

ABSTRACT

Children's literature serves as a means for the transmission of beliefs and values from one generation to the next; they shape children's perception of the world (Cherland, 2016; Tsao, 2008). When reading, children are often able to "identify themselves with the characters" (Cekiso, 2013, p. 202), meaning that they assimilate and learn cultural norms, values, beliefs, and even stereotypes through books. This study aimed to illustrate how a selection of South African picturebooks directly or indirectly challenge patriarchal ideologies commonly found in children's literature by providing alternative representations of female characters. It focused its lens on six picturebooks available on Book Dash, a free online South African social impact publisher, which were published between 2014 and 2021. The picturebooks chosen for analysis were: *And Also!* by Anja Venter, Nkosingiphile Mazibuko, and Lauren Beukes; *Graca's Dream* by Melissa Fagan, Karlien de Villiers, and Marike le Roux; *Katiiti's Song* by Philippa Kabali-Kagwa, Mary Marble, and Kirsten Walker; *Queen of Soweto* by Mia du Plessis, Jessica Taylor, and Marli Fourie; *There Must Be a Rainbow* by Sinomonde Ngwane, Nerissa Govender, and Thulisizwe Mamba; and *Yes You Can!* by Subi Bosa, Xolile Sepuru, and Georgia Demertzis.

Three main research questions were established for the study. The questions were: (1) how are female characters (children and women) represented in these selected picturebooks; (2) what meaning is produced from these representations; and (3) how are these meanings and representations similar or different to those produced in picturebooks in the past?

Through the utilization of a qualitative content analysis research design and a methodology that combined critical literacy, ideology, gender construction and identity, and African feminisms, it was found that these picturebooks do in fact provide positive and alternative representations of female characters.