CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

4.1 Reception Theory

4.1.1 Introduction

According to Robert C. Holub in his book, *Reception Theory: A critical Introduction* (1984), reception theory refers throughout to a general shift in concern from the author and the work to the text and the reader. Similarly, reader-response criticism also refers to a general shift in attention from the author of the work to the text-reader pole. Therefore, in the case of my research, reception theory is applied to the women in three groups as they interpret the film they have watched and this is a shift of focus from the intention of the author in *Fools* to the interpretation readers bring to the film.

However there are important features that separate the reader-response criticism from reception theory. To start with, according to Holub (1984), reader-response criticism theorists have had very little contact with or influence on one another. Holub further indicates that these theorists are not participating in any critical movement and are responding with their methods to quite different predecessors and circumstances. These critics are spread across the world teaching at various institutions and do not meet on a regular basis nor do they publish in the same journals or attend the same conferences.

In contrast, reception theory must be understood as a more cohesive, conscious, and collective undertaking. It is a reaction to social, intellectual, and literary developments in West Germany during the late 1960s. Reception
theory emerged as a group effort on both the institutional and critical levels involving a productive exchange of ideas among its advocates. The proceedings of the meetings concerning reception theory are published under the series title *Poetik Und Hermeneutik* (Poetics and Hermeneutics) (1967), documenting the development and cohesiveness of this enterprise.

Furthermore, reception theory may be separated from reader-response criticism on the basis of lack of mutual influence. Robert C Holub writes, “Aside from Iser, whose writings have received extensive coverage in both camps, there has been practically no contact between the two groups” (1984: xiii). Holub continues to clarify that differences between reader-response criticism and reception theory are ultimately superficial and too abstract for a merging.

### 4.1.2 The Dramatic Rise of Reception Theory

It would be interesting to find out how reception theory, which according to Holub (1984) was virtually unknown in 1965, could have become so popular over the next decade. Holub claims that reception theory has proved to be one of the most marketable items that the scholarly community ever produced (1984: 6). He further indicates that no one today can seriously question the enormous impact it has had on the interpretation of literature and art, “From Marxists to traditional critics, from classical scholars and medievalists to modern specialists, virtually every methodological perspective and area of literary endeavour has responded to the challenge raised by reception theory” (Holub, 1984:7).

### 4.1.3 Perception and the “Device”

The shift in attention from the pole of author-work to the relationship between text and reader is perhaps exhibited most clearly in the early writings of Victor
Shklovskii. According to Shklovskii, “Imagery is not the constitutive element of literature for it is itself only a means of creating the strongest impression,” (Quoted in Holub, 1984:16). Practical language here refers to traditional methods such as imagery, theme, language, simile, metaphor and many other literary substances expected from a text to qualify as an aesthetic object. Furthermore, Shklovskii discovers the guiding principles for analyzing and evaluating works of art. For him the ordinary perception, which is associated with practical language, tends to become habitual or automatic. The “algebrization” or “making automatic” of perception leads inevitably to a failure to “see” the object; instead, one merely recognizes it, i.e. perceives it in a habitual fashion. (Holub, 1984:7)

Shklovskii believes that the function of art, on the other hand, is to dehabitualize perceptions, to make the object alive again. He further indicates that the role of the recipient is thus of primary importance. In a certain sense it is the perceiver who determines the artistic quality of the work. Perception and not creation, reception, not production, become the constituent elements of art.

Shklovskii further explains that the “device” is the means by which one becomes aware of objects, the technique, which makes the thing perceivable and artistic (ibid). Therefore the device became the central tool for literary analysis. In this context, device is the element that bridges the gap between text and reader, making the work itself a worthwhile genuine aesthetic object.

In relation to my research, I dehabitualize perceptions to make the object “Fools”, alive again. This happens as I employ reading and interpretation of Fools by black South African women. These women deploy the habit of looking at the text and offer alternatives to “traditional” ways of looking. They bring in their world experiences to interpret Fools. This makes the role of the
recipient of primary importance, as it is the perceiver who determines the artistic quality of the work.

The device applied in this research in order to bridge the gap between interviewees and *Fools* was an empirical study. Prior to watching the film, questions were formulated to guide the reader.

4.1.4 Defamiliarisation

According to Holub (1984), Shklovskii’s concept of defamiliarisation is most often associated with the device. This concept refers to a particular relationship between reader and text that removes the object from its normal perceptive field. Defamiliarisation, though intended by the author for manipulative or perceptive purposes, is a process that establishes a relationship between reader and text, and literature as art is defined by this very activity. What happens in the process of this “reading” of *Fools* is similar to the already mentioned theory of dehabitualisation.

4.1.5 Production of Meaning

What has interested Wolfgang Iser from the outset is the question of how and under what conditions a text has meaning for a reader. This contrasts the traditional interpretation that according to Holub has sought to elucidate a hidden meaning in the text. Iser wants to see meaning as the result of an interaction between text and the reader, as “an effect to be experienced”, not an “object to be defined” (Quoted in Holub, 1984). If the object is constituted only through an act of cognition on the part of the reader, then the focus is switched from the text as object to the act of reading as process. Hence the process of interpreting for the subjects and interviewees of the *Fools* empirical research is the means by which the meaning of the film comes to be generated.
The literary work is neither completely text nor completely the subjectivity of the reader, but a combination or merger of the two. Therefore the domains of exploration that Iser maps out firstly involve the text in its potential to allow and manipulate the production of meaning. Iser regards the text as a skeleton of “schematised aspects” that must be actualised or concretised by the reader. Then he investigates the processing of the text in reading. Finally, he examines the conditions that give rise to and govern text-reader interaction. Thus Iser hopes to clarify not only how meaning is produced, but also what effects literature has on its reader.

4.1.6 The Implied Reader

In Holub (1984), the implied reader is defined as both a textual condition and a process of meaning production: “the term incorporates both the prestructuring of the potential meaning by the text, and the reader’s actualisation of this potential through the reading process.” (Holub, 1984:84). The roots of the implied reader are firmly planted in the structure of the text and in the case of my research; women and representation of women constitute the implied reader.

Looking at the film *Fools*, which in this case can be regarded as the text in discussion, it features many women in three generations. This compelled me to adopt women as the readers and interpreters of the text in order to actualise the potential meaning of the text. Though the film’s main theme is built around what one man has done, his deed affects all women in the story. I therefore used women as implied readers for the research topic as indicated, “Representation of Women in *Fools*.” Meanings surfaced according to the implied experiences of the readers and their familiarities with women represented in the filmic narration.
4.1.7 Interpretation and the Search for Meaning

Reception theory takes a position that is apparently opposed to traditional practices. As indicated earlier, Iser strongly argues against the form of interpretation, which is concerned first and foremost with the meaning of a literary work. His alternative, illustrated in Holub (1984), involves paying more attention to the process than the result. Meaning for Iser is not to be dug out of the text or pieced together from textual clues but rather is reached by an interactive process between reader and text.

Reception theory does break with older notions of interpretation. As it has been noted before, the most general tendency of reception theory has entailed the shift of attention from the text to the reader. The recipient has therefore supplanted the determinate text to which traditional criticism had adhered.

This is what basically happens in the case of my research. Instead of just taking the meaning as put forth in the text, I allow the recipient to look at it with a critical eye and draw new meanings from it.

To conclude one can simply indicate that reception theory has undoubtedly had a tremendous impact on the way in which literary studies are now conducted. It is very important for the writer to know what kind of audience he or she is targeting because every text assumes to convey meaning to the reader. So, if the text is not designed to accommodate how the reader might respond towards it, the reader can interpret the text’s meaning in a destructive way. Therefore, reception theory can be said to have changed the understanding of production of meaning in a text.

For example, my spectators’ response to *Fools* indicates that the text omitted to cater to the historical shift that was taking place in South Africa. Instead of...
these women feeling as though images of themselves are being reflected in the film, they are angered by the images. The women’s interpretations show that there is tremendous change required in the way black women are represented in South African films.

Much of reception theorists’ work can be understood to demonstrate how the reader is the ultimate source of meaning. Therefore, the rehabilitation of the reader must be taken seriously. According to Holub (1984), empirically based studies have insisted on looking at actual people reading texts. This is probably because; empirical studies are actually guided by or based on practical experience of the world people see and feel, not by ideas out of books. Therefore, the women’s experiences constitute their interpretation of how the text represents them.

4.2 The Spectators for Fools

As clearly outlined in my methodology, I selected three groups of black South African women who live in Johannesburg as my sample group. The groups comprise of women from different tribal groups based on their regional origins. The women are categorised into different classes and ages. Some are from less privileged classes while others are professionals with regular income jobs. The other group are students aspiring to upward mobility. Their age difference is meant to represent different generations also to match ages of the women’s characters in the film.

The first group consists of four young women ages ranging from 20 to 28. All are students at Wits University ranging from undergraduate level to PhD. These women reflect the youngest generation of women characters in Fools. Only one of these young women had seen the film before although she could not recollect the story in detail. These spectators come from different provinces in South Africa and different tribes so their major languages differ even though they are all
African. Communication mostly occurred in English, often the women’s second language, which became the language they felt most comfortable in given the diversity of cultures and languages. Although most of these women come from working classes, they are an educated group and aspire to middle class values and status.

The second group comprises of five women who work as cleaners at student residence, West Campus Village, at Wits University. Their ages range between 25 and 46. This means they cut across the younger generation and the middle generation in *Fools*. Some of the women are empowering themselves by acquiring education while others are satisfied to earn a living for their families and themselves. As far as class is concerned, all of them are of a working class. Like the first group, they originate from different cultural backgrounds and provinces in South Africa.

During the discussion, they easily responded to one another using the language they are most comfortable with, which is a common practice in Johannesburg. The language use switched from time to time. Some women stuck to their ethnic vernacular while others could easily switch between languages but basically, the whole discussion was in African ethnic vernaculars and never in English. Despite Gauteng not being their place of origin, they all live in the township, which to a certain degree has influenced their lives.

The township has shaped these women’s lives in terms of whom they interact with socially. They no longer only encounter fellow villagers, as it might have been where they originally come from. With the rapid lifestyle of Johannesburg city nearby, their thinking has changed significantly. Life has changed in the sense that they have to consider the level of crime and abuse of women in Johannesburg and deal with matters pertaining to their own protection as well as their families.
These women are not only familiar with their rights as women but consider the differences in the treatment of women in rural and urban areas. For example, each day they have to commute from the township to town to reach their work destination, which requires fare. They either use a train or taxis and some use both as means of transport. Another important aspect is that in order to survive in Gauteng, they have to speak all the prominent languages in the township.

The third group comprises of five women aged between 40 and 55. I have decided that this group also cuts across two generations in the film, the middle aged and the oldest generation. Women in this group originate from the township though most of them are professionals who are now living in townhouses, the suburbs that are historically white. The group comprises of women of working class and middle class statuses.

This group are familiar with the representations of women in township life in Fools as they have lived most of their lives in Soweto and are still very much part of the township. They also recognise the houses that are used as part of the setting in the film. For reasons initially unknown to me they decided to communicate in Sesotho, yet not all of them were Sesotho speakers. However, I later noticed that they were familiar with one another and much more comfortable together hence their communication in a mutual black vernacular. They are familiar with the political and social transition that has taken place in South Africa over the last ten years. In short, this group has lived through the political transformation in South Africa and easily identifies with the temporal context of both the film and the novel.

As to how they relate to the political history of South Africa, all of these black women lived through the apartheid regime. They have suffered the consequences of apartheid even at their work places as adults alongside suffering discrimination as women. They witnessed the release of Mandela and experienced the birth of democracy in South Africa.
4.3 Analysis of Reader Reception to *Fools*

As described earlier, this research aims to conduct an ethnographic study of black women’s interpretation of *Fools*. The purpose of the study is to discover how black women as spectators read the representations of women in South African cinema with particular reference to *Fools*.

During the collection of data I categorized my focus groups according to generations. The next step was categorizing those generations in relation to the generations of the significant characters in the film and these are: Mimi (19), Busi (28), Nosipho (39) and MaButhelezi (66). The focus of the research as indicated is to find out how the spectators in three groups interpret these characters and their representations.

Looking at the history of the country’s struggle for liberation, one will notice a significant role played by black women collectively and also as individuals in their families, as well as at their work places. *The Making of Modern South Africa* by Nigel Worden (1994) has a very interesting cover page of black women, some carrying babies on their backs, holding up placards with words such as, “WOMEN DO NOT WANT PASSES” and, “WITH PASSES WE ARE SLAVES”. This incident dates as far back as 1956 when a mass demonstration by black women against pass laws occurred (Worden, 1994). This action is an example of many of the brave encounters of protest by black women in South Africa, proving the political agency of black women in South African history. When looking at the characters in *Fools*, one quickly notices the subservient nature of the representations.

*Nosipho*, the nurse, is a middle class woman who has equivalent education to her husband, the teacher Zamani. However, she endures psychological abuse from the husband who is a drunk as well as a rapist. In the film, she lacks recognition from the society and an example can be drawn from Zani’s
conversation with Zamani in the train when he says, “I remember your wedding to reverend Shezi’s daughter, the biggest white wedding the township ever saw. A teacher and a priest’s daughter! What a fine couple?” It should be well noted that no one says ‘a teacher and a nurse’. Nosipho is not recognized as an individual but as her father’s property, and later her husband’s property. Is this the reason Nosipho is silent about everything? Spectators completely disagree with this silence.

Nosipho’s reaction to her husband raping his pupil becomes clear from the few uptight discussions she has with her husband. It is clear from these brief talks that they have never even discussed the matter. She is annoyed, extremely angry, but silent about it. It is obvious that she has taken a step to show her dissatisfaction, as she is no longer intimate with her husband. Once she says to her husband, “You men have no shame!” This indicates that she feels that Mimi’s case has been treated unjustly. She clearly had anticipated a more appropriate punishment for her husband’s deed. Two of the interviewees confirm this about Nosipho

DORA: Nosipho is going through a lot of pain as a result of her husband’s drunkenness and rape. However, she is unable to express herself and carries everything inside.

KEFILOE: She is suffering but does not let it out externally. Finally she gets fed up and packs as she carries the pain without letting it out.

(Appendix p103)

Spectators are sympathetic to Nosipho and relate to her story. However, they do not share the same ideas with her. The first group is very angry and surprised by Nosipho still being with Zamani when she knows very well that he has raped a schoolgirl. Moreover, the fact that she is a nurse, they expect her to know more
about matters pertaining to abuse and human rights thus do not expect her to be passive. One of the spectators even proceeds to explain

NOMA: Nosipho seems too submissive and bottled up, even when she tries to be aggressive; there is that aura around her of being submissive. (Appendix, p95)

The spectators believe that Nosipho is not taking any action about her situation suggesting that it is a clear indication that she has a low self-esteem.

NOMA: Nosipho is passive, very passive, taking things as they come. (Appendix, p95)

On the other hand spectators of her age are annoyed by her packing, which indicates that she was ready to leave Zamani. They do not agree with the fact that she is willingly forced out of her house by circumstances that are not caused by her. They do not understand how she can leave without giving her marriage a chance or to talk to a professional like a marriage counsellor.

The older generation agrees that she should have tried to talk to her husband before she left. However, they indicate that many women die in abusive marriages while they could have avoided it by leaving in time. At this juncture they are not sure whether to regard her packing as a gesture of giving up on her marriage. Like the first group they comment

MANANKI: Nosipho is a boring character. She is too submissive.

MANINI: Nosipho has taken the matter too lightly.

(Appendix, p105)
Actually Nosipho is not the only passive character in the film. **MaButhelezi** also shares the silence. In my introductory chapter I described her as almost always very calm about bad things happening to her family. She treats Zamani with respect when he comes to her house despite what he has done to her daughter. This indicates acceptance of the decision taken by elders, male only, to forgive Zamani for his actions. She refers to him as a ‘shame’, which makes it clear that like every normal human being, she is hurt but does nothing about it. She even fails to take her daughter to the clinic to find out how much damage the rape has caused. This does not satisfy the spectators; they comment

RAINY: Mimi was afraid to tell her mother that she was pregnant because MaButhelezi did nothing knowing very well that she had been raped. (Appendix, p 105)

One of the women identifies with the situation of a daughter keeping pregnancy a secret. The situation here is unusual because Mimi is a victim and fair measures should have been taken. The delegation of old men does nothing to see that Mimi is compensated or that Zamani apologizes to the family that has been wronged. Even if the situation did not allow for police involvement, something could have been done. It is a well known practice in the African societies that if a girl is impregnated out of the wedlock, the male family has to compensate the girl’s family as she is now regarded as “spoiled goods” and it will not be easy for her to find a husband. However this arrangement does not happen in Mimi’s case.

During the apartheid regime, the police used to be the black society’s worst enemy. Even black policemen used to harass and mistreat black women. The situation was so bad that the black community found it difficult to seek help from the police. At times like in the case of Mimi, if one went to open a case, the victim would be ridiculed and perhaps go through a gang rape by the police. White police preferred to believe that rape and violation of basic human rights was appropriate treatment of blacks.
Therefore, it was not possible for the victim’s family and the mediators, elders, to approach the corrupt police in solving this matter as that could only make matters worse.

Kgafela oa Magogodi raises the concern of women like MaButhelezi in South African cinema holding significant positions as heads of their families yet their representations are not positive. He writes, “MaButhelezi's household in Fools provides another example of matrifocality; as a widow, she is in charge of the family. These are independent women who are portrayed as self-sufficient, but their roles are marginal compared to those of the male in the stories.” (2003:199)

All spectators disagree with her behaviour. Among the members of the third group, there are those who believe it is because MaButhelezi is uneducated hence her behaviour. In this respect, MaButhelezi embraces traditional views while the spectators are more for human rights, equal rights for women. It is now the subject of tradition versus modernity as one spectator suggests

MANANKI: To you and me, the situation maybe abnormal as we are enlightened but MaButhelezi is a traditional woman and she understands that as the old men have gone to Zamani’s, the problem will be solved. (Appendix, p104)

This returns us to the issue of class. As I have indicated, the spectators understand that MaButhelezi’s behaviour results from her lack of education. They believe she is old-fashioned and this automatically places her in a certain generation of the uneducated, she lacks knowledge according to them.

MaButhelezi is not exactly comfortable with the rape. It is just that she does not react the way the spectators expect her to. Her way of dealing with matters is relevant to the political and social climate of her time. This is a woman who is
experiencing oppression in two ways. She is living as a person suffering from the consequences of apartheid and secondly as a woman experiencing patriarchal rule, also patriarchy on two levels, white oppression and African patriarchy. All these put her in a rather awkward state of affairs for decision-making and expression of her true feelings.

When Zamani arrives with Zani at MaButhelezi’s, she goes about her business without even looking at them. One wonder’s if her pain is so strong that she cannot even look at this man? Then the first group members ask

TS’EPANG: Is the old woman blind?

PORTIA: Doesn’t the mother know about the rape?
(Appendix, p96)

Indeed after witnessing Mimi being raped by Zamani and earlier witnessing Zamani being let off the hook on account of his social status as a teacher, ‘because the community needs a teacher’, MaButhelezi’s response of pretending not to see Zamani seems unfounded. bell hooks addresses the power in looking, “When thinking about black female spectator, I remember being punished as a child for staring, for those hard, intense, direct looks children would give grown-ups, looks that were seen as confrontational, as gestures of resistance, challenges to authority.”

Busi, is a young woman aged 28. She is very much different in behaviour from her mother and Nosipho, as she seems to be more liberated. She is outspoken indicating her stand in matters happening to her family. Very early in the film we see her coming out of her house tearing her clothes as she shouts at the elders, “Why don’t you come and tear me apart?” Later in the film it becomes clear why she was so angry. She is always quick to defend her family despite whom she
has to take on. Neither class nor masculinity intimidates her. Nosipho’s and her mother’s behaviour angers her.

Although Busi lives amongst this society at times where women are expected to respect men, she portrays the opposite behaviour from that of her mother. One of the spectators says

MANINI: Busi does not portray behaviour of a child brought up by MaButhelezi.
(Appendix, p103)

This is because Busi stands out as the only one who dares to look and offer resistance, challenging authority as hooks describes.

This research offers South African women that kind of power. MaButhelezi’s failure to look indicates submissiveness and lack of liberation within herself.

The questions are followed by observations like

NOMA: I don’t know if I grew up around an aggressive grandmother but she would not have reacted like MaButhelezi. (Appendix, p98)

These young women are angry at the fact that MaButhelezi was willing to forgive so easily.

PORTIA: If I were Mimi I would have preferred Busi’s reaction to my mother’s. (Appendix, p93)

According to hooks, mock feminism is that kind of representation that is meant to portray resistance or liberate women. Meanwhile, it puts down their intelligence as the way these women behave in these representations mock their resistance.
Although Busi challenges authority, the way she goes about it includes disrespecting her mother and fighting Nosipho who is as much a victim of patriarchy as she is.

Although hooks talks about mock feminism in the case of representations like Busi’s, it is much better than what their mother does or rather what she fails to do. Part of Busi’s behaviour lacks strategy such as attacking Nosipho who has done nothing wrong, but she does not just sit back and take circumstances as they come as all the women in the film do. All the time Busi tries to be heard, she shouts and indulges in dramatic behaviour that offends everyone around her. She never approaches any situation calmly. For example, the way she shouts at the elderly men, her attack of Zamani and the outrageous attack of Nosipho. She has a right to be angry but the way she goes about it is too aggressive.

MaButhelezi’s behaviour does not worry the younger generation only but also the older groups of spectators.

PRISCILLA: There is no way under any circumstances I would forgive anyone who raped my child. (Appendix, p98)

DORA: You should all understand being mothers what would happen should your child get raped. You fight, become mad, you can even be mad with words. (Appendix, p102)

Amadiume raises the issue of problems that affect women in Africa such as girl children being forced into marriage before they are ready physically. She indicates that the girls suffer certain illnesses that are caused by pregnancies at early age. Though Mimi's pregnancy surfaces late, it hurts everybody when she miscarries, and this affects even Nosipho who was attacked by Busi because of the rape. Rape has affected Mimi emotionally as well and this we hear through the letter she wrote to her brother, "I will never trust a man for as long as I live".
Amadiume further indicates that women in communities even without adequate resources have to take care of each other. This is the case with the rape in *Fools*, especially at the period of miscarriage where we see Nosipho helping selflessly. Busi too is forced to swallow her pride and forget her anger towards Nosipho and she cries out for Nosipho’s help. The only concern at this point in time is the well-being of Mimi.

Nosipho’s silent behaviour angers Busi, as she is a nurse and more informed. Busi needs solidarity, which she is not getting from Nosipho. Nosipho does absolutely nothing in reaching out to Mimi’s family after what her husband has done. It is Nosipho’s denial to take responsibility for her family member’s act that pushes Busi to harass her.

Women from the third group indicate that MaButhelezi is quiet with everything including an injured child, which is not normal. They are angry with the filmmaker as they insist there is no mother who would behave like MaButhelezi regardless of generation, class, and race. These women though they are the oldest generation of the three groups, adamantly refuse to identify with MaButhelezi. They reinforce their responses by mocking her.

KEFILOE: It is possible for MaButhelezi to just keep quiet and ignore her daughter’s rape considering that the son comes in bleeding yet she remains quiet, other children help the injured brother to the bedroom, she is still quiet and does not even spare him a look. So, anything is possible. (Appendix, p104)

In interpreting their culture, female spectators are informing the world on the shortcomings of their representations.
MANINI: It is obvious that those who made *Fools* did not research well enough in order for them to portray positive images of black women. (Appendix, p105)

4.4 Class Differences

According to Ifi Amadiume, economic inequities highlight class differences. Class differences encourage social exploitation and the spectators identify with the exploitation. So, Busi stands out as a woman who resists the imposition of domination in *Fools*. This Busi does by challenging class, age and gender, which also goes hand in hand with patriarchy.

Looking at the scene in MaButhelezi’s house when Zamani brought the injured Zani home, Busi tells Zamani fearlessly that he calls himself a teacher but he is actually just a useless rapist and that she doubts there is any good he can teach children. She clearly indicates that even though he is an elder, she, Busi, has no respect for him and those who behave like him. When her mother instructs her to offer Zamani traditional beer in a jar that used to serve their father, Busi firmly tells her mother that she will not do that, as it would be an insult to her dead father. She stands her ground and refuses to acknowledge Zamani’s presence in their house as a visitor.

Though most of the spectators understand Busi’s dilemma, they think she is very much disrespectful and again the issues of culture emerge as spectators comment

MAPULA: The rape incident is painful but Busi lacks respect for insulting Zamani who is older. (Appendix, p99)

MANINI: Busi does not strike me like a child raised by MaButhelezi who is so humble. She personalizes matters that do not concern her. (Appendix, p103)
As much as spectators are living in modern South Africa with new political climate, they still embrace certain traditional values and principles. For example, the fact that they see Busi’s behaviour lacking respect means that they are still adhering in beliefs that a child should consent to the elders’ authority despite the fact that the elder could be wrong in a given case. Also they appear to think that the fact that Busi is ‘loud’ is cheap. They believe in modesty, which according to them qualifies one for a certain class. Moreover, they still embrace the thought that certain matters are better off left in the hands of particular individuals. In short, these women’s way of looking remains influenced by patriarchy.

In black societies, there is a certain way that the elite and educated people carry themselves which is different from the way those who are less privileged do. They are not loud and they approach sensitive matters differently. Moreover, they always avoid embarrassing situations and if they are by any chance drawn into such matters, they always try to remain calm and not portray violent mannerism. That is because it is generally believed that only ignorant people shout and may create despicable scenes.

Overwhelmingly, the spectators agree that Busi’s behaviour is not appropriate. Though Busi seems like the right candidate to challenge dominant representations, the way she goes about it is not acceptable to the spectators. Instead a young woman who lacks respect and the intelligence to deal with emotional matters is portrayed.

PORTIA: Busi is a typical township girl.

NOMA: She is outspoken but very aggressive.

BOKANG: In most cases one is not supposed to be so violent without assessing the situation.
What the women in these groups are against more importantly is the fact that Busi attacks Nosipho as well. They all think she unleashes her anger at the wrong person. Even those that agree that placed in the same position with Busi they could have behaved the way she did, still insist it is not suitable. One even suggests

BOKANG: If there was a problem to thrash out, Busi should have called Nosipho aside not attacked her in public. (Appendix, p93)

As bell hooks indicates, progressive and positive representations of women are essential. There are many ways Busi could have dealt with her pain and pursued justice without putting herself down. She could have reported the matter to the police or better, encouraged her mother to do so instead of causing the whole family embarrassment. As an elder sister, she could have acted as Mimi’s mentor and discussed the possible consequences of rape with her or even more, involved Nosipho as a nurse in a profitable way. She is so energetic and capable of achieving a lot regarding this matter but her energy is wasted in anger that leads her to being disrespectful even of her mother as she stubbornly refuses to submit to her authority. As a woman, she is supposed to understand Nosipho’s dilemma, instead she blames a fellow sister.

4.5 Communication Barrier in *Fools*

The communication barrier between women in *Fools* surfaces at this point. Busi calls out to Nosipho for help as Mimi experiences the miscarriage. From there we see all the prominent women characters working together for the first time. However, their silence and lack of response is pronounced. We see them exchanging buckets and together helping the small girl back to the house. Then one begins to wonder, do women in South Africa have a communication barrier
even during crucial moments like this? Even if women cannot speak directly about the plight, which could be rape or miscarriage, there could at least be mundane issues to discuss trying to move the focus from what is actually happening at the moment. The silence makes the situation even more awkward and painful.

This is not the only incidence in the film where communication breaks down. There is also lack of communication between Nosipho and her husband as on several occasions she refuses to talk to him and does not try to find a solution to their problems.

Spectators too disagree with the communication barrier amongst women as Mimi bleeds. Although it is obvious that the circumstances are terrible for the fact that Nosipho’s husband is the source of the pain everybody is going through, it is still not right that women make this worse by being silent. Spectators also think it is wrong for women in Fools to be so silent.

NOMA: I was amazed by communication barrier as women worked together.

PORTIA: Women didn’t talk; there was lack of communication.

(Appendix, p96)

At the wedding preparation, Busi and Nosipho dismiss each other through avoidance. One would expect other women to confront the matter fairly instead of taking sides and making Busi appear ridiculous for being angry that her sister has been raped. As much as it is true that she is directing her anger at the wrong person, one should be allowed to be sad and angry especially if she has been wronged. The whole argument has been provoked perhaps not by Nosipho but the question; “Busi is your brother still mad?” was enough to fuel Busi as she was being ridiculed. The whole incident promotes communication problems among women in Fools.
4.6 Exclusion of Women from Important Matters

Exclusion of women from important matters is one of the vivid themes in the film. Only men form a group that tries but does not reach a fair resolution about Mimi’s rape in the film. When approaching Zamani’s house, the delegation of elders made up of men can hear Zamani shouting at his wife. As he opens the door to receive them, it is obvious that he has been drinking alcohol. When they enter the house, he has to remove a tray with beer bottles and a drinking glass from the table. His behaviour indicates that he does not even feel the slightest remorse for what he has done. However, they say to Zamani, “After a storm has passed, and the trees have fallen, and there is need to clear, it is time to find out what real men are available to do the job. So, we have decided that we need teachers and we expect to see a spade in your hands soon.” Another adds, “Take this as a warning for your deed, but you can go back to work.” All this is done overlooking the fate that has befallen an innocent teenage girl.

It is obvious and well known that Mimi could not personally be involved in the decision making regarding the rape issue. However, not even once is there any consultation of some sort with her yet it is her body and rights that were violated. The decision that is made favours Zamani and the community and has no impact in making Mimi to feel better. No one even acknowledges that Mimi has been offended and no apology is offered. As if this is not enough, the girl experiences a second violation in the film. She remains silent about this happening.

Could this be because rape occurred so frequently among black communities that it was no longer a vital matter? There are many reasons that can be attributed to the numerous occurrences of rape in black societies. Mostly this deed resulted from men failing to take pressure from the white oppressors. Most men felt need to prove their manhood and sometimes went about it the wrong way by hurting those weaker than them and those happened to be their women and children.
Zamani laments, “I AM A RESPECTABLE MAN! I AM A RESPECTABLE MAN!” following the dirty deed he has committed. From the tone of his voice, it is clear that he is not only trying to convince the world that he is a respectable man but mostly, he is trying to convince himself. He eventually admits to his wife, “The problem is Nosipho, you are not aware that I degraded a long time ago.”

Women in the third group confirm that street committees in the townships were made of men only. This is a depiction of a real life situation. bell hooks argues that imitating life is not what films do. This is confirmed by her referral to Jeanette Winterson when she writes, “Strong texts work along the borders of our minds and alter what already exists. They could not do this if they merely reflected what already exists,” (hooks, 1996:2).

Though *Fools* merely portrays what black women have been living in the townships by absorbing whatever decisions men threw at them without suggesting change, it is obvious from the women’s responses to the film that what they actually require is true representations of their true experiences. This therefore is a contradiction, as it does not reflect hooks point in the way interpreted for the text. This clearly indicates that with an empirical research, findings have proved to be quite different from theoretical assumptions.

Do women always meet a sorry fate in life? If this is the case, bell hooks suggests that at this point films are supposed to suggest a way forward by featuring stories that are progressive. As indicated earlier, the story *Fools* is about one man’s struggle to redeem himself in the eyes of his community after an act, which has destroyed his family and devastated his community. Teacher Zamani’s act of raping Mimi affects all the female characters in the film. Though the story centres on a male character, a woman is the one who meets a sorry fate. The rapist’s wife is the one who suffers abuse from the victim’s sister as well as the embarrassment for her husband’s deed. The very same husband contributes to her misery with endless abuse. In short, none of the prominent female characters
in the film appears to neither have agency nor be able to extricate themselves from the traditional, cultural and political structure of patriarchal values. As one of the spectators from the first group says

PORTIA: All we see is, women being raped, women suffering, women fighting each other, then men having dreams there. It’s bad that it is generally accepted that women fight against each other. (Appendix, p96)

Ayari writes, “It is worth noting that nine times out of ten female characters in African films meet a sorry fate. There are almost no positive heroines,” (Bakari and Cham, 1996:183). Obviously there is still much to be done in privileging women’s issues in African cinema. Again, looking at the political background of South Africa, women played a significant role in liberation. So, how about creating representations that indicate this truth? Positive images that are progressive and would definitely teach film audiences could be more acceptable and intriguing.

The film depicts a male gaze as women characters in the film are portrayed the way men who contributed in the making of Fools fancy seeing them. The director is a man and the story is a male centred, male biased tale in which women lack personalities while male characters in the film are multidimensional, as hooks would say. Women in the first group that identify with the younger generation, comment as follows on Nosipho’s character

NOMA: I would have loved to see her interact with her colleagues at work.

BOKANG: See her life as well as we are only allowed to see her husband’s life and what he does to her.

PORTIA: We only see men living their lives, men’s dreams, men chatting as men but this does not happen with women.
To a larger extent, women from other groups are of the same opinion with the above comments as they clearly indicate in not so many words that they would like to see Nosipho at work where according to them she is probably happy instead of seeing her embarrassed all the time. This does not happen to Nosipho only in the film. From Busi’s stories at home, it is obvious that she also has a job but again we are not allowed to see her at a public place or any of the younger female characters at school. The women are like private properties that are confined to certain spaces without lives to live.

This discussion continues to an extent whereby one of the spectators raises a point that others should not forget that the scriptwriter as well as the director are men and are telling the story from a male perspective. In a way, the spectator agrees with hooks’ statement that the black male gaze has a different scope from that of the black female. The spectator puts it thus

NOMA: We must give it into consideration that it is a man who wrote the story and his point of view is very narrow and he can only think of women’s frustrations. His point of view is limited in the scope because he is a man.  
(Appendix, p96)

However, a woman from the first group asks angrily

PORTIA: Doesn’t he have a wife? Because he could show us the real situation with his wife. All he concentrates on is women being raped, women suffering. Is this the way he’d portray his wife?  
(Appendix, p96)

Ntozakhe is Zani’s girlfriend. The opening scene portrays her naked as they are having sex in the train. They are both from Swaziland where they are schooling.
We never see her as an individual as she is always featured as Zani’s girlfriend in everything she does. Yet they are supposed to have acquired equivalent education superior to that offered in South Africa, the sub-standard schooling imposed on blacks.

Looking at the portrayal of Ntozakhe, it might seem like there is nothing much to say as one of the spectators indicates

NOMA: Her appearance is too little. She is not really featured. (Appendix, p95)

However, her value is important, as it is symbolic. One may wonder why this character was scarce, as she possesses the same education quality with Zani who is fighting for freedom. Why does she not work together with Zani especially since they are together? We see her at the picnic being the first one to pick the stone when a white man is beating Zamani, but she never gathers the bravery to use it.

The film’s historical setting is December 1989, towards the release of Mandela. Ntozakhe’s appearance relates well with negotiations of peace and dropping of arms by African National Congress (ANC) and resorting to discussion instead of war. In a way the film worked as part of the negotiating tool towards a long sought peace for all South Africans. Spectators in the first group interpret Ntozakhe’s behaviour thus,

NOMA: Dropping of a stone is normal for an educated person. (Appendix, p95)

Another spectator responds that Ntozakhe dropped the stone because the white man had already broken down. This is the truth of the white regime as it was obvious at this point in time that its future was bleak.
4.7 Men Representing Women

Farida Ayari indicates that, “The images of women in African cinema remain essentially that created by men,” (Bakari and Cham, 1996:181). This statement is true of what is taking place in the making of Fools. As already mentioned, a man, Njabulo Ndebele, initially created the story, the scriptwriters are two men and the film director is a man. Ayari continues to write about women in African films, “These are women fabricated within the imagery of the men who make films, regardless of how close to reality this imagery maybe…the image of women in African cinema is the result of a male gaze at a mostly male society and the representation remains a male one,” (Bakari and Cham, 1996:181-182).

Kgafela oa Magogodi (2003) continues to clarify that there are women who are portrayed as self-sufficient, but their roles are marginal compared to those of the males in the story. This is confirmed by the way men are free to say whatever they like about the apartheid rulers, “I swear some day that De Klerk shall see his mother.” This statement indicates someone who is liberated and not afraid of anything. However, a woman with so much power as MaButhelezi lacks bravery to protect her children from perpetrators such as Zamani. Not even once does she fail to address the rapist as, “Teacher Zamani.” In addition, she looks the other way.

Amadiume raises the point that the victims tend to come from poor families. In Fools, the teacher, Zamani belongs to the middle class and the victim, Mimi seeks upward socioeconomic mobility through education only that her dreams are shattered as the middle class exploits the poor. Marxist ideology indicates that this is the case in all situations as the lower classes serve the bourgeois group. Mimi’s mother MaButhelezi sends her to deliver a gift for helping Mimi with her schoolwork. MaButhelezi’s family is poor yet she sends her daughter with a
chicken to a family that does not need that chicken as much as her own family does. What is more, she is thanking a person for doing a job that he is paid to do.

Mimi is sacrificed for the community as elders decide that teachers are scarce so Zamani has to be forgiven in order for him to continue bettering the lives of the majority. Mimi’s predicament is regarded as a little matter in comparison to losing a teacher. Hence earlier I indicate that Mimi’s is a double violation: rape and silence.

Zamani rapes Mimi and gets away with the deed. This deed happens to Busi once again as it is obvious from her talks with the women preparing for the wedding that no one consulted her for the arrangements that the society, which she is a member of, has to take part in cooking for that wedding. Again, it is important to note that at the gatherings comprising of women only, the question of class surfaces. An example can be drawn from the way Busi is treated while Nosipho is awarded social respect. Besides, the fact that Busi questions the wedding arrangements demonstrates her challenge to class by indicating that she does not care whether Nosipho is a nurse or her husband a teacher by pointing out her dislike of her and domination of the society.

The issue of religion is also important as women in the second group feel that MaButhelezi is silent as a result of Christian teachings, which Amadiume argues is introduced by patriarchy and gender inequality that was not there amongst black societies during pre-colonial period.

In former African societies women were respected and awarded political positions. For example, the daughters would always be consulted before making certain decisions in the community. Women held positions equivalent and sometimes even higher than men. Christianity on the other hand brought about the teachings that a woman will always be submissive to a man and regard her
husband as superior. Since Christianity followed colonialism, it is accurate to say that patriarchal teachings of Christianity came about with colonialism.

Members of the second group suggest that MaButhelezi’s behaviour results from her Christian beliefs and she has learned to forgive.

TS’EPISO: MaButhelezi is a believer and is doing things the way they should be done.

PRISCILLA: MaButhelezi is clearly a strong believer as she has managed to control her anger.

TS’EPISO: MaButhelezi is too sweet and forgiving. She also applies her Christianity and is also old-fashioned. (Appendix, p99)

Although in black communities respect for elders has always been insisted upon, at this juncture instead of seeing respect in MaButhelezi’s behaviour, what surfaces is helplessness. She is a victim of patriarchy and colonial missionary values. The women read the situation thus

PRISCILLA: MaButhelezi respects the male decision and that is in her.

TS’EPISO: MaButhelezi belongs to another generation where they were taught how to forgive and she understands that Zamani is a man and a teacher, a respectable man in the society. (Appendix, p100)

When watching Fools it becomes clear that Christianity and religious values are seen as feminine virtues, made evident from the scene at the train station with a congregation almost entirely made of women. They sing in their group moving
slowly slightly behind a leader who is a man. As their leader is dancing in front of them with a bible in his hand, he leads a song, "We will follow Jesus wherever he goes." One sees a perfect picture of these women doing exactly what the song is saying, following this man as if he is Jesus. This confirms Amadiume’s observation about Christianity and patriarchy going hand in hand. It symbolizes women submitting to male domination.

Finally it is essential to consider age gap between MaButhelezi and her children. She appears to be in her sixties yet her first born, Busi, seems to be in her late twenties. According to my experience, if it ever happens that a mother starts to have children late, it is rare. One wonders if the filmmaker did this in order for the film to suit the European market, as the situation is very much awkward in this case. European societies comprise of many educated women who are working for a living. Unlike African women, it is not common in the European communities for a wife to raise children while the husband remains the sole provider. Therefore, European women tend to start families rather late after acquiring good education and developing a career.

This portrayal of MaButhelezi ends up confusing spectators as they all refer to MaButhelezi as grandmother. Spectators end up attributing some of the problems that cannot be solved in the film to this matter. They think the reason why MaButhelezi does not talk to Mimi about what has happened is because she is embarrassed to discuss such matters with such a young girl. Mimi must also be uncomfortable because of the age and generation gap.