruehl S, Speakman MA (eds), *The changing experience of women*. Oxford: Blackwell. pp. 267
- Bryson BP, Davis AK. 2010. Conquering stereotypes in research on race and gender. *Sociological Forum* 25(1): 161–166. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1573-7861.2009.01163.x>
- Courtney AE, Lockeretz SW. 1971. A woman's place: An analysis of the roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements. *Journal of Marketing Research* 8(1): 92–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002224377100800114>
- Defillippi RJ, Arthur MB. 1994. The boundaryless career: A competency-based perspective. *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 15(4): 307–324. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.4030150403>
- Ellece SE. 2011. 'Be a fool like me': Gender construction in the marriage advice ceremony in Botswana – a critical discourse analysis. *Agenda* 25(1): 43–52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2011.575584>
- Furnham A. 2001. Self-estimates of intelligence: Culture and gender difference in self and other estimates of both general (g) and multiple intelligences. *Personality and Individual Differences* 31(8): 1381–1405. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869\(00\)00232-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-8869(00)00232-4)
- Gorin SS, Arnold JH. 1998. *Health Promotion Handbook*. Maryland Heights: Mosby.
- Grant-Vallone EJ, Ensher EA. 2011. Opting in between: Strategies used by professional women with children to balance work and family. *Journal of Career Development* 38(4): 331–348. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894845310372219>
- Grobler P, Warnich S, Carell MR, Elbert NF, Hatfield RD. 2006. *Human Resource Management in South Africa*. London: Cengage Learning EMEA.
- Hirshman L. 2006. *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*. New York: Viking.
- Hofstede G. 1991. *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the mind*. London: Harper Collins.
- hooks b. 2000. *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. London: Pluto Press.
- Hung K, Li SY. 2006. Images of the contemporary woman in advertising in China: A content analysis. *Journal of International Consumer Marketing* 19(2): 7–28. [https://doi.org/10.1300/J046v19n02\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J046v19n02_02)
- Kirshner D, McDougall, EID, Ross JA. 2004. Enculturation: The neglected learning metaphor in mathematics education. *North American Chapter of the International Group for the Psychology of Mathematics Education October 2004 Toronto, Ontario, Canada*. p. 766.
- Lauer J. 2013. Female role portrayal in South African magazine advertisements. *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in Southern Africa* 32(1):21–37.
- Lovejoy M, Stone P. 2006. Sidetracked: professional women's career interruption and redirection. *Annual meeting of the American Sociological Association*, August, Montreal Convention Center, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.
- Maudeni Z. 2002. State culture and development in Botswana and Zimbabwe. *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 40(1): 105–132. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X01003834>
- Mogapi K. 1991. *Ngwao ya Setswana*. Mabopane: LZ Sikwane Publishers.
- Mwangi MW. 1996. Gender roles portrayed in Kenyan television commercials. *Sex Roles* 34(3-4): 205–214. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01544296>
- Operario D, Fiske ST. 2001. Ethnic identity moderates perceptions of prejudice: Judgments of personal versus group discrimination and subtle versus blatant bias. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 27(5): 550–561. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167201275004>
- Plaatjie B. 2009. The impact of HIV and AIDS on planned parenthood in the area of Mthatha. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Republic of South Africa. 1998. *Domestic Violence Act*, Act 116. Pretoria: Government Gazette.
- Rudansky S. 1991. The roles portrayed by women in magazine advertisements. Unpublished MCom thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- Schein VE. 2007. Women in management: reflections and projections. *Women in Management Review* 22(1): 6–18. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09649420710726193>
- SehloDIMELA MM. 1958. *Moelelwa*. Bloemfontein: Nasionale Pers.
- Serudu MS. 1989. *Koketšatsebo*. Pretoria: De Jager-Haum.
- Valentine D, ed. 1988. *Infertility and adoption: A guide for social work practice*. New York: The Haworth Press.
- Valls-Fernández F, Martínez-Vicente JM., 2007. Gender stereotypes in Spanish television commercials. *Sex Roles* 56(9-10): 691–699. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-007-9208-2>
- Vinicombe S, Colwill NL. 1995. *Training, mentoring, networking, the essence of women in management*. Hemel Hempstead: PrenticeHall.
- Williams C. 1976. *The destruction of African civilization*. Chicago: Third World Press.
- Zondi NB, Khuzwayo BC. 2015. Tradition and the culture of rights at the crossroads: A literary perspective. *Literator* 36(1): 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v36i1.1175>