

**THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN DURING BEREAVEMENT IN SELECTED SESOTHO
SA LEBOA NOVEL *SELLO SA MOHLOLOGADI* AND THE DRAMA *MAHLODI***

by

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THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN DURING BEREAVEMENT IN THE SESOTHO SA LEBOA NOVEL *SELLO SA MOHLOLOGADI* AND DRAMA *MAHLODI*

I declare that the above dissertation is my own work and that all sources that I have quoted, used, or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the dissertation in accordance with the requirements of the originality-checking software and that it meets the accepted requirements for originality.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the portrayal of women during bereavement in selected Sesotho sa Leboa novel and drama. This research was significant in the fields of literature, gender studies, and African studies as it shed light on the often-overlooked oppression of widows. The study examined how widows were portrayed in the two selected genres, *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*. The oppression of widows had long been ignored and had not been taken seriously. Patriarchy oppressed women during bereavement, and this had turned into a norm and tradition practised by society. Women who experienced widowhood continued to suffer, especially those from rural areas and tribal lands, where adherence to certain cultural norms was still prevalent. They were perpetually tormented, discriminated against, and oppressed in the name of culture, and were afraid to challenge this status quo.

This study employed qualitative research methods, as they allowed the researcher to analyse and evaluate selected texts in their own terms. Data were collected from two purposefully selected *Sesotho sa Leboa* genres, drama and novel, in line with the research topic. The population of this study consisted of Sesotho ba Leboa literary texts that dealt with widowhood. *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi* are sampled texts.

For this study, feminism provided a robust theoretical framework, enabling a critical analysis of widows' roles and lived experiences in the selected texts. This study promoted gender equity in rural communities where patriarchal norms marginalised women. It sought to provide a platform for rural women to share their experiences and lay the groundwork for future research on women.

Keywords: Death, Women, Widowhood, Widower, Bereavement, Sello sa Mohlologadi, Mahlodi, African Feminism, Patriarchy, Culture, Oppression, Tradition.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The death of a husband makes a wife a widow, and that not only brings pain but also gives rise to many challenges. This statement is also explained by De Beer, Castello, and Maree (1994:260) as follows: “death not only places the deceased in a stage of transition but also affects the lives of those who survive him.” In South Africa, apartheid was abolished in 1994. As the country shifts its policies, women's social and political status has changed, especially in how they are perceived, their capabilities, and their importance. The country observes International Women's Day on 8 March every year to promote the image and status of women. The country also notes the 16 Days of Activism to combat discrimination against women and children. However, there is still a grey area when it comes to the treatment and exploitation of a widow and the role that society plays to stigmatise, discriminate, and oppress a widow through cultural practices.

It is worth noting how cultural practices perpetuate the discrimination of women, starting from the wedding day until widowhood. Most songs are directed to the bride. The country noted cultural practices that perpetuate discrimination against women on the wedding day, especially the songs that are directed to the bride, let alone the process of *go laiwa*, to be graded or to play by the rules. Not all the songs are bad. However, a song such as '*le ge ba loya o loye le bona*', meaning even when they witch, do likewise. This song is not good as it implies that a woman must remain silent when challenges in marriage occur; hence, widows are unable to challenge the oppression and discrimination that they face daily. Dow (2007:157-159) argues that during the marriage process, a woman is offered in exchange for cattle, and she is expected not to let down the elders, regardless of the inconvenient situation she may be facing. People will sing the song *dikuku di monate lenyalo le boima*, which is loosely translated as 'cakes are delicious, but marriage is tough'. It metaphorically signifies that marriage should be celebrated despite its challenges.

Being a widow in the African context is just a humiliation that is coupled with stigma, oppression, slavery, and discrimination. A widow in the African context is a woman

without status, dignity, and whose life is doomed for a given mourning period that ranges from six to twelve months. During this period, a widow is perceived as someone in mourning who should wear a black dress (*o ilešhe*) among Basotho ba Leboa. She is perceived as a jinxed and cursed person who will make others sick. Consequently, she is excluded from social, cultural, economic, and political activities. De Beer et al. (1994:279) define the mourning period as *sefifi*, meaning 'darkness'. They further emphasise that the affected person is believed to be contaminated and may contaminate others; hence, strict measures should be taken to avoid contact with her and potential misfortune.

Current legislation and improved perceptions of women have paved the way for an African woman to be more than just confined to the kitchen. Some widows are performing sterling work in government and the private sector, and do not wear black mourning clothes.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and analyse whether there has been a shift in the literature on how widows are depicted, with reference to the current democratic dispensation and equality as emphasised in Section 9 of the Constitution's Bill of Rights. The study examined how patriarchy has made men have over the lives of women and how women have perpetuated this practice by oppressing other women. Selected Sesotho sa Leboa, specifically a novel and a drama, were investigated.

There are a few debates that are raised to investigate the oppression that a widow is facing daily, especially when looking at oppression and discrimination (Harma, 2015). These debates were raised during the International Widows' Day on 23rd March 2011 (Harma, 2016).

1.2 JUSTIFICATION OF THE STUDY

People ignore the oppression of widows and have not taken their onslaught seriously. Patriarchy oppresses women during bereavement, but now women have taken a baton from men and are oppressing each other. This has turned into a norm and tradition practised by society. Women who experience widowhood across the globe continue to suffer, especially those from rural areas and tribal lands where adherence to some cultural norms is still prevalent. They are perpetually tormented, discriminated, and oppressed in the name of culture, and are afraid to challenge this status quo. Married

women do not want to disappoint their families, clans, and communities of origin. They are also afraid of being rejected by their in-laws and the public. As a result, they live with stigma, frustration, and pain to please the public. They do not gain the respect that they deserve as human beings in the same way as widowers are treated.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is an outcry that the status of women continues to fade owing to cultural practices imposed on them (Ngoveni, 2021). Ironically, women are the ones perpetuating this phenomenon, and these are the consequences of patriarchy. Literature, specifically novels and dramas, often portrays widows in a negative light. Widows are faced with discrimination and oppression, which is not well-documented in literature. The Constitution fails to include widows' rights in its Bill of Rights. They are excluded from social, cultural, economic, and political activities. This is contrary to the principles of equality and human dignity, which are emphasised in the country's Constitution and Bill of Rights. The problem of widowhood has existed across the country since time immemorial. In rural areas where cultural norms are observed, the problem is even worse. Widows are hurt and undermined, and their views are not even considered. Widows are living with stress and are unable to challenge this because they want to please their families and their in-laws.

This research then focused on the extent to which literature, such as novels and dramas, portrays a woman during bereavement to minimise the challenges that widows face.

1.4 AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to investigate how the novel *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and the drama *Mahlodi* portray women during bereavement. The study critically analyses how the author depicted women during bereavement in the two literary works. Furthermore, the study aims to address the following objectives.

- To identify the challenges that a woman faces due to bereavement.
- Examine how female characters express and cope with bereavement in the novel and drama.
- Analyse how patriarchy has played a role in making men control women.
- To analyse how women's griefs are depicted in *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi*

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the challenges that women face due to bereavement?
- How do female characters express and cope with bereavement in the selected novel and drama?
- How has patriarchy played a role in the domination of women by men?
- How are women's griefs depicted in *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi*?

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study makes a significant contribution to the existing literature by providing a focused analysis of the portrayal of a woman during mourning. The primary gap it filled was the limited exploration of how mourning rituals and processes are depicted in the literature, particularly regarding women's roles in these cultural practices. The study further expanded the scholarly conversation on women's roles in mourning, offering a gendered, culturally grounded perspective underexplored in the existing literature. It contributed to the feminist readings of African literature, deepened our understanding of African mourning rituals, and provided a nuanced exploration of identity, grief, and resilience.

1.7 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

1.7.1 Oppression

The word oppression is from the verb oppress, which means to govern or to rule unjustifiably. Allen (2007) also asserts that oppression implies inflicting pain on someone or making someone very sad. In this research, widows are the culprits who are cruelly treated and cannot speak for themselves.

1.7.2 Values

According to De Beer et al (1994), values are regarded as valuable, important, desirable, correct, and worth striving for. Anthropologists concur that people from all cultures carry specific mental programmes that develop throughout life, particularly in early childhood, when certain actions are punished or rewarded. As the process of enculturation

continues, mental programmes are upheld. The contents of this mental programme are referred to as values, namely, truth, goodness, and beauty,

1.7.3 Patriarchy

According to Mohatle (2015), in Abrams (1971:81), patriarchy is characterised by a rule of father- or male-centredness, where it is controlled, organised, and conducted in a manner that subordinates women to men in all cultural domains, including familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal, and artistic spheres. In other words, patriarchy entails a society in which men govern.

1.7.4 Feminism

Feminism is a political and intellectual project, a movement for social justice, equality, and the development of theory. It addresses issues of gender and racial inequality. It investigates social and economic life (Benschop & Verloo, 2016; Calas & Smircich, 2014).

1.7.5 Culture

Culture is described as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (De Beer et al. 1994:8). In other words, culture can be seen as that which a particular group of people have in common within a specific language such as behavioural patterns, beliefs, and way of doing things.

1.7.6 Tradition

Allen (2007:629) defines tradition as the passing down of beliefs, customs, and other cultural elements from one generation to another, or the fact of being passed on in this manner. For example, suppose certain people or communities have a practice of widows being isolated and wearing a black dress for mourning. In that case, this tradition will be passed from one generation to another.

1.7.7 Death

De Beer et al. (1994:248), in Van Gennep (1960), describe death as a transitional period for survivors. It is, however, also a transitional period for the dead. He further states that

it is believed to take some time for the deceased to enter life after death, and that survivors observe this period as a time of mourning.

1.7.8 Society

The term society refers to a permanent group of human beings that is organised to accomplish a common purpose. It is a large human group. It is also self-perpetuating, as its continuity is ensured by the addition of new members through birth into society and other forms of incorporation. According to De Beer et al. (1994:11), society is defined as a group of persons living as a distinctive entity and having its own culture which persists in time. Therefore, society is a group of human beings organised to accomplish a common purpose, and this group has its own culture.

1.7.9 Disempowerment

According to Webster (1828), disempowerment is to cause (a person or group of people) to be less likely than others to succeed: to prevent (a person or group) from having power, authority, or influence.

In the current study, disempowerment refers to treating a widow less favourably than a widower, causing her to feel small and less competent.

1.7.10 Bereavement

According to Allen (2007:56), bereavement means suffering from the recent death of a close relative.

1.8 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The study consists of five chapters outlined as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction and background

This chapter provides a transparent background to the problem, including the problem statement, aims and objectives of the study, research questions, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms, the chapter layout, and the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Chapter 2 examines the perspectives of other researchers and scholars on the portrayal of women during bereavement in selected Sesotho sa Leboa literature. An introduction and a problem statement directed the discussion.

Chapter 3: Theoretical framework and research methodology

This chapter presented the theory that the researcher used in this study regarding the portrayal of a woman during bereavement. It encapsulated the research methodology used in the study. It also investigated the research methods and data in the form of oppression and discrimination that a woman experienced during bereavement.

Chapter 4: Data collection and analysis

This chapter analyses and interprets data collected from literary works, including novels, drama, textbooks, and media. The researcher rounded off what had been started in the introductory chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusions.

This chapter presents the findings and conclusions of this study. It summarised the entire study.

1.9 CONCLUSION

The chapter provides comprehensive information on the study's background, justification, problem statement, aims and objectives, research questions, significance, and key terms.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION.

The preceding chapter, Chapter 1, provided the study's introduction and outlined the work plan on which the researcher was working. The introduction and background, goals and objectives, and questions to be addressed by the research are presented first, followed by the organisation and justification of the study, a brief synopsis of the research design, the research methodology, the theoretical framework, and a review of the relevant literature.

The second chapter builds on the previous chapter by reviewing relevant literature on the challenges widows face globally, on the African continent, and locally in our country, South Africa.

To review literature is to discuss the views of other scholars concerning the same topic that the researcher is investigating. De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2011) assert that the literature review mostly clarifies the problem. Saunders & Rojon (1999:467) explain literature review as a detailed and justified analysis and commentary of the merits and faults of the literature within a chosen area, which demonstrates familiarity with what is known about your research topic. Bowers-Brown and Stevens (2010:76) view the literature as the starting point for a research enquiry, where the researcher accumulates information, analyses what has already been researched, and identifies gaps.

The literature review focuses on the process of researching the issue in the chosen area and on understanding the research problem, approaches, and theories that can be applied to it. In addition, Keur (1982:85) defines literature review as an information analysis and synthesis, focusing on finding and not simply bibliographic citations, summarising the substance of the literature, and drawing conclusions from it. Cooper (1989) explains that a literature review is a process that utilises database reports of primary studies found in the literature, which may be verbal, but most case reports are written documents. Cooper (1989) further states that a literature review is used to describe cases where issues integrated into the contents of major reports should be

evaluated. Another view is that it is about reports recorded about the topic. It is not about new information that scholars have written about a research topic before one commences the research process.

The literature review drew on previously published material to guide the researcher in understanding how other scholars had addressed the same topic and to help identify and close gaps where necessary. In the current study, the researcher gained a broader understanding of research on widows' challenges, compared them with the Basotho ba Leboa literature, and concluded by proposing possible solutions.

The following section reviews worldviews and African and local literature on widowhood and its challenges.

2.2 WORLD VIEWS

The following scholars' work was reviewed under the world views category: Black and Santanello (2012), Lloyd Sherlock, Corso, and Minicuci (2015), and Sandys (2001). This review inevitably put a researcher in a position to close gaps and, where necessary, make improvements, especially by examining the challenges widows face in Basotho ba Leboa.

Black and Santanello (2012) conducted a study where they wanted to explore the reaction of elderly widows after the loss of their husbands. They also wanted to check how death affected a widow. Data were gathered through qualitative interviews with a widow and two biological children. Those interviews were conducted using ethnographic methods and informal conversations, which were digitally recorded. Participants completed consent forms before participation. The discovery that they found was that death causes pain and a change in the widow's life.

They also noted a loss of identity caused by the number of years they had lived together. Another challenge they discovered was that widowhood has economic, emotional, and social implications that can change a woman's status, especially for a married woman who becomes a widow (Black and Santanello, 2012:474). It is worth noting that the above information continues to oppress and portray a widow negatively. Widows are excluded from the public domain for as long as they are mourning and continue to live with frustration and pain. Unlike Black and Santanello (2012), who employed interviews in their

study, the current study investigated the challenges experienced by a widow in Basotho ba Leboa, without conducting interviews. Data were gathered through the selected novel from Sesotho sa Leboa. The conclusion was informed by the researcher's understanding, derived from a thorough analysis of the selected novel.

Lloyd-Sherlock, Corso, and Minicuci (2015) conducted research across five countries on widowhood, socioeconomic status, health, and well-being in low- and middle-income countries. The selected countries were China, Ghana, India, the Russian Federation, and South Africa. The qualitative method, informed by statistics from the countries mentioned earlier, was used to reach conclusions. Undeniably, they noted that no statistics were available for researchers to use in identifying the challenges associated with widowhood. This made local and national authorities ignore and overlook the plight of widows.

Following this, it was discovered that, although women should not lose property and status when their husbands passed on, little progress had been made in this regard. Again, they discovered that widows were still discriminated against, abused, and subsequently lost property after the death of their husbands. Ultimately, this impacted their socio-economic status, health, and overall well-being. The current study analysed a novel in Sesotho sa Leboa to examine how literature depicted and portrayed widows. Challenges faced by widows were also identified, and an attempt was made to close the gap. Sandy (2001) argues that widows are still faced with patriarchal customary and religious laws that lead to discrimination in inheritance rights, abuse, and exploitation that occurs in the hands of family members. Again, they suffer loss of social status and marginalisation. Furthermore, she adds that widows are neglected by the Government and the International community, such that their legal, social, and economic status needs immediate attention at all levels of society due to the discrimination that they face. Evidently, she notes that widowers get better treatment because they are allowed to remarry even if they are aged. At the same time, widows are restricted and forced into a relationship with a relative. She used interviews to reach the findings.

Subsequently, it was agreed that all discriminatory practices enforced through customary, religious, and modern laws should be abolished. In addition, the violation of women's human rights through cultural and religious institutions should be condemned. Furthermore, the rights of widows should be included in international instruments, and widows should be empowered through more frequent regional and international

meetings. Sandys (2001) and Sherlock (2015) found the same, particularly regarding the loss of social status, abuse, and property loss, despite their differing data collection methods. It is worth noting that the challenges that widows are facing continue to be a crisis in the world despite the research that is done. Researchers needed to do more and close gaps where possible. The current study analysed how patriarchy had played a role in making a man control a woman. Data were collected from selected novels in Basotho ba Leboa. No interviews were used. Findings depended on the researcher's understanding after analysing the selected novel.

United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948): UDHR Chapter 1, Article 1 states that Human rights should be respected irrespective of race, sex, language, or religion to address international problems in the economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian spheres. Without reservation, sex includes all human beings, inclusive of widows and widowers. Again, cultural problems refer to cultural practices that are imposed on widows, which lead to plights that widows are facing across the globe as compared to widowers.

Contrary to the UDHR, widows are still discriminated against and oppressed, as stated by Loyd Sherlock et al (2015). Furthermore, patriarchal customary laws that lead to discrimination in inheritance rights, abuse, and exploitation are still enforced (Sandys, 2001). Consequently, this suggests that researchers should continue to conduct further studies and close existing gaps, particularly in rural areas where traditional cultural practices remain prevalent.

2.3 AFRICAN VIEWS

The following scholars' work was reviewed under African views: Harma (2016), Chen and Dreze (2009), Onyima (2022), Boaheng and Boahen (2022), and Twamasi (2016). Subsequently, these scholars reviewed literature from our diverse continent, focusing on the plights of widows across different countries.

Harma (2016) conducted a study entitled '*The Loomba Foundation Widows' Report*', which aimed to address the key issues widows face across the African continent. He used a conference and interviews to collect data. He discovered challenges such as stigma, oppression, discrimination, a high rate of infections of HIV/AIDS, Ebola, and a lack of self-respect. Traditional cleansing rituals performed by widows worsen HIV/AIDS and Ebola,

and this has led to an increase in chronic and fatal cases. Elderly widows must take care of orphaned grandchildren owing to the collapse of the economy, HIV/AIDS, and those caught up by Ebola.

Harma (2016) further noted that widows are still expected to have sex with a relative and drink water that was used to wash the body of their deceased husband. They are shaved with razors, where health protocols such as sterilisation are not followed. They must remarry the late husband's brother. This makes the spread of the disease worse in sub-Saharan Africa. Widows are accused of deliberately killing their husbands and infecting them with HIV/AIDS. This belief is prevalent in countries such as India, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Taking Widows' property by force remains a challenge. Despite the challenges widows face, Harma (2016) noted a shift and progress in Namibia, where the implementation of constitutional policies is prioritised and gender equality is given focus.

In conclusion, International Widows' Day was launched and is celebrated annually on June 23 to draw attention to the plight of widows and to create social impact, including addressing health, educational, and overall empowerment needs. He further suggested that the government should strengthen ministers' power to plan, implement policies, and effect reforms. Harma (2016) identified several challenges faced by widows in African countries; the current study also investigated the challenges widows faced in Basotho ba Leboa. A challenge of how patriarchy had played a role in making men control women was one of the factors that the current study investigated. A Sesotho sa Leboa novel was scrutinised, unlike Harma, who considered several countries on the continent and conducted interviews.

Chen and Dreze (2009) wrote an article entitled '*Recent Research on widows in India Workshop and Conference Report*'. The goal was to support widows in their specific demands, such as pensions, property rights, and other rights to which they are entitled. To collect data, they conducted a three-day workshop and used interviews. They have discovered that in India, there is a stereotypical character characterised by two views. The first one is that widow remarriage in India is not allowed because Hindu society prohibits it, and they want their families to be honoured and to protect property as well. The second view was that remarriage was widely practised by communities in other regions, where childless widows were allowed to remarry, and widowed mothers were

restricted from remarrying. They further noted that property rights were managed by customary law. They revealed that of 57 widows, only 17 have registered properties in their own name, and of those, only two registered in their original name because they do not have sons, whereas the remaining 15 registered jointly with their sons.

They further noted that the law restricts widows' access to this property, giving in-laws or their sons the final say if the widow wants to sell. The debates that unfolded over three days informed the solutions they developed. Some widows who attended the workshop agreed to break the taboo on wearing black dresses and to encourage other widows to do the same. Activists also agreed that widows should be invited to the marriage ceremony. The current study also investigated how widows were ill-treated by their in-laws regarding their property after they had lost their husbands. Unlike Chen and Dreze (2009), who conducted a workshop and conference, the current study sampled a novel from Basotho ba Leboa, analysed it, and drew conclusions based on the characters it portrayed.

Onyima (2022) questioned the idea of the bad treatment of widows in Nigeria. She noted the following findings. Nigeria has about 15 million widows out of 258 million widows in the world. She further said that widows suffer social, economic, and health constraints and even historical challenges that are clouded by low literacy level, cultural beliefs, and rituals. She also noted that widows are subjected to inhuman rituals and harmful practices and that Nigeria is a patriarchal society. Cultural beliefs and rituals cloud these challenges. Widows also suffer discrimination, stigmatisation, and maltreatment. She noted that widows are restricted from inheriting land and property, where they find themselves losing everything after the loss of their husbands. Widowers are treated differently from widows; they are not monitored and can remarry immediately, while widows are monitored under strict measures and harmful widowhood practices by local women and in-laws. She noted that widowers can choose to keep their beards, and not wear mourning dress, and they can remarry immediately. For this reason, both Chen and Dreze (2009) and Onyima (2022) share similar sentiments regarding the management of property after a husband's death. Similarly, Dreze (2009) and Onyimo (2022) discovered health constraints. Without any reservation this will affect the widow's socio-economic status that will lead into depression and affects psychological factor. Equally important Harma (2016) and Onyima (2022) same challenge where a widow should remarry husband brother without considering health protocols.

Onyima (2022) further notes that widows are expected to remarry the late husband's brother voluntarily. They are forced to eat on broken plates and sleep on a bare floor. She reports that they are not allowed to bathe, change clothes, do house chores, and should not go to the water that was used to bathe their dead husbands' bodies. However, there is a shift due to the Christian market. She argued that widows are accused of the cause of their husband 's death and should be part of the human rights movement. To conclude, she suggested that all gender-based violence hidden as culture and rituals must be prohibited. She further suggested that men can protect their wives and children by writing a will, and all existing legal instruments protecting widows should be implemented. The current study is rooted in a patriarchy that brings about cultural beliefs that are imposed on a widow, which Onyima (2022) 's article also addresses, let alone the maltreatment that it brings, and how local widows take a lead in imposing cultural beliefs on a widow. This study will investigate the maltreatment of a widow in the Basotho ba Leboa novel.

Boaheng and Boahen (2022) conducted a study entitled '*Theological and Ethical Reflections on care for widows from an African perspective*'. They wanted to analyse God's scriptures regarding the care of widows. To collect data, they used books, journals, articles, and dissertations on widowhood in Africa. They found out that in most African countries, widowhood experiences unethical rituals, mandatory remarriages, harassment, denial of solitude, impoverishment, loss of social status, and depression, as well as financial, sexual, and social exploitation. They further suggested that the church must allocate a portion of its funds to help widows with their needs. Nature. God's nature should influence this because God hates exploitation. Traditional authorities were also encouraged to minimise unethical widowhood practices. Similarly, Boaheng and Boahen (2022) share Onyima's (2022) sentiments, especially regarding the maltreatment the widow is facing. Boaheng and Boahen (2022), who collected data from articles, books, and dissertations, analysed data from selected novels in Basotho ba Leboa to determine whether there is a shift in literature considering the current democratic dispensation.

Twumasi (2016) examines traditional and cultural practices, as well as the rights of women, in Ghana. The purpose was to investigate the human rights violations underlying widowhood practices in Cape Coast and Komenda in Ghana's Central Region. They found that in Ghana, two perspectives characterise widowhood: the dominant negative perspective, which focuses solely on its negative aspects and receives more attention,

and a less dominant positive perspective. An example of this negative perspective is that after burial, widowhood practices are imposed on a widow for a period of a year. During this period, widows are allowed to go outside only at dawn, which typically occurs around 3 a.m. She eats only once a day. She also bathes at dawn. She should also abstain from sexual activities. An older woman will be assigned to a widow to ensure that these practices are carried out without fail (Tei-Ahontu ,2008) in (Twumasi ,2016). The last perspective is minor, which rejects criticism that is imposed against widowhood practices, and it is believed that Christianity and Western feminism influence them.

Twumasi (2016) collected data from various subgroups, such as widows, widow family heads, chiefs' widowhood rituals practitioners, elderly females, supervisors of widowhood practices, and officials from the Commission for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Officials from the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, and an official from the domestic violence and victims support unit of Ghana. To conclude, Twumasi (2016) recommends that the government implement existing laws in its constitution and legislation and raise awareness through radio broadcasts. The government should engage stakeholders, including chiefs and community leaders. The researcher employed the following criteria to evaluate and strengthen the study's trustworthiness: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability. To conclude, it is worth noting that scholars who conducted research in Africa found that, in most African countries, widows often face difficulties compounded by cultural rituals. The most challenging part is when those who are practising are doing it as a norm without realising that it is against human rights and forms part of oppression.

2.4 LOCAL VIEWS

The following scholars' works were reviewed under the section Local Views: Cebekhulu (2015), Paw (1975), Molefi and Motalenyane (2020), Manala (2015), Khosa, Nkatini, Wepner, and Meyer (2022), and Ngoveni (2021). The preceding discussion provided a critical overview of how literature had been reviewed at global and continental (African) levels. Building on this foundation, the focus then shifted to South Africa, examining both urban and rural contexts, particularly in tribal areas where cultural practices remain strongly upheld. In this context, literature concerning the maltreatment of widows was explored to highlight existing gaps within traditional communities, specifically in Ntoane

Village (Dennilton), Limpopo Province. This helped to address the various challenges faced by widows among the Basotho ba Leboa.

Cebekhulu (2015) conducted a study entitled '*Understanding the experiences of young widows in rural KwaZulu-Natal*' in which she attempted to examine how young widows' images were depicted in societies. She also investigated whether there has been a change in how women and young widows are portrayed, reflecting the socio-cultural and political realities of the day. Additionally, her study also highlighted the difficulties experienced by young widows and described how they interacted with one another and explained how gender prejudice originated. To collect information, young widows in the study region were interviewed using a qualitative research design. The debates and analyses, organised by topic, were built on respondents' opinions. Analysis of the data showed that young widows in a patriarchal society appear to be ill-prepared for their widowhood.

Cebekhulu (2015) employed feminist theory to critically analyse the representation of these young women across genres, determining whether the perceived oppression of young widows is depicted in contemporary literature. Based on the study's findings, suggestions were offered for human rights advocates, social professionals, and traditional leaders. The current study investigated women's bereavement using the selected literature. Unlike Cebekhulu's study, no interviews were conducted. Pauw (1975) argued about the widowhood of Xhosa-speaking Christians. The purpose was to investigate Christianity and Xhosa tradition, with a specific focus on burial and mourning practices. To collect data, he used interviews. The following findings were discovered: He analysed and portrayed a widow as a submissive person in mourning. According to Xhosa tradition, a widow wearing a black dress is taken very seriously, despite the complexity of the process. He also discovered that in East London, a widow from a shop-owning family confessed that she observed stringent rules that would be impossible for children to follow. She adhered to rules because they were in her blood. She had to remove pictures from her lounge and live with only paintings. She had to wear a full black dress for a year and avoid bright colours for another year after the cleansing ceremony. This makes her unable to move because she keeps thinking of the past. The influence in the township will make sure that widows undergo strict measures.

He further notes that widows in Xhosa tradition live with fear and compromise their Christianity. It is also believed that if you neglect mourning as a widow, you are abandoned by those on whom you depend, and this is coupled with loss of social status and self-respect in society. The interpretation is that you disrespect both the ancestors and your husband. During Christian funerals, widows are covered with blankets to shield their eyes from light, and all Christian widows wear a full black dress for the death of their husbands. Widowers, however, are treated differently by wearing only a small black band on their sleeves as a sign of mourning.

Pauw (1975) revealed that black colour in dress symbolises misfortune, disruptive forces, and the shadow of death. He notes that people will not share jokes with a widow; they should address her calmly, and the bereaved should behave appropriately, constantly reminded by the black attire. As previously discussed, it is worth noting that the literature's portrayal of widows is unfair. A widow is restricted from freedom of speech and trapped in a black attire that is associated with misfortune; hence, society will be afraid to associate with her. This is contrary to the human rights guaranteed by our Constitution. While literature in Pauw showed that widows were not portrayed favourably and were disrespected, the current study also investigated how literature, specifically the selected novel from Basotho ba Leboa, portrayed widows.

Molefi and Motalenyane (2020) conducted a study investigating the social isolation of widows and the stigma they experienced in a rural South African setting. The researchers conducted semi-structured individual interviews with the participants. The study revealed that widows are distinguished by a social obligation to extend the family, to feel a profound sense of social isolation and loneliness in dealing with their grief and loss. After their partners had passed away, the widows said that there was a loss of social support and that they were subjected to demanding cultural stereotypes. The study further discovered that an ongoing factor in the widowhood experience in rural South African settings is implied guilt by the in-laws and other family members regarding the widows' participation in the death of their partners.

Manala (2015) conducted a study where he argues that African culture deliberately disrespects, discriminates, and imposes unfair treatment on widows in African communities. In addition, unfair treatment includes the prohibition of a widow from living in her home, where she ends up being trapped like a prisoner. Notably, a widow should

seek permission even if she visits fields and associates only with widows. Again, a widow should not greet people first and should wear a black dress with a black headcloth to symbolise darkness. Western culture has brought civilisation to Africans by introducing clothing. Basotho ba Leboa and other Africans copied Westerners' clothing (dresses and blankets) because they had never had any before. We mainly used animal skins for clothing. Even today, we continue to benefit from the use of clothes; however, this practice of wearing a black dress during the mourning period by a widow to oppress, stigmatise, and discriminate against widows in the name of culture is not acceptable. The painful part is that it is no longer enforced by patriarchy. However, it is women who facilitate the entire process of the mourning period to discriminate against a widow through cultural practices.

Manala (2015) further questions the idea that African people practice ubuntu, including religious teachings that emphasise love and caring. Contrastingly, this idea is not understandable when considering the treatment that widows face daily in African communities. For this reason, it means widows in African communities are excluded from social, cultural, economic, and political activities. This will create a note documenting the current situation, which presents a significant challenge, given the reality that women are working and expected to provide for their families. Manala (2015) used a qualitative method to collect data from diverse African contexts and personal information, including church-related events. The current study identified shifts in the literature regarding how widows were depicted. A qualitative method was employed, and data were collected from *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi a Sesotho sa Leboa* novel and drama. In Khosa Nkatini, Wepner and Meyer's (2022) research indicates that widows are oppressed and discriminated against as compared to widowers. Evidently, widows are identified by wearing black and navy clothing for a period of twelve months during the mourning period. Furthermore, they should remarry irrespective of Western culture, where death should separate the couple, and their mobile phone is managed by a relative immediately after the husband is declared dead. During the period of funeral arrangements, a widow is kept in a room with a group of fellow widows. In contrast, widowers have fewer rituals and a shorter mourning period.

In addition, he noted that maltreatment that is traumatising is where a widow must break an egg by squeezing her thighs and jump into a fire to prove that she is innocent in her late husband's death. Again, a widow is not allowed to share utensils nor shout, and she

should kneel when greeting people. The most traumatising part is when a widow's vulva should be cut out to take out the late husband's blood from her (Khosa et al, 2022).

Due to what was previously discussed, the study concludes that it is worth noting that patriarchy plays a vital role in controlling the life of a woman. Undeniably, literature continues to portray and depict a widow inhumanely without considering the equality that is emphasised by section 9 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa of 1996. In the current era, women work in various roles in society, for instance, as policewomen, nurses, chefs, and educators. Subsequently, this will create a significant challenge for day-to-day activities.

Khosa et al. (2022) employed a qualitative approach involving interviews. Manala (2015) seems to agree with Khosa (2022) on maltreatment and discrimination of a widow; however, Khosa (2022) differs from Manala (2015) and Pauw (1975) in that both noted fewer rituals for a widower, which is coupled with a shorter mourning period as compared to a widow. Furthermore, Khosa also noted the navy colour that widows use for mourning. In both Khosa et al (2022) and Manala (2015), patriarchy is deeply rooted in literature and continues to oppress a widow as compared to a widower. Cebekhulu (2015), Pauw (1975), and Manala (2015) found that widows are portrayed in black dress, which affects their participation in social and cultural activities. The current study also identified challenges that a widow faced during bereavement.

Ngoveni (2021) conducted a study entitled '*Women's experiences, challenges and coping strategies of widowhood in Mopani District of Limpopo.*' He employed a qualitative research approach, sampling 13 widows and conducting face-to-face interviews. He found that widows lose status, such as being a married woman, financial loss, social support from family and religious group, and experience performing traditional rituals. He further noted the community's negative perception of widows. He recommended that social workers should design programmes that would discourage any form of abuse associated with the stigma, oppression, and discrimination of widows. She further recommended that communities include local chiefs and community leaders. This study was like Ngoveni's, as it also employed a qualitative research approach. However, the sampling did not involve human subjects; instead, it used an object, such as a novel in the Basotho ba Leboa genre, that addressed widowhood.

2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shed light on the various meanings of a literature review as defined by scholars. It was clear that different scholars have defined a literature review as previously published information by other researchers on the same topic that the researcher is working on. In relation to the portrayal of women during bereavement, literature was reviewed globally, on the African continent, and locally in our country, South Africa.

Notably, literature has revealed that widows are still faced with maltreatment, social, economic, and emotional exploitation. This is most evident in communities where culture is still practised. Harma (2016) notes a shift in policy implementation under the Namibian constitution, with priority given to gender equality. Goldstone (2021) also noted the freedom to choose to wear a black dress despite the strict measures associated with it. A literature review has revealed that little research has been done, especially in Basotho ba Leboa villages, where culture is still practised, particularly in tribal lands. The current study aimed to close the gaps left.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the literature review, examining studies at global, continental, and local levels in South Africa. This chapter focused on the theoretical framework, research methodology, and research design used to analyse the portrayal of women during bereavement in selected Sesotho sa Leboa literary works.

3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Hlongwane (2024), the theoretical framework refers to the theory a researcher chooses to guide a research project. In other words, it is a set of concepts drawn from a theory to explain an event or provide a structure that supports the study. Theoretical frameworks introduce and explain the theoretical underpinnings of the research problem (Hlongwane, 2024). Similarly, Varpio et al. (2020) and Osman (2024) describe the theoretical framework as a set of concepts derived from one or more theories to support the study.

This study was grounded in African Feminism, a branch of feminist theory. Feminism is described by Bell et al. (2018) as both a political and intellectual movement dedicated to social justice and equality and a means of developing theory. It addresses gender and racial inequality by examining social and economic systems. It encourages people to explore how patriarchal structures, such as domination by men over women or among women themselves, function.

According to Goredema (2010), African feminism is a movement that addresses differences between colonised and colonising women. It advocates for African women's histories, realities, and aspirations both on the continent and in the diaspora.

African feminism has evolved through three distinct waves, each influenced by a corresponding political era: precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial. In the precolonial era, women held leadership roles and had equal access to resources. Examples include Zulu

leaders like Queen Nandi and Basotho ba Leboa figures such as Queen Maselekwane, the first Rain Queen, whose lineage continued through Queen Modjadji II and Queen Khesetoane Modjadji III (Inumidun, 2024). During the colonial era, women such as Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela fought apartheid, exemplified by the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria.

In the postcolonial era, African feminism has been characterised by educated, middle-class women who challenge Western feminist ideologies while addressing socio-cultural and economic inequalities faced by African women (Goredema, 2010).

In this study, African Feminism was employed to examine the racial and gender inequalities faced by widows, with a focus on Basotho ba Leboa. The theory guided the exploration of social and economic oppression, exploitation, and domination of women by men and, at times, by other women during bereavement, an outcome of patriarchal influence.

3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Osman (2024) states that a research methodology is a strategy and rationale for a research project, involving the methods and theories behind these methods to develop an approach that aligns with the objectives. Equally important, the methods used in the study enabled the researcher to achieve the objectives, validate the findings, and uncover the underlying truth. Osman (2024).

De Vos, Strydom, Fouche, and Delport (2011:61-62) explain research methodology as the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about a topic. In other words, it can also refer to the steps that are used to solve an unsolved problem.

Mimansha and Patel (2019) define research methodology as the systematic theoretical analysis of the methods used in the field of study, including concepts such as paradigms, theoretical methods, phases, and quantitative or qualitative techniques. Furthermore, research methodology is a systematic approach to solving a research problem through a set of logical steps. The research methodology included the research paradigm, research

design, population and sample, data collection methods, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

3.3.1 Research Paradigm

In Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), a research paradigm is described as the lens through which a researcher views the world, interprets it, and acts within it. Kivunja and Kuyini (2017) further emphasise that this lens enables the researcher to examine the methodological aspects of a study, determine the research methods to be applied, and decide how data are to be analysed. In brief, this refers to what was studied, how it was studied, and how the results were analysed and interpreted.

This study examined the portrayal of women during bereavement in selected Sesotho sa Leboa novel and play. The researcher used a qualitative approach to analyse how women were depicted during periods of mourning. Specifically, qualitative content analysis was employed to examine the novel *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and the drama *Mahlodi* to understand how the authors portrayed widows. The researcher interpreted and analysed the texts based on the authors' personal experiences and observations as reflected in *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*.

Furthermore, Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:27–28) clarify that there are four elements of a research paradigm: epistemology, which originates from the Greek word meaning “knowledge” and describes how knowledge is acquired; ontology, which concerns the nature of reality and the questions a researcher asks about the phenomenon being studied; and axiology, which relates to ethical values and principles that guide research practice.

In this study, epistemology was employed to gain knowledge from literary works and to critically examine the portrayal of widows in society. The study enabled the researcher to understand the role of patriarchy in men's dominance over women and the challenges that women face during bereavement.

The four main paradigms discussed in this study were interpretivism, positivism, post-positivism, and constructivism.

- **Interpretivism**

This approach enabled the researcher to delve deeper into the subject under study, observing, understanding, speaking about, and interpreting its meaning (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017:33). The world around us was to be interpreted in this manner. Oppression of widows in Basotho ba Leboa was to be interpreted.

- **Positivism**

Kivunja and Kuyini (2017:30) assert that this approach involves formulating and testing hypotheses, providing operational definitions, and performing calculations using mathematical equations and expressions to conclude. Osman (2024) agrees with Kivunja and Kuyini (2017), stating that the research assumes an empirical, scientific study of society.

- **Post-Positivism**

Osman (2024) claimed that truth can be revealed when historical and cultural contexts are understood. In other words, this paradigm depended on referencing other paradigms to uncover truth and address problems. In this case, the truth around the plights of Basotho ba Leboa widows will be revealed and addressed.

- **Constructivism**

According to Osman (2024), truth is variable and continuously evolving; thus, reality is shaped collectively. In other words, social context and human interactions influence and construct our perception of reality.

In summary, this study adopted the interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism's view on ontology and epistemology is that reality is multiple and relative. Equally important, interpretivists understand the world through perceived and interpreted knowledge. This paradigm enabled the researcher to delve deeply into the selected novels and drama to identify and analyse portrayals of widowhood.

Furthermore, the researcher explored these genres to interpret the knowledge embedded within them and to examine the challenges faced by widows in Basotho ba Leboa society. This approach was complemented by a critical-transformational paradigm that enabled the researcher to expose the social justice issues underlying oppression, inequality, and power structures at multiple levels.

To conclude, the study did not involve human participation; however, ethical considerations, which form part of axiology, were observed.

3.3.2 Study approach and design

Research design is a plan for answering the research question. It includes the aims, goals, research questions, methods, approach, sampling, and interpretation techniques (Osman, 2024).

Babbie (2007:112) asserts that research design involves a set of decisions regarding the topic to be studied, including the population, research methods, and purpose. According to Fouche et al. (2011), this explanation means that the research design is the result of the researcher and all the steps they follow to reach the final product. He further describes research design as a group of small, worked-out formulas from which the researcher can select or develop one or more that are suitable for their specific goals and objectives.

Creswell (2009) also describes research design as the plans and procedures for conducting research, ranging from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. He argues that the choice of data depends on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researcher's personal experience, and the study's audience.

While Osman (2024) and Creswell (2009) agree that research design is a plan and procedures for research that include methods of data collection, Fouche et al. (2011) see research design as all the steps taken by the researcher to reach the final product.

Furthermore, Mimansha and Patel (2019) state that the purpose of research design is to facilitate the collection of relevant evidence with minimal effort, time, and cost.

There are three research designs: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. The qualitative method employs words to convey concepts and experiences, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the subject matter. It includes interviews, word-based observations, and open-ended questions (Osman, 2024).

Osman (2024) explains that in quantitative methods, data is presented in numerical and graphical form. Standard methods include observation recorded as numbers, experiments, and surveys with closed questions.

Osman (2024:29) claims that qualitative research allows the researcher to understand concepts, thoughts, or experiences. In this type of research, the researcher gathers in-depth insights on topics that are not well understood and expresses them in words.

Qualitative research aims to answer the question 'why?' It seeks to describe and explain phenomena within a broader context. In this approach, data collection involves unstructured information, including words, objects, and images. Qualitative research is also subjective because the results depend on the researcher's interpretation of the data. Department of Criminal and Procedural Law (2018:15)

Creswell (2009) also defines qualitative research as the process of inquiry that involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in participants' settings, data analysis that inductively builds from problems from particular to general themes, and research that interprets the meaning of the data. In this type of research design, the final report has a flexible structure. He further emphasises that qualitative research uses words and that data is collected by observing a setting. It is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.

Mimansha and Patel (2019:49) argued that qualitative research is primarily concerned with qualitative processes and focuses on the study of human behaviour. The researcher therefore observed body language, opinions, and feelings.

In the current study, the researcher did not use a quantitative method but a qualitative method to address the unresolved issue of the portrayal of women during bereavement. The primary reason for not using quantitative research was that no surveys, statistics, or numerical data were employed in this study. The qualitative method was suitable because it allowed the researcher to utilise literature such as *Sello sa Mohlologadi*, a novel, and *Mahlodi*, a drama, both of which are part of the *Basotho ba Leboa* literary works. The settings of the *Sello sa Mohlologadi* novel and the *Mahlodi* drama were observed, analysed, and interpreted subjectively by the researcher, using words from both literary works to examine the portrayal of women during bereavement.

3.3.3 Data Collection Methods

Mimansha and Patel (2019:49) argued that qualitative research is primarily concerned with qualitative processes and focuses on the study of human behaviour. The researcher therefore observed body language, opinions, and feelings. This study adopts a qualitative method to address how authors portray women during bereavement. The primary reason for not using quantitative research was that no surveys, statistics, or numerical data were employed in this study. The qualitative method was suitable because it allowed the researcher to utilise literature such as *Sello sa Mohlologadi*, a novel, and *Mahlodi*, a drama, both of which are part of the Basotho ba Leboa literary works. The settings of the *Sello sa Mohlologadi* novel and the *Mahlodi* drama were observed, analysed, and interpreted subjectively by the researcher, using words from both literary works to examine the portrayal of women during bereavement. According to De Vos (2011:376), the procedures for data collection comprise observation, interviews, document study, and secondary analysis.

Ritchie and Lewis (2003:35) noted that document analysis is one method for data collection. They argued that it involves studying existing documents to understand their substantive content or to clarify their more profound meaning, as revealed by their style. Neuman (2000:395) further states that a secondary source is one of the sources of document study, defined as original written material based on the author's own experiences and observations.

For this study, the Sesotho sa Leboa novel *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and the drama *Mahlodi*, which addressed the topic of widowhood, served as the primary sources for the researcher, who collected the data. The researcher further scrutinised, interpreted, and analysed the text, drawing on the authors' own experiences and observations as outlined in *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*. Using the actions and portrayals of different characters across genres helped the researcher collect data from the texts.

In addition, the researcher collected data from the novel and drama by identifying key moments related to widowhood. Relevant sections were highlighted to mark dialogues, actions, or descriptions of widowhood. Data were categorised by grouping similar instances to identify recurring themes.

In brief, the current study used published existing materials as data collection methods. These existing materials included books such as *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*, articles such as Modjadji Rain Queen of South Africa and Royal Women of the Zulu Monarchy through the Keyhole of Oral History: Queens Nandi (c.1764–c.1827) and Monase (c.1797–1880), a dissertation such as Traditional and Cultural Practices and Rights of Women: A Study of Widowhood Practices among Akhans in Ghana, and a thesis such as The Portrayal of Women in Sesotho Literature with Special Reference to South African Novels, Poems and Proverbs.

3.3.4 Study Setting, study population and sampling

- **Study Setting**

Majid (2018) states that a setting is a physical location where research is conducted and is a crucial element of the research process. Moreover, the setting of a research study can significantly influence its design, implementation, and outcomes. In short, how research is conducted is determined by the study's environment, context, characteristics, and logistics (Majid, 2018).

In this study, the specific location is not specified. The choice is intentional, as the researcher intends to use a novel and a drama book rather than collect data from participants.

- **Study population**

Population can be defined as the total number of possible units or elements included in the study (Grey, 2004:82). Burney (2001:248) refers to the population as the sampling frame. In this study, the population comprises Sesotho sa Leboa novels and dramas that portray women during bereavement.

- **Sampling**

Sampling always implies the simultaneous existence of a population from which the sample is a smaller section of individuals selected (Gravetter & Fozano, 2003:465). A sample comprises elements or subsets of a population considered for inclusion in the study, or it can be viewed as a subset of measurements drawn from the population of interest (Unrau et al., 2007:279). A sample is a small portion of the total set of objects, events, or persons from which a representative is made (Barker, 2003:380).

The researcher further employed purposive sampling. This was a non-probability sampling method that involved selecting subjects deemed the most informative sources to fulfil the study's objectives. In this study, the researcher purposively selected a novel and a drama, believing that from these two genres she would be able to collect data on women in widowhood.

To conclude, in the current study, a smaller section of the literary work was selected from a larger body of work. Essentially, these large groups referred to selected Basotho ba Leboa literary texts about widowhood. *Sello sa Mohlologadi's* novel and *Mahlodi's* drama were the literary works sampled to represent the document analysis and the sample frame.

3.3.5 Data Analysis Method

Data analysis was the process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the collected data. Broadley conceived this as the activity of making sense of, interpreting, and theorising data (Schwandt, 2007:6). The researcher used qualitative content analysis by examining selected texts from the novel *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and the drama *Mahlodi* to analyse how the writers portrayed a widow and to check if there was a shift considering current democracy. The current study interpreted and theorised the data collected from *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*, after thorough scrutiny, to uncover the meaning of the portrayal of women during bereavement in the selected Sesotho sa Leboa novels. The focus was solely on these texts, with no human participation or interviews. Feminist theory helped analyse how patriarchy played a role in controlling women. This also addressed the oppression and exploitation that created challenges women faced during bereavement.

The researcher employed qualitative content analysis of selected literary texts to examine how writers portrayed widows. According to Sinha (1980:22), content analysis had to do with "the analysis of an individual author's work in the perspective of his personality." In this study, two authors whose work was studied were Modise (2021) and Mminele (1968). Sinha (1980:32) and Krippendorff (1980:53) alleged that the content to be analysed, whether written down or tape-recorded, was readily available. Furthermore, there were relevant aspects of the content that needed to be studied through content analysis (Sinha, 1980:32). These aspects were referred to as units, and they comprised characters, words,

themes, items, time measures, and space. The researcher identified the body material for analysis and recorded the findings. Relevant themes were thoroughly scrutinised using content analysis, with particular focus on the portrayal of women during bereavement to bring meaning. The focus was limited to the Sesotho sa Leboa novel and drama, as there was no human participation or interviews.

- **Ensuring Rigour**

In Seale and Silverman's (1997) view, rigour in qualitative research is a process that places greater emphasis on data analysis and on the use of transcription techniques to improve the accuracy of data recording. In addition, they declare that in qualitative research, a small number of texts and documents may be analysed for a different purpose. In this study, a small number of texts from *Sello sa Mohlogadi's* novel and *Mahlodi's* drama were selected and analysed to examine how literature portrays women during bereavement and whether there is ever a shift in a democratic dispensation.

Again, Seale and Silverman (1997) assert that qualitative researchers claim the ability to reveal local practices through which given products (stories, files, and descriptions) are assembled. In this study, portrayals of a woman during bereavement in the literature were examined through local practices, using information gathered from *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi* by Basotho ba Leboa.

In qualitative research, trustworthiness should be a key consideration. This helped determine the correctness of the researcher's findings. To evaluate the correctness of findings, the following attributes were applied: Credibility, Transferability, Confirmability, and Dependability (Anney, 2014:272). These attributes were discussed in detail below.

- **Credibility**

This refers to the confidence in the truth. Anney (2014:276), cited in Halloway & Wheeler (2002) and Macnee & McCabe (2008), emphasises that rigour in qualitative research involves using strategies such as sampling, field journal triangulation, peer examination, prolonged and verified field experience, time, member checking, structural coherence, and interview techniques to establish the authority of the researcher (Anney, 2014:276). In this study, the researcher sampled *Mahlodi* drama and *Sello sa Mohlogadi's* novel for data collection. To enhance the credibility of the findings, peer debriefing was also employed to seek support from other professionals, including academic staff serving as

supervisors and co-supervisors. Their comments helped the researcher improve the quality of the inquiry's findings.

- **Transferability**

The transferability of findings concerns their applicability to other settings and circumstances, and the validity of the findings is assessed through this process. Qualitative research involves extensive descriptions of the research setting and contexts. This provides readers with sufficient information to evaluate findings relevant to various circumstances. (Mandal,2018).

The researcher needs to apply transferability when researching by specifying the methods of analysis used, the setting in which the research takes place, and providing complete descriptions of the texts analysed. The research approach was clear and transparent, allowing readers to assess the relevance of the findings to other contexts or demographics.

- **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the objectivity of research during data collection and analysis. Two or more individuals must agree on the accuracy, usefulness, or meaning of the data. This attribute also provides a means to demonstrate quality and evaluate the method used. The researcher might focus on establishing confirmability. Techniques such as triangulation (of data, researcher, and context) can also be practical tools for confirmability (Mandal, 2018). In this research, the researcher ensured confirmability by considering ethical considerations related to text analysis.

- **Dependability**

This attribute signified the consistency of findings over time. To ensure dependability was applied correctly, specific steps were taken, including establishing an audit trail strategy, maintaining a code record, conducting stepwise replication, and performing peer review and triangulation (Anney, 2014:278). The audit trail involved validating data through the inquiry process. During this process, the researcher retained documents, including interview and observation notes, raw data, and field records.

For this study, the researcher primarily focused on raw data and notes collected from the *Mahlodi* drama and the *Sello sa Mohlologadi* novel for cross-checking and inquiry

purposes. Records collected in the field, observation notes, and interviews were not used, as there was no human participation. Stepwise replication is an evaluation process in which two or more researchers independently analyse the same data and then compare their results (Anney, 2014:278, as cited in Chillisa & Peece, 2005). For this study, the data were provided to the supervisor and co-supervisor for further review to ensure the dependability of the inquiry.

3.3.6 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations promote important moral and social values, such as social responsibility, human rights, animal welfare, legal compliance, and health and safety (Kabir, 2016). Research should be based on mutual trust, acceptance, cooperation, promises, and well-accepted conventions between all parties involved in a research project. A researcher should be familiar with the basic ethical principles and have up-to-date knowledge about policies and procedures designed to ensure the safety of research subjects. In addition, a researcher should avoid sloppy or irresponsible research, as ignorance of policies designed to protect research subjects is not a valid excuse for ethically questionable projects (Strydom, 2011:113).

This study did not involve human participants; instead, data were collected from two literary books. However, it considered ethical considerations, which are part of the research policy. The Policy on Research Ethics (UNISA, 2016) states that it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that no research is conducted without ethical clearance. Researchers are permitted to conduct only studies authorised by the relevant Research Ethics Review. An Ethical Clearance Certificate for the study was obtained from the Department of African Languages in the College of Human Sciences at the University of South Africa.

In this study, the researcher adhered to all ethical considerations for data collection stipulated in the institution's policies. The study stipulated the following ethical considerations: privacy, harm, risk, confidentiality, and anonymity.

- **Privacy**

Privacy involves keeping to oneself that which is not meant for others to see or analyse. Every individual has the right to privacy, and it is their choice to decide when, where, and

to what degree their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours will be shared. In short, privacy refers to personal privacy (Strydom, 2011).

- **Harm**

Everything that we do in life can harm someone. Therefore, the researcher must weigh the risks against the importance and potential benefits of the specific research project (Barbie, 2007:27). The researcher has an ethical responsibility to protect participants, within all reasonable limits, from any physical discomfort that may arise from the research project (Cresswell, 2009:64).

- **Risk**

According to Strydom (2011), researchers may cause harm and face risks when they negotiate permission to enter an unfamiliar field of research. To avoid risk, researchers had to take responsibility and honour the promises they made to respond. The current study posed a very low risk because it did not involve participants.

- **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality meant that information should be handled in confidence. It was closely related to privacy. The difference between the two was that privacy concerned a person's personal information, while confidentiality concerned information that should be kept safe. In Strydom's (2011) view, violations of privacy and confidentiality were synonymous. This study did not involve any matters of confidentiality, as it only used literature by *Mahlodi* and *Sello sa Mohlologadi*.

- **Anonymity**

Barbie (2007) argues that the term 'anonymous' should be used to describe confidentiality. Furthermore, anonymous information protects the subject's privacy. Researchers might secretly mark questionnaires after assuring subjects of anonymity, either in the cover letter or verbally. If the subject remains anonymous and not exposed to risk, the researcher could use concealed media.

Again, there are other ethical considerations, such as honesty, where the researcher should accurately record the collected data in writing, as outlined in the sampled literary works, including *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi*. The researcher also respected and acknowledged every person who contributed to the research. In addition, integrity was

considered, compelling the researcher to honour the agreement made with seniors. Lastly, the researcher complied with applicable policies and laws.

3.4 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research used African feminism to address the oppression that African women across the globe are facing during bereavement, particularly Basotho ba Leboa. Culture, tradition, socio-economic and socio-political issues, the role of men, race, sex, and sexuality categorise this oppression.

Equally important for the researcher is to explore the world and address the oppression mentioned earlier; the research paradigm should be employed. Common paradigms that support this research include Interpretivism, Positivism, Post-positivism, and Constructivism.

Additionally, the qualitative method and a population consisting of Sesotho sa Leboa, a novel, and a drama were used to represent the specific group or population being studied. The chapter further described the sampling of two genres, *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*, that addressed widowhood. Data were collected from the two genres, drama and novel, and selected texts were examined, interpreted, and analysed to meet the objectives.

Although no human participants or interviews were involved, the study addressed ethical considerations and policies. The ethical considerations covered included privacy, harm, risk, confidentiality, and anonymity.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and critically analyses the content of the two genres selected for this study: *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*. However, before discussing and analysing the contents of the two books, a summary of each was provided. This chapter explored how the authors of these two books depicted and portrayed a widow, focusing on the challenges widows faced and how patriarchy contributed to men's dominance over women. Both *Mahlodi* and *Sello sa Mohlologadi* are examined in this chapter. Below is a summary of the two genres selected for this study.

4.2 SUMMARY OF SELLO SA MOHLOLOGADI

Sello sa Mohlologadi is a work of protest prose that highlights societal issues. The main character is Dikeledi, the daughter of Mr Lereko. She was born and raised in Morekerekere village. Mr Lereko was the breadwinner, working as a bricklayer. The family struggled to afford basic needs. Life became harder after the death of Mr Lereko, who fell off the wall he was building and was killed by bricks. Mrs Lereko became a widow and observed the strict mourning customs. Dikeledi, as the eldest child still in school, was expected to find temporary work during holidays to help support the family. She passed her matriculation exams and then worked as a cashier at a Woolworths in Pretoria. She met Lesiba Maila, who was living in Madibong, and married him. On the wedding day, a process called '*go laya*, meaning 'to lay down the rules or laws,' was performed according to tradition. This ritual helped prepare the bride to behave appropriately in marriage. She was expected to have children, cook, and keep the home clean. Most importantly, she had to be resilient in facing difficulties and avoid returning home to prevent shame to the family.

Lesiba was working as a police officer. He was the only son and the youngest of his siblings. His two sisters had children but were unmarried and unemployed. Traditionally, Lesiba was supposed to inherit his father's homestead. His sisters were stubborn and expected Dikeledi to come home from work and cook for the whole family without help. His mother-in-law supported the mistreatment Dikeledi received from her sisters-in-law. The only support Dikeledi had was from her father-in-law and her husband, Lesiba. After

her father-in-law died, life became more difficult for her. Dikeledi remembered what she was told on her wedding day during the *go laya* 'to lay down the rules or laws' process and chose to stay silent while suffering. She continued her studies, which helped her secure a management position. Lesiba also got promoted. One day, while Lesiba was at work, seven dangerous thieves escaped from jail.

Police officers, including senior officers, were tasked with searching for the thieves. Unfortunately, the thieves went unnoticed because they arrived in a disguised police van and wore police uniforms. They shot and killed Lesiba. At that time, Dikeledi was caring for three children with Lesiba, and she was responsible for their well-being. Lesiba's death turned Dikeledi into a widow, and she had to go through a mourning period. Her life became even more miserable without support.

4.3 SUMMARY OF MAHLODI

Mahlodi is a play that examines the intersection of Christianity and traditional laws. These traditional laws are based on cultural practices that prescribe how a widow should behave after her husband's death. The book is named after Mahlodi, the main character. Mahlodi's mother died immediately after giving birth to her, and unfortunately, her father also died shortly afterwards. Mahlodi was then raised by her uncle, Mphegolle, who later offered Mahlodi to the family of Phadime and Morabane when Mahlodi married Sepheu. Mahlodi and Sepheu were Christians. Sepheu died in a car accident early in their marriage.

Mahlodi became a widow and had to go through cultural practices that were very difficult for her to handle because she was a Christian, and her family members did not support her as they did not understand her Christian beliefs. Among other things, Mahlodi was supposed to *go tsene/wa*, meaning 'enter into a levirate marriage,' with Lepadime, the younger brother of the late Sepheu. Mahlodi escaped to the priest's home to seek help. She was welcomed and, fortunately, employed at a nursing home, where she cared for older adults. While working there, she met Masilela, whom she later married. The priest received the lobola from Masilela's family on behalf of Phadime and Morabane. Phadime and Morabane bought a trailer they had long desired but could not afford. The trailer helped them win a tender to load stones for the construction of a new church. Phadime

and Morabane repented and became Christians. Phadime and Morabane felt guilty about the wrongs they had done to Mahlodi.

The works of Modise (2021) and Mminele (1968) address traditional laws, the oppression of widows, and socio-cultural practices related to widowhood, loss, mourning, and patriarchy, which were analysed in the next section.

4.4 DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

The following section presents data collected from the selected texts by *Sello sa Mohlologadi* (2021) and *Mahlodi* (1968).

4.4.1 Sociocultural Practices Surrounding Widowhood

African feminist theory, as discussed by scholars such as Goredema (2010), Nnaemeka (2004), and Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), highlights the complex relationship between tradition, gender, and power. While some aspects of African feminism suggest that precolonial African societies granted women relative autonomy and respect, the realities shown in *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi* demonstrate that patriarchal customs and traditions still oppress widows today.

Among the Basotho ba Leboa, widowhood is marked by restrictive mourning rituals that confine women to domestic spaces and isolate them from social life. These customs, framed as cultural obligations, often neglect widows' emotional and psychological well-being. The South African Constitution, in Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights (Clause 9), guarantees equality and freedom from discrimination. However, these practices contradict those principles by maintaining patriarchal control over women's bodies and movements.

In *Sello sa Mohlologadi*, mourning rituals are closely linked to gendered expectations. According to Modise (2021:23), a widow must stay at home throughout the mourning period, avoid contact with others, and refrain from sexual activity to prevent the spread of *makgoma*, an ailment traditionally believed to be transmitted via sexual intercourse with a widow. Even when forced to go out, she must return before dawn, and the mourning period lasts eleven months. Such confinement is discriminatory and oppressive, denying widows the freedom to rebuild their lives. The extract below outlines that:

...ka setšo sa bathobaso mohlologadi o swanetše go dula ka gae ge a hlokofaletšwe a se ye ga motho. Ga se a swanela go feafea, ka ge a se a dumelwa go kopakopana le batho... Le ge a gapeletšega, a tšwa a ya mo gongwe, ga a swanela go sobelelwa ke letšatši a sa ile. Ka Sepedi mohlologadi o ilela dikgwedi tše lesometee gore a apole boso.... Modise (2021:23).

(In African culture, a widow must stay at home during the mourning period and not go to anyone's house. She should avoid activities because she is not allowed to interact with other people... Even if a widow is compelled to go out, she must return before sunset. Within Sepedi traditional practice, a widow is expected to mourn for a period of eleven months to take off her black mourning clothes)

Goredema (2010) argues that African culture, in its original form, did not inherently oppress women; however, patriarchal reinterpretations of these traditions have reinforced gender inequality. Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) notion of double patriarchy, the dual domination of women by both indigenous customs and colonial influence, explains how culture has been reshaped to maintain male privilege. Similarly, Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of Nego-feminism highlights the importance of negotiation and mutual respect within cultural frameworks. However, the treatment of widows demonstrates a lack of such negotiation, reducing them to passive subjects of patriarchal control.

The portrayal of Mrs Lereko, a Bapedi widow described as *molwetši*, 'a sick person,' exemplifies this oppression. Confined for eleven months after her husband's death, she was unable to provide for her family, forcing her daughter Dikeledi to seek employment. Despite 31 years of democracy, widows still face stigma due to beliefs about *makgoma*, a supposed illness transmitted through contact or sexual intercourse with a mourning widow (Mathibela et al., 2019). The black mourning attire becomes a visual sign of widowhood and a source of social avoidance, perpetuating fear, agency and discrimination.

This stigmatisation undermines widows' dignity and sense of community. Instead of support, they are treated as outcasts, in violation of their constitutional right to human dignity (as guaranteed in Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights). In Mminele (1968), Mahlodi is

described as *ditšhila*, meaning ‘filthy’, and *go goboga*, meaning ‘notorious’, highlighting her perceived impurity. Her father-in-law, Phadime, and uncle, Mphegolle, organise a cleansing ceremony to end the mourning period, during which she must remove her black clothing and shave her hair Mminele (1968:12–14).

Nna ke be ke re lebaka le fihlile la gore bjale re tloše ditšhila tše le rena, re ke re swane le batho ba bangwe. Ditaba a di bolelweng re ke re široše bogoboga. Mminele (1968:12).

(I thought the time had come for us to put away the filth and become like other people. Let the matter be communicated to do away with our notoriety.)

According to De Beer et al. (1994:279), *ditšhila* symbolises impurity and is thought to attract illness or bad luck. This belief supports the idea that widows pose a danger to the community, justifying their separation. Such portrayals are degrading, violate women’s dignity, and cause psychological harm.

Both *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi* reveal how patriarchal interpretations of culture stigmatise and restrict widows under the guise of tradition. From a feminist critical stance, these depictions highlight the tension between constitutional ideals of equality and ingrained patriarchal norms. They call for a re-examination of widowhood practices through feminist frameworks that emphasise negotiation, dignity, and principles of justice central to Nnaemeka’s Neco-feminism and Ogundipe-Leslie’s vision of equity within African culture.

Kgalema’s wife, Mongatane, said *Mahlodi* dares to challenge traditional arrangements made by men in the clan. The statement was made because men in the community were forcing *Mahlodi* to follow outdated laws. The main issue was that *Mahlodi* should be forced to remarry Lepadime, even though Lepadime had already married someone else. It was non-negotiable. No one was willing to listen to *Mahlodi* or consider her feelings. *Mahlodi* proved herself as a brave woman capable of facing men and speaking out against the forced marriage arrangement. She was just stubborn when dealing with the cultural issues she did not associate herself with. The quote below shows that when she says:

“Ga ke ba boife, ke botate, ke swanetše go boledišana nabo ka tšeo ke bonago ke sa di kwe gabotse”. Mminele. (1968:22).

(I am not afraid of them, they are my fathers, I must communicate with them on issues that I do not understand well.)

Mahlodi's declaration that she is not afraid of those men is a powerful act of feminist resistance. In a setting where women are expected to remain silent and submissive, her open defiance challenges patriarchal authority and reclaims a voice for widows. Feminist theory views such resistance as vital in breaking down gender hierarchies and affirming women's agency even within oppressive cultural contexts. Butler (1990) emphasises that women's resistance to gendered norms can weaken patriarchal systems by rejecting assigned roles. Likewise, Hooks (1984) states that acts of defiance, even in private, are political acts that oppose systems of domination.

Mahlodi's voice remains outspoken, challenging patriarchal ideals. She claimed equal power, as during the first wave of African feminism, when culture and tradition did not oppress women, as Goredema (2010) notes. She defied the oppressive marriage system despite the disrespect she received from Mphegolle, her uncle, who raised her. This caused Mphegolle to be less receptive to her challenge and instead portray Mahlodi unfairly, as quoted below.

“O etišitše bonganga pele” Mminele (1968:24).
(She is good at being stubborn.)

According to the patriarchy, men do not believe women can challenge any decisions they make. This is why Mphegolle failed to accept Mahlodi's denial of the forced marriage and portrayed Mahlodi as being stubborn.

4.4.2 Experiences of widows during periods of loss and mourning

Death occurs in African cultural societies, as it does in many others; however, in African culture, pain persists beyond death, preventing the affected widow from receiving support and healing. After her husband's death and mourning period, a widow was expected to accept the loss, undergo counselling if needed, and take care of herself and her family. However, in African culture, widows are often left without support and treated inhumanely

by the public and immediate family members who are supposed to support them. A widow's life is characterised by the frustration of loss and the hardships described below.

In addition to the challenges listed above, Khosa Nkathini (2022) notes that widows are expected to grieve for 12 months. During this period, widows are restricted from any sexual activity and contact with outsiders because they are considered contaminated. Additionally, widows should keep company with other widows.

4.4.3 Challenges Faced by Widows During Periods of Loss and Mourning

In *Sello sa Mohlologadi*, Dikeledi, a widow residing in Madibong village, experiences multiple layers of hardship following the death of her husband, Lesiba. Modise (2021:72) records that:

“Tše dingwe tša dithulaganyo ba be ba sa mo reriše. Lepokisi la mohu, ke bona ba le kgethilego a se fiwe tumelelo ya go kgetha lepokisi la monna wa gagwe. Fela mo go nyakegago tšhelete ba tla go yena.”

(In some of the plans, she was not consulted. The coffin of the deceased, they chose it, and she was not permitted to choose her husband's coffin. However, where money is needed, they come to her.)

This excerpt underscores Dikeledi's exclusion from critical funeral decisions, reflecting the patriarchal belief that widows should remain passive and confined to domestic or emotional roles during mourning. Dikeledi's in-laws reinforced this marginalisation by approaching her only when financial matters arose. Their exploitation intensified when they demanded access to Lesiba's remaining savings.

Modise (2021:74) illustrates this through the conversation initiated by Dikeledi's mother-in-law:

“Mmatswale wa Dikeledi le barwedi ba gagwe ... ba thoma poledišano le Dikeledi ... mokgekolo a botšiša mohlologadi gore bjale ka gore Lesiba e be e le ngwana wa gagwe ebile a mo fepa, bjale go tlile go direga eng ka ditšhelete tša gagwe?”

(Dikeledi's mother-in-law and her daughters Started the conversation with Dikeledi... the older lady asks Dikeledi that because Lesiba has passed and he was her son who was supporting her, now what will happen to his money).

From an African feminist perspective, this episode illustrates how patriarchal, and material interests are perpetuated through family structures, often with women themselves, such as mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, acting as enforcers of patriarchal control (Hooks, 2000). Dikeledi is thus subjected to double marginalisation: first through her exclusion from decision-making, and second through her economic exploitation. As Millett (1970) observes, patriarchy maintains its dominance by systematically denying women authority and access to resources.

Despite these oppressive conditions, Dikeledi's eventual actions signify resilience and resistance. Modise (2021:81-82) recounts that:

“Modimo o ile a mo fa maatla a thoma bophelo mathomong a godiša bana ba gagwe a ba a ba agela ngwako wa bona ... a ya go thoma bophelo bjo boswa.”

(God gave her the strength to start anew, raising her children and building them a house of their own, then she went on to start a new life)

This marks a pivotal moment of transformation in which Dikeledi transcends victimhood through self-reliance. Her decision to rebuild her home and establish independence for her children aligns with the principles of *Nego-feminism* (Nnaemeka, 2004), which emphasises women's negotiation and strategic resistance within patriarchal systems to reclaim agency and dignity.

A similar trajectory is observed in *Mahlodi* by Mminele (1968), where the protagonist, Mahlodi, is subjected to patriarchal exclusion after the death of her husband, Sepheu. Her in-laws, represented by Kgalema and Mphegolle, unilaterally determine the funeral arrangements without her input.

Mminele (1968:4) records the justification provided by Phadime:

“Ge e le ka ga poloko nna ke be ke no re e ka ba mo gae... Ge re ka re re ya kua mabatleng a majakane, batho ba re tla ba rwala ke eng?”

(When it is about the burial, I am just saying that it should be here at home ... If we can say we are going to the *majakane* graveyard, what will we use to transport these people?)

Although this reasoning appears practical, it reflects the deeper patriarchal structures that exclude women from participation in decisions that directly affect them.

Mahlodi's resistance to forced levirate marriage further illustrates her defiance against patriarchal authority. Her father-in-law, Phadime, disowns her, declaring:

“Ge e le Mahlodi yena, sa gagwe e no ba gore a ye go moruti yoo wa gagwe. Ge e le ka lapeng la ka gona ga ke sa mo nyaka.”
(Mminele, 1968:26)

(As for Mahlodi, all she has to do is go to her pastor. As far as my family is concerned, I do not want him anymore.)

This expulsion signifies the punitive nature of patriarchy, where women who resist oppressive customs are ostracised and deprived of material security. As Hooks (2000) notes, patriarchal systems are upheld not only through male authority but also through collective compliance and silence within family and community structures.

From a feminist standpoint, both Dikeledi and Mahlodi's experiences illuminate the emotional, economic, and social dimensions of widowhood under patriarchy. Their exclusion from funeral arrangements, whether in the selection of a coffin or the determination of a burial site, epitomises the denial of women's agency in contexts where they should possess legitimate authority. By valuing widows solely for their financial contributions while disregarding their voices, patriarchal systems reduce them to passive dependents. As Millett (1970) contends, patriarchy sustains gender inequality by reserving decision-making power for men while relegating women to subordinate roles.

Modise (2021:80) poignantly encapsulates this ongoing oppression:

“... basadi ba sa hlorišwa ka baka la setšo. Mosadi ge a re o emiša hlogo o botšwa ka mokgwa wo a sego a swanela, ka ge setšo goba tumelo goba bagologolo ba ile ba re.”

(Women are still oppressed because of culture. When a woman raises her head, she is told that she should not, because culture, religion, or ancestors said so.)

This statement reinforces the notion that widows, as women, remain entrapped by patriarchal traditions justified through cultural and religious beliefs.

Ultimately, the experiences of Dikeledi and Mahlodi reveal how patriarchal practices continue to infringe upon widows' rights to property, dignity, and participation in community life. However, their acts of resistance, Dikeledi's rebuilding of her home and Mahlodi's rejection of forced marriage, symbolise the reclamation of agency within an oppressive social order. Their narratives underscore the necessity of re-evaluating cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequality and hinder women's autonomy, particularly in the context of bereavement and mourning.

4.4.4 Portrayal and depiction during bereavement

Dikeledi, as a widow, is depicted in the selected texts as the person who killed her husband, as shown in the extract below:

“Le ge go tsebja gore Lesiba o bolailwe ke dikebekwa, ke ge go šetše go tsogile mahemeheme a gore Dikeledi ke yena a bolailego Lesiba. A mmolaya bjang mola Lesiba a bolailwe a le mošomong? Baboledi ba tšeo e tlabe e se mang ge e se dikgaetšedi tša Lesiba.”
(Modise, 2021:70-71).

(Although it is known that criminals killed Lesiba, there are already rumours that Dikeledi killed Lesiba. How could she kill him, as Lesiba was killed at work? Who will be the ones talking about that, if they are not Lesiba's sisters?)

The treatment of Dikeledi by her in-laws, characterised by humiliation, false accusations, and disrespect, illustrates what Simone de Beauvoir (1949) describes as the reduction of women to the other, a role defined by subjugation and silence. The mother-in-law's verbal attack, accusing Dikeledi of being motivated by greed, strengthens the stereotype that women's actions arise from material desire, thus denying them moral integrity and emotional depth. Feminist scholars such as Hooks (1984) and Butler (1990) argue that such narratives maintain patriarchal control by policing women's identities and punishing those who deviate from submissive norms.

However, Dikeledi's silence in response to these accusations, shaped by her socialisation and the teachings she received during the wedding ceremony, reveals another layer of gendered expectation. Her restraint reflects what Butler (1997) calls the performance of gendered docility; a behaviour expected of women to uphold social harmony even when they are wronged. While her silence might be interpreted as weakness, feminist perspectives may see it as a form of resistance through dignity and moral strength, exposing the cruelty and hypocrisy of those who persecute her.

Therefore, through the character of Dikeledi, Modise's work promotes a feminist critique of widowhood, patriarchy, and the suppression of women in African societies. It emphasises the importance of reexamining cultural stories that continue to sustain women's marginalisation, especially those who no longer occupy socially accepted roles as wives under male dominance.

Her sisters' in-laws falsely accused Dikeledi of killing Lesiba, while Lesiba was shot and killed by thieves at work. The behaviour of the sisters' in-laws was inhumane, disrespectful, and unacceptable. The mother-in-law, who was also present, did not act like a parent; instead, she accused Dikeledi, saying she could do that because she likes money. However, Dikeledi remained humble and did not defend herself, as she had been taught during the wedding ceremony, as outlined below.

“...wa mafelelo e beile koko wa Dikeledi, a laya setlogolo sa gagwe a mmošša gore a dule bogadi, a fihle a godiše kgoro ya Maila a ba belegele bana a ba apee, a tšwela pele ka go mmošša gore bogadi bo dula ke dikokoto ebile mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo... o swanetše go kgotlelela tšohle kua bogadi.” (Modise, 2021:42).

(...the last one was Dikeledi's grandmother, she laid down the rules for her granddaughter and told her to stay in marriage, raise Maila's clan, give birth to children and cook for them, went on to tell her that in marriage lasts the strong ones, and a woman is a baboon, her hands are eaten... she has to endure everything in marriage.)

The excerpt above highlights key issues within African feminism, a theoretical approach that focuses on African women's lived experiences and underscores community responsibility, resilience, and negotiation within patriarchal systems rather than outright opposition to them. Dikeledi's grandmother's advice illustrates how women are traditionally socialised into endurance and duty within marriage norms that primarily value women for their reproductive and nurturing roles. African feminism recognises such practices as part of the complex interaction between culture, gender, and survival. Patriarchy regards this as resilience and bravery. Elderly African women regard these as well-brought-up women. As Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) explains, African women's oppression must be understood within historical and cultural contexts that link gender with tradition, class, and community expectations. Therefore, the grandmother's advice is rooted in a communal logic that prioritises marriage to ensure lineage continuity and family honour. Her words reflect an effort to pass down wisdom meant to help women navigate, rather than escape, the patriarchal landscape of marriage.

Through an African feminist lens, however, the extract also prompts a critical re-evaluation of these gendered expectations. The proverb *mosadi ke tšhwene o lewa mabogo* (a woman is a baboon; her hands are eaten) illustrates how women's suffering and endurance are normalised as virtues. This reflects how cultural norms often justify women's subordination in the name of strength and perseverance. Obioma Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of Nego-feminism, the feminism of negotiation, give and take, is relevant here, as it promotes agency through negotiation rather than confrontation. African feminism challenges the glorification of suffering by advocating for women's capacity to question, negotiate, and redefine the limits of endurance and submission. Rather than viewing suffering as a sign of strength, it seeks to reclaim womanhood from servitude, promoting a balance between cultural respect and women's empowerment. As a result, the extract becomes a site of tension between inherited tradition and the evolving consciousness of African womanhood, which seeks dignity and equality without abandoning its cultural identity.

The grandmother's advice leads Dikeledi to accept oppression, disrespect, and domination from her sisters-in-law while remaining resilient. She opts for silence to avoid bringing shame to her family and to conform to her clan's traditional expectations. This shows how the process of *go laya* ("laying down the rules") can psychologically harm a woman by forcing her to internalise pain and hide her suffering. Dikeledi's endurance reflects the broader consequences of patriarchal conditioning that equates silence with virtue. As Amina Mama (1995) notes, patriarchal structures in African societies are often maintained through internalised control, where women's complicity becomes a survival strategy within systems that limit their autonomy.

As the story unfolds, Dikeledi continues to face humiliation and exploitation from her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, including false accusations that intensify her suffering. From a feminist perspective, this dynamic exposes the internalisation of patriarchy, where domination goes beyond men over women to include women oppressing other women (Bell et al., 2018). This highlights how patriarchal systems sustain cycles of exploitation and silence among women themselves, emphasising the need for an African feminist consciousness that transforms endurance into empowerment.

Without hesitation, traditional beliefs also blame women for killing their husbands, as shown below.

"Re kwele gantshi ge molekane wa monna a hlokofetše go thwe o bolailwe ke mosadi, mosadi ka go hloka mahlatshe ge a hlokofetše go thwe o bolailwe ke go hloka maitshwaro" (Modise, 2021:81).

(We have heard many times that when a male partner died, it is said that a woman killed him; a woman, unfortunately, when she died, it is said that she was killed by immorality.)

Control over power controlled by patriarchy has made Africans believe that men should live forever, and women should die, because when a man dies, a woman is accused of being responsible for that death. However, when a woman dies, her death is attributed to ill-discipline. This shows inequality and disrespect. A society dominated by males belittles women. This belief in spreading false accusations that disrespect women is part of the third wave of African Feminism, which outlines challenges women face around the world.

The outcome depends on each country's liberation, culture, and traditions, which differ (Goredema, 2010).

Dikeledi in *'Sello sa Mohlologadi'* rises above the attacks she faces and comes across as a hardworking woman and a leader. Similarly, Mahlodi in *'Mahlodi'* also overcomes pressure, exploitation, humiliation, and oppression from her clan due to an arranged marriage. The two females exhibit leadership qualities, as shown in the quotes.

“Ka ge e be e le yo mogolo mošomong, a thomile e le cashier ge nako e eya a hlatlošwa a ba menetšara...” (Modise 2021:51-52).

(As he was the senior at the work, he started as a cashier and was later promoted to a manager ...)

Nna lehono ke leboga pelo ya Mahlodi. Ke gona ke bonago gore ruri Mahlodi ke mosadi mo a swerego ga a lese Mminele (1968:58).

(I am grateful to have a person of Mahlodi 's heart because she is a real woman who holds on.)

The quotes highlight the struggles of educated women. They remain selfless even in challenging circumstances, thinking of themselves and those who depend on them. Dikeledi was caring for three children she was responsible for raising. Mahlodi also needed to attend training and found employment so she could support herself after being abandoned by her in-laws. According to Goredema (2010), the challenge faced by Dikeledi and Mahlodi falls within the post-colonial wave, in which middle-class Black women challenge the legacy established by middle-class white women and by uneducated Black women, who are in the majority. Dikeledi's in-laws, who were uneducated and part of the majority, humiliated, disrespected, and exploited her, as previously mentioned. However, Dikeledi remained brave and went on to become a leader. Mahlodi's in-laws, also uneducated and in the majority, failed to break her spirit, and she endured challenging circumstances to become a true woman.

Inequality remains a tricky issue regarding the treatment a widow receives compared to that of a widower. A widow is depicted as a supernatural being, with all the rules and regulations that govern widowhood, as shown below:

“O swanetše a itlhomphe a dule gotee lapeng la gagwe, ... Se se makatšago ka go ilela ebilego se mpefediša ke gore banna bona ga ba na bothata, ba iphelela moroba ka gore ba ikaparela diaparo tša bona, o ka se kwe ba rwešwa ke motho molato” (Modise, 2021: 23 -24).

(She should respect herself and sit in one place in her home, ... The strange thing about mourning and what makes me angry is that men have no problem; they live for themselves easily because they wear their own clothes, and you cannot hear anyone blaming them.)

The above quote undermines a woman's feelings and dignity; avoiding intimacy is inhumane and disrespectful. It further promotes inequality in terms of freedom and power because men can leave freely and dress as they like without any accusation, while women face oppression and discrimination.

Patriarchy significantly contributes to oppressing, exploiting, and discriminating against widows, as explained above. Widowers, on the other hand, enjoy all rights and freedoms. The writer, a woman, openly opposes the oppression of widows caused by cultural practices, values, and norms practised by communities, while widowers remain free.

Undeniably, widows face oppression, while widowers benefit from a society primarily governed by men. Widowers are free to leave without cultural restrictions being imposed on them. The South African Bill of Rights guarantees equality, which contradicts the description provided here.

Building on what was explained earlier, a widow is seen as someone whose life is set for a mourning period determined by her family. During this time, she must endure oppression, suppress her feelings, and be treated as special. A widow does not just face the loss of her husband but also additional restrictions that increase her suffering, yet she is expected to manage it all. All of this happens in the name of culture.

Widows face mistreatment from in-laws and in public settings where they should be free to move and protected by the constitution. Examining the representation of widows in literature, there has been little change, except in the government and private sectors,

where significant progress has been made, as they are no longer required to wear black dresses. Still, they continue to encounter restrictions when arranging funerals.

Equally important, how will Dikeledi cope as a widow without support from her immediate family before facing the public? Clearly, this will lead to depression, and she is likely to be affected by diseases such as high blood pressure. In short, widows still face hardship, especially in rural areas where traditional laws and cultural practices remain strictly enforced.

In short, traditional laws and cultural practices in communities oppress, exploit, discriminate against, and worsen the plight of widows. Mahlodi was left homeless because she refused to marry Lepadime, who was the younger brother of the late Sepheu. This kind of practice is primarily observed in rural areas, where cultural traditions are still strongly upheld. Biblically, in the book of Genesis (1:12), we are created in God's image, and we are equal before the Lord. Both women and men are meant to multiply and lead. Additionally, all human beings should treat each other with dignity and respect, as emphasised by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996).

4.4.5 How patriarchy played a role in making a man control a woman.

The discussion among Phadime, Morabane, and Mphegolle made it clear that Morabane has approved the men's decisions. Morabane, Mahlodi's mother-in-law, says she wondered why the men in that clan were so quiet when deciding on Mahlodi's cleansing ceremony. She said:

“Le gopotše gabotse. Rena re be re šetše re fela pelo re kgotsa gore na le reng le napile le rile tuu! A di phethege.” (Mminele, 1968:14)

(You thought correctly. We were already impatient and wondering why you were so silent! Let them happen.)

Mahlodi's mother-in-law said these words; she did not consider what Mahlodi had said to the men in the family. She did not even want to consider that she knew Mahlodi was a Christian. Mahlodi explicitly stated that, as a Christian, they do not take part in matters of tradition; she even allowed them to continue as they wish. This is evident from the extract

below when Mahlodi answered the family men who were telling her about the preparations for undressing the black widow's dress, known as *poolo le dikapolo*:

"Aowa, a go kwaneng lena. Ga ke na maatla a go le thibela."

(Mminele, 1968:13)

(You must agree. I do not have the power to stop you.)

Despite what Mahlodi has said above, Mahlodi's uncle, Rangwane Mphegolle, insisted that Lepadime should be the one to care for Mahlodi and marry her through levirate marriage. He did not consider Mahlodi's input. His remarks seemed disrespectful and suggested he had more authority over Mahlodi. Even though Mahlodi's father-in-law appeared caring and attentive to Mahlodi's wishes, Mphegolle remained firm. The extract below shows:

"Bjale gona se se diregago a se direge. Ba ba nago le dipolelo ba ka no bolela. Re ka se kgone go hlwa re rapediša boroko ka go budulala. O swanetše gore a be a dumele. Ge wena o rata go mo dumelela gore a dire ka mo a ratago gona, e tla ba di bonwa ke wena. Ge ele nna nka se di kgone" (Mminele, 1968:14).

(Now then, what happens, let it happen. Those with statements can talk. We can no longer pray for sleep by breathing. She must be convinced to agree. If you want to let her do as she pleases, it's up to you. As for me, I cannot.)

Morabane's belief in what men are doing is unshakable, and she speaks on behalf of other women; they trust the decisions men make. Mphegolle exhibits aggressive behaviour and enforces the forced marriage against Mahlodi, which is sealed, and there should be no further arguments. Mphegolle is challenging Phadime because he believes women should have no say in decisions made by men. Traditional laws and the authority he holds over women allow him to overrule. As shown, all this happens because of patriarchy and culture meant to oppress and exploit a widow, causing frustration and pain.

Without any reasonable doubt, feminist theory demonstrates that African culture is governed by patriarchal ideology, where one group dominates another, such as women over women or men over women (Bell et al., 2018). In the above discussion, a man

dominates another woman without realising the oppression and exploitation that will cause harm and pain to Mahlodi. Mphogolle and Lepadime were oppressing Mahlodi because cultural laws give them power over a woman. Everything they were saying aligned with what people in the community would say.

Beyond that, Phadime gave instructions for preparing sorghum beer, and Morabane complied diligently, questioning why, since, traditionally, women are restricted to domestic work. The process of making sorghum will negatively affect Mahlodi, who opposes forced marriage. Mahlodi no longer suffers from oppression and exploitation by Phadime and Mphogolle, but also faces control from women, who are influenced by men's instructions. This is how patriarchy enables them to dominate and lead.

The conversation between Morabane and Kgalema continued as they showed each other the sorghum beer, which was arranged to facilitate a levirate marriage between Lepadime and Mahlodi. However, Mahlodi did not approve or support the move. She was not even available at home when the issues regarding the sorghum were prepared; she had gone to church. This showed that Mahlodi was firm in her words and actions, but the family members continued with the preparations. Mahlodi's mother-in-law, Morabane, showed her neighbour, Mr Kgalema, the prepared bowl of sorghum for the marriage. The extract below portrays their conversation:

Kgalema: *"Aowa hleng ga o nyatšege e tloga e le wona mogopo wa monna, Bjale a nke re kwe, a kere tša wona ke tša ka moswane?"* (Mminele, 1968:17).

(Kgalema: It is not despicable; it is really a man's wooden bowl. Now let us taste it, does it mean it is reserved for tomorrow?)

Morabane: *"O tla fela o botšiša nna gape mola banna ba geno e lego bona ba ka re botšago gore ke tša neng. Rena basadi le re fele re theetša lena."* (Mminele, 1968:17).

(You keep on asking me again when your men are the ones who can tell us when they are. We women always listen to you.)

Equally important, the conversation between Morabane and Kgalema illustrates Morabane's obedience to traditional laws and the men in her clan. It also highlights how women are listeners and men are rulers. Morabane's statement that women should listen to men confirms how patriarchy controls women and the power men have over them. Similarly, the discussion continued with Kgalema, Phadime's elder brother, announcing to the women that Lepadime had agreed to take care of Mahlodi, and all the men were happy about it. Malleke, one of the women, said the words below:

Kgalema: *Ditaba ke tše, botša basadi gore banna bale ba lego ntle ba re Lepadime ke yena a swanetšego gore a hlokomele lapa le la morwa wa gago. Le yena re mmoditše o bile o dumetše. Le banna ka moka taba yeo ba e thabetše. Le yena Mphegolle o wele pelo.* Mminele (1968:21).

(Kgalema: Here is the news, tell the women that those men out there say Lepadime is the one who should take care of your son's family. We told him too, and he agreed. Moreover, all men liked the news. Mphegolle also is satisfied.)

Malleke: *Di a kwala di bile di a ratega. A re lebogeng seo bakgalabje ba se dirilego. Ge re re banna ba motse re ra ba mohuta wo. Re tla roma mang go re išetša malebo a rena go bona?* Mminele (1968:21).

(Malleke: They are reasonable and lovely. Let us appreciate what the elderly have done. When we say village men, we mean this kind. Whom shall we send to deliver our thanks to them?)

In the quote above, Kgalema was not suggesting that women could have a say in decisions made by men outside of forced marriage. It was final, and men did not expect women to contribute. It was a settled matter; the only thing left was for women to carry out the decision without fail. The behaviour of women in the quote, remaining silent and listening to every decision made by men without offering their input, shows that men are rulers with power, and women are listeners, oppressed and exploited. Due to patriarchy, women are expected to be submissive to men and elders.

From a feminist analytical framework in the African context, patriarchy refers to the organisation of social life in which men have final control over more aspects of women's lives and actions (Goredema, 2010). Lepadime, as a man in that clan, understands that he should command, and women will follow. Malleke respects the decisions made by men, even praising men's accomplishments as a sign of being a real man. Her utterances above demonstrate her contentment with men making decisions without consultation. This does not even reach her mind, considering the wife of the identified man, Lepadime. Mahlodi is disrespected and undermined by men who hold more power and control over women.

The quote below indicates that the power enforced by patriarchy over women caused women to believe that debates are meant for men. Mongatane, one of the neighbours, was the woman who gave Mahlodi feedback after all the deliberations. She was not allowed to negotiate with Mahlodi on what men had said. She had to deliver the news to Mahlodi as it is. The excerpt below captures what she said:

Bakgalabje ba o ba bonago mo lapeng, ba boledišana ka wena. Ba bone gore ga go botse ge ba ka lesa lapa le la Sephesu le hwelela, ka gona ba kwane gore yena monnago, e lego Lepadime, a tsoše lapa le la mogolo wa gagwe. Rena ga go se re ka bolelago ge go setše go boledišane bona beng ba motse. Fela se rena re se bonago ke gore ge ba ilalo ba rata gore wena o se ke wa lahlega o bone yo a ka go fepago. Rena re a go lebogiša ge o bile le mahlatse ka ge ka mo geno go le yo a go fepago (Mminele1968:21).

(The older men you see in the *lapa* talk about you. They saw that it was not good to let this Sephesu family disappear, so they agreed that your husband's younger brother, Lepadime, should revive this family of his brother. We have nothing to say, since the owners of the homestead have spoken. However, when they do that, they want you not to get lost and to see who can take care of you. We congratulate you for being lucky because in your home, there is someone to take care of you.)

The quote above illustrates how older women accepted men's views in the community. They also try to present their reports politely so that Mahlodi can feel comfortable with the decision. Even when Mahlodi tells them she cannot do that because Lepadime has his

own wife and children to care for, they still refer to the older men. The older women regard Mahlodi as an impossible young woman who does not respect the elderly. This portrays how Mahlodi is dominated and oppressed by older women whom men control, women who control them because of their power. Patriarchy has brainwashed women into accepting decisions made by men. Mongatane views these men as the clan's owners. Culture and society governed by men have taught women to be comfortable with decisions made against them by men.

Furthermore, Mphegolle, the uncle (*rangwane*) of Mahlodi, continues to act as a dictator, issuing orders based on the authority they hold. Without negotiating or obtaining the consent of Mahlodi, who, according to Basotho ba Leboa, is regarded as a father figure to Mahlodi, he stresses what was agreed upon. The extract below highlights his words:

“O tla nkwa gabotse Mahlodi. Bjale ke rata go go feletša polelo, Nna ke go gafetše ba ga Phadime ka pelo e tšhweu. Nna ga ke rate go go bona o rwele dinkatana o etla go nna o re ba go rakile ka gore ga o rate go theeletša se rena batswadi ba gago re se bolelago. Ge ba ka go raka nna le gaka o se ke wa tla. O ye gona moo o rego melao ya ntshe o e hlompha go feta rena” (Mminele, 1968:23-24).

(You will hear me well, Mahlodi. Now I want to finish the speech, I have handed you over to the Phadime family with a whole heart. I do not like to see you carrying luggage coming to me, saying they kicked you out because you do not like to listen to us, your parents.)

Phadime commands Mahlodi to follow the men's decision, and she is also promised disownment by the entire clan, including her husband and family. Mahlodi is abandoned and disrespected.

Morabane's act of helping her husband, Phadime, humiliate and undermine Mahlodi's dignity clearly shows that patriarchy still controls women. Women often do not realise they are under this control. The quote below demonstrates this:

Ge ke sa maketše ka kwa go kwala monkgo wa lešela le e swa. Ge ke etšwa go bona gore e ka ba go swa kae ka bona Morabane a emeletše mollo woo, a fela a lahlela gomme gona moo ka bona gore o lahlela tšona diaparo tše tša ka. Ge ke sa eme moo ke maketše,

ka bona Phadime a etla a rwele le tšona dikobo tše ke bego ke robetše ka tšona a tlile go di lahlela gona moo mollong. Mminele (1968:32)

(While I was still surprised, I heard the smell of a burning cloth. When I went out to see where it might be burning, I saw Morabane standing by the fire, always throwing, and there I saw him throwing my own clothes. While I was standing there in surprise, I saw Phadime coming with the same clothes I was sleeping in to throw them into the fire.)

Mahlodi explained to the priest how her in-laws are treating her because she refuses to remarry Lepadime, the younger brother of the late Sepheu. A society dominated by men brainwashes Morabane. She follows her husband Phadime's decision. Instead of supporting Mahlodi against patriarchy, Morabane humiliates, discriminates against, and exploits her by staying silent, refusing to talk, and locking her outside overnight without a place to sleep. As a woman, Morabane should have supported Mahlodi's fight against patriarchy, but instead, she abandons and humiliates her. She remains submissive to Phadime while Mahlodi endures the suffering as a result and resists the treatment.

To conclude, Mphegolle clearly told Mahlodi that the arrangement is final and satisfactory; all that remains is for Mahlodi to comply. If she pressures the family to disown her, he will also turn her away from his home. Of course, Mphegolle is confident in his decision because patriarchy gives him the authority to give orders to a woman without question. Mahlodi should be oppressed and humiliated without being allowed to defend herself. As shown in the examples from Mahlodi above, it clearly demonstrates that patriarchy still plays a significant role in controlling and oppressing women. Women have now taken on the same oppressive roles as men to humiliate, exploit, and mistreat widows without support. Their understanding is that acting against community-held values is considered taboo.

4.4.6 Emotional and Mental Challenges

In the Basotho ba Leboa tradition, widows face challenges that affect their mental health as outlined below:

“Ngwana wa batho o be a lla bošego le mosegare a llišwa ke tšeo ba bego ba mo dira tšona lapeng le. O ile a fela a ba a tleretlepha ke diaparo ka moka.” (Modise, 2021:74).

(The human child cried day and night for what they were doing to her in that house. She got slimmer, and even all her clothes did not fit her anymore.)

“Ba be ba mo kodutla ka mehla a fela a llela go mmagwe gomme mmagwe a fela a mo kgothatša a re a kgotlelele...” (Modise 2021:75).

(They always used sarcasm towards her, and he kept crying to her mother, and her mother kept encouraging her to be patient...)

Dikeledi's constant crying day and night was a clear sign that she was emotionally exhausted and depressed, causing her to lose weight. The exploitation, oppression, and humiliation she faced affected her mental health. Ultimately, all these factors contributed to her depression, as outlined below.

“Mošomong ba ile ba bona ka mokgwa wo a bego a fela ka gona le gona o be a setše a dira diphošwanaphošwana mošomong, sa go kweša bohloko ke gore kgatelelo ya monagano e be šetše e tšea karolo ye kgolo mo bophelong bja gagwe. O nyakile go dira kotsi ya sefatanaga makga a mmalwa” (Modise, 2021:76).

(At work, they saw how she was getting slimmer, and she was already making minor mistakes at work; sadly, depression was already taking a big part in her life. She almost had a car accident several times.)

The oppression and pressure Dikeledi face from her clan cause her depression. Her behaviour of escaping three accidents she almost caused shows that she is emotionally affected and depressed. Her life is at risk due to her widowhood after losing her husband and the lack of support from her in-laws and her own mother, who is afraid of being shamed by Dikeledi.

The above explanation shows how a widow's emotional and mental health is affected by a society dominated by men, where women are often oppressed and exploited by one another. Widows have endured considerable suffering. As I mentioned, Dikeledi was depressed and unable to perform her duties properly at work. Her life was also at risk because she nearly caused three accidents.

This demonstrates how patriarchy, as a social system, is not only maintained by men but also internalised and enacted by women themselves. In the novels, Dikeledi's mother-in-law and sisters-in-law, along with her own mother, become agents of patriarchal control, reinforcing the widow's subjugation and suffering. This supports Millett's (1970) claim that patriarchy operates through both male and female agents, upholding the status quo and restricting women's agency.

As already discussed, Dikeledi's mom understands that Dikeledi should not shame her. These are the teachings she received on her wedding day.

In short, a widow faces suffering and mistreatment during her husband's death and mourning period, which often continues even after the burial. This treatment lasts for the mourning time set by her family, ranging from three to eleven months. She is pressured by societal norms, values, and customs, especially in tribal areas where traditional practices are still strongly observed.

Although *Sello sa Mohlogadi* clarifies this, Mminele in *Mahlodi* also describes how a widow's mental health is impacted by her experiences, as explained below in the conversation between Mahlodi and the priest:

Moruti: "*Go reng Mahlodi o re tsogelela lehono, o a babja?*"

Mahlodi: "*Moruti sa pele ke kgopela dijo, ke swerwe ke tlala mo go boifišago.*" (Mminele 1968:26)

(Moruti: Why did you come to my place these early hours of the morning, Mahlodi? Are you sick?)

(Mahlodi: Priest, firstly, I am asking for food, I am extremely starving.)

These are the words that the priest asked. Mahlodi replied, saying she is asking for food and is extremely hungry. Mahlodi's behaviour of walking the streets alone during the early hours of the morning suggests that she is confused and not thinking clearly, to the extent that she does not prioritise her safety.

The communication above indicates that Mahlodi was no longer thinking clearly and could not answer the question she was asked. This was due to a lack of support and the pressure from immediate family members, as previously mentioned. The struggles of widows need attention.

Moruti: (*Go tsena Mahlodi a itatile ka lepayana la go gagoga.*) “*Go reng Mahlodi, o reng o apere lepa go fiša ka mokgwa wo*”?

(*Moruti: (Enter Mahlodi wrapped in a torn blanket.) “What is going on, Mahlodi, why are you wearing a blanket while it is so hot?”*)

Mahlodi: “*Tše di bonwago ke nna ga di laodišege, ke bile ke a kgotsa gore e ka ba ke gona ge Modimo a araba dillo tšaka ka mokgwa wo.*” (Mminele, 1968:32).

(Mahlodi: I cannot tell what I see, and I wonder if God has answered my cry in this way)

Undeniably, Mahlodi was so emotionally and mentally affected that she could not differentiate summer from winter. She was wearing an old blanket in hot weather. This illustrates how widows suffer due to cultural practices.

4.5 CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter demonstrates that in African culture, particularly among the Basotho ba Leboa, widowhood is characterised by sociocultural practices that significantly influence women's experiences during times of loss and mourning. These experiences often include emotional and psychological challenges. Literature often depicts widows negatively. *Sello sa Mohlologadi* describes a widow as a sick person, while *Mahlodi* portrays her as impure or filthy.

Widows should not face discrimination or social isolation because of their loss, as such treatment fosters unfair stereotypes and worsens their suffering. For example, Mrs Lereko was confined to her homestead and could not find work to support her family. Likewise, both Mahlodi and Dikeledi lost their homes due to mistreatment by their in-laws. Their status as widows exposed them to emotional distress and mental health issues: Dikeledi became so depressed that her job performance and physical health declined, almost causing an accident, while Mahlodi's trauma caused her to behave strangely, such as wearing an old blanket in the heat.

Overall, the chapter shows that widows' struggles within these sociocultural contexts are severe and need urgent attention, as they highlight the intersection of gender, loss, and social injustice in African societies.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the researcher concludes the discussion from Chapter One and clarifies the problem statement to ensure all research questions are addressed. The previous chapter has critically analysed the two selected genres: *Sello sa Mohlogadi's* novel and *Mahlodi's* drama. The focus was on the selected text, which addresses the plights of widows in Basotho ba Leboa. In this chapter, the study will present the findings from Chapter Four, the recommendations, and conclude.

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The following section provides summaries of the study's chapters.

5.2.1 Chapter 1

In this chapter, the researcher outlines the transparent background of the portrayal of a woman during bereavement in the selected Sesotho sa Leboa novel, *Sello sa Mohlogadi*, and the drama, *Mahlodi*. A brief background of widows' sufferings that include humiliation, exploitation, oppression, and discrimination is highlighted in this chapter. The chapter also outlined the problem statement, highlighting the cultural practices imposed on women. Furthermore, the chapter includes aims and objectives, research questions, a justification of the study, the study's significance, and definitions of key terms.

5.2.2 Chapter 2

This chapter reviewed literature relevant to the challenges faced by widows globally, on the African continent, and locally in South Africa. It is in this chapter that other scholars have researched the treatment and challenges widows face. The work of Loyd Sherlock, Corso, and Minicuci (2015) demonstrates, through research, that no statistics indicate that researchers have identified any challenges associated with widowhood. Sampled countries were China, Ghana, India, the Russian Federation, and South Africa. The discovery they noted was that widows are still discriminated against, abused, and lose

property after the death of their husbands. There has been little progress made in assisting widows.

Furthermore, Onyima (2022) discovered that widows in Nigeria still suffer social, economic, and health constraints and even historical challenges that are clouded by low literacy level, cultural beliefs, and rituals.

Molefi and Motlalenyane (2020) also conducted a study examining the social isolation of widows and the stigma they face in the South African context. They discovered that an ongoing factor in the widowhood experience in the rural South African setting is implied guilt by in-laws and other family members regarding widows' participation in the death of their partners.

This research was therefore relevant to minimising the challenges widows face. Attention was given to Basotho ba Leboa widows.

5.2.3 Chapter 3

In this chapter, considerable attention is given to the methodology used in this research to address the portrayal of women during bereavement in the selected Sesotho sa Leboa novel, *Sello sa Mohlogadi*, and the *Mahlodi* drama. African feminist Theory, relevant to this research, was briefly described. In addition, attention was also given to research paradigm, research design, data collection methods, sampling and population, data analysis, and ethical consideration, which is empirical for a researcher to consider because ignorance of policies designed to protect a research subject is not considered a valid excuse for ethically questionable projects (Strydom, 2011:113).

5.2.4 Chapter 4

This chapter presented and critically analysed the contents of the two genres selected for this study, *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi*. A summary of the two books was given before the selected texts could be critically analysed. The chapter has further established how authors of the two books depicted and portrayed a widow, focusing on the challenges that a widow faced and how patriarchy contributed to the dominance of a man over a woman, and how a widow's mental health is affected due to failure to cope with grief. Both genres,

Sello sa Mohlologadi and *Mahlodi*, were analysed in this chapter. In brief, the researcher has rounded off what was started in the introductory chapter.

5.2.5 Chapter 5

In chapter five, the study's findings and conclusions were presented. The chapter has revealed that the plights of widows still need attention. The conclusion was drawn after analysing the work of Mminele (1968) and Modise (2021) using selected texts relevant to the portrayal of a woman during bereavement in the Sesotho sa Leboa novel *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and the *Mahlodi* drama. This chapter has concluded on how the authors of the two books depicted and portrayed a widow, focusing on the challenges that the widows face and how patriarchy contributed to the dominance of men over women. The chapter concluded that widows are unable to cope with bereavement due to the ill-treatment that they receive from families and society. Above all, literature inhumanely depicts their grief. The study concludes by presenting the research findings, recommendations, and conclusions that were initially presented.

5.3 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This part of the study will reveal that, apart from the 31 years of democracy that South Africa has enjoyed, Widows in Basotho Ba Leboa are still faced with challenges and portrayals that bring inequality, humiliation, exploitation, and oppression, which affects widows' mental health. The role that patriarchy has played in making men control women was also revealed in chapter four, where it was exposed by the artwork of Mminele (1968) and Modise (2021) that women remain submissive, listeners, and oppressed by men without even being aware that they are exploited due to cultural practices and traditional laws. Men remain dictators, rulers, debaters, and owners of their clan without being questioned. They treat women as if they do not have the brains to bring change in communities and society.

There is still inequality when looking at the treatment given to widowers who walk freely without being prosecuted. At the same time, widows in Basotho Ba Leboa should follow strict measures during the mourning period (Modise, 2021). The following are the findings of this study.

5.3.1 Findings about the sociocultural practices surrounding widowhood

In this section, objectives one and four of the study will be covered to expose the challenges that widows in Basotho ba Leboa still face and how widows are depicted in *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi*. When analysing the selected text in Modise (2021), it was found that widows in Basotho ba Leboa are still trapped by traditional laws that restrict their movement and require them to mourn for a period stipulated by the family. In Basotho ba Leboa, this period ranges from six to eleven months. Mrs Lereko, who belonged to the Basotho ba Leboa cultural group, was restricted in her movements and should avoid sex because it is believed she would infect people with diseases, and that is known as *makgoma*. Mrs Lereko must return home before dawn if she is forced to go out. All these cause discrimination and oppression.

Both Dikeledi in Modise (2021) and Mahlodi in Mminele (1968) were oppressed, exploited, restricted in their movements, and deprived of the right to make funeral arrangements for their late husband, Lesiba and Sepheu, respectively. The Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa is non-discriminatory, which is contrary to the traditional laws of Basotho ba Leboa that impose obligations on widows.

5.3.2 Challenges faced by widows during the mourning period

Selected text from Mminele (1968) and Modise (2021)'s literary work gives rise to findings mentioned hereunder:

Mminele (1968)'s literary work further exposed that Mahlodi was left homeless by her in-laws, and all her blankets and clothes were burned simply because she did not want to be taken care of by Lepadime. Dikeledi and her children were also forced off her property. The in-laws took her furniture and forced her to share her money with them (Modise, 2021). Discrimination through black attire, where the public could easily identify a widow, was noted in Mminele (1968) when Phadime and Mphegolle were planning Mahlodi's cleansing ceremony for *go apola mašela a maso* (to terminate or undress the black attire).

The above findings show that widows are still exploited, discriminated against, and humiliated without any assistance. Widows continue to face numerous challenges, as mentioned above, and require further research.

5.3.3 Findings about the role played by patriarchy in making a man control a woman

Objective three was outlined to demonstrate the power men hold over women. Men possess more power than women and become aggressive and disrespectful if not listened to. The behaviour was outlined by Malleke, who praised men for exerting leverage over Mahlodi. When Mahlodi contested the decision of forced marriage, Lepadime and Mphegolle became aggressive and disowned her (Mminele, 1968).

Women are seen as listeners, submissive, and confined to kitchen work, while debates are considered the domain of men. When men have spoken, the decision cannot be changed. Mongatane regarded men as the owners of the clan and as real men. It was discovered that Morabane remained submissive and made sorghum beer to support the arranged marriage, which was a means of leverage used by males in that clan. Again, Mongatane told Mahlodi that if men have spoken, there is nothing they can do. Mongatane also told Kgalema that culture taught them to listen to men. '*Rena basadi le re re fele re theetša lena*' (We women you say we listen to you). The actions of the women quoted in this context suggest that debates were intended for men, while women remained submissive and listened to men (Mminele, 1968).

Men dictate, overrule, and exploit. This was discovered when women in that clan blessed the announcement made by men after they concluded the forced marriage for Mahlodi and Lepadime. Furthermore, the exploitation of women was exposed when Mongatane said men have spoken, these are real men in the clan (Mminele, 1968).

This proved that Mahlodi was betrayed by women who were supposed to support her; however, they were controlled by a society governed by men and sought to please them. Women still believe that whatever men say will remain correct. They are not aware that they are equal, as stated in the Bill of Rights, and they are entitled to express themselves.

5.3.4 Findings about emotional and mental health challenges

This part will cover objective number two of the study. It will expose how female characters express and cope with bereavement in the novel *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and the drama *Mahlodi*. After analysing Mminele (1968) and Modise (2021), the study discovered that Dikeledi's mental health was affected as a widow due to the lack of support and

humiliation she received from her in-laws. She was depressed and nearly caused three accidents. She also experiences weight loss (Modise, 2021). Mahlodi was mentally affected to the extent that she ended up wearing an old blanket on a hot summer day. She puts her life at risk by walking to the priest's home alone in the early hours (Mminele, 1968).

The above findings proved that women failed to cope with bereavement to the extent that their mental health was affected.

5.3.5 Findings about how women's griefs were depicted in *Sello sa Mohlologadi* and *Mahlodi*

Objective number four of the study was covered in this part. Mrs Lereko, as a widow, was depicted and portrayed by literature as *mokgethwa*, 'supernatural being' because she was supposed to suppress her feelings and avoid sex during the period of mourning. Again, Mrs Lereko was regarded as a *ditšhila*, a filthy person who should go through a cleansing ceremony. Modise (2021).

Dikeledi was depicted and portrayed by literature as a '*mmolai* 'a killer' in African culture. In African culture, it is believed that when a man dies, he is killed by her wife. However, when a woman dies, she is killed by ill-discipline. Dikeledi was also depicted as *Sebelegi sa kgotlelelo*, 'A strong baby maker'. All this was revealed in the work of (Modise, 2021)

On the other hand, the research found that Mahlodi was portrayed as a *lenyatšo la go hloka phedišano* 'disrespectful and uncooperative'. This was simply because Mahlodi was dismissing forced marriage according to the principles of the tribe, Basotho ba Leboa; it was believed that if she did not comply, it meant she disrespected them. Furthermore, she was portrayed as *senganga* 'stubborn' because she was not allowed to express herself during the family's arrangements for a leverage marriage (Mminele, 1968).

The examples given in these findings address the study's research questions and objectives.

There is a slight shift for a working woman, as Mahlodi in Mminele (1968) rises under challenging circumstances and is regarded by her in-laws as a real woman because she

works and takes care of them. Dikeledi, as well as Modise (2021), fought back after her husband's death and was subsequently promoted to a management position.

The above depiction about a widow advocates that widows are still infringed when coming to section 10 of the Bill of Rights that talks about human dignity. Evidently, widows cannot cope due to the humiliation and bad portrayal that they are facing.

Widows do not only face the loss of their husbands but also a portrayal that is not pleasing and challenges that affect their mental health, as we have seen with depression that Dikeledi, as a widow, has gone through.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

To address challenges that women face due to bereavement, there should be campaigns like the ones that address the sixteen days of activism against women and children, where traditional leaders and communities will be taught about the damage caused by rituals and the bad treatment given to a widow. Equally important, International Widows' Day, which is celebrated annually, should be observed not only internationally but also in communities where traditional cultural practices persist, to bring about change in widows' lives.

Social workers should be pursuing community meetings in tribal lands to educate communities to treat widows and widowers equally, irrespective of sex. This can help widows cope with bereavement and can address objective two. It was exposed in Modise (2021) that *Banna ga ba na bothata, ba iphelela moroba ka gore ba no ikaparela diaparo tša bona, o ka se kwe ba rwešwa ke motho Molato* '.... Men have no problem; they live for themselves because they just wear their clothes, and you can't hear anyone blaming them'.

The study recommends that literature should start to portray and depict a widow in a positive way to educate society, words that were used in *Sello sa Mohlogadi*, such as *mmolai* 'killer', and in *Mahlodi*, where the author was using words such as *senganga*, 'stubborn are inhuman. If literature portrays a widow in a positive light, the public will likely accept and view her more favourably. This will cover objective number four of this study.

Both men and women should be educated about clauses that are not protected under the Bill of Rights, for example, clause 9, which addresses equality. This can minimise patriarchy and promote gender equity for men not to possess power over women, particularly in rural areas where culture is still observed. Men who resemble the characters Lepadime and Mphegolle, who were dictating to Mahlodi to admit to forced marriage, can improve (Mminele, 1968).

The study further recommends that people accept widows, as they assist them in both the private and public sectors without being affected by *makgoma*. Dikeledi worked as a manager at a Woolworths store and fulfilled her duties without fail (Modise, 2021). The study further recommends that more research be done, especially in rural areas and tribal lands, where culture and traditional laws are still emphasised. This will contribute positively to language, as writers will begin to portray widows in a positive light, and the public will come to accept them.

5.5 CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

This study presents the portrayal of women during bereavement in Sesotho sa Leboa. Characters that resemble real-life situations and are featured in the novel *Sello Sa Mohlogadi* and the *Mahlodi* drama highlight the challenges women face during bereavement, which this study explores. Mrs Lereko and Dikeledi, as widows, were restricted in their movements (Modise, 2021). The way Mminele (1968) and Modise (2021) depicted widows reveals that they are portrayed inhumanely, using words such as *senganga* ('stubborn'), *molwetši* ('sick person'), and *mmolai* ('killer').

The study further examined how female characters express and cope with bereavement in *Sello sa Mohlogadi* and *Mahlodi*, where the results of widows' sufferings in both genres showed that the mental health of widows such as Mahlodi and Dikeledi was affected. Dikeledi suffered from depression, and Mahlodi, as well, was wearing an old blanket on a hot summer day. When analysing the role played by patriarchy in making a man control a woman, the study exposed that men have more power over women and therefore women suffer oppression, exploitation, and humiliation because women remain silent and are submissive to men. Morabane praised the men of the clan by arranging a leverage marriage for Mahlodi, while Mahlodi was humiliated and exploited by the family that disowned him (Mminele, 1968). Characters in both genres served as the eyes of society,

helping people understand the plights of widows in the societies in which they lived. More research should be done, particularly in rural communities where patriarchal norms marginalise women.

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ANNEXURES

ANNEXURE A: Ethical clearance certificate



College of Human Science_CRE C

Date: 20/02/2025

Dear: Mrs Makgaetse Mashilo

NHREC Registration # : (Rec-240816-052)
Ref # : 6651
Name: Mrs Makgaetse Mashilo
Student # : 08111227

Decision: Ethics Approval from 20
February 2025 to 19 February
2026

Researcher: Mrs Makgaetse Mashilo
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Co-Supervisor: Dr Seleka Tembani etembasm@unisa.ac.za

The Portrayal of Women During Bereavement in the Sesotho Sa Leboa Novel: Sello Sa Mohiologadi and the Drama Mahlodi

Qualification: MA degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the College of Human Science_CRE C for the above-mentioned research study. Ethics approval is granted for one year.

The negligible-risk application was reviewed by the College of Human Science_CRE C on **20 February 2025** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College of Human Science_CRE C.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (**19 February 2026**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal, for Ethics Research Committee approval.

Additional Conditions

1. Disclosure of data to third parties is prohibited without explicit consent from Unisa.
2. De-identified data must be safely stored on password protected PCs.
3. Care should be taken by the researcher when publishing the results to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the university.
4. Adherence to the National Statement on Ethical Research and Publication practices, principle 7 referring to Social awareness, must be ensured: "Researchers and institutions must be sensitive to the potential impact of their research on society, marginal groups or individuals, and must consider these when weighing the benefits of the research against any harmful effects, with a view to minimising or avoiding the latter where possible." Unisa will not be liable for any failure to comply with this principle.

Note

The reference number 6651 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Kind regards,



Prof Khatija Khan
Chair of College of Human Science_CREC
E-mail: khankb@unisa.ac.za



Professor Omwara Basile Onyancha
Executive Dean / By delegation from the Executive Dean of College of Human Science_CREC
E-mail: anyanab@unisa.ac.za

ANNEXURE B: Editing certificate



Dr MLMudau 0765817382

177 Fynbos Str Montana Park 0182

The matter referred: Confirmation letter editing _ Student: **MS Mashilo Mokgaetše Tryphina**, Student no: **08111227**.

This letter confirms that I, ML Mudau, senior lecturer in the Department of African Languages at the University of South Africa (Unisa), have completed the following tasks regarding her MA in African Languages study entitled, '***The PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN DURING BEREAVEMENT IN SELECTED SESOTHO SA LEBOA NOVELS, SELLO SA MOHLOLOGADI AND THE DRAMA MAHLODI.***'

- Language editing,
- Page settings,
- Formatting,
- Technical setup of the study,

I hope you will find everything entirely to your satisfaction.

Kindest Regards

Dr ML Mudau

30 October 2025