DEPICTION OF SOCIAL ILLS THROUGH CHARACTERISATION AND SETTING IN SELECTED XITSONGA NOVELS: A CONFLICT THEORY ANALYSIS

By

THANDIWE QUCHIWE KHOZA

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN AFRICAN LANGUAGES,

in the subject

AFRICAN LANGUAGES (Xitsonga)

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: DR C NKWINIKA

June 2026

DECLARATION

Name: Thandiwe Quchiwe Khoza

Student number: 31643582

Degree: Master of Arts in African Languages

I, Thandiwe Quchiwe Khoza, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled, *Depiction of Social Ills Through Characterisation and Setting in Selected Xitsonga Novels: A Conflict Theory Analysis* is my own original work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to originality-checking software and that it meets the accepted requirements for originality. I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at UNISA for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

Signature:  Date: 25 July 2026

DEDICATION

This dissertation is lovingly dedicated to my beloved parents, Ncaniye Linah Khoza. and Scotch Mundawu Khoza, for their unconditional love, unwavering support, encouragement, and the values they instilled in me throughout my life.

I also dedicate this work to my beloved daughter, Mandile Samantha Thobela, whose love, patience, encouragement, and constant source of inspiration gave me the strength and determination to complete this journey. This achievement is as much yours as it is mine.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to my supervisor, Dr Codelia Khoza Nkwinika, for granting me the opportunity to pursue my Master of Arts Degree at the Centre for Language and Communication. Your unwavering guidance, invaluable expertise, constructive feedback, and continuous support throughout this study have been greatly appreciated. Your encouragement and academic mentorship have contributed significantly to the successful completion of this research.

My sincere gratitude is also extended to Dr Fanecky S. Mashele, my principal, for your constant encouragement, motivation, and invaluable assistance in editing this dissertation. Your support and belief in my abilities inspired me to persevere throughout this academic journey.

I am deeply grateful to Mr T.J. Mhlongo, my colleague and technologist, for your generous support and willingness to assist whenever I required help. I sincerely appreciate the time and effort you sacrificed to ensure that I completed this study.

My heartfelt appreciation goes to my dear friend, Mr Joshua Mhlarhi, for your unwavering support, encouragement, and readiness to assist whenever I encountered challenges. Your kindness and generosity are deeply valued.

To my beloved daughter, Mandile Samantha Thobela, thank you for your unconditional love, prayers, encouragement, emotional support, and the many sacrifices you made throughout this journey. Your patience, understanding, and unwavering belief in me gave me the strength and determination to complete this degree.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to my beloved parents for their unconditional love, prayers, encouragement, and emotional support. Thank you for believing in me and for always inspiring me to strive for excellence.

Above all, I give all honour and glory to my Heavenly Father. I thank You, Lord, for Your grace, wisdom, strength, protection, and unfailing love throughout this journey. It is through your guidance and faithfulness that I have reached this milestone. To you be all the glory.

ABSTRACT

Social ills such as poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, racism, abuse, and persecution continue to affect communities despite various interventions aimed at addressing them. This study examines the portrayal of social ills, with particular emphasis on persecution, in four selected Xitsonga novels: *Hlayisa* by Baloyi and Mongwe (2015); I Vutomi by Lubisi (1998); Mulunguntima by Khosa (1994); and *Ximintantsengele* by Shabangu (2016). The purpose of the study is to explore how Xitsonga novelists represent the causes, manifestations, and consequences of persecution and other social problems, as well as the strategies characters employ to address these challenges. The study is grounded in Conflict Theory, which explains how social inequality, power struggles, and competition for resources contribute to the emergence and persistence of social ills. Adopting a qualitative approach, the study employs descriptive and exploratory research designs. Data were generated from the selected novels and analysed through content and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that persecution is represented through various forms of discrimination, marginalisation, abuse, and social exclusion that are rooted in unequal social relations and power imbalances. The novels further demonstrate that social ills are interconnected and often reinforce one another, resulting in negative consequences for individuals, families, and communities. At the same time, the texts promote values such as social justice, resilience, moral responsibility, and collective action as possible responses to these challenges. The study contributes to Xitsonga literary scholarship by demonstrating how indigenous-language literature serves as a medium for social critique, awareness-raising, and the promotion of social transformation. It further enriches the understanding of the role of literary texts in addressing contemporary societal issues in South Africa.

Keywords: Xitsonga novels, social ills, persecution, conflict theory, literary representation, thematic analysis, social transformation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION ii
DEDICATION iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
ABSTRACT vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS 1
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND 5
1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study 5
1.2. Problem Statement 7
1.2.1 Scholarly Gap 8
1.3. Research purpose, research objectives and research questions 9
1.3.1 Research Purpose 9
1.3.2 Research Objectives (ROs) 9
1.3.3 Research Questions (RQs) 9
1.4. Significance of the study 10
1.5. Rationale for the Study 10
1.6. Study Limitations 11
1.7. Definition of Terms 12
1.7.1 Gender-Based Violence 12
1.7.2 Persecution 12
1.7.3 Racism 13
1.7.4 Religious Persecution 13
1.7.5 Abuse 13
1.7.6 Poverty 14
1.7.7 Social Ills 14
1.7.8 Characterisation 14
1.7.9 Setting 15
1.7.10 Consistency with the Study Objectives 15
1.8. Chapter Layout 15
1.9 Conclusion 16
CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW 17
2.1 Introduction 17
2.2 Theoretical Framework 17
2.2.1 Introduction 17

2.2.2 Overview of Conflict Theory 17
2.2.3 Key Concepts of Conflict Theory 18
2.2.4 Conflict Theory and Literary Criticism 19
2.2.5 Relevance of Conflict Theory to the Study 20
2.2.6 Conceptual Framework 20
2.2.7 Limitations of Conflict Theory 20
2.3 Comprehensive and Critical Review of Literature 21
2.3.1 Conceptualising Social Ills in Literature 22
2.3.2 Characterisation as a Representation of Social Realities 23
2.3.3 Setting as a Reflection of Social Conditions 24
2.3.4 Depictions of Social Ills in African Literature 25
2.3.5 Social Ills in Xitsonga Literature 25
2.3.6 Literature Review Gap 26
2.4. Conclusion 27
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 28
3.1 Introduction 28
3.2 Research Approach 28
3.3 Research Design 28
3.4 Corpus Selection 29
3.4.1 Study Corpus 29
3.4.2 Selection Criteria 29
3.5 Data Collection Procedures 30
3.5.1 Procedures for Close Reading 30
3.6 Units of Textual Analysis 30
3.6.1 Characters 30
3.6.2 Settings 30
3.6.3 Narrative Events 30
3.6.4 Dialogue and Narrative Commentary 31
3.7 Data Analysis Procedures 31
3.7.1 Coding Procedures 31
3.7.2 Theme Development 32
3.8 Use of Quotations and Translation Procedures 33
3.8.1 Use of Original Xitsonga Quotations 33
3.8.2 Translation Procedures 33

3.9 Trustworthiness and Interpretive Credibility 33
3.9.1 Prolonged Engagement 33
3.9.2 Evidence-Based Interpretation 34
3.9.3 Consistency of Coding 34
3.9.4 Reflexive Documentation 34
3.9.5 Auditability 34
3.10 Researcher Reflexivity 34
3.11 Application of Conflict Theory in Data Interpretation 34
3.12 Ethical Considerations 35
3.12.1 Copyright Compliance 35
3.12.2 Accurate Representation 35
3.12.3 Faithful Quotation 35
3.12.4 Responsible Translation 35
3.12.5 Avoidance of Misrepresentation 36
3.13 Limitations of the Methodology 36
3.14 Chapter Summary 36
CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS 37
4.1 Introduction 37
4.1.1. Brief Summaries of the Selected Novels 37
4.1.2 Concluding Link to the Study 39
4.2 Analytical Framework for Interpreting Social Ills 40
4.3 Characterisation as a Vehicle for the Depiction of Social Ills 41
4.3.1 Victim Characters as Representations of Marginalisation 42
4.3.2 Oppressor Characters and the Abuse of Power 44
4.3.3 Resistant Characters as Agents of Social Transformation 45
4.3.4 Characterisation Through Naming 45
4.4 Depiction of Social Ills Through Setting 47
4.4.1 Domestic Setting 47
4.4.2 Workplace Setting 49
4.4.3 Community Setting 51
4.5 Setting as a Site of Social Inequality 53
4.5.1 Domestic Settings 53
4.5.2 Workplace Settings 55
4.6 Language and Dialogue as Instruments of Oppression 59

4.7 Conflict as a Narrative Strategy 62
4.7.1 Gender Conflict 62
4.7.2 Workplace Conflict 62
4.7.3 Social Conflict 62
4.8 Conflict Theory Synthesis of Findings 64
4.9 Chapter Summary 65
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 67
5.1 Introduction 67
5.2 Conclusions 67
5.2.1 Depiction of Social Ills in the Selected Novels 67
5.2.2 Character Types Used to Represent Social Ills 67
5.2.3 Settings Used in the Representation of Social Ills 68
5.2.4 Common Social Ills Depicted in the Selected Novels 68
5.2.5 Conflict Theory and the Representation of Social Ills 68
5.3 Recommendations 68
5.3.1 Recommendations for Literary Scholarship 68
5.3.2 Recommendations for Theoretical Research 69
5.3.3 Recommendations for Language and Literature Education 69
5.3.4 Recommendations for Writers and Publishers 69
5.3.5 Recommendations for Policymakers 69
5.4 Conflict Theory Link 75
5.5 Chapter Summary 76
REFERENCE LIST 77

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction and Background of the Study

Despite more than two decades of democratic governance, South Africa continues to experience numerous social challenges, including poverty, unemployment, inequality, crime, abuse, discrimination, and other forms of social injustice. These social ills remain deeply embedded within many communities and continue to affect the social, economic, and psychological well-being of individuals and groups. Consequently, they have attracted considerable attention from policymakers, researchers, and literary scholars seeking to understand their causes, manifestations, and consequences. Within this context, literature serves not only as an artistic medium but also as a social institution through which societal realities are represented, interrogated, and critically examined.

Literature has historically functioned as a mirror of society, reflecting human experiences and social conditions across different historical and cultural contexts. Using characterisation, setting, symbolism, narrative perspective, conflict, and other literary devices, authors engage with social realities and invite readers to consider issues affecting their communities critically. As such, literary texts provide valuable insights into the social, cultural, political, and economic circumstances that shape human behaviour and experiences. Furthermore, literature contributes to public discourse by exposing social problems, challenging dominant ideologies, and encouraging critical reflection on societal transformation.

Scholars such as Sasson (1995) and Weightman and Weightman (1995) argue that social problems are understood and interpreted through socially constructed narratives shaped by factors including culture, race, gender, religion, and socioeconomic conditions. Similarly, Rundquist, Fox, and Strom (1994) contend that

social and cultural contexts play a significant role in shaping perceptions of social challenges and responses to them. These perspectives suggest that literary representations of social issues are not merely reflections of reality but are also shaped by broader social, historical, and ideological forces. Consequently, the study of literature provides an important avenue for examining how societies perceive, negotiate, and respond to social problems.

According to Bossard (1938), social problems are conditions that adversely affect significant sections of society and threaten collective well-being in accordance with prevailing social values and norms. Such problems may manifest in various forms, including poverty, violence, abuse, exploitation, corruption, inequality, family disintegration, and discrimination. The representation of these conditions in literary texts enables readers to engage critically with the realities confronting society while simultaneously fostering awareness of their implications for social development. Within the South African literary landscape, African-language literature occupies a significant position in documenting and interpreting the lived experiences of local communities. Xitsonga literature provides valuable insights into the social, cultural, and economic realities of Xitsonga-speaking communities. Through fictional narratives, Xitsonga authors address a wide range of societal concerns, often exposing social injustices and highlighting the challenges experienced by individuals and communities. Consequently, Xitsonga novels constitute important literary and cultural texts through which societal issues may be examined and understood.

This study focuses on the depiction of social ills in four selected Xitsonga novels, namely Mulunguntima (Khosa, 1994), I Vutomi (Lubisi, 1998), Hlayisa (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015), and Ximintantsengele (Shabangu, 2016). These novels portray diverse social experiences and provide a suitable basis for investigating how social

problems are represented within Xitsonga literary discourse. The study examines the nature of the social ills portrayed in the selected texts, the literary techniques employed by the authors to depict these issues, and the extent to which such representations reflect broader societal realities.

Particular attention is paid to the role of characterisation, setting, symbolism, conflict, dialogue, and narrative perspective in the construction and communication of social meanings. Characters frequently embody societal values, tensions, and experiences, while settings and conflicts provide the contextual framework through which social issues are revealed and interpreted. Through an examination of these literary elements, the study seeks to determine how Xitsonga novelists portray social ills and how such portrayals contribute to readers' understanding of societal challenges.

The study is premised on the view that literature functions as a form of social commentary capable of reflecting, critiquing, and raising awareness of societal conditions. By analysing the depiction of social ills in selected Xitsonga novels, this research advances Xitsonga literary scholarship. It enriches broader discussions concerning the relationship between literature and society. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the significance of literary texts as vehicles for social critique, cultural reflection, and the promotion of social consciousness within contemporary South African society.

1.2. Problem Statement

Social ills such as persecution, poverty, unemployment, gender-based violence, racism, and abuse continue to affect societies globally and remain important subjects in literary discourse. Literature often serves as a reflection of social realities by exposing societal challenges and stimulating critical engagement with issues affecting communities. Xitsonga novels are no exception, as many writers draw on lived

experiences and social conditions to portray various forms of social injustice and inequality. Despite the presence of these themes in Xitsonga literary works, limited scholarly attention has been paid to how social ills are depicted in selected Xitsonga novels. Existing studies have largely focused on thematic analysis, language use, cultural representation, and literary techniques, with insufficient attention given to how writers construct social criticism through characterisation, setting, and other narrative strategies. Consequently, there remains a need for a focused study examining the depiction of social ills in selected Xitsonga novels and exploring how these literary representations reveal the social realities and power relations that shape human experiences.

1.2.1 Scholarly Gap

Although previous studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of Xitsonga literature, little research has specifically examined the depiction of social ills across multiple Xitsonga novels. Furthermore, existing scholarship has paid limited attention to how authors employ literary devices such as characterisation, setting, dialogue, symbolism, conflict, and narrative perspective to construct social critique. There is also a scarcity of studies that utilise Conflict Theory as an analytical lens to investigate how issues of power, inequality, and social struggle are represented in Xitsonga literary texts. This gap limits the understanding of Xitsonga literature's role in reflecting societal problems and promoting social awareness. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analysing the depiction of social ills in selected Xitsonga novels through the lens of Conflict Theory.

1.3. Research purpose, research objectives and research questions

1.3.1 Research Purpose

The purpose of the study is to explore the depiction of social ills through characterisation and setting in selected Xitsonga novels using a Conflict Theory analysis.

1.3.2 Research Objectives (ROs)

To achieve this purpose, the study focuses on the following objectives:

RO 1: To explore how writers depict social ills in their literary works

RO 2: To investigate the types of characters portrayed by the writers of the selected novels to represent social ills in their works

RO 3: To determine the types of settings used by the writers of the four selected works in dealing with social ills in their novels

RO 4: To determine the most common types of social ills treated in these four selected novels.

1.3.3 Research Questions (RQs)

To investigate the main research question more effectively and efficiently, the question is further broken down into the following sub-questions:

RQ 1: How do authors depict social ills in their literary works?

RQ 2: What types of characters do the writers of the selected novels portray to represent social ills in their narratives?

RQ 3: What environments do the authors of the four chosen texts employ to address societal issues in their narratives?

RQ 4: What moral societal afflictions are explored in the four selected novels?

1.4. Significance of the study

While social ills have been extensively investigated in the social sciences, there remains limited literary scholarship that examines how these problems are constructed and communicated through characterisation and setting in Xitsonga novels. Consequently, the contribution of Xitsonga literature to social critique and social transformation remains insufficiently understood. This study addresses this knowledge gap by providing a systematic analysis of the literary representation of social ills in selected Xitsonga novels and demonstrating the role of indigenous-language literature in engaging with contemporary social challenges.

1.5. Rationale for the Study

Literature serves as a powerful medium through which societal realities are represented, interpreted, and critiqued. The study of social ills in literary texts is important because it provides insight into how writers engage with and respond to challenges affecting communities. Through an analysis of characterisation and setting, this study examines the literary strategies employed by selected Xitsonga novelists to depict social problems and convey social concerns.

Characterisation is central to the representation of social ills, as authors often use fictional characters to embody societal experiences, values, conflicts, and inequalities. Examining the portrayal of characters enables a deeper understanding of how issues such as poverty, abuse, crime, corruption, and other forms of social injustice are experienced and negotiated within society. Furthermore, analysing characterisation reveals how literary texts give voice to marginalised groups and challenge dominant social attitudes and stereotypes.

Similarly, setting provides the socio-cultural and historical context within which social problems emerge and develop. An investigation of rural, urban, traditional, and

contemporary settings offers valuable insights into how environmental and contextual factors influence the portrayal of social ills. Understanding the relationship between setting and social issues enhances the interpretation of literary texts and demonstrates how place shapes human experiences and social realities.

The study is also significant because it identifies the dominant social concerns reflected in selected Xitsonga novels, thereby contributing to an understanding of the relationship between literature and society. By examining recurring social issues and the literary techniques used to portray them, the research highlights literature's role as both a form of social commentary and a vehicle for social consciousness.

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Xitsonga literature by providing a focused analysis of social ills through the lenses of characterisation and setting. The findings are expected to enrich literary criticism, support the application of conflict theory in literary studies, and provide a foundation for future research on the representation of social issues in African-language literature. Furthermore, the study may enhance readers' awareness of contemporary social challenges and underscore literature's potential to stimulate critical reflection, social dialogue, and positive social transformation.

1.6. Study Limitations

The study is limited to four selected Xitsonga novels and therefore does not claim to represent the entirety of Xitsonga literary production. Furthermore, the findings are based on textual analysis and should be interpreted as conclusions about literary representation rather than direct evidence of social realities.

The study also focused specifically on characterisation and setting. Other literary elements, such as plot, imagery, metaphor, and intertextuality, were not examined in detail.

1.7. Definition of Terms

For this study, the following concepts are defined conceptually and operationally to clarify how they are understood and applied in the analysis of the selected Xitsonga novels. Guided by Conflict Theory, the definitions emphasise issues of power, inequality, domination, competition for resources, and social exclusion, which are central to the study's investigation of social ills through characterisation and setting.

1.7.1 Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence refers to physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, or economic harm directed at an individual because of their gender. It is often rooted in unequal power relations between men and women (United Nations, 1993).

In this study, gender-based violence refers to the abuse, victimisation, or oppression experienced by characters based on gender in the selected Xitsonga novels. It is analysed as a manifestation of unequal power relations and social inequality depicted through characterisation and setting.

1.7.2 Persecution

Persecution refers to persistent discrimination, victimisation, oppression, or unfair treatment directed at individuals or groups because of beliefs, identities, or social positions (Hathaway, 2001).

In this study, persecution refers to the exclusion, marginalisation, intimidation, or mistreatment of characters within the selected novels. From a Conflict Theory perspective, persecution is viewed as a result of unequal power relations and struggles between dominant and subordinate social groups.

1.7.3 Racism

Racism refers to attitudes, practices, behaviours, or institutional arrangements that discriminate against individuals or groups on the basis of race or ethnicity (Clark et al., 1999; Salter et al., 2018).

In this study, racism refers to the portrayal of racial prejudice, discrimination, exclusion, and unequal treatment of characters in the selected Xitsonga novels. Conflict Theory explains racism as a mechanism through which dominant groups maintain social, political, or economic power over others.

1.7.4 Religious Persecution

Religious persecution refers to discrimination, oppression, intimidation, or victimisation directed at individuals or groups because of their religious beliefs or practices (Tieszen, 2005).

In this study, religious persecution refers to the mistreatment or exclusion of individuals based on their religious affiliations, beliefs, or practices. It is examined as a form of social conflict arising from competing beliefs and struggles for social influence.

1.7.5 Abuse

Abuse refers to the physical, emotional, psychological, sexual, verbal, or economic mistreatment of an individual by another person or group (World Health Organization [WHO], 2002).

In this study, abuse refers to acts of harm, exploitation, coercion, or ill-treatment experienced by characters in the selected novels. Guided by Conflict Theory, abuse is understood as the exercise of power and control by dominant individuals or groups over vulnerable members of society.

1.7.6 Poverty

Poverty is a condition in which individuals or households lack sufficient resources to meet basic human needs and to participate fully in social and economic life (World Bank, 2022).

In this study, poverty refers to the deprivation, economic hardship, and lack of access to resources experienced by characters in the selected Xitsonga novels. From a Conflict Theory perspective, poverty is viewed as a product of unequal distribution of resources and opportunities within society.

1.7.7 Social Ills

Social ills refer to undesirable social conditions, behaviours, or circumstances that negatively affect individuals and communities and are generally regarded as harmful to societal well-being (Scot & Marshall, 2009).

In this study, social ills refer to societal problems such as persecution, poverty, gender-based violence, racism, abuse, unemployment, and religious intolerance depicted in the selected Xitsonga novels. These social ills are examined through characterisation and setting to determine how they are represented and how they affect individuals and communities.

1.7.8 Characterisation

Characterisation is the literary technique by which an author creates and develops fictional characters and reveals their personalities, motivations, behaviours, and relationships.

In this study, characterisation refers to the way the authors construct characters to represent, experience, perpetuate, or challenge social ills. This definition aligns directly with the investigation of the character types writers use to portray social ills in the selected novels.

1.7.9 Setting

Setting refers to the physical, social, cultural, and historical environment in which the events of a literary work occur.

In this study, setting refers to the environments within which social ills are experienced, sustained, or challenged in the selected Xitsonga novels. Particular attention is paid to family, community, religious, educational, and socio-economic settings that shape characters' experiences of social problems. This definition aligns with the task of determining the types of settings writers use to depict social ills.

1.7.10 Consistency with the Study Objectives

These operational definitions are consistent with the four objectives because they:

- support the exploration of how writers depict social ills through literary representation.
- facilitate the analysis of characters as vehicles for representing social ills.
- enable the examination of settings as contexts within which social ills occur; and
- provide analytical categories for identifying and comparing the most common social ills portrayed across the four selected novels.

1.8. Chapter Layout

Chapter 1: introduction and background

This chapter provided an overarching introduction and context for the study, elucidating the rationale, problem statement, aims and objectives, research inquiries, and definitions of essential terms, as well as all pertinent information on the research methodology and framework.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter examined the current body of literature on social maladies and highlights areas for further research.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This chapter delineated the study's research methodology, examining the research design, procedures, data collection, and data analysis. Ethical considerations are also included in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Presentation, analysis and discussion of findings

This chapter presented and analysed the four selected Xitsonga novels to see how social ills have been treated.

Chapter 5: summary of findings, discussion, conclusions and recommendations

Following extensive deliberations, a synthesis of insights from the examined data is presented, leading to pertinent recommendations and conclusions.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter established the foundation for the study by presenting the background, problem statement, purpose, objectives, and research questions. It further discussed the study's rationale and significance, identified its limitations and delimitations, and defined the key concepts informing the investigation. The chapter concluded with an outline of the dissertation structure. The next chapter examines the literature and theoretical perspectives relevant to the depiction of social ills through characterisation and setting in selected Xitsonga novels.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviewed the literature relevant to the study titled "*Depiction of Social Ills Through Characterisation and Setting in Selected Xitsonga Novels: A Conflict Theory Analysis.*" The review is organised around Conflict Theory, characterisation, setting, the representation of social ills in African literature, and existing scholarship in Xitsonga literary studies. The purpose of the review is to establish the current state of knowledge, identify areas that have received scholarly attention, and highlight gaps that justify the present study. Particular attention is given to the role of characterisation and setting in representing social realities and social inequalities in literary texts.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Introduction

This study is informed by Conflict Theory, which provides an appropriate framework for examining how social inequalities, power relations, marginalisation, and resistance are represented in literature. Since the selected Xitsonga novels depict social ills such as persecution, poverty, abuse, racism, unemployment, and gender-based violence, Conflict Theory offers a useful lens for analysing how these problems emerge, affect characters, and are embedded within specific social settings.

2.2.2 Overview of Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory originated from the work of Marx and Engels (1848), who argued that society is characterised by unequal access to resources and opportunities. These inequalities create tensions between dominant and subordinate groups and frequently result in conflict. Marx (1867) further maintained that social institutions often preserve the interests of powerful groups at the expense of marginalised populations.

The theory was subsequently expanded by Weber (1946), who demonstrated that conflict may arise not only from economic differences but also from disparities in power, status, authority, religion, and ethnicity. Similarly, Gramsci (1971) argued that dominant groups maintain power through cultural and ideological institutions that normalise inequality.

Conflict Theory, therefore, views society as a site of continuous struggle in which competing groups seek access to resources, recognition, and social power.

2.2.3 Key Concepts of Conflict Theory

2.2.3.1 Social Inequality

Conflict theorists argue that societies are characterised by unequal access to economic, social, and political resources (Marx & Engels, 1848). Such inequalities often manifest in social problems such as poverty, discrimination, exclusion, and unemployment.

2.2.3.2 Power Relations

Power refers to the ability of individuals or groups to influence social structures, institutions, and opportunities (Weber, 1946). Unequal power relations often shape how individuals experience privilege or marginalisation.

2.2.3.3 Exploitation

Exploitation occurs when one group benefits disproportionately from the labour, vulnerability, or resources of another group (Marx, 1867). In literary narratives, exploitation frequently underlies social problems such as abuse, discrimination, and persecution.

2.2.3.4 Marginalisation

Conflict Theory emphasises the exclusion of certain groups from social, economic, and political participation. Marginalised individuals are often denied access to opportunities and resources, resulting in social vulnerability.

2.2.3.5 Resistance and Social Change

Conflict is viewed as a catalyst for social transformation. Social change occurs when disadvantaged groups challenge unequal social arrangements and seek greater justice and inclusion (Mills, 1956).

2.2.4 Conflict Theory and Literary Criticism

Conflict Theory has become an influential approach in literary studies because it enables scholars to explore how literature represents power, inequality, oppression, and resistance (Eagleton, 1976; Tyson, 2015). Literary texts often portray struggles between dominant and subordinate groups, thereby reflecting broader social realities. From this perspective, characters may embody competing social interests, while settings may serve as spaces where inequality, exclusion, and social conflict are experienced. Literature, therefore, serves not only as artistic expression but also as a medium of social critique.

African literary scholars such as Achebe (1958), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), and Ndebele (1991) demonstrate that literature frequently interrogates poverty, colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and other forms of social injustice. Contemporary scholarship continues to emphasise the role of narrative in shaping understandings of power, identity, and social relations (Reali, Cevasco, & Marmolejo-Ramos, 2024).

2.2.5 Relevance of Conflict Theory to the Study

Conflict Theory is particularly relevant to this study because the selected novels portray social ills that arise from unequal power relations and social inequalities. The theory assists the study in:

- examining how characters experience persecution, poverty, abuse, racism, and gender-based violence.
- analysing relationships between dominant and marginalised characters.
- investigating how settings reflect unequal social conditions.
- understanding how structural inequalities sustain social ills; and
- explaining how literature critiques social injustices and promotes social awareness.

The theory, therefore, provided a suitable framework for analysing how characterisation and setting are used to depict social ills in the selected Xitsonga novels.

2.2.6 Conceptual Framework

The study conceptualises the relationship between Conflict Theory, literary devices, and social ills as illustrated below:

Social Critique and Transformation

The framework proposes that Conflict Theory informs the analysis of characterisation and setting, which function as the primary literary mechanisms through which social ills are represented. Through these representations, the novels critique social inequalities and contribute to broader discussions of social transformation.

2.2.7 Limitations of Conflict Theory

Although Conflict Theory provides valuable insights into power relations and social inequality, it has certain limitations. First, the theory tends to emphasise conflict and

domination, sometimes overlooking cooperation, social cohesion, and individual agency. Second, it may privilege structural explanations of social problems while underestimating psychological, cultural, or personal factors that influence human behaviour. Third, literary texts often contain multiple meanings and interpretations that cannot be explained solely through social conflict.

To address these limitations, the present study uses Conflict Theory primarily as a framework for understanding social inequalities and their literary representation rather than as the sole explanation for all aspects of the selected novels.

2.3 Comprehensive and Critical Review of Literature

This section reviews scholarly literature on the depiction of social ills in literary texts, with particular emphasis on the role of characterisation and setting in representing social realities. Literature has long served as a medium through which writers reflect, interrogate, and critique societal challenges. Through literary representation, authors expose social inequalities, moral tensions, and structural injustices that affect individuals and communities. Consequently, literary texts provide valuable insights into the nature, causes, and consequences of social problems.

The review is organised around four broad themes: social ills in literature, characterisation as a tool for social representation, setting as a reflection of social realities, and the portrayal of social problems in African and Xitsonga literature. The discussion is informed by Conflict Theory, which views society as characterised by inequalities, competition for resources, and struggles between dominant and subordinate groups (Coser, 1956; Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). Through this theoretical lens, literary depictions of poverty, abuse, discrimination, violence, and other social ills may be interpreted as reflections of broader social conflicts and power relations.

The purpose of this review is to establish the scholarly context of the study, identify existing knowledge on the depiction of social problems in literature, and highlight gaps in research relating to Xitsonga novels. In doing so, the review provides a foundation for analysing how social ills are represented through characterisation and setting in the selected novels.

2.3.1 Conceptualising Social Ills in Literature

The concept of social ills refers to conditions or behaviours that negatively affect individuals, groups, or society as a whole and require collective intervention (Loseke, 2003; Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969). Social ills commonly include poverty, unemployment, crime, gender-based violence, substance abuse, discrimination, corruption, family disintegration, and social exclusion. These conditions are often associated with unequal access to social, economic, and political resources.

From a sociological perspective, social problems emerge when significant sections of society perceive a condition as undesirable and harmful to social well-being (Morgan, 2019). Conflict theorists further argue that social problems are rooted in unequal power relations and structural inequalities that privilege certain groups while marginalising others (Marx, 1867/1976; Coser, 1956). Consequently, social ills cannot be understood merely as individual failures but as manifestations of broader social and economic structures.

Literature plays a critical role in representing these social realities. According to Eagleton (2008), literary texts often reveal tensions within society by exposing relationships of domination, exploitation, resistance, and inequality. Through fictional narratives, authors can critique prevailing social conditions and stimulate public awareness of societal challenges. Thus, literary representations of social ills serve not only aesthetic functions but also sociocultural and ideological purposes.

2.3.2 Characterisation as a Representation of Social Realities

Characterisation refers to the process through which authors create and develop fictional characters within a narrative (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Through characterisation, writers reveal characters' personalities, beliefs, motivations, social positions, and relationships. Characters, therefore, function as representations of broader social realities and human experiences.

Literary scholars distinguish between direct and indirect characterisation. Direct characterisation occurs when the narrator explicitly describes a character's traits, whereas indirect characterisation emerges through actions, dialogue, thoughts, and interactions with other characters (Murfin & Ray, 2018). Both forms enable authors to portray complex social experiences and human behaviour.

In literary texts dealing with social issues, characters often embody specific social conditions or ideological positions. Ndebele (1991) argues that meaningful literary representation lies in portraying ordinary individuals whose experiences reflect broader societal realities. Through carefully developed characters, writers expose the effects of poverty, oppression, gender inequality, violence, and social exclusion on individuals and communities.

From a Conflict Theory perspective, characters frequently represent competing social groups situated within unequal power structures. Dominant characters may symbolise authority, wealth, or privilege, while marginalised characters embody oppression, exploitation, and resistance. Characterisation, therefore, becomes an important literary mechanism for illustrating struggles over power and resources within society (Tyson, 2015).

In African literature, characterisation is frequently employed to expose social injustices and challenge oppressive systems. Characters often serve as vehicles through which

authors critique corruption, patriarchy, poverty, ethnic divisions, and political abuse. The literary construction of characters, therefore, contributes significantly to the social and ideological meanings conveyed by a text.

2.3.3 Setting as a Reflection of Social Conditions

Setting refers to the time, place, and social environment within which a narrative unfolds (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Beyond providing background information, setting shapes character behaviour, influences events, and contributes to thematic development.

Literary scholars emphasise that setting often functions symbolically by reflecting broader social realities (Lukács, 1962). Rural settings, for example, may reveal poverty, traditional cultural practices, and limited access to resources, while urban settings may expose unemployment, crime, inequality, and social alienation. Consequently, settings help readers understand the social contexts within which characters experience various challenges.

Conflict Theory highlights the importance of social environments in producing and sustaining inequality. According to this perspective, social spaces reflect power relations and unequal distributions of resources within society (Ritzer & Stepnisky, 2022). Literary settings, therefore, serve as sites where social conflicts, exclusion, and inequality become visible.

In African literature, settings frequently function as representations of broader social structures. Novelists often depict communities affected by poverty, political instability, discrimination, and social transformation. Through these settings, authors illustrate the conditions that give rise to conflict and social suffering. Thus, setting is not merely a physical backdrop but an active component of social critique.

2.3.4 Depictions of Social Ills in African Literature

African literature has consistently engaged with social issues affecting the continent. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Mariama Bâ, and J. M. Coetzee have explored themes of poverty, corruption, gender inequality, racial discrimination, violence, and political oppression.

Armah's *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968) portrays corruption and moral decay in post-independence Ghana. Through both characterisation and setting, the novel exposes how political power can become a source of exploitation rather than liberation. Similarly, Bâ's *So Long a Letter* (1981) critiques patriarchal structures and gender inequalities that marginalise women within society.

In South African literature, social ills are frequently represented through narratives addressing apartheid, racial discrimination, poverty, crime, and inequality. Coetzee's *Disgrace* (1999) examines shifting power relations, social violence, and historical injustices in post-apartheid South Africa. Such works demonstrate how literature functions as a form of social commentary by exposing societal tensions and inequalities.

Across these texts, authors employ characterisation and setting to illustrate the lived experiences of individuals affected by social problems. Consequently, literary representation becomes a means of interrogating societal structures and promoting critical reflection on social realities.

2.3.5 Social Ills in Xitsonga Literature

Xitsonga literature similarly reflects social realities and addresses challenges affecting communities. Scholars have observed that Xitsonga novels frequently engage with themes such as poverty, abuse, crime, cultural change, family conflict, gender inequality, and moral decline (Ntuli, 1972; Malungana, 1999; Baloyi, 2015).

Studies on Xitsonga literary texts indicate that authors often use characters to represent broader social experiences and moral struggles. Characters are frequently positioned within challenging social environments where they confront poverty, discrimination, family conflict, and social injustice. These representations enable writers to critique social conditions and encourage reflection on community values and social responsibility.

Similarly, settings in Xitsonga novels often reflect changing social and economic realities. Rural and urban environments are used to portray social transformation, migration, unemployment, inequality, and moral challenges associated with modernisation. Through these settings, authors contextualise characters' experiences and reveal the structural conditions underlying social problems.

Despite the presence of social ills in Xitsonga literary texts, existing scholarship has focused largely on themes of culture, language, identity, and morality. Relatively little attention has been devoted to examining how social ills are specifically depicted through characterisation and setting across multiple Xitsonga novels.

2.3.6 Literature Review Gap

The reviewed literature demonstrates that social ills are a significant concern in literary studies and that characterisation and setting are important literary devices for representing social realities. Existing studies within African and South African literary scholarship have shown how authors utilise fictional narratives to expose poverty, inequality, discrimination, violence, and other societal challenges.

However, within Xitsonga literary studies, limited research has specifically investigated the depiction of social ills through characterisation and setting. Most existing studies have concentrated on thematic, linguistic, cultural, and stylistic aspects of Xitsonga

literature. Furthermore, few studies have adopted Conflict Theory as a framework to examine how literary representations reveal relationships among power, inequality, and social problems.

This study seeks to address these gaps by analysing how social ills are depicted through characterisation and setting in selected Xitsonga novels. Using Conflict Theory, the study further examines how these representations reflect broader social inequalities, struggles for power, and structural conditions that contribute to social problems.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature on social ills, characterisation, setting, and the relationship between literature and society. It further examined Conflict Theory as the theoretical lens guiding the study. It identified a gap in existing scholarship concerning the depiction of social ills through characterisation and setting in selected Xitsonga novels. The chapter thus provided the conceptual and theoretical foundation for the study and established the basis for the textual analysis undertaken. The following chapter discusses the research methodology used to address the research questions and achieve the study objectives.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures employed to investigate the depiction of social ills through characterisation and setting in selected Xitsonga novels. The chapter discusses the research approach, research design, corpus selection, data collection procedures, units of textual analysis, coding and thematic analysis procedures, translation procedures, trustworthiness, researcher reflexivity, application of Conflict Theory, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations. The methodological framework was designed to facilitate a systematic and rigorous literary analysis of the selected texts.

3.2 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach. Qualitative research seeks to understand meanings, experiences, interpretations, and representations within specific contexts rather than produce statistically generalisable findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach is particularly appropriate for literary studies because literary texts require careful interpretation of language, themes, characters, and narrative structures.

The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth examination of how social ills are represented in the selected Xitsonga novels and how authors use characterisation and setting to construct these representations.

3.3 Research Design

The study employs a descriptive literary analysis design informed by an interpretivist paradigm. Literary analysis involves examining how texts generate meaning through literary devices, thematic patterns, narrative structures, and sociocultural representations (Tyson, 2015).

The study further incorporates principles of qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Qualitative content analysis facilitated the systematic identification and organisation of textual data, while thematic analysis enabled the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns and themes across the selected novels (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.4 Corpus Selection

3.4.1 Study Corpus

The study analyses the following Xitsonga novels:

- *Mulunguntima* (Khosa, 1994)
- *I Vutomi* (Lubisi, 1998)
- *Hlayisa* (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015)
- *Ximintantsengele* (Shabangu, 2016)

3.4.2 Selection Criteria

The novels were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling allows researchers to select information-rich texts that are most relevant to the research objectives and theoretical framework (Patton, 2015).

The following criteria informed the selection:

1. The texts are original Xitsonga novels.
2. The texts contain identifiable social ills relevant to the study.
3. The novels provide substantial character and setting development.
4. The texts depict social challenges aligned with the study's conceptual focus, including persecution, poverty, abuse, racism, unemployment, and gender-based violence.
5. The novels represent different publication periods, enabling comparative analysis.

6. The texts are recognised within Xitsonga literary scholarship and are suitable for close textual analysis.

3.5 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected through intensive textual engagement using close reading.

3.5.1 Procedures for Close Reading

Close reading is a widely used literary method that involves detailed examination of textual features such as language, imagery, characterisation, narrative structure, and thematic development (Tyson, 2015).

The close-reading process was conducted in four stages:

1. Initial reading to gain familiarity with the plot, characters, settings, and themes.
2. Re-reading to identify representations of social ills.
3. Focused reading centred on characterisation and setting as literary devices.
4. Extraction and annotation of relevant textual passages for analysis.

Analytical memos were recorded throughout the process to document emerging interpretations and thematic patterns.

3.6 Units of Textual Analysis

The analysis focused on four principal units:

3.6.1 Characters

Characters who experience, perpetrate, resist, or respond to social ills.

3.6.2 Settings

Physical, social, religious, cultural, educational, economic, and familial settings in which social problems occur.

3.6.3 Narrative Events

Events depicting conflict, oppression, exclusion, discrimination, victimisation, and resistance.

3.6.4 Dialogue and Narrative Commentary

Dialogue and narrative descriptions that reveal social attitudes, ideologies, and power relations.

3.7 Data Analysis Procedures

3.7.1 Coding Procedures

Following data collection, textual extracts were systematically coded. Coding involves assigning labels to meaningful segments of data to facilitate organisation and interpretation (Saldaña, 2021).

Three broad coding categories guided the analysis:

3.7.1.1 Characterisation

Sub-categories:

- victims.
- oppressors.
- resisters.
- bystanders.
- authority figures; and
- socially marginalised characters.

3.7.1.2 Setting

Sub-categories:

- family settings.
- community settings.
- educational settings.
- religious settings.
- economic settings.
- rural settings; and

- urban settings.

3.7.1.3 Social Ills

Sub-categories:

- persecution.
- poverty.
- abuse.
- gender-based violence.
- racism.
- unemployment.
- discrimination; and
- social exclusion.

3.7.2 Theme Development

Thematic analysis followed the six-phase approach proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022):

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Generation of initial codes.
3. Development of categories.
4. Theme identification.
5. Theme refinement; and
6. Interpretation and reporting.

The analysis generated broader themes such as:

- power and oppression.
- poverty and inequality.
- social exclusion and discrimination.
- gendered violence.

- resistance and resilience; and
- social justice and transformation.

Themes were subsequently interpreted through the lens of Conflict Theory.

3.8 Use of Quotations and Translation Procedures

3.8.1 Use of Original Xitsonga Quotations

To preserve textual authenticity and linguistic integrity, quotations were presented in their original Xitsonga form wherever possible. Retaining original quotations ensures accurate representation of linguistic nuances, cultural meanings, and authorial intent.

3.8.2 Translation Procedures

Where English translations were necessary:

- The original Xitsonga quotation was presented first.
- an English translation followed immediately thereafter.
- translations prioritised semantic equivalence rather than literal word-for-word rendering.
- culturally specific expressions were translated contextually; and
- translated extracts were compared with the original texts to ensure consistency and accuracy.

The original Xitsonga version remained the authoritative text for interpretive purposes.

3.9 Trustworthiness and Interpretive Credibility

Given the interpretive nature of literary analysis, several strategies were employed to enhance trustworthiness.

3.9.1 Prolonged Engagement

Repeated readings promoted familiarity with the texts and deepened interpretation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.9.2 Evidence-Based Interpretation

Interpretations were grounded in direct textual evidence drawn from the novels.

3.9.3 Consistency of Coding

Coding procedures were applied systematically across all texts to ensure analytical coherence (Saldaña, 2021).

3.9.4 Reflexive Documentation

Analytical notes and reflexive memos were maintained throughout the study to document interpretive decisions and analytical development (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

3.9.5 Auditability

The coding process, theme development, and analytical decisions were documented to create a transparent audit trail (Nowell et al., 2017).

3.10 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the researcher's critical awareness of how personal experiences, beliefs, disciplinary training, and theoretical positioning may influence interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

To enhance reflexive awareness:

- interpretations were grounded in textual evidence.
- alternative interpretations were considered where appropriate.
- analytical decisions were documented throughout the process; and
- conclusions were based on recurring patterns rather than isolated textual examples.

3.11 Application of Conflict Theory in Data Interpretation

Conflict Theory served as the primary analytical lens for interpreting the selected novels. The theory directed attention towards:

- power relations.

- inequality and marginalisation.
- oppression and exploitation.
- social exclusion.
- resistance and resilience; and
- social transformation.

Characterisation was analysed to determine how characters embody positions of dominance, vulnerability, resistance, or exclusion. Similarly, settings were examined as social spaces in which inequalities are experienced, reinforced, or challenged.

The application of Conflict Theory enabled the study to explain how social ills are represented and linked to broader social structures and power relations.

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Although the study did not involve human participants, several ethical principles guided the research.

3.12.1 Copyright Compliance

The novels were used strictly for academic research purposes. Copyright ownership remains with the respective authors and publishers.

3.12.2 Accurate Representation

The study sought to represent the authors' texts, characters, and narrative contexts accurately and responsibly.

3.12.3 Faithful Quotation

All quotations were reproduced exactly as they appear in the original texts.

3.12.4 Responsible Translation

Translations were undertaken carefully to preserve semantic meaning and cultural nuance.

3.12.5 Avoidance of Misrepresentation

Interpretations were based on textual evidence and relevant literary scholarship to minimise distortion or misrepresentation.

3.13 Limitations of the Methodology

The study is limited to four selected Xitsonga novels and therefore does not claim to represent the entirety of Xitsonga literary production. In addition, literary interpretation is inherently subjective, meaning that alternative readings of the texts remain possible. Nonetheless, the use of systematic coding, close reading, thematic analysis, textual evidence, and Conflict Theory enhanced the credibility and consistency of the findings.

3.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodological procedures employed in the study. It discussed the qualitative research approach, descriptive literary analysis design, corpus selection, close reading procedures, units of textual analysis, coding and thematic analysis processes, trustworthiness measures, reflexivity, application of Conflict Theory, ethical considerations, and methodological limitations. The following chapter presents and analyses the findings.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents, analyses, and discusses the findings on the depiction of social ills in four selected Xitsonga novels: *Mulunguntima* (Khosa, 1994), *I Vutomi* (Lubisi, 1998), *Hlayisa* (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015), and *Ximintantsengele* (Shabangu, 2016). The discussion is organised around the study's objectives and research questions, focusing on how the authors represent social ills through literary techniques such as characterisation, setting, language, dialogue, symbolism, naming, conflict, irony, and narrative perspective.

The analysis examines the portrayal of gender-based violence, racism, abuse, persecution, poverty, and unemployment in the selected texts. Guided by Conflict Theory, the chapter explores how these social problems are linked to unequal power relations, domination, marginalisation, exploitation, and struggles over resources within society (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002; Tyson, 2015). Through this theoretical lens, the study demonstrates how the novels expose social inequalities and critique oppressive social structures. The chapter begins with summaries of the selected novels.

4.1.1. Brief Summaries of the Selected Novels

4.1.1.1 Ximitantsengele (Shabangu, 2016)

Ximitantsengele narrates the life of Ntsengele Godfrey Kubayi, a family man whose marriage to Lindiwe Maluleke and relationship with their three children deteriorate after he becomes involved with Florence, also known as Mafloza Ndlovu, to her acquaintances. Following his promotion to managerial level at Gazankulu Development Corporation (GDC), Godfrey neglects his family and diverts financial

resources to support his extramarital relationship with Florence. His irresponsible behaviour results in emotional and economic hardship for his wife and children.

Eventually, Godfrey and Florence lose their jobs after being caught engaging in an inappropriate relationship at work. Florence subsequently subjects Godfrey to neglect and humiliation while pursuing relationships with influential men for personal gain. Godfrey later discovers that another man biologically fathers the child he believed to be his. Following a series of humiliating experiences and personal setbacks, he returns to his family and seeks forgiveness. Despite his actions, his wife and children welcome him back. The novel explores themes of infidelity, family disintegration, neglect, greed, abuse of authority, and redemption.

4.1.1.2 Hlayisa (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015)

Hlayisa tells the story of Hlanganaswo, whose marriage to Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula is destroyed by his relationship with another woman, Rirhandzu. As he prioritises his extramarital affair, he abandons his family. He ceases providing financial support, forcing his son, Hlayisa, to leave school to seek employment and support the household.

When Tsatsawani opposes Hlanganaswo's intention to marry Rirhandzu as a second wife, he violently assaults her, causing injuries that later lead to her death. Hlanganaswo rejects responsibility for her suffering and continues his relationship with Rirhandzu. However, when Rirhandzu's husband is released from prison, Hlanganaswo is expelled from her home and left destitute. Unable to cope with the consequences of his actions, he eventually commits suicide. The novel highlights domestic violence, abandonment, poverty, gender-based violence, and the destructive consequences of infidelity.

4.1.1.3 I Vutomi (Lubisi, 1998)

I Vutomi centres on Dave Sekhukhune, a university lecturer whose ambition to become Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies drives him to orchestrate the attempted murder of the incumbent head, Billy Masangu. Dave hires two criminals to carry out the attack, but Billy survives after being rescued and taken to the hospital.

The crime is eventually exposed through the actions of Davula, a cattle herder who inadvertently obtains crucial evidence linking the perpetrators to the attempted murder. Following a police investigation, Dave and his accomplices are arrested and brought to justice. The novel examines corruption, abuse of power, greed, criminality, and unethical competition in the workplace.

4.1.1.4 Mulunguntima (Khosa, 1994)

Mulunguntima follows the conflict between Johnson Hlongwane, the deputy manager of Prestige Publications Enterprises (PPE), and Ephraim Chavalala, the company's Public Relations Officer. When Ephraim is selected to represent the company at an international workshop in Europe, Hlongwane becomes jealous and seeks to prevent him from attending.

Motivated by prejudice, jealousy, and personal ambition, Hlongwane attempts to frame Ephraim and another employee, Nyeleti, for fraud by using a stolen company cheque. His scheme is ultimately uncovered, leading to his arrest. Ephraim is exonerated and proceeds to attend the workshop as planned. The novel addresses workplace discrimination, abuse of authority, dishonesty, jealousy, and corruption.

4.1.2 Concluding Link to the Study

Collectively, the four novels portray a wide range of social ills affecting individuals, families, and communities. These include infidelity, family disintegration, poverty, domestic violence, corruption, abuse of power, discrimination, greed, and criminal

behaviour. Through characterisation, setting, and plot development, the authors expose the causes and consequences of these social problems, making the novels suitable texts for investigating the depiction of social ills in Xitsonga literature.

4.2 Analytical Framework for Interpreting Social Ills

The analysis of the selected novels is informed by Conflict Theory, which views society as characterised by unequal power relations, competing interests, and struggles over resources that produce social inequality and social conflict (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002; Tyson, 2015). From this perspective, social ills are not understood as isolated personal experiences but as manifestations of broader structural and ideological inequalities. Consequently, the framework enables the study to examine how literary texts represent, reproduce, and critique systems of domination, marginalisation, and exploitation.

To address the first research question, which investigates how social ills are depicted in selected Xitsonga novels, the analysis focuses on characterisation, setting, dialogue, naming, conflict, symbolism, irony, and narrative perspective as key literary mechanisms through which social realities are constructed. Characterisation is examined to determine how victims, perpetrators, and other social actors are represented and how these representations reveal relations of power and inequality. The setting is analysed as a social and ideological space that reflects the material conditions within which poverty, abuse, racism, persecution, unemployment, and gender-based violence emerge and persist. Through a Conflict Theory lens, these representations illuminate the structural conditions that sustain social disadvantage and exclusion.

The second research question seeks to identify the literary techniques employed in depicting social ills. Accordingly, dialogue is analysed to explore how language

functions as an instrument of authority, resistance, and social control. Naming practices are examined for their ideological significance and their role in constructing social identities and power hierarchies. Conflict is interpreted as a narrative expression of broader struggles between dominant and marginalised groups, reflecting competition for power, status, and access to resources. Symbolism and irony are analysed to uncover implicit social meanings and critiques that challenge oppressive social arrangements and expose contradictions within society. Narrative perspective is further examined to determine whose voices are privileged or marginalised and how such narrative choices shape readers' perceptions of social reality and inequality.

Viewed collectively, these analytical dimensions facilitate a critical interpretation of the selected novels by demonstrating how literary techniques function as vehicles for social commentary and ideological critique. Guided by Conflict Theory, the analysis moves beyond the mere identification of social problems to explain how the texts expose unequal social relations, challenge dominant structures of power, and foreground the experiences of individuals and groups affected by social injustice. In doing so, the framework provides a coherent basis for answering the research questions and achieving the study objectives concerning both the depiction of social ills and the literary strategies through which such depictions are realised.

4.3 Characterisation as a Vehicle for the Depiction of Social Ills

In this section, the primary and the secondary research questions that were being addressed are:

Research Question 2: *What types of characters do the writers of the selected novels portray to represent social ills in their narratives?*

Research Question 1: *How do authors depict social ills in their literary works?*

Characterisation emerged as one of the principal literary devices through which the selected novelists depict social ills. Rather than merely presenting social problems as abstract societal concerns, the authors embody these problems in specific characters whose actions, experiences, and relationships reveal broader structures of inequality and oppression. Consistent with Conflict Theory, the novels portray social conflict through the interactions between dominant and subordinate characters. Victim characters frequently experience persecution, abuse, poverty, and discrimination, while oppressor characters exercise power through violence, intimidation, exploitation, and exclusion. These character types reveal the unequal power relations that underpin many of the social ills represented in the selected novels (Eagleton, 1976; Tyson, 2015).

4.3.1 Victim Characters as Representations of Marginalisation

Victim characters function as important vehicles through which social suffering is represented. Their experiences reveal the personal consequences of social inequality and allow readers to engage emotionally with the effects of abuse, neglect, persecution, and poverty.

In *Hlayisa*, Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula is portrayed as a victim of patriarchal domination and gender-based violence. Her victimisation culminates in the violent assault perpetrated by Hlanganaswo after she refuses to support his intention of marrying a second wife. The narrator states: *"Wa delela nsatindziwena!" Ku vula Hlanganaswo hi ku teka nsimbi leyi a yi ri kwalaho a ba nhloko ya Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula a ya wela ehansi a va a khomiwa hi xithongwana* (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015, p. 30).

Translation

(“You are a disrespectful woman!” said Hlanganaswo as he picked up an iron object and struck Tsatsawani N’waKhazamula on the head, causing her to collapse and lose consciousness.)

The significance of this scene extends beyond physical violence. The assault symbolises the unequal power relations that characterise the marriage. Hlanganaswo resorts to violence when his authority is challenged, suggesting that gender-based violence functions as a mechanism for maintaining male dominance. From a Conflict Theory perspective, the attack illustrates how power is exercised through coercion when dominant individuals perceive their authority to be threatened (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002; Weber, 1946).

Tsatsawani's victimhood is further reinforced through economic abandonment. Following Hlanganaswo’s departure from the family home, she is left solely responsible for caring for the children. Her suffering, therefore, becomes both emotional and economic. Through Tsatsawani’s character, the authors expose the intersection between gender inequality and economic vulnerability.

Similarly, in *Ximintantsengele*, Lindiwe and her children become victims of emotional and economic neglect following Godfrey’s relationship with Florence. One of the clearest expressions of this neglect occurs when Sorota and Wisani visit their father’s workplace to seek financial assistance for their university applications, only to be denied access. This incident represents more than parental irresponsibility; it highlights the unequal distribution of resources within the family. The father's authority allows him to withhold support, leaving his children vulnerable.

Conflict Theory interprets such situations as examples of unequal access to power and resources within social institutions. Although the family is often imagined as a

space of care and support, these novels reveal that it may also function as a site of domination and exclusion.

4.3.2 Oppressor Characters and the Abuse of Power

If victim characters reveal the consequences of inequality, oppressor characters reveal the mechanisms through which inequality is sustained. The selected novels repeatedly present characters who misuse social, institutional, economic, or gender-based power.

In *Mulunguntima*, Johnson Hlongwane emerges as one of the most significant figures of oppression. His persecution of Ephraim Chavalala stems primarily from jealousy and competition. Rather than encouraging professional excellence, Hlongwane attempts to sabotage Chavalala's career advancement. His hostility becomes evident when he says: *“Ndzi nge heri ndzi xi tsakerile xifanyetana lexi. Ni ku xi susa laha femeni ndza swi tsakela”* (Khosa, 1994, p. 6).

Translation

(“I will never like this little boy. I would be happy to remove him from this company.”)

The derogatory phrase *xifanyetana lexi* (“this little boy”) is particularly important. Although Chavalala is an adult professional, Hlongwane uses diminutive language to undermine his status and reduce his credibility. The language reflects symbolic violence, whereby oppressive individuals use discourse to diminish others and reinforce social hierarchies.

The attempted framing of Chavalala through the stolen company cheque further illustrates the abuse of institutional power. Hlongwane’s actions are not motivated by organisational concerns but by a desire to maintain privilege and prevent a rival from gaining status. This aligns with Conflict Theory’s proposition that dominant individuals

frequently seek to monopolise resources and opportunities for personal benefit (Collins, 1975).

A similar pattern is evident in *I Vutomi*, where Dave Sekhukhune hires criminals to assassinate Billy Masangu. Dave's actions reveal the extent to which ambition and competition may lead to exploitation and violence. Rather than earning promotion through merit, he seeks to remove a competitor. The novel, therefore, constructs career advancement as a site of social conflict, where individuals compete for scarce opportunities and power.

4.3.3 Resistant Characters as Agents of Social Transformation

Although oppression is widespread in the selected novels, the authors also construct characters who challenge inequality.

Davula in *I Vutomi* serves as a representative of resilience and ethical resistance. Despite intimidation by criminals and police, he ultimately helps expose the truth.

Similarly, Nsatimuni in *Mulunguntima* refuses to submit completely to Hlongwane's intimidation. Her resistance demonstrates that lower-status individuals are not entirely powerless.

Conflict Theory argues that social change occurs when marginalised groups resist domination. These resistant characters, therefore, function as vehicles for social transformation within the narratives.

4.3.4 Characterisation Through Naming

The Research Questions that are addressed are the following:

Research Question 1: *How do authors depict social ills in their literary works?*
Research Question 2: *What types of characters do the writers of the selected novels portray to represent social ills in their narratives?*

The findings reveal that naming functions as an important technique of character construction. This confirms observations by Mathye et al. (2022) that names in Xitsonga literature frequently contribute to character depiction and thematic development.

The name Dlayani, for example, is associated with violence and death. Significantly, the character bearing this name becomes involved in criminal activities and attempted murder. Likewise, the name Hlayisa is associated with care and responsibility. Ironically, Hlayisa assumes adult responsibilities at an early age after his father abandons the family.

Through such names, the authors provide anticipatory clues about character roles and thematic concerns. Naming, therefore, functions as a mechanism through which social identities, inequalities, and social conflicts are represented.

The study objectives and research questions inform the organisation of this chapter to ensure a systematic analysis of the depiction of social ills in the selected Xitsonga novels. Section 4.3 focuses on characterisation and primarily addresses Research Question 1: *How do authors depict social ills in their literary works?* and Research Question 2, *What types of characters do the writers of the selected novels portray to represent social ills in their narratives?* The section examines the construction of victim, oppressor, and resistant characters, as well as the significance of naming practices, to demonstrate how characterisation contributes to the representation of social inequality, oppression, and social conflict. In doing so, the section directly responds to the study objectives of exploring the depiction of social ills and investigating the types of characters employed by the authors.

4.4 Depiction of Social Ills Through Setting

In different novels, the authors select different settings where major events will take place. Below are the settings in which social ills occurred between perpetrators and their victims.

4.4.1 Domestic Setting

Family spaces become locations of:

- abuse
- neglect
- violence
- gender oppression

For example, the incidents in Tsatsawani's home and in Jordaan's farm.

In Baloyi and Mongwe (2015), abuse is portrayed when Hlanganaswo told his wife, Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula, that he wanted to marry a second wife, and his wife refused. Hlanganaswo shouted to his wife: *"Wa swi lava a wu swi lavi ndzi ta n'wi teka hi nkanu ya marahani"* (p.28), and this meant that he would marry a second wife by force regardless of permission from his wife.

One Sunday, when Hlanganaswo visited his home because by that time he was staying with his side chick, Tsatsawani greeted her husband in a manner that showed she accepted that the husband was no longer staying with them; he visited them for a few minutes. Hlanganaswo was very angry, and he said to his wife.

> *"U ndzi vuyisa emutini wa mina hi ka wena Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula. A wu na nawu nsatindziwena. Xana i mani a nga ku sumela leswaku ndzi rhurhile la kaya ke?" Ku pitsula Hlanganaswo a karhi a mpfhumpfhampfhumpfheka bya mpfuvu leyi nga suka entlhambini wa timpfuvu hikokwalaho ka ku va na ximpfuvana xa xinuna." (p.26).*

(You welcome me into my own home, you Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula. You do not have manners, you woman. Who told you that I relocated from my home?" Hlanganaswo said it harshly as a hippopotamus that moved away from a group of hippopotamuses because it has a male hippo calf.)

Tsatsawani sent Rivoningo to bring her father water so he could wash his hands before eating. Hlanganaswo uttered harsh words to his wife:

"He wena Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula, kasi a wu se ri dyondzisa goya ra wena ku ri mina a ndzi hlambi hi mati yo huma efirijini ke? Swona leswi a ngo fika a ku dzii, a yima onge wo va socha u swi dyondzisa hi mani?" Xana i nawu wa ka Chauke lowu u dyondzisaka vana lava va mina ke?" Hlanganaswo a vula hi ku teka lapi a funengeta tindyelo leti a ti ri na swakudya handle ko phema na kantsongo. (p.27).

(You, Tsatsawani N'wa-Khazamula, you did not teach your wildcat that I do not bathe with ice-cold water from the refrigerator? She stood still in front of me as if she were a soldier; who taught her to behave like this? Are these the principles of the Chauke clan that you are teaching my children?" He said this by taking a hand cloth, covering the food without eating even a small portion of the food.)

What can be noted here is that now that Hlanganaswo has a side chick, he calls her biological daughter a wildcat.

Butana, an adopted child by Rirhandzu, assaulted Hlanganaswo, and this shows that all the members of the family were against him. Back then, he was the one who brought up all the children whom Rirhandzu adopted, but now that they had finished their tertiary studies and were working, they turned against him. *"Butana xi vuya na xigiya xi fika xi fumbutela Hlanganaswo nhloko leyi xi tlhela xi cinela ehenhla ka yena*

hambileswi a karhi a tisola aka ku honisa ka yena." (p.129). The quotation above means that Butana came with a wooden club and repeatedly struck Hlanganaswo on the head and trampled on him, even though he regretted his violence.

In the novel, *I Vutomi* by Lubisi (1998), abuse is portrayed by Jordaan when he chased Davula at night: *"Pfula jong, xiphukuphuku lexi!" "Famba sweswi! A ndza ha lavi ku ku vona laha purasini ra mina. Loko ndzo ku vona "ek skiet jou dood!" (*p.18). ("Open you fool!" "Leave now! I do not want to see you here on my farm. If I see you, I will shoot you to death!")

4.4.2 Workplace Setting

Examples:

- PPE
- GDC
- University of Turfloop

These settings reveal:

- power struggles
- exploitation
- corruption
- victimisation

All these settings link directly to Conflict Theory because of the events that occur. In this story, Ximitantsengele, by Shabangu (2016), tells the story of Ntsengele Godfrey Kubayi, who was married to Lindiwe Maluleke. They were blessed with three children, namely Ganyani, Sorota and Wisani. Their family was characterised by love, respect and happiness. Godfrey secured a new job at the Gazankulu Government Corporation (GDC) in Giyani, where he was a manager. He met Florence Mafloza Ndlovu at his new employment. He fell in love with Florence and gradually abandoned his family.

He began to reject his wife and kids despite repeated advice from his wife, his uncle Sambula, and his friend Maxangu to return home and fulfil his responsibilities. However, Godfrey ignored their advice and moved into Florence's house. He later promoted Florence from a junior clerk to his personal assistant.

Godfrey borrowed money from GDC to build Florence a luxurious mansion and furnished it with expensive furniture. As a result, he stopped providing for his wife and children and rarely returned home to spend time with his family. He eventually told his wife that he no longer loved her and even questioned whether their children were biologically his. One day, Sorota and Wisani went to their father's place of employment to ask him for money to pay for the return of their application forms to the University of the North (also known as Turfloop). Florence refused to allow them to see their father, and they sadly returned home without seeing their father or having money to submit their application forms.

Godfrey and Florence had developed a habit of getting intimate in his office, but one day they were caught in the act of making love, and both were immediately dismissed from their positions. After losing their jobs, Florence's attitude towards Godfrey changed dramatically. She refused to wash or iron his clothes, cook for him, or care for his needs. Instead, she insisted on a "50/50" cohabiting arrangement, expecting him to cook for himself and contribute equally to household responsibilities. She also told him to secure another job.

Florence's friend, Japisa, later introduced her to councillors from various municipalities who offered her opportunities to secure tenders to construct Rural Development Programme (RDP) houses. Japisa advised Florence that, if she wanted to secure more tenders, she should pursue romantic relationships with influential councillors. Florence subsequently began bringing other men home. She would send Godfrey out

of their bedroom, claiming that she needed to hold meetings with them, forcing him to sleep in her son Vhelaphi's room. She also bought a car without informing Godfrey.

When Florence's mother, Bathabile, died in Nkowankowa, Godfrey offered to accompany her to the funeral, but she refused. During the funeral, Florence met Mandla Bamuza, who had previously been transferred from GDC Giyani to GDC Bushbuckridge. Godfrey had met Florence while she was pregnant and had believed that the child, Masesi, was his. However, Mandla wanted to see his child, and Florence allowed him to visit her at home in Siyandhani, even though she was living there with Godfrey. During the visit, Godfrey learned that Masesi was not his biological child but Mandla's. Shocked by his revelation, he collapsed and was admitted to Nkhensani Hospital.

After being discharged from the hospital, Godfrey was confronted by Vhelaphi, who threatened him with a firearm. This incident prompted Godrey to return to his family and ask Lindiwe and their children for forgiveness. By then, his family had become highly successful: Lindiwe was a circuit manager, Ganyani was an engineer, Sorota was a lawyer, and Wisani was a social worker. Despite everything Godfrey had done, they forgave him and welcomed him back into the family.

4.4.3 Community Setting

Examples:

- Songeni
- Siyandhani

Community settings reveal:

- social attitudes
- exclusion
- support systems

- collective prejudice

This novel, *I Vutomi*, tells the story of Dave Sekhukhune, a lecturer at the University of the North (Turfloop), who was determined to become the Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies. At the time, Billy Masangu occupied the position. Driven by his ambition, Dave hired two criminals, Dlayani and Hlomani, to assassinate Billy. He provided them with a map indicating the location at Magoebaskloof where they were to ambush Billy's vehicle. The criminals opened fire at Billy's car, causing it to plunge into a deep ravine. Fortunately, Billy was rescued by one of the university's students, Mathevula, who was travelling back to Turfloop, and was rushed to the hospital for medical treatment.

Meanwhile, Davula was employed by Jordaan as a cattle herder. On the day of the shooting, one of Jordaan's cows went missing. While searching for the cow near Magoebaskloof, Davula heard gunshots and ran towards the scene. As he fled, he noticed a white four-wheel-drive bakkie hidden in the bushes. Through its window, he saw a sheet of paper, which he took before running away. Unaware that the paper was the criminals' map. Davula narrowly escaped after the two gunmen realised that he had taken it. When he returned to the farm, he informed Jordaan that one of the cows was still missing and explained that he had fled after two armed men had tried to shoot him. Influenced by his wife, Jordaan chased Davula away from the farm that very night, forcing him to return to Songeni in Bushbuckridge.

Later, Jordaan saw a television news announcement offering a reward of one hundred thousand rand to anyone who could provide information leading to the arrest of those responsible for the Magoebaskloof shooting. Realising that Davula had witnessed the incident, Jordaan reported the matter to the police. Together with the police officers, he travelled to Songeni to locate Davula. Davula handed over the map he found in the

criminals' bakkie and assisted the police by describing the two suspects. The investigation ultimately revealed that Dave Sekhukhune had hired Dlayani and Hlomani to carry out the attempted murder. As a result, all three men were arrestedHaving examined the role of characters, Section 4.4 shifts the discussion to setting and addresses Research Question 3, *What environments do the authors of the four chosen texts employ to address societal issues in their narratives?* The analysis explores how rural, urban, domestic, institutional, and community settings function as sites where social problems emerge, develop, and are sustained. Particular attention is given to the way these environments reveal structural inequalities and unequal access to social and economic resources, thereby reflecting the central concerns of Conflict Theory. This section, therefore, addressed the objective of determining the types of settings the authors used in their treatment of social ills.

4.5 Setting as a Site of Social Inequality

4.5.1 Domestic Settings

Domestic settings emerge as important locations for the representation of abuse, neglect, and gender-based violence.

This novel *Hlayisa*, tells a story of Hlanganaswo, who was married to Tsatsawani N'wa- Khazamula, and together they had two children, Hlayisa and Rivoningo. Their family was characterised by love, respect, and happiness. However, their lives changed when Hlanganaswo fell in love with Rirhandzu, whose husband, Rewind, was serving a prison sentence. Rirhandzu had a child named Baseleni. As his relationship with Rirhandzu developed, Hlanganaswo neglected and abandoned his wife and children. He moved into Rirhandzu's house and stopped providing financial support for his family, leaving Tsatsawani without money to buy food for their children.

As a result of the family's financial hardship, Hlayisa left school at an early age to look for work so that he could support his mother and younger sister, Rivoningo. Later, Hlanganaswo returned home and informed Tsatsawani that he intended to marry Rirhandzu as his second wife because Tsatsawani had only given birth to two children, whereas he desired a larger family. Tsatsawani rejected his proposal. Enraged, Hlanganaswo assaulted her by striking her on the head with an iron, leaving her unconscious. Instead of taking her to hospital, he abandoned her until her brother, Masenyane, arrived and took her for medical treatment.

Masenyane reported the assault to the police, who later went to Hlanganaswo's workplace and served him with a warrant of arrest. In his response, Hlanganaswo threatened Tsatsawani, warning that if she did not withdraw the case, he would kill both her and their children. Although Tsatsawani received medical treatment, her condition continued to deteriorate. She was admitted to hospital for a second time, where she eventually died from her injuries. Hlanganaswo did not contribute towards burying his wife nor attend her funeral, choosing instead to remain with Rirhandzu.

Meanwhile, Rewind was released from prison on parole and returned home. Rirhandzu immediately turned against Hlanganaswo and chased him out of her house. She assaulted him repeatedly with a broom and ordered him to collect his torn clothes and leave her in peace. Hlanganaswo refused because he knew that he had nowhere to go following his wife's death. Rewind then forcibly removed him from the house and threatened to shoot him if he ever returned. With nowhere else to turn, Hlanganaswo asked to be dropped off at the cemetery where Tsatsawani had been buried. The graveyard became his home, and he slept beside his late wife's grave. Every morning, he searched for food and the nearby municipal dumpsite to survive. One day, while at

the cemetery, he found a firearm. Overwhelmed by despair and the consequences of his actions, Hlanganaswo used the firearm to take his own life.

In *Hlayisa*, the family home shifts from a space of unity to a space of conflict following Hlanganaswo's relationship with Rirhandzu. This transformation symbolises the destructive impact of patriarchy and irresponsibility on family structures.

4.5.2 Workplace Settings

The workplace functions as a setting in which inequality, corruption, and abuse of authority are exposed.

In *Mulunguntima*, PPE becomes a site of institutional conflict. Promotions, employment opportunities, and access to professional development become contested resources.

Similarly, GDC in *Ximintantsengele* becomes a setting where corruption, favouritism, and misuse of authority occur.

From a Conflict Theory perspective, workplace settings reveal competition for power and resources. These settings are also serving as fertile ground for abuses as it can be noted below.

In the novel, *I Vutomi* by Lubisi (1998), abuse is portrayed by Jordaan when he chased Davula at night: *“Pfula jong, xiphukuphuku lexi!” “Famba sweswi! A ndza ha lavi ku ku vona laha purasini ra mina. Loko ndzo ku vona “ek skiet jou dood!” (*p.18). (“Open you fool!” “Leave now! I do not want to see you here on my farm. If I see you, I will shoot you to death!”)

Khosa (1994) portrays abuse of power through Hlongwane’s treatment of his junior workers. Rather than consulting or negotiating with them when assigning duties outside their job descriptions, Hlongwane simply issues instructions and expects them to comply. Hlongwane called Nyeleti in his office, and he said, *“Famba u ya ndzi xavela*

sopo ya homu ni swilayi swa mune swa xinkwa xa buraweni." (p. 22). ("Go and buy me some beef soup and four slices of brown bread".)

Nyeleti gave an excuse that she wanted to catch up on the work she had not finished the previous day. However, Hlongwane continued to abuse his authority. Ignoring her explanation, he turned to Nsatimuni and said:

> *"Na wena u lava ku fana na N'waripewu," ku kavanyeta Hlongwane hi rito ra vukarhi a ri karhi a kombetela Nsatimuni. "U lava ku fana na xiphunta lexi xa ku ala ku rhumiwa? A xi dyondzekangi, a xo va nchumu, hi lo xi thola hi ku xi twela visiwana, se xi hundzuka mavala xi mila ni ntshiva* (p.22).
>
> ("Do you also want to be like this useless person?" "Do you want to be like this fool who refused to be sent? She is not educated, she is nothing, we took pity on her, and hired her, but now she has changed and become cruel.")

Hlongwane continued to abuse his authority and angrily said to Nsatimuni, *"He wena Nsatimuni," a kariha. "U vula mina sweswo, wa swi tiva leswaku ndzi mulungu wa wena? Wa swi tiva leswaku ndzi vasi wa wena la?" Ndzi ta ku hlongola loko u ri na nomu."* (p. 22). ("Are you referring to me? Do you know that I am your boss? Do you know that I am your boss here? I will fire you if you dare talk back at me.")

Shabangu (2016) portrays verbal abuse when Vhelaphi confronts Godi by asking him:

> *Vhelaphi a languta Godi hi ku n'wi swondzolota, ivi hi rito ro dakwa a ri karhi a lwa ni ku suka a yima laha a, a, tshame kona a ku: "A, a, a, ka ha ri wena madala? Kasi u ta vhaya rini u ya eka n'wina? Ta ku lava tintwana ta wena daar ekaya! Ninginika u hi nyika space xa ku hefemula ndhoda!" (p. 92).*
>
> (Vhelaphi gave Godi a sidelong glance. In a drunken voice, he tried to stand up from where he was seated and said, "Is it still you, old man? When are

you going home? Your children need you there! Move aside and give us some space to breathe, old man!)

Emotional or psychological abuse is another type of social ill. Its depiction is portrayed when Mayimele's wife tried to rape Hlayisa's mind by telling him that he must sleep with her on the same bed while Hlayisa was still a virgin; his wish was to follow the biblical ways of getting married, and he was too young to have sex with such an old woman. Hlayisa ignored her proposal. Mayimele's wife said this to the young boy.

"Xana a wu wanuna leswi u ngo famba? Kumbexana u lo luma hi mpfundla? Nkata Mayimele a vutisa Hlayisa, "Loko mina na wena hi nga funengela nkumba wun'we ndzi nga engetela na muholo wa wena hi kanharhu". Ku ringanyeta nkata Mayimele. (p.44).

(Are you not a man since you are leaving? Or have you been bitten by the rabbit?" She then attempted to persuade him by saying, "If you and I were to share a blanket, I would increase your salary to three times what you currently earn," Mrs Mayimele suggested.)

Mrs Mayimele was trying to convince the boy so that he could fulfil her desire. She inflicted psychological abuse; the boy was put in a corner, and he was in a fight with his thoughts as to whether to accept her request or refuse to take her request. Mrs Mayimele knew that everyone likes to get an increment from their workplaces, and no one wishes to lose their job; that is why she threatened Hlayisa that, failing to honour her request, he would dismiss him from work.

Marito ya manana Mayimele ya xanisile xifanyetana lexi hikuva xi tikume xi ri exikarhi ka ndzelekano wa miehleketo, mufana a nga tivi ku u to amukela xikombelo xa manana Mayimele kumbe u to xi honisa. Miehleketo na mapfalo ya xifanyetana swi ve na nyimpi leyikulu, hikuva mbilu yi fike laha

yi swi tsakelaka kambe mapfalo ma xi alela. Loko xa ha kanakana xi ve xi tsundzuka khombo leri mana wa xona a nga xi lemukisa rona. Mufana a xi tsundzuka marito ya mana wa xona loko a ku " N'wananga, tiva leswaku vavasati va le ntsungeni wa ganga leriya va dumile hiku vitana vatirhi va le swirhapeni va nghena na vona ndlwini. (p.47).

(Mrs Mayimele's words left the boy feeling frustrated because he was experiencing conflicting ideas. He was torn between accepting Mrs Mayimele's proposition and rejecting it. While his heart was tempted by her offer, his conscience urged him to resist. As he struggled with this conflicting thought, he remembered his mother's warning: My son, know that the women from that side are well known for inviting their gardeners to have sexual relations with them.)

Mayimele's wife started inflicting hatred on Hlayisa because he refused to take her request. She started accusing him of being a thief while she knew that she was lying. Hlayisa had a stigma of being a thief while he did not steal anything. She further influenced her husband to dismiss Hlayisa from work.

"*Loko Hlayisa vhiki leri u nga n'wi hlongoli mina ndzi ta tlhelela eka vava na mhani. U fanele u swi tiva leswaku a va ndzi hlongolanga le kaya mina." Ku vula nkata Mayimele hi ku hokoloka*. (p.46).

(If you do not dismiss Hlayisa this week, I will go back to my parents' home. You should know that I was never chased away from home," she said loudly.)

Building upon the discussion of setting, Section 4.5 examines dialogue and language as important literary strategies through which social realities are communicated. While

supporting Research Question 1 on the depiction of social ills, this section further demonstrates how linguistic choices, power relations, social control, and resistance are represented through character interaction and discourse. The analysis shows how language functions as a vehicle through which dominant and marginalised voices negotiate power within the narratives.

4.6 Language and Dialogue as Instruments of Oppression

Language plays a crucial role in constructing social inequalities.

Derogatory terms such as *Khafula*, *Mfenhe*, and *Mahlalele* communicate racism, prejudice, and social exclusion. Khafula is *kaffir* in the South African context, it is an extremely offensive word or label for a black person regardless of gender. Mfenhe is a baboon and has an extremely offensive meaning when used to refer to a black person in an African context. Mahlalele refers to an unemployed man who does not bother himself by looking for a job, who lazes about when other men are working or looking for jobs. These labels reduce individuals to inferior social categories and reinforce unequal power relations. An example of this can be noted below.

Shabangu (2016), in his novel *Ximitantsengele*, portrays GBV when Godfrey (also known as Godi among his acquaintance) Kubayi and Mafloza were expelled from work at Gazankulu Development Corporation (GDC). Mafloza did not love Godfrey; she pretended because she wanted money from him. After they were both expelled from work, Mafloza's friend Japisa assisted her to get tenders. She started to fall in love with the councillors of different municipalities to get more tenders. One day, when Godfrey asked for food from his wife, Mafloza, she would call him bad names like "*mahlalele*", which means a lazy man who doesn't want to work for his family; he just wakes up every day and drinks alcohol without providing anything for his family. Mafloza said to Godi, *"U vulavula yini na mina mahlalele ndziwena?* "*A vula hi ku n'wi*

hwahla xikandza hi xihahati hi voko ra ximatsi leri a ri nembelela hi swingwavila etintihweni." (p.101). ("What are you talking to me about, you unemployed person?" She said this by striking his face with the palm of her left hand, adorned with jewellery on her fingers.)

When Godfrey asked for food from his wife Mafloza, she insulted Godfrey, saying this,

> *"U ngo miyela onge u mbheveve, a wu ndzi twi ku ri ndzi ri yini?" A mpfandza, ivi Godi a nga si ehleketa nchumu, o twa dlonyo, tihlo leri! "Yowee, kasi ndzi fela yini mi ndzi dlayaka matihlo?" Ku kalakala Godi a ri karhi a ringeta ku bakanya xandla xa Mafloza, ivi mbuyangwana a ya ku khuvaxaxaa, lahaya ko taniya". (p. 26).*
>
> ("Why are you quiet? Are you mute? Can't you hear what I'm saying?" As she continued insulting him, she suddenly poked him in the eye. Godfrey screamed, "What am I dying for? You are killing my eyes". He cried out in pain and made muffled sounds while trying to push away Mfloza's hand, then the poor soul fell to the ground.)

Dialogue therefore functions not merely as communication but as a mechanism of domination. *Hlayisa* centres on Hlanganaswo, whose affair with Rirhandzu destroys his marriage and family. His abandonment of parental and spousal responsibilities causes severe financial hardship, forcing his son Hlayisa to leave school and support the family. This is evident in the conversation below:

> "Wa delela nsatindziwena!" Ku vula Hlanganaswo hi ku teka nsimbi leyi a yi ri kwalaho a ba nhloko ya Tsatsawani N'waKhazamula a ya wela ehansi a va a khomiwa hi xithongwana (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015, p. 30).
>
> Translated literally, the statement means:

(“You are a disrespectful woman!” said Hlanganaswo as he picked up an iron object and struck Tsatsawani N’waKhazamula on the head, causing her to collapse and lose consciousness.)

This incident illustrates more than a physical assault. Through Hlanganaswo's actions, the authors construct a patriarchal power relationship in which violence becomes a means of enforcing male authority. From a Conflict Theory perspective, the assault represents the use of coercive power by a dominant individual seeking to maintain control when his authority is challenged (Tyson, 2015). The episode therefore depicts gender-based violence not as an isolated act of anger but as a manifestation of unequal gender relations within the domestic sphere.

In another incident the situation escalates into domestic violence when Hlanganaswo assaults his wife, Tsatsawani, leading to her death. Following his rejection by Rirhandzu and her husband, Hlanganaswo is left destitute and ultimately commits suicide. The novel highlights domestic violence, family abandonment, poverty, gender-based violence, and the consequences of moral irresponsibility (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015).

This finding aligns with Conflict Theory's argument that power is exercised not only through physical means but also through symbolic and ideological control.

Section 4.6, which focuses on conflict, symbolism, and irony. This section primarily advances Research Question 1 by demonstrating how these literary techniques contribute to the depiction of social ills. Through the analysis of conflict, the study examines struggles between individuals, families, communities, and institutions as reflections of broader societal inequalities. Symbolism and irony are further explored to reveal deeper social meanings and critiques of exploitation, oppression, and

injustice. From a Conflict Theory perspective, these techniques expose tensions arising from unequal power relations and competing social interests.

4.7 Conflict as a Narrative Strategy

Conflict structures every novel examined in this study.

4.7.1 Gender Conflict

- Hlanganaswo versus Tsatsawani
- Godfrey versus Lindiwe

4.7.2 Workplace Conflict

- Hlongwane versus Chavalala
- Dave versus Billy

4.7.3 Social Conflict

- Rich versus poor
- Powerful versus vulnerable

Conflict exposes underlying inequalities and drives narrative development. Through these conflicts, the authors reveal tensions embedded within social structures.

Section 4.7 synthesises the social ills identified across the selected novels and addresses Research Question 4: What are the most common social ills represented in the selected novels?

In the following events in the different novels one can note how people are systematically subjected to horrible situations by people close to them due to different circumstances.

Baloyi and Mongwe (2015), persecution is portrayed when Hlanganaswo rejected his wife and children; he went to stay with his side chick while her husband was in prison. Rirhandzu started to ignore Hlanganaswo because her husband was back. She forgot that she was the one who influenced Hlanganaswo to reject his family. One day, when

Hlanganaswo was back from the unveiling of his wife's tombstone Rirhandzu refused to open the door for him; she said, "Xana *hi wena mani vusiku lebyi? Loko u ri munhu nghena, kambe u tiva leswaku "you're coming at your own risk." (125).*

Rewind and Rirhandzu both evicted Hlanganaswo from the house that he built while Rewind was in prison. They both threw Hlanganaswo's clothes out, telling him to go back to his home and leave them in peace. Hlanganaswo refused to take the clothes, and Rewind forcefully made him go:

> *"Hiloko Hlanganaswo a sihalala ku teka switlakati swa yena a famba", "Rewind hi ku nyenyetseka hiloko a n'wi khoma hi buru*ku *a n'wi tlakusela ehenhla a karhi a n'wi byela leswaku u ta kala a n'wi yayarhela."* (p.128)
>
> ("Hlanganaswo resisted taking his torn clothes and leaving", Disgusted, Rewind grabbed Hlanganaswo by his trousers and lifted him off the ground, while threatening to shoot him.")

Hlanganaswo was frustrated when realised that he was no longer wanted in Rirhandzu's house hence, he refused to go. He had no place to stay since his wife, Tsatsawani N'wa-Khazamula, was dead and buried. Hlanganaswo decided to go and stay at the graveyard. He felt embarrassed to go back home because he had rejected his family, hoping his love with Rirhandzu would last forever.

Shabangu (2016) portrays persecution when Godi rejected his family after he started a new relationship with Mafloza. He inflicted pain on the family; his children could not get fatherly love like before. He started to come home late around midnight, and sometimes he would sleep at Mafloza's house. He stopped supporting his children. He told his wife, Lindiwe, that these children are not his children. Lindiwe must take care of these children because he educated her. Godi told his wife that he does not love her anymore. When Sorota and Wisani went to see their father at GDC, Mafloza

would deny them, and they would go back heartbroken. Lindiwe was frustrated because she was expected to pay University fees for Ganyani and Sorota alone.

The discussion compares the occurrence and significance of themes such as poverty, gender-based violence, abuse, racism, persecution, and unemployment to determine which social ills are most prevalent within the selected texts. This section therefore responds directly to the fourth research objective concerning the identification of the most common social ills represented in the novels.

4.8 Conflict Theory Synthesis of Findings

The findings are further supported by textual evidence drawn from the four selected novels. In *Mulunguntima* (Khosa, 1994), the experiences of marginalised characters illustrate how social exclusion and unequal power relations shape individual life outcomes. The treatment of vulnerable characters by socially privileged individuals demonstrates the conflict between dominant and subordinate groups, thereby reinforcing the Conflict Theory argument that social inequality is embedded within social structures.

Similarly, *I Vutomi* (Lubisi, 1998) portrays the challenges faced by characters navigating poverty and social hardship. The novel demonstrates how economic deprivation influences interpersonal relationships and access to opportunities. Through the struggles experienced by affected characters, the text exposes the unequal distribution of resources that lies at the heart of Conflict Theory.

In *Hlayisa* (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015), social inequalities are revealed through the interactions between powerful and vulnerable individuals. The narrative portrays various forms of abuse and exploitation, highlighting how authority and privilege may

be used to marginalise others. These representations illustrate the operation of domination and resistance within society, central concepts within Conflict Theory.

Likewise, *Ximintantsengele* (Shabangu, 2016) depicts social tensions arising from discrimination, exclusion, and unequal social relations. Through conflict among characters and the consequences of their actions, the novel demonstrates how societal structures contribute to the perpetuation of social problems. The text therefore functions as a critique of social arrangements that sustain inequality and injustice.

Collectively, the textual evidence supports the argument that the selected novels portray social ills as outcomes of unequal social, economic, and ideological relations rather than merely individual failures. Through a Conflict Theory lens, these narratives expose systems of domination and foreground the struggles of marginalised individuals and communities.

Finally, Section 4.8 integrates the findings through the lens of Conflict Theory. Drawing together the analyses presented in the preceding sections, this synthesis demonstrates how the depiction of social ills, the construction of characters, the use of setting, and the recurrence of specific social problems are interconnected manifestations of unequal power relations, marginalisation, domination, and struggles over resources. Consequently, the section addresses all four research questions collectively and demonstrates how the selected Xitsonga novels function not only as reflections of social reality but also as critiques of the structural inequalities that perpetuate social injustice.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented and analysed the findings on the depiction of social ills in *Mulunguntima* (Khosa, 1994), *I Vutomi* (Lubisi, 1998), *Hlayisa* (Baloyi & Mongwe, 2015), and *Ximintantsengele* (Shabangu, 2016). Guided by the research objectives,

research questions, and Conflict Theory, the chapter examined how the selected authors represent social ills through literary techniques such as characterisation, setting, dialogue, naming, conflict, symbolism, irony, and narrative perspective.

The analysis demonstrated that the authors employ diverse character types, including victims, oppressors, and resistant figures, to portray social inequalities and their effects on individuals and communities. The study also established that settings such as homes, schools, workplaces, and community spaces function as important sites through which social problems are experienced and reproduced. In addition, the analysis revealed that dialogue, conflict, symbolism, irony, and other literary devices play a crucial role in communicating social criticism and exposing unequal power relations.

The findings further showed that poverty, abuse, unemployment, racism, persecution, and gender-based violence constitute the most prominent social ills represented across the selected novels. These social problems are depicted not as isolated experiences but as interconnected manifestations of broader structural inequalities. Through the lens of Conflict Theory, the chapter demonstrated that the selected novels critique systems of domination, marginalisation, and exploitation, while simultaneously foregrounding the experiences of those who are disadvantaged by unequal social arrangements.

Overall, the chapter has answered the research questions and achieved the objectives of the study by demonstrating how the selected Xitsonga novels depict social ills, the character types and settings used in these representations, and the most common social problems addressed in the texts. The findings confirm the significance of literature as a vehicle for social commentary and critique, as well as a means of promoting awareness of social injustice and inequality.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the findings discussed in Chapter 4. The conclusions are organised according to the research objectives and research questions. The chapter also outlines recommendations for future literary research and concludes with final remarks on the study's contribution.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 Depiction of Social Ills in the Selected Novels

The study established that the selected Xitsonga novels depict social ills as significant social realities affecting individuals, families, and communities. Through various literary techniques, the authors portray social problems not merely as personal experiences but as issues rooted in broader social conditions. The novels reveal how social inequalities contribute to the emergence and persistence of poverty, abuse, unemployment, racism, persecution, and gender-based violence.

5.2.2 Character Types Used to Represent Social Ills

The study found that the authors employ diverse character types to represent social ills. Victim characters are used to illustrate the consequences of social injustice and inequality, while oppressor characters embody the forces of domination, exploitation, and abuse. Resistant characters challenge these conditions and demonstrate agency in confronting social problems. The interaction among these character types contributes significantly to the representation of social conflict within the selected novels.

5.2.3 Settings Used in the Representation of Social Ills

The findings revealed that the authors utilise a variety of settings, including homes, schools, workplaces, villages, and community spaces, to depict social ills. These settings serve as more than physical locations; they function as social environments in which power relations, inequality, and conflict are experienced and negotiated. The selected settings therefore play an important role in shaping the representation of social realities within the narratives.

5.2.4 Common Social Ills Depicted in the Selected Novels

The study established that poverty, abuse, unemployment, racism, persecution, and gender-based violence are the most prominent social ills depicted across the four selected novels. Although the manifestations of these problems vary from one text to another, they consistently emerge as recurring concerns that affect social cohesion and individual well-being.

5.2.5 Conflict Theory and the Representation of Social Ills

Using Conflict Theory as an analytical lens, the study found that the representation of social ills in the selected novels reflects broader struggles over power, status, and access to resources. The novels expose relationships of domination and marginalisation while simultaneously highlighting acts of resistance by disadvantaged individuals. Consequently, the study concludes that the selected texts function not only as literary narratives but also as critiques of social inequality and injustice.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Recommendations for Literary Scholarship

Future studies should examine the depiction of social ills in a larger corpus of Xitsonga literary texts to determine whether similar patterns emerge across different genres and historical periods. Comparative studies involving Xitsonga and other South African

languages may also provide valuable insights into shared and unique representations of social problems.

5.3.2 Recommendations for Theoretical Research

Researchers should consider applying alternative theoretical perspectives, such as Feminist Theory, Postcolonial Theory, Ecocriticism, or Critical Discourse Analysis, to explore dimensions of social ills that may not be fully captured through Conflict Theory alone. Such approaches could generate complementary interpretations of power, identity, and social justice within Xitsonga literature.

5.3.3 Recommendations for Language and Literature Education

The novels selected for this study should be utilised in literature classrooms to facilitate critical discussions of social challenges affecting contemporary society. Their inclusion in teaching and learning contexts can encourage learners to engage with issues such as poverty, unemployment, abuse, racism, and gender-based violence from both literary and social perspectives.

5.3.4 Recommendations for Writers and Publishers

Xitsonga writers should continue producing literary works that engage with contemporary social issues. Literature has the potential to create social awareness, stimulate dialogue, and encourage critical reflection on societal challenges. Publishers should support the production and dissemination of such texts to increase their accessibility to wider audiences.

5.3.5 Recommendations for Policymakers

The recommendations presented below are directly derived from the findings discussed in Chapter 4 and are aligned with relevant South African policy frameworks.

5.3.5.1 Strengthening Poverty Alleviation and Employment Programmes

The analysis in Sections 4.4 (Setting and the Representation of Social Ills) and 4.7 (Common Social Ills in the Selected Novels) revealed that poverty and unemployment are among the most pervasive social ills depicted in the selected novels. Characters in *I Vutomi*, *Mulunguntima*, *Hlayisa*, and *Ximintantsengele* frequently experience economic hardship, social exclusion, dependence, and limited access to opportunities. These findings suggest that economic vulnerability serves as a catalyst for several other social problems examined in the study.

In response to these findings, policymakers should strengthen employment creation, youth skills development, entrepreneurship funding, and community economic-development initiatives. This recommendation aligns with the *National Development Plan (NDP) 2030*, which identifies the reduction of poverty, unemployment, and inequality as core national priorities. The NDP aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality through inclusive *economic* growth and employment creation.

5.3.5.1.1 Proposed measurable outcomes:

- Increased youth participation in vocational and skills-development programmes.
- Growth in local entrepreneurship and small-business support initiatives.
- Reduced unemployment rates among vulnerable communities.
- Increased household participation in income-generating programmes.

5.3.5.2 Intensifying Interventions Against Gender-Based Violence and Abuse

Sections 4.3 (Characterisation), 4.5 (Dialogue and Language), and 4.7 (Common Social Ills) demonstrated that abuse and gender-based violence are repeatedly portrayed through the experiences of victimised characters subjected to domination and exploitation. The study found that abusive relationships are frequently

characterised by unequal power relations, reflecting the Conflict Theory proposition that social inequalities facilitate domination by powerful groups over vulnerable individuals.

Policymakers should therefore strengthen prevention, protection, and support mechanisms for victims of abuse and gender-based violence. This recommendation aligns with South Africa's *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF) 2020-2030,* which focuses on prevention, justice, survivor support, accountability, economic empowerment, and research.

5.3.5.2.1 Proposed measurable outcomes:

- Increased access to shelters, counselling services, and victim-support centres.
- Improved reporting and response rates for gender-based violence cases.
- Increased participation in GBV prevention and awareness programmes.
- Expanded community-based interventions targeting abusive behaviours and harmful gender norms.

5.3.5.3 Promoting Social Cohesion and Anti-Discrimination Initiatives

The **findings** presented in Sections 4.3, 4.6, and 4.7 indicate that racism, persecution, and social exclusion are portrayed as significant social problems affecting interpersonal relationships and community cohesion. Through characterisation and conflict, the selected novels expose discrimination, prejudice, and unequal treatment as contributors to social division and marginalisation.

Policymakers should strengthen programmes that promote social cohesion, anti-discrimination education, and respect for diversity. This recommendation aligns with South Africa's *National Action Plan (NAP) to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance*, which seeks to combat racism and discrimination while promoting equality, dignity, and human rights.

5.3.5.3.1 Proposed measurable outcomes:

- Increased implementation of anti-discrimination educational programmes.
- Improved community participation in social-cohesion initiatives.
- Increased public awareness of equality and constitutional rights.
- Reduced incidents of reported discrimination and social exclusion.

5.3.5.4 Strengthening Family and Community Support Systems

The analysis of the setting in Section 4.4 established that homes, communities, schools, and workplaces function as critical sites where social ills emerge and are sustained. The study revealed that families and communities often serve as spaces where poverty, abuse, conflict, and neglect are experienced most directly.

Consequently, policymakers should strengthen community-based social support systems by increasing investment in social workers, family support services, school-based interventions, and community development programmes. This recommendation aligns with the *White Paper for Social Welfare* (1997), which advocates developmental social welfare approaches aimed at addressing poverty, vulnerability, social marginalisation, and community well-being through integrated social support systems.

5.3.5.4.1 Proposed measurable outcomes:

- Increased availability of community social workers and counselling services.
- Improved uptake of family-support programmes.
- Reduction in school dropout rates associated with social vulnerability.
- Increased access to community-based welfare and psychosocial services.

5.3.5.5 Promoting Human Rights and Social Justice Education

The findings concerning victim, oppressor, and resistant characters in Section 4.3 indicate that many social problems arise from unequal power relations, violations of dignity, and the abuse of authority. Through Conflict Theory, these patterns reflect structures of domination that normalise inequality and suppress the voices of marginalised individuals.

Policymakers should strengthen human-rights education across schools, universities, and community programmes to foster awareness of equality, dignity, non-discrimination, and social justice. Such interventions support the constitutional values underpinning South Africa's democratic framework and complement the objectives of both the *NSP-GBVF* and the *National Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination*.

5.3.5.5.1 Proposed measurable outcomes:

- Increased inclusion of human-rights content in educational programmes.
- Improved learner awareness of constitutional rights and responsibilities.
- Increased participation in community rights-awareness initiatives.
- Greater reporting of rights violations through formal support mechanisms.

5.3.5.6 Supporting Indigenous-Language Literature as a Tool for Social Awareness

Sections 4.5, 4.6, and 4.8 demonstrated that the selected novels function as powerful forms of social critique. Through dialogue, symbolism, conflict, irony, and narrative perspective, the authors expose social injustices and encourage critical reflection on societal challenges.

Policymakers within the education, arts, culture, and language sectors should therefore support the production, dissemination, and teaching of Xitsonga literary texts

that engage with contemporary social issues. Literature can serve as an accessible medium for social education and awareness creation.

5.3.5.6.1 Proposed measurable outcomes

- Increased inclusion of Xitsonga literary texts in school and university curricula.
- Expanded library and community-reading programmes.
- Increased publication and preservation of indigenous-language literature.
- Greater public engagement with social issues through literature-based programmes.

5.3.5.7 Addressing Structural Inequalities Through Integrated Policy Responses

The Conflict Theory synthesis presented in Section 4.8 found that poverty, unemployment, abuse, racism, persecution, and gender-based violence are interconnected manifestations of structural inequality. The findings showed that these social ills seldom occur in isolation; instead, they reinforce one another through unequal access to resources, opportunities, and social power.

In line with Conflict Theory and the objectives of the *National Development Plan 2030,* policymakers should adopt integrated, multi-sectoral approaches that involve the education, labour, social development, health, justice, and community safety sectors. The NDP explicitly identifies poverty, unemployment, and inequality as interconnected national challenges requiring coordinated responses.

5.3.5.7.1 Proposed measurable outcomes:

- Improved interdepartmental coordination on social-development programmes.
- Increased access to integrated social-support services.
- Reduced levels of poverty and unemployment in targeted communities.

- Improved indicators of social inclusion, safety, and community well-being.

5.4 Conflict Theory Link

The findings discussed in Sections 4.3 to 4.8 consistently demonstrated that social ills in the selected Xitsonga novels are rooted in unequal power relations, social exclusion, domination, and restricted access to resources. Through the lens of Conflict Theory, the novels portray poverty, unemployment, abuse, racism, persecution, and gender-based violence as outcomes of broader structural inequalities rather than isolated personal problems (Marx & Engels, 1848/2002; Tyson, 2015). The recommendations above, therefore, seek not only to address the symptoms of these social problems but also to contribute to transforming the structural conditions that sustain inequality and social injustice. This alignment between the findings, theory, and policy recommendations strengthens the study's contribution to literary scholarship and social development discourse.

These documents have an important role to play in the well-being of the societies and all stakeholders:

- *National Development Plan (NDP) 2030:* explicitly aims to eliminate poverty and reduce inequality and identifies poverty, unemployment, and inequality as core national challenges.gov+1
- *National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF) 2020-2030:* provides South Africa's framework for prevention, justice, response, support, accountability, economic empowerment, and research relating to GBVF.
- *White Paper for Social Welfare (1997)*: promotes developmental social welfare and interventions aimed at poverty, vulnerability, marginalisation, and community development.gov

- *National Action Plan (NAP) to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2019)*: seeks to combat discrimination and promote equality, dignity, social cohesion, and human rights.

5.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the study's conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions demonstrated that the selected Xitsonga novels portray social ills through diverse literary techniques, character types, and settings. Guided by Conflict Theory, the study established that poverty, abuse, unemployment, racism, persecution, and gender-based violence are represented as consequences of unequal power relations and broader social inequalities. The chapter further recommended avenues for future research, literary scholarship, teaching, and literary production. Overall, the study contributes to understanding how Xitsonga literature serves as a medium for social commentary, critique, and awareness of social injustice.

REFERENCE LIST

Abrams, M. H., & Harpham, G. G. (2015). *A glossary of literary terms* (11th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Achebe, C. (1958). *Things fall apart*. Heinemann.

Armah, A. K. (1968). The beautyful ones are not yet born. London: Heinemann

Bâ, M. (1979). *So long a letter*. Dakar : Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines.

Bal, M. (2009). *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative* (3rd ed.). University of Toronto Press.

Baloyi, K. G. & Mongwe, M. J. (2015). *Hlayisa*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter.

Baloyi, M. E. (2015). *Xitsonga literature and social transformation*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.

Bossard, J. H. S. (1938). *Social Change and Social Problems.* Revised edition. New York: Harper and Brothers.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(com)ing a Knowing Researcher. International Journal of Transgender Health, 24, 1-6.

Clark, R., Anderson, N. B., Clark, V. R. & Williams, D. R. (1999). Racism as a stressor for African Americans: A Biopsychological Model. *American Psychologist,* 54:805-816.

Coetzee, J.M. (1999). *Disgrace*. London: Secker & Warburg.

Collins, R. (1975). *Conflict sociology: Toward an explanatory science*. Academic Press.

Coser, L. A. (1956). *The functions of social conflict*. Free Press.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.

Department of Political Science, University of Illinois at Chicago. A Great Cities Institute Working Paper. Available at: https://greatcities.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/GCP-96-6-Voter-Project.pdf. (Date accessed 03 February 2022).

Department of Social Development. (1997). *White paper for social welfare: Principles, guidelines, recommendations, proposed policies and programmes for developmental social welfare in South Africa*. Government Printer.

Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. (2020). *National strategic plan on gender-based violence and femicide 2020-2030*. Government of South Africa.

Eagleton, T. (1976). *Marxism and Literary Criticism.* London: Methuen & Co.

Eagleton, T. (2008). *Literary theory: An introduction*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.

Hathaway, J. C. (2001). Temporary Protection of Refugees: Threat or Solution? In *Perspective on Refugee Protection in South Africa*, edited by Handmaker J. et al., 41-9. Pretoria, South Africa: Lawyers for Human Rights. Available at: https://repository.law.umich.edu/book_chapters/89/. (Date accessed 12 February 2022).

Khosa, T. H. (1994). *Mulunguntima.* Cape Town: Van Schaik.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.

Lubisi, C.M. (1998). *I Vutomi*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman

Lukács, G. (1962). *The historical novel*. London: Penguin Books.

Machaba, R. L. (2011). *The portrayal of women in Xitsonga literature with special reference to South African novels, poems and proverbs* (Master's dissertation, University of South Africa).

Malungana, C. M. (1999). *Themes and characterisation in Xitsonga novels*. SOVENGA: University of Limpopo.

Marx, K. (1976). *Capital: A critique of political economy* (Vol. 1, B. Fowkes, Trans.). London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1867)

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (2002). *The communist manifesto*. London: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1848)

Mathye, L. K., Mandende, I. P., & Mabaso-Nkuna, R. F. (2022). The naming technique(s) in the depiction of characters and development of themes in two selected Xitsonga novels. *Journal of African Languages and Literary Studies, 3*(3), 69–89. https://doi.org/10.31920/2633-2116/2022/v3n3a4

Mills, C. W. (1956). *The Power Elite.* London: Oxford University Press.

Morgan, K. (2019). *Understanding social problems*. London: Oxford University Press.

Murfin, R., & Ray, S. M. (2018). *The Bedford glossary of critical and literary terms* (4th ed.). Bedford: St. Martin's.

National Planning Commission. (2012). *National Development Plan 2030: Our future, make it work*. The Presidency, Republic of South Africa.

Ndebele, N.S. (1991). *Rediscovery of the ordinary: Essays on South African literature and culture*. Johannesburg: COSAW.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16*(1), 1-13. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Ntuli, D. B. Z. (1972). *The role of characterisation in African literature*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). London: SAGE.

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2021). *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological* (2nd ed.). London: SAGE.

Reali, F., Cevasco, J., & Marmolejo-Ramos, F. (2024). Some contributions from embodied cognition to psychonarratology. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10936-024-10110-8

Republic of South Africa. (2019). *National action plan to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance*. Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.

Ritzer, G., & Stepnisky, J. (2022). *Sociological theory* (11th ed.). London: Sage.

Rundquist, B., Fox, S., & Strom, G. (1994). *An Experiment in Using Issue Information to Increase Citizen Participation in the 1994 Illinois Gubernatorial Election.*

Saldaña, J. (2021). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (4th ed.). London: SAGE.

Salter, P. S., Adams, G., & Perez, M. J. (2018). *Racism in the Structure of Everyday Worlds: A Cultural-Psychological Perspective. Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 27: 150–155.

Sasson, T. (1995). Crime Talk: *How citizens construct a social problem*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Scot J & Marshall. (2009). *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Shabangu, I. S. (2016). *Ximitantsengele.* Pretoria: Lingua Franca Publishers.

Theodorson, G.A. & Theodorson, A.G. (1969). *A modern dictionary of sociology*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company.

Thiong'o, N. (1986). *Decolonising the mind: The politics of language in African literature*. Heinemann.

Tieszen, C. L. & Theological Research Exchange Network. (2005). *A theological framework for understanding persecution* (dissertation). Available at: https://www.worldcat.org/title/193872233. (Date accessed 12 February 2022).

Tyson, L. (2015). *Critical theory today: A user-friendly guide* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (DEVAW), *General Assembly Resolution 48/104*, 20 December 1993, Articles 2 & 4. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.21_declaration%20elimination%20vaw.pdf. (Date accessed 12 February 2022).

Weber, M. (1946). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology* (H. H. Gerth & C. W. Mills, Eds.). Oxford University Press.

Weightman, K. & Weightman, A. (1995). *"Never right, never wrong"*: Child welfare and social work in England and Sweden. *Scandinavian Journal of Social Welfare,* 4, 75-84. Available at: www.sws.soton.ac.uk/cwab/Guide/Weightmn.doc. (Date accessed 12 February 2022).

World Bank, 2022 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank 1818 H Street NW, Washington, DC 20433 Internet: www.worldbank.org

World Health Organization (2002). The World Health Report: 2002: Reducing The Risks, Promoting Healthy Life. World Health Organization. World Health Organization. https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/42510