

**WOMEN, SOCIETY
AND
CONSTRAINTS**

WOMEN, SOCIETY AND CONSTRAINTS

*A collection of contemporary
South African gender studies*

Edited by
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AND
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© 2000 University of South Africa

ISBN 1-86888-149-0

Published by Unisa Press
University of South Africa
PO Box 392, 0003 Pretoria

Cover design and layout: Lien Strydom

Typeset by Pretoria Setters

Printed by ABC Press, Epping

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INTRODUCTION

Jeanette Malherbe

The aim of this first, introductory essay is to provide a framework within which the other papers here may be read, understood and assessed. They are all papers on gender, and they express the thinking of individuals in contemporary South Africa who are concerned with gender issues, that is, with the constraints on women's freedom, with equitable treatment for women and men, and with women's empowerment. The different authors therefore have in common, a unifying interest in the marginalization of women in patriarchal societies and how this may be overcome. However, as we might expect from a multicultural society like ours, the individual contributors also have a wide variety of viewpoints, cultural contexts, individual interests, discursive traditions, and concepts of gender. This collection is therefore like a patchwork quilt: each contributor follows the same theme, but interprets it in an individual way, choosing her or his own colours, fabrics and shapes.

This variety has a valuable consequence. We are presented with many different perspectives on the one thing, gender, and come to perceive many different aspects of it. It is a hidden object in our society, whose presence was not clearly realized and described in its current form, until about forty years ago, and whose existence is still denied by many of those people who are happy with the status quo in our patriarchal society. So a sampler of gender issues is helpful in providing the reader with many different examples of the same thing. There is solidarity in this situation, of many different contributors all with the same aim of dismantling patriarchy, and solidarity is the strength of any political movement.

Nicholson (1990: Introduction) refers to the oppression of women 'in all its endless variety and monotonous similarity'. The common thread in gender issues, and the similarity in all discussions of gender, is the fact that male / female relations are unjust and oppressive of women. This means that gender studies are essentially politically motivated. The aim of those who write about gender issues is to change the power relations that currently structure society along the lines of sex. A collection of papers such

as this one therefore has a transformative potential. Its positive value lies not just in contributing to an ethos of gender sensitivity and equity, but in providing the motivation for concrete action and in showing what direction that action should take.

We live in a society where sexism has been put on a par with racism by the government of the day as an evil to be eradicated, and where public initiatives to this end are constantly being launched. However it is change that cannot be brought about solely by legislation and public action. It calls for a change of attitude in every member of society. 'While the ANC accords women equal status, it is highly improbable that under an ANC government, women will, in fact, enjoy equality of status with men, for equal relations emanate from a state of mind and not from laws' wrote Winnie Mandela nearly ten years ago, before the ANC had even been officially unbanned. 'Presently, neither sex sees the other as equal ... both men and women in our society see women as subordinate to men. Until these status differences are redefined, and the redefinition becomes a reality in the hearts and minds of our two genders, women will continue to be subordinated' (Mandela, 1990:9).

THE OBSCURE AND ELUSIVE SOCIAL OBJECT OF GENDER

It's important to note at the start that although gender studies looks into the unfair relations between men and women in society, and opposes the marginalization and domination of women by men, gender studies are not the sole preserve of women nor are those who promote and support the patriarchy always males. Men can be feminists, just as much as women can be patriarchs. Taking up the 'feminist standpoint' is a matter of being sensitive to gender injustice and oppression, and wishing to eradicate them. The criterion for gender sensitivity is therefore having a certain kind of consciousness or mindset. It is not a matter of biological sex.

Gender is elusive in the first place because it is a pervasive and powerful background condition of our existence. It is hard to form a clear idea of, or even to think about, the large features and the overall shape of our own society. People are unconsciously governed in their everyday behaviours and thinking by social mechanisms. They are conditioned by customary practices, attitudes and expectations which they are usually not even aware of, like those that determine gender relations. Doing gender studies

is a deliberate attempt to get clear on the nature of the mechanisms and practices governing relations between men and women in a particular social and cultural context. The basic premise of gender studies is that the different characters of men and women, as widely accepted in society, are a product of socialization and not a biological given. Girls and boys are brought up to act and think the way they do, and if they were conditioned differently, then the character of the two sexes, and gender relations would be different too. For example, if little boys were given dolls from an early age, taught how to hold and feed and cuddle and dress them, they would be more nurturing and caring in character. Nurturing is presently seen as a result of women's biology, and a characteristic which men do not possess.

It takes a trained eye to notice how gender is constructed and to be able to pick out the small nuances that bear evidence to the underlying power relations between the sexes. Such an eye is acquired by gaining familiarity with the literature on gender issues, immersing oneself in the discourses surrounding them, and contributing to the debates. The stronger and more substantial the literature on gender issues is, and the more lively the discussion of it, the stronger and more vital the opposition to patriarchal forces, and the better the chances of women's empowerment and liberation.

An important reason for the obscurity of gender, is that the patriarchy routinely and steadfastly denies its existence. For those on the up-side of the power relation to admit the existence of domination and oppression, and of all the means there are for maintaining it, would be for them to admit guilt and be committed to undoing it. Women are all conditioned in a patriarchal society to be fearful of authority and supportive of the status quo, so that to engage in gender studies is to undertake an act of rebellion that requires some moral courage. The whole field of gender studies is dismissed by the establishment as politically motivated propaganda without the necessary 'objective evidence' to support it. The claim is that feminism and gender studies seek to overthrow the existing institutions for knowledge production, which are dedicated to disinterested, value-free enquiry. Women's studies, say the leaders of our social institutions, present partial and distorted views of society and gender relations in an effort to gain political power for women.

Here are some typical statements of this kind of criticism of gender studies in the university:

'... the academic community should not support academic feminism as a separate program of studies in higher education because it is primarily a political ideology. As such, it seeks to transform the university curriculum and community into an uncritical advocate of an unexamined political ideology of radical egalitarianism. In so doing, it undermines a sacred and central role of the university which is to provide both the critical resources and the setting for an honest evaluation of the merits of various political and moral ideologies rather than to promote actively any particular moral or political ideology in an atmosphere hostile to the possibility of honest critical evaluation of competing ideologies' (Almeder, 94: 301).

By implication, the writer believes that the university is at present, at least outside the area of academic feminism, an impartial adjudicator between competing ideologies. The assumption is that academic institutions do not promote any one particular identifiable ideology, nor are they hostile to any.

In another statement of this criticism, of the undesirable politicization of gender studies, Susan Haack has written:

'The label ('feminist epistemology') is designed to convey the idea that inquiry should be politicized. And that is not only mistaken, but dangerously so ... Inquiry aims at the truth ... [and] this should remind us that those who despair of honest inquiry cannot be in the truth-seeking business ... they are in the propaganda business. [It] is dangerously mistaken, also, from a political point of view, because of the potential for tyranny of calls for "politically adequate research and scholarship" (Haack, 93:37–38).

Again, the assumption behind this criticism of feminist studies as politicized, is that university studies in their present institutionalized form are apolitical; that scientists and scholars are perfectly impartial and disinterested in the results of their projects; that there is at present no preferred 'establishment' view of what constitutes 'politically adequate research and scholarship'. This is a myth that feminist critique has long since exposed¹. The results of establishment research programmes are usually androcentric (taking the male as the norm for all people) and sexist (assuming

women are of lesser interest and importance and value than men). That these results are claimed to be universally valid, does not make them so. Gender studies does not deny the charge of politicization. It responds to the 'accusation' by pointing out that any enquiry takes place within a context of the enquirers' history, culture, sex, class, race, etc. If enquiry is inevitably context-driven, surely it is better to be honest about one's context, rather than denying it?

What makes a gender studies paper different from a mainstream paper then, is its specialized focus on women as an oppressed or marginalized group. It is quite possible to produce studies of women as a group which are not gender studies. A paper which 'objectively' describes the condition of rural women, or gives data on the economic indicators for women under a certain age, need not be a gender studies paper. The term 'gender' is a politically loaded one. It is a term that refers to imbalances of power in society and to the righting of these. It always has connotations of oppression; any use of it must include some reference to the injustice and marginalization which women in general suffer in patriarchal societies.

To conceive of gender in this way is to understand the word as signifying the whole set of social mechanisms by means of which members of the male sex are empowered and those of the female sex are disempowered. It includes such things as the masculine and feminine stereotypes as they exist in the media, literature and the popular imagination, and the expectations which people consequently have of men and of women; socialization devices for training and maintaining men and women in their 'proper' roles and character; the masculinization of public spaces, reason and intellectual activity and the feminization of private places, emotionality and nurturing activity; compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia and the thousands of ways in which society enforces these; taking the model of the nuclear family as the incontestable basis of a 'healthy' society; and much more besides.

In the light of this understanding of what 'gender' means, the political charge of the term becomes obvious. Any work in gender studies is bound to reveal the injustices and oppressive practices of the patriarchy, and in so doing, it cannot but condemn them and suggest revisions and improvements. This understanding of the term 'gender' also provides the

answer to the question which may be asked of the papers in this collection: 'There are at least two genders, masculine and feminine. If these are gender studies, why are they only about women? Where are the men?' .

There are two parts to an answer. Firstly, to study gender is to be engaged in exposing oppressive power relations. To call something 'oppressive' is to condemn or at least to pass a negative judgement on that thing, and to be committed in some degree to opposing it. It is natural therefore that feminists, men or women, should take the perspective of the oppressed, viz., women. The disadvantages which men may suffer as a result of their gender are not socially disempowering or marginalizing. An analysis of the masculine stereotype for instance (assertive, physically strong, self-willed, rational and logical, authoritative, etc) shows that to be a man in our society is to be in a very privileged position. As a result, it is not unfair that 'gender studies' are identified with 'women's studies' or 'feminist studies'. Nor is this a move which totally excludes men, for the following reason.

The feminine condition is determined in large part by the masculine condition. Women broadly speaking can be self-sacrificing and subservient only if men are self-willed and dominating. That is, the masculine gender is the complement of the feminine; to understand or change the one involves understanding and changing the other. So in the second part of an answer to the question: 'Where are the men in gender studies?', it must be pointed out that the male sex and the masculine gender (the two are not the same) do in fact feature in any discussion of gender. Men are always present by implication, as those whom women are to serve and nurture, heed and obey; they are present as the background to the feminine condition.

GENDER STUDIES AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY

We have said that it is the purpose of gender studies to promote an awareness of the power relations between men and women in some particular social context. Our contemporary context is South Africa on the threshold of the second millenium, the so-called 'New South Africa' of the 'Rainbow Nation'.

The new South Africa is usually taken to have begun in April 1994, the date of the first fully democratic election of a government in this country.

It is therefore sharply distinguishable in time from the old SA. It is sharply distinguishable in character also from the old SA, which had been marked by a universally deplored neglect of basic individual rights and denial of civil liberties and in which sexism was as entrenched as racism. It was not a climate in which gender studies could easily be undertaken, or done on a significant scale, or widely disseminated, or was likely to enjoy institutionalized support. The present climate is different, and we are experiencing a flourishing of gender studies in consequence.

It is fair to say that the new SA self-consciously sets itself to be a state which protects human rights, and that means women's rights as well². The twin bases of the ANC government's platform are non-racism and non-sexism, with equal weight given to both. The SA Constitution protects women's rights in that it guarantees the rights of individuals, and it protects homosexuals against discrimination. The freedom of sexual orientation clause will go a long way towards dissolving one present basis of sexual relations in our society, viz., compulsory heterosexuality and homophobia. Since it is these sexual relations from which the patriarchy draws much of its strength and blind obedience, any new freedom of sexual orientation will work against gender injustice at a very deep level. It is one thing to have rights in the law, but they mean little until they are implemented in society. There are encouraging signs that the rights of women in the Constitution are being put into practice, witness the test cases being brought almost daily to the courts³.

South Africa has ratified CEDAW (a convention to end discrimination against women) and has submitted the first of its scheduled report-backs to the United Nations Commission charged with monitoring the implementation of CEDAW in signatory countries⁴. The government-appointed Commission for Gender Equality (mandated by clauses 119 and 120 of the Constitution) i.a. surveys the implementation of gender rights programmes within state departments and the public and private sectors, develops and conducts educational programmes on gender, investigates abuses of gender rights and makes recommendations to Parliament on gender issues. The Office on the Status of Women, located in the Office of the Deputy President, has the responsibility of co-ordinating the national gender programme by liaising with all ministries, the nine provinces, local government, civil society and international organizations. On a smaller scale, there are

several Parliamentary structures aimed at making Parliament more gender sensitive, at monitoring implementation of the Government's commitments made at Beijing and in CEDAW, and at helping women to participate fully in the law-making process (Moolman, 1997:94).

All these organizations and projects are the concrete expression of the Government's commitment to gender rights and women's empowerment. They are all initiatives of the new SA; there were no state or para-statal gender organizations, offices or women-friendly structures pre-1994. What women's organizations there were, were usually formed by groups in opposition to the government, e.g. the early Bantu Women's League (founded, among others, by Charlotte Manye Maxeke, the subject of an essay in this book), which later became the African National Congress Women's League; the Natal Organization of Women, founded when the ANC had been banned, as an offshoot of the UDF. The visible support given by Government to women's rights has resulted in a climate favourable to the pursuit of gender studies in every sphere. Where it was unheard of ten years ago, it is now not uncommon to find women's studies programmes being offered in the universities, and it is far easier today to get a gender institute established, even in conservative universities, than it was before 1994⁵.

In this way, gender sensitization and the process of women's empowerment is finding an institutional space in our society. It has the effect of encouraging work in the area of gender studies and of producing the research, the theoretical analyses, comments and observations that are needed to focus and motivate further gender transformation in society. Thus, the articles here have been produced in the more gender-friendly environment of the new SA, and they highlight ways in which still-existing gender inequities and disempowering inequalities need to be addressed. Patriarchal defence mechanisms typically refuse to accept the facts of gender relations as oppressive, or as unjust in any way. The essays in this volume however are very persuasive and it would take a diehard masculinist to remain unconvinced, having read them, of the disempowering conditions at work in society. To describe current gender relations as unjust and disempowering of women, and to read of women's oppression and recognize it as such, is to find yourself automatically committed to opposing the injustice and resisting the oppression.

NOTES

1. See Harding, 1990 and Rose, 1994, for the standard feminist critique of so-called 'objective' or 'scientific knowledge'. There is an extensive body of literature, not only feminist in orientation but sociological and post-modern too, which shows how there is no such thing as absolutely universal, context-free knowledge.
2. Extract from an ANC gender policy discussion document – July 97, quoting from a speech of Samora Machel's: 'The emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of a humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the Revolution, the guarantee of its continuity and the precondition for its victory. The main objective of the Revolution is to destroy the system of exploitation and build a new society which releases the potentialities of human beings ... This is the context within which women's emancipation arises'.
3. For instance, the case of Anne Prior (Applicant) and Charles Donald Battle (Respondent) was brought before the Umtata Magistrate's Court in Oct 1995, and is pending. Because the Applicant had been married within the Umtata Magisterial District, she and her spouse were bound by customary law which meant that she was under the marital power of her husband with all the usual defects of that legal status. It was argued that under the new Constitution, this was a breach of human rights and an offence against individual dignity. The case is pending, having being opposed by CONTRALESA, the Council of Traditional Leaders of SA. Another recent case, one which tested the freedom of sexual orientation clause, was that of a lesbian police officer who claimed medical benefits for her partner. Justice JP Roux in the Pretoria High Court found that the stability and commitment of the relationship warranted it the same protection under the law as a heterosexual marriage. *Star*, Fri 6 Feb, 1998: 16.
4. 'The report establishes a baseline of information on women, assesses progress made by Government to date in meeting the Convention's 16 articles, and identifies areas for further action. An updated version of the report is available on the web at: <http://www.polity.org.za/govdocs/reports/cedaw1/html>'. Moolman, 1997:95.
5. Cf. the history of the Institute for Gender Studies at the University of

South Africa. Begun in the 1980's as the Centre for Women's Studies, staffed by unpaid volunteers who usually worked in the academic departments of the university, in Jan 1998 it was promoted to the status of an Institute, with two salaried positions, offices, computers, and all the perks normally accorded an institutional structure of the university.

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- The Star Newspaper*, Johannesburg. Friday 6 Feb., 1998.

**CONTESTING
THE
ANCIENT VOICES**

INTRODUCTION TO 'CONTESTING THE ANCIENT VOICES'

M Kleijwegt

This section contains four essays which attempt, each in their own way, to show how an understanding of cultures from the past and the acknowledgement of a living heritage may enrich our perspective on gender relations in the present. Richard Evans and Marc Kleijwegt explore gender relations in Greco-Roman Antiquity. Evans presents a convenient overview of remarkable women mentioned in Greek and Roman historical writings and demonstrates how the authors of these writings - without exception males - depicted women along the lines of traditional stereotypes. Kleijwegt argues that legal regulations dealing with marriage and divorce do not tell the full story about how individual women may have experienced the constraints of marriage and divorce. In other words, in a society dominated by patriarchal codes a legal situation which gives certain rights to women may not necessarily result in exercisable rights or transform itself into a situation where all women will benefit. Grazia Weinberg's essay straddles two different cultures, ancient and contemporary, in her analysis of the conflict of the sexes as evidenced in the reworking of the Clytemnestra story by contemporary Italian writer Dacia Maraini. Sisana Dlamini analyses traditional gender-related proverbs, idioms and everyday usages among the siSwati of Swaziland and demonstrates how language is an important instrument of power to convey and entrench traditional, male-generated, ideas about gender-relations. In spite of their widely divergent perspectives, all four essays share an emphasis on the entrenched position of patriarchal power which can be most conveniently discovered in the cultural traditions and social codes of behaviour forming part of the cultures that are studied.

The inclusion in a volume such as this of two essays dealing with the ancient non-Christian cultures of the Mediterranean world requires some further clarification since their relevance may not be immediately perceived. Evans' focus is on the writing of history in the Greek and Roman world, an area which has continued to influence the modern world. In style and subject matter the ancient historians set the standard for centuries to come, and even today the perspective of the majority of histori-

cal writings is not essentially different from that adopted by the Greeks and Romans. Through an identification of two stereotypes, the 'whore' and the 'heroine', Evans illustrates the antecedents of stereotypes still familiar to us today (for some modern-day parallels, see essays 10, 12, and 15). The distant perspective enables us to recognize the artificiality of such male constructions in a fruitful and detached way. It is to be understood, of course, that in the Greco-Roman world, as in today's world, the more positive stereotype of the 'heroine' is a creature which comes closest to the male idealization of how women should behave. Evans' essay shows in clear outlines that it does matter who is writing the histories and that an awareness of male-centred views of history (in books or in the schools) is of essential importance to a correct understanding of the past. In his essay on the constraints of marriage and divorce in Roman society Kleijwegt attempts to demonstrate how legal rulings on marriage and divorce are simplifications and reductions of complex, multi-interpretable social and cultural phenomena. Although the position of women in the household into which they married was subject to considerable change and improvement over time, it can still in its formal groundings be traced back to their status as outsiders. Woman's position was therefore treated with perennial suspicion and in important matters the woman was required to be a silent partner. The case of Cicero's wife Terentia and her daughter Tullia epitomizes the complexities involved. On first scrutiny the two women appear to have considerable freedom in conducting the arrangements for Tullia's next marriage, but it turns out that this is mainly due to the fact that Cicero was not present in Rome (a common enough occurrence in an imperialist state where members of the upper classes were sent out to govern parts of the empire). The involvement of the two women, therefore, creates the impression of an arrangement by default (it should be stressed that our only source for this, however, is Cicero's own correspondence). To those of a cynical disposition it will come as no surprise that Cicero later divorced Terentia - for reasons which we would subsume under incompatibility of character - and married a teenage bride, essentially for the huge dowry that she brought him.

The usefulness of an ancient perspective is fully demonstrated in Grazia Weinberg's essay on a modern adaptation of a Greek tragedy by Aeschylus on the figure of Clytemnestra. In the Greek tragedy, Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, the leader of the Greek expedition to

Troy, takes a lover during her husband's absence and upon his return murders him. In her view this behaviour is fully justified, because Agamemnon, in order to receive favourable winds to enable the Greek fleet to set sail for Troy, had sacrificed their daughter Iphigeneia, thus generating a conflict between mother-right and paternal power. Weinberg expertly leads us through the Greek tragedy and brings out its relevance to contemporary feminists, as evidenced in the interpretation of Dacia Maraini, the original tragedy having of course been written by a male author. What must astound the reader of this essay is the ease with which Maraini was able to readjust the story to a contemporary setting, thus demonstrating the power and universality of the original. The final essay in this section, by Sisana Dlamini, deals with the immediate context of a culture native to Southern Africa, and illustrates the relevance of studying the living heritage of a people. Among the siSwati stereotyping of expected social behaviour is transmitted through sayings and proverbs. The expressions of everyday usage codify gender-related performance. However, the messages inculcated by these conservative sayings and proverbs are questioned in folksongs in which women sing freely about how they experience the marital relationship. Since these songs have no identifiable author and are owned by the entire female community, they form a powerful medium for the expression of criticism. Dlamini's essay provides an enlightening parallel to Weinberg's essay in that they both testify to the creative efforts of women to reject and rewrite male views of women.

After reading these essays it should become clear that the skewing of gender relations to favour the male point of view is a pattern available in most cultures. The realization of this process in our contemporary world with the assistance of as much background information as possible will enable us to modify and enrich the way disciplines are taught and understood. Moreover, a broad knowledge of gender traditions will enable us to perceive patriarchal codes in a much clearer light, thus sensitising people to the oppressive nature of these practices and offering possibilities for strategising against it. As the essays in this section show, recognising the codes can lead to successful rewriting.

WHORES OR HEROINES: THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN GRAECO-ROMAN HISTORIES

Richard Evans

INTRODUCTION

The Rogers and Hammerstein Broadway hit musical, first produced in 1956, which later became an Oscar award-winning movie, *The King and I*, marks the starting point for this chapter, with the following apposite quotation:

*A woman is a female who is human,
Designed for pleasing man, the human male,
A human male is pleased by many women,
And all the rest you hear is fairy tale.*

*A girl must be like a blossom,
With honey for just one man,
A man must live like honey bee,
And gather all he can.
To fly from blossom to blossom,
A honey bee must be free,
But blossom must not ever fly from bee to bee to bee.*

Now I am, of course, quoting from the lyrics of a song delivered and made famous, in that musical, by Yul Brunner. But it is interesting to observe that the lyricist, Oscar Hammerstein, has put into the mouth of an ostensibly liberal and westernizing king of Thailand the ultra-conservative social mores of his time – the late 19th century. Indeed, many of the sentiments he expresses would not be out of place in SE Asia even today.

Since the time when men first wrote and, in doing so created a literature, they have written about women. In Western culture the phenomenon of a literature as opposed to a purely oral tradition finds its genesis in the person of the poet Homer and in the two works attributed to him, namely the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.¹ The traditional date of their composition is some time in the eighth century BCE, though authentic copies of these tales are dated only to late in the sixth century, some two hundred year

later, and to Athens where these poems were first read at religious festivals. Homer's importance as the progenitor of humankind's endeavours in the field of literary artistry was universally acknowledged in antiquity and his influence on later writers was profound.

I

In each of the Homeric epics, it is a woman who has the central if passive role. In the *Iliad*, Helen, who was the cause of the Trojan War, appears seldom and never as a figure of action. In the *Odyssey* Penelope occupies a static position in the family home around which all the activity takes place. Although Helen's adultery with Paris propelled the Greeks into a conflict with the Trojans which lasted for ten years, she escapes portrayal as a whore; and in fact Homer's portrait is rather sympathetic. As one of the Trojans is made to declare:²

'Who on earth ... could blame the Trojan and Achaean men-at-arms for suffering so long for such a woman's sake? Indeed, she is the very image of an immortal goddess. All the same, and lovely as she is, let her sail home and not stay to worry us and our children after us' (Il. 3.156–160).

It is Helen's beauty which seems to place her above any criticism of wrong-doing, while Paris, the Trojan prince with whom she eloped, is ridiculed by his brother Hector:

'Paris, you pretty boy ... you women-struck seducer, why were you ever born? Why weren't you killed before your wedding day? Yes, I could wish it so. Far better than to be a disgrace to the rest of us, as you are, and an object of contempt. How the long-haired Achaeans must laugh when they see us make a champion of a prince because of his good looks, forgetting that he has no strength of mind, no courage' (Il. 3.39–45).

And in the *Odyssey* when Helen appears reunited with her former husband Menelaus, king of Sparta, Homer still speaks of her with considerable reverence:

Helen with her ladies came down from her lofty perfumed room, looking like Artemis with her golden staff ... Helen sat down on the chair, which had a stool below it for her feet ... 'Surely this must be King Odysseus' son

Telemachus, whom his father left as a new-born baby in his home, when you Achaeans boldly declared war and took the field against Troy for my sake, shameless creature that I was' (Od. 4.130–143).

Helen's beauty, again compared to that of a goddess, clearly deterred criticisms of any past wrongs though she herself admits that she was party to unacceptable behaviour. Yet this seems to be a minor misdemeanour. Later in antiquity women could be prosecuted for adultery and divorced, even incarcerated on islands, but men were mostly exempt from either prosecution or penalty. Women in the Bronze Age, if the case of Helen may be presented as an authentic example, obviously had more freedom of action and were not necessarily regarded as the more guilty party. Paris her paramour was evidently perceived as the doer of the crime and Helen, perhaps because of her godlike qualities, the victim who could be, and obviously was, completely rehabilitated.

Penelope, on the other hand, the wife of Odysseus, who remained true to her husband during the ten years in which he fought against Troy, and in the following ten years in which he journeyed to his home in Ithaca, appears from the outset as a paragon of female virtues. There can be no doubt about her heroic qualities even though she does not once leave the confines of her home.

Wise Penelope, has true judgement, and all her thoughts are thoughts of virtue. (Od. 9.440)

She was not, however, lacking in feminine guile, a trait much ascribed to exceptional women in antiquity, as we shall see. In the second half of her husband's twenty-year absence she was constantly pursued by suitors for her hand in marriage. Odysseus was the chieftain of the island of Ithaca but his son Telemachus was not his automatic successor. The position of Basileus or king was elective among the senior families of the community.³ And the husband of Penelope would clearly have an advantage over other would-be successors since her choice would have been made wisely. She may have been a passive role-player in this saga, but she was certainly not unimportant for through marriage to Penelope lay the route to kingship. But she evidently believed that her husband would one day return and so she adroitly put off the day when she would have to choose a new husband.

'Young men who after Odysseus' death have come here seeking my hand in marriage, you are eager for this marriage with me. Nevertheless, I ask your patience until I have finished weaving this robe, so that what I have spun may not be wasted and be for nothing. It is king Laertes' burial-robe ... I dread the reproach from Achaean women here for allowing one who has gathered great possessions to lie at his death without a shroud.' From that time on she would weave the great web all day, but when night came she would have torches set beside her and would unravel the work. For three years on end this trickery foiled the suitors, but when the seasons passed and the fourth year came, one of her maids who knew the secret revealed the truth, and ... so with ill grace she finished the work. With the weaving over, she washed the great web and then displayed it; it shone out like the sun or the moon. (Od. 24.165–170)

When Odysseus did indeed return he was reunited with his wife and killed all the suitors for her hand. One of these gives an account of Penelope's intrigues on his arrival in Hades. Penelope is constantly referred to by Homer as 'the Wise' and her handling of her situation and her determination to await the return of Odysseus certainly combines to form a portrayal of a heroine.

Pandora in Hesiod's *Works and Days* (47–105) fares much more poorly. Pandora was the first mortal woman who was created by Zeus and the other Olympian gods, who all bestowed on her various characteristics; hence her name 'all gifts'. However, she was also taught flattery and guile by Hermes, another of the gods. Pandora was not intended to be a companion but a burden for the first men, Prometheus and Epimetheus. Prometheus ('Forethought') had stolen fire and Zeus meant to have his revenge through the actions of Pandora. Prometheus himself was much too cunning to be deceived by this gift of the gods, but his brother ('Afterthought') accepted this woman, together with a sealed jar which she brought with her. Now she was told never to open this jar because it contained all the evils of the world, but in the absence of the men she found the temptation irresistible.

Previously the races of humankind used to live completely free from evils and hard work and painful diseases, which hand men over to the Fates. For mortals soon grow old amidst evil. But the woman Pandora removed the cover from the great jar with her hands, and scattered the evils within and for men devised sorrowful troubles.⁴

II

The treatment of women by Herodotus, the first Greek historian writing two hundred and fifty years later has very noticeably undergone some changes in comparison to the earliest examples. And even if Herodotus is not always positive about the women he describes, he cannot be accused of the pessimism which abounds in Hesiod's work. Moreover, the women he portrays even as villains are far more active than any of those portrayed by Homer. For example, in the case of Pheretima, queen of Cyrene, we seem to have the tale of a woman who overstepped the boundaries of not only an unspoken code of female behaviour, but who also went far beyond the bounds of human decency. She suffered as a result.

Pheretima was mother of the ruler of Cyrene on the north African coast, and was expelled from the city with her son during the course of a civil war. She fled to Salamis on Cyprus where she was well received by its ruler Euelthon. He treated her very generously and gave her numerous presents, but her response was always the same. She thanked him for the present, but declared that she would have preferred an army instead, which she could have led back to Cyrene to regain her position there. Euelthon refused her request on several occasions, and finally:

... sent her a golden spindle and staff, with wool on it. Pheretima repeated the same words as before, which drew from Euelthon the reply that he had sent her a present which, unlike an army, he thought suitable for her sex. (Hd. 4.165)

Some time later after her son had regained his power but had been murdered by the people of the city of Barca, Pheretima fled to Egypt where she obtained the army she sought. She returned to Cyrene and stormed the city of Barca, and she had impaled on the walls of the city those men who had been responsible for the death of her son, and she cut off the breasts of their wives, which were also displayed. As a result of her brutality:

Pheretima's web of life was not woven happily to the end ... she died a horrible death, her body seething with worms while she was still alive ... by the nature

and severity of her punishment of the Barcaeans, she showed how true it is that all excesses in such things brings down on men the anger of the gods. (Hd. 4.180)

Yet, in the story of Artemisia, queen of Halicarnassus, audacity and guile brought great rewards. During the invasion of Greece by the Persian king Xerxes in 480 BC, among his commanders and trusted advisers was Artemisia.

It seems to me a most strange and interesting thing that she – a woman – should have taken part in the campaign against Greece. On the death of her husband the sovereign power had passed into her hands, and she sailed with the fleet in spite of the fact that she had a grown-up son and there was no need for her to do so. Her own spirit of adventure and manly courage were her only incentives. (Hd. 7.98)

The Greek army had been defeated at the battle of Thermopylae and the fleet had not done particularly well at Artemisium north of the island of Euboea. As a result, the Persian army stormed into Attica, captured and burned the city of Athens and the Acropolis. A short time beforehand, most of the citizens of Athens had been evacuated to Troezen, Aegina and Salamis. The combined Greek fleet of 380 ships, mostly Athenian triremes, remained stationed in the bay of Salamis and waited for a Persian offensive.⁵ Xerxes convened a council of war to discuss future tactics particularly for an outright and immediate attack on the Greek fleet. Most of those present advocated a set-piece battle, which they believed the king to favour. Artemisia alone urged the king to be cautious, and stated that Xerxes had accomplished his objective, namely the sack of Athens and, if he avoided a battle at that stage, he could easily force peace terms on the Greek city-states in a very short time.

Artemisia's friends were dismayed when they heard this speech and thought that Xerxes would punish her for trying to dissuade him from giving battle; but those who were jealous of her standing among the most influential persons in the armed forces were delighted at the prospect of her ruin. Nonetheless ... the king was highly pleased; he had always considered Artemisia an admirable person, but now he held her in even greater regard. Still, his orders were that the advice of the majority should be followed, for he believed that in the battles off Euboea his men had shirked their duty because he had not been pre-

sent in person – whereas this time he had made arrangements to watch the fight with his own eyes. (Hd. 8.69)

The Persian fleet advanced into the bay and the Greeks prepared to repel the invaders. The fight was brief for in a short time the Phoenician contingent on the right wing of the Persian fleet was suffering badly and there was a rapid breakdown in order as individual ships and their commanders tried to escape the Greek onslaught and certain death. Artemisia, who was being chased by an Athenian trireme:

... happened to be closest to the enemy and since there were other friendly ships just ahead of her, escape seemed impossible. In this difficult situation she thought of a scheme, which turned out greatly to her advantage. With the Athenian ships closely following she drove ahead with all speed and rammed one of her friends – a ship of Calynda ... and was lucky enough ... to reap a double benefit. For the captain of the Athenian ship, on seeing her ram an enemy, naturally supposed that her ship was a Greek one, or else that she was deserting to fight on the Greek side; and so he abandoned the chase ... That was one piece of luck – that she escaped with her life; the other was that, by this very act she raised herself higher than ever in Xerxes' esteem. The story goes that Xerxes ... observed the incident, and that one of the other onlookers remarked, 'Do you see, my lord, how well Artemisia is fighting? She has sunk an enemy ship'. Xerxes asked if they were sure it was really Artemisia, and was told that there was no doubt because they knew her flag well, and of course thought that she had sunk a Greek ship. She was indeed lucky in every way – not least in the fact that there were no survivors from the Calyndian ship to accuse her. Xerxes' comment on what was told to him is said to have been: 'My men have turned into women, my women into men.' (Hd. 8.87–88)

After the battle Xerxes summoned Artemisia and asked her advice. Should he remain with his army in Greece after so great a defeat on the sea? She suggested that he quit Greece while his plans and achievements were still intact. If his minions left behind later suffered defeats this would not reflect adversely on the reputation of the king, since he would not have been involved with the campaigns himself.⁶

Artemisia's advice to the king was most agreeable, since it was an expression of his own thoughts ... he complimented Artemisia and sent her off to Ephesus with his sons – some of his bastards who had accompanied him on the expedition. (HD. 8.101; cf. 107)

The difference between the ugly fate of Pheretima and the good fortune of Artemisia is possibly a result of the fact that the latter's deception on the battlefield was done on the spur of the moment and her slaughter of allied sailors was not premeditated. How she fared in later life we are not told, but the fact that the same family seems to have ruled Caria until its conquest by Alexander the Great in the 330's suggests that Artemisia's duplicity, if it was historical, was never discovered and that in later life she prospered.



It is interesting to observe that within a generation of Herodotus' composition, Thucydides in the history of the great Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) fails to mention a single woman. There is simply a complete absence of any reference to any prominent women and certainly not a heroine or whore portrayed in a whole work which, though never completed, is as extensive as Herodotus' theme on the Persian Wars.

Thucydides' history is noted for its solemnity and was written with a specific and didactic purpose in mind: the training of future statesmen, who through an acquaintance with the history of a disastrous war in Greece could with fore-knowledge avoid new follies. His work was not intended for the audience of the market-place as had been the custom with all literary compositions down to his own time. And the model of Thucydides was quickly taken up by other writers in antiquity who wished to emulate the sombre nature of this type of history. For the purpose of this discussion two historians are worthy of note. The first is Polybius who wrote a contemporary account of the expansion of the Roman empire in the second century BCE. He was heavily influenced by Thucydides and the didactic message, though different, is crystal clear: Rome's greatness was inevitable. But no Roman woman is given recognition for having even a contributory role in that imperial development. His older coeval, another politician and public figure, M. Porcius Cato, was the first Roman historian to write purely in Latin. His history rather takes matters to extremes since he mentions no one at all except himself in an account of the entire history of Rome from its prehistoric origins down to his own time. He is chiefly remembered as the progenitor of Latin historical writings, but like

Thucydides his approach to composition captured the minds of later writers. Sadly little remains of his main work the *Origines*.

Thucydides may not have found room to accommodate a study of female roles in his history, but that does not mean that women had either become unfashionable as a topic of news or that they had renounced exceptional behaviour. The biographer Plutarch, writing in the early second century CE, includes in his study of the great Athenian statesman Pericles a vignette of his mistress Aspasia. Aspasia was clearly a high-society courtesan whose place next to this public figure would, even in modern times, have probably been suppressed. But Aspasia was much too famous to be excluded from any work about Pericles, as Plutarch states:

... this is perhaps a suitable place to consider the extraordinary art or power this woman exercised, which enabled her to captivate the leading statesmen of the day and even provided the philosophers with a theme for prolonged and elevated discussions ... these details concerning Aspasia come to my mind as I write, and it would have been unnatural to omit them. (Plut. Per. 24.1–3)

Aspasia is credited with rare political wisdom, a rarity which is perhaps rather surprising since ‘wisdom’ per se features in Homer’s portrayal of Penelope who was in all respects a paradigm of family virtues. However, this facet is coupled with freedom of action, since Aspasia herself had apparently determined on her career through her own free will. She was a confidante of the philosopher Socrates and kept respectable company though her profession was considered dishonourable. After the death of Pericles, Aspasia actually married Lysicles, another politician who achieved public prominence through this connection. Her prominence came about possibly because of the independence of action she enjoyed in a trade which did not bind her to the strict social conventions of her fellow women, particularly those in the aristocracy.

As in literature, women have always featured in the art of vase paintings, frescoes, funerary monuments and particularly on the coinage. Therefore we find Athena, the patron goddess of the city of Athens, invariably portrayed on its coins, while elsewhere such as at Syracuse in Sicily, Arethusa had a constant place on the coinage. Most states in antiquity had a patron goddess even if male gods were as often worshipped and were regarded

as being more powerful and influential in the lives of all humans. By the beginning of the third century BCE mortal women in regal roles begin to occupy the coinage in their own right. For instance, Berenice, the queen of Ptolemy I, King of Egypt, about 300 BCE, and several of her successors as queens and consorts were also portrayed on the coins.

IV

In Rome too, from the beginning of a systematic coinage in about 211 BCE with the advent of the silver denarius, the goddess Roma became the regular obverse type for much of the next two hundred years.⁷ She is not, however, always endowed with especially female qualities. Witness her military appearance: she was a defender of the state or *res publica*. Unlike in Greece, Roman portrayal of Roman women on the coinage precedes the emergence of women in literary compositions. Although we hear of one woman who was writing and had her letters published towards the end of the second century BCE,⁸ it is only sixty years after that that the following description of a Roman woman was written by a Roman historian.

... Sempronia .. had committed many crimes of masculine daring. In birth and beauty, in her husband also and in children, she was exceptionally favoured; well read in Greek and Latin literature, she was able to play the lyre and dance more skilfully than an honest woman needed, and had many other accomplishments which are indispensable for licentiousness. And there was nothing which she held so cheap as modesty and chastity; you could not easily say whether she was less sparing with her money or her honour; her desires were so ardent that she sought men more often than they sought her ... she had often broken her word, denied her debts, been an accomplice to murder. Nevertheless she was a woman of exceptional endowments; she could write verse, exchange a joke, and use language which was modest, tender or vulgar; in sum, she possessed a high degree of wit and charm. (Sall. Cat. 25.1–5)

Verum ingenium eius haud absurdum; posse versus facere, iocum movere, sermone uti vel modesto vel molli vel procaci; prorsus multae facetiae multusque lepos inerat.

This last is a description of Sempronia, another vignette much like that devoted to Aspasia and the similarities are obvious though the writers, Sallust and Plutarch, lived one hundred and fifty years apart. Sempronia,

on the periphery of a conspiracy against the Roman republic, was again portrayed as an exceptionally independent woman of high society, not a courtesan like Aspasia but nonetheless possessing male daring rather like Artemisia, and with prostitution again as a pervasive element. Sempronia, who was at least half-admired by Sallust, was clearly a character and for all her dabbings in politics, did not suffer for behaving out of the ordinary. Like Aspasia she either outwitted her men or was tolerated or even worshipped for being different.

Not so fortunate were the high-society ladies noted by Livy in the fourth decade of his history of Rome, *ab urbe condita* or 'from the foundations of the city'.⁹ For example, a certain Hostilia was executed for murdering her husband, C. Calpurnius Piso, consul in 180 BCE, so that her son by a previous marriage, Q. Fulvius Flaccus, could succeed him (Liv. 40.37.1–7).¹⁰ She was prosecuted on the basis of rumours and gossip, and convicted on this circumstantial evidence. In a similar episode some thirty years later Publilia and Licinia, two aristocratic women again married to prominent public officials, were prosecuted for allegedly poisoning their husbands (Liv. Per. 48; Val. Max. 6.3.8). They were found guilty and were executed by their families ('strangulatae sunt'). In 129 BCE the great Roman general P. Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus was found dead in his bed, and both his wife, Sempronia, and his mother-in-law, Cornelia, were widely believed to have poisoned him, though they were never charged (Liv. Per. 59).¹¹ The death of famous and influential men in the community could be a dangerous time for their unfortunate spouses, since wives could easily be implicated as the killers. In fact, Scipio Aemilianus probably died of heart failure, while the earlier instances of sudden death all occurred while plagues were ravaging Italy. And as far as adultery was concerned, the Romans could be equally ruthless in their sentencing of women. In 114 three Vestal Virgins, Aemilia, Licinia and Marcia, half the priestly college of the goddess Vesta and all from aristocratic families, were convicted of adulterous liaisons and suffered the penalty for breaking their vows of chastity (Liv. Per. 63; Obseq. 37).¹²

The Romans evidently perceived in women particular feminine strengths or virtues, as exemplified by the deities Libertas or Venus Victrix illustrated on the denarii of Marcus Brutus and Julius Caesar.¹³ But they were also under no illusions about a woman's capacity for either leadership or

action, which they might otherwise regard as a more masculine attribute. Hence the appearance also on a denarius of Caesar of a very warlike and vigorous goddess such as Juno Sospita,¹⁴ engaged in battle dressed as a Gallic warrior. She is indeed the precursor of that great Celtic rebel against Roman rule in the 60's CE, Boudicca, queen of the Iceni in Britain.

Perhaps one of the most famous women in antiquity who combined these facets of leadership and action was Cleopatra, the last ruler of an independent Egypt before the region was absorbed into the Roman empire. Cleopatra was confirmed as the queen of Egypt as a result of the support, and some would say, infatuation of Julius Caesar.¹⁵ She is usually portrayed as rather languid female with obvious cat-like qualities, slow to move but ruthless once roused.¹⁶ The famous or infamous modern cinematic portrayals by Vivien Leigh and Elizabeth Taylor are nonetheless to some extent borne out by the ancient evidence. Caesar had arrived in Egypt following his victory at the battle of Pharsalus in 48 and quickly became embroiled in the complicated family politics of the Alexandrian royal court, in a city which itself thrived on endemic civil strife. Plutarch states:

Cleopatra ... embarked in a small boat and landed at the palace when it was getting dark. Since there seemed to be no other way of getting in unobserved, she stretched herself out at full length inside a sleeping bag, and Appolodorus, her sole companion, after tying up the bag, carried it inside to Caesar. This little trick ... which showed her provocative impudence, is said to have been the first thing about her which captivated Caesar and, as he came to know her better, he was overcome by her charm ... (Plut. Caes. 49.1)

Cleopatra was then aged about twenty, and she accompanied Caesar back to Rome, but after the dictator's assassination on the Ides of March 44 she returned to Egypt. Shortly afterwards she was summoned to Tarsus in Cilicia by one of Caesar's successors Marcus Antonius (Plut. Ant. 36.1). And there began one of the great love stories of antiquity, if not of all time.

Antony was under her spell and together they set out to make the Middle East their personal domain, partly to be carved out from the empire of the Romans, partly to be won from the empire of the Parthians.

However, they soon alienated Roman sympathies and especially Octavian, Caesar's heir, with whom they eventually came into conflict. He defeated the lovers at the battle of Actium in 31 BCE and they fled to Alexandria. A year later with Octavian's army outside the city Antony fell on his sword. After she had buried Antony, Cleopatra, to forestall being hauled off to Rome as a prize of war by Octavian, committed suicide through the bite of an asp or Egyptian cobra concealed, it is said, in a basket of figs.

... they found her lying dead on a golden couch dressed in royal robes ... Iras lay dying at her feet, while Charmian, already tottering ... was arranging the crown ... Then one of the guards cried out angrily, 'Charmian, a fine deed this?' and she answered, 'It is indeed most fine, and suitable for a descendant of so many royal kings,' and as she uttered the words, she fell dead by the side of the couch. (Plut. Ant. 85.4)

Cleopatra and Antony were interred together. But their love affair is much celebrated in Plutarch's biography of Antony where, in fact, much of the second half of the narrative is as much devoted to Cleopatra, such was fame of this couple even one hundred and twenty years afterwards.¹⁷ And this literary material about the last queen of Ptolemaic Egypt constitutes one of the most extensive studies of any woman in antiquity. On account of her many accomplishments and perhaps also her notoriety, Cleopatra was a worthy subject for such an examination. Her role as an enemy of the Roman empire seems to have been quickly forgotten and she remains one of the more attractive figures in an age of civil strife and turbulent politics.

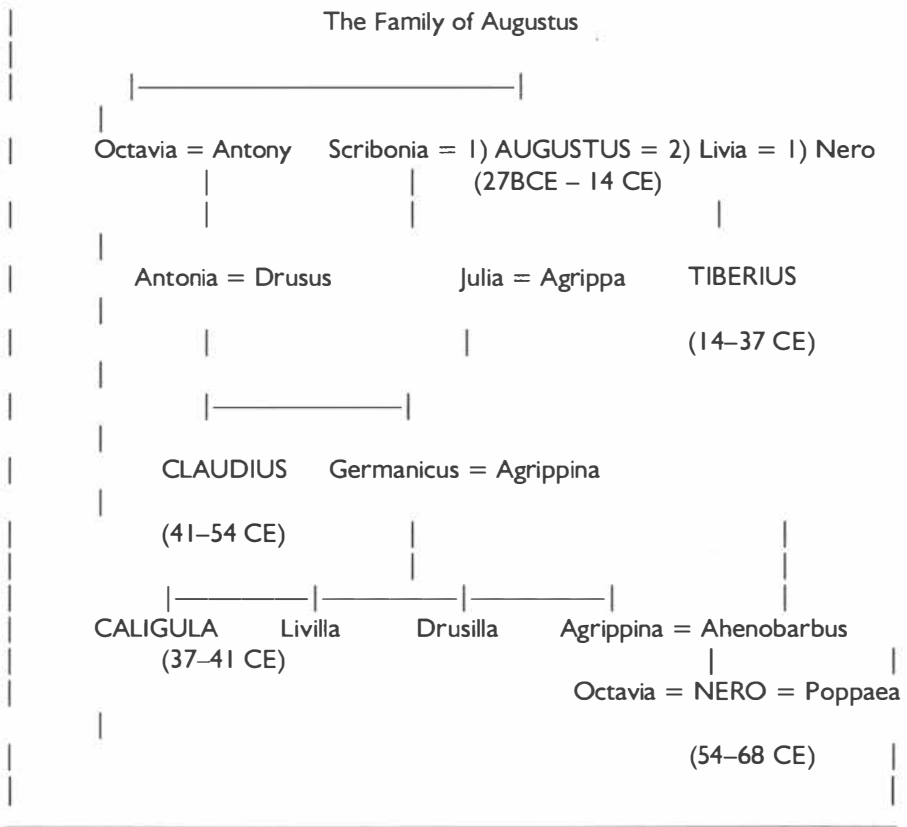
V

Octavian, who became the first emperor as Augustus in 27 BCE, was destined to found a dynasty – the Julio-Claudians – which ruled the Roman empire for the next century. One of his great grand-daughters, Agrippina, lived a particularly colourful and eventful life and she acquired great power, but she died in a scene of horror which probably could not be bettered by any Hollywood director.¹⁸ She was married at the age of thirteen (28 CE) and widowed at the age of twenty-five (40 CE), then with one son aged three. At that time her brother Caligula was the emperor and initially he favoured his three sisters, Agrippina (the eldest), Livilla and

Drusilla. But Caligula had Agrippina banished after he suspected her of plotting against him. After he was murdered in 41 CE, and after his uncle Claudius had become emperor, Agrippina was recalled from her exile, married a second time and widowed again. In 47 CE the emperor's wife Messalina, herself worthy of detailed treatment, conspired against her husband, was discovered and executed.¹⁹ The emperor's advisors believed that he should marry for a fourth time and the winner of a little informal competition was:

Agrippina, daughter of his brother Germanicus, who hooked him. She had a niece's privilege of kissing and caressing Claudius, and exercised it with a noticeable effect on his passions: when the senate next met, he persuaded the senators to propose that a union between him and Agrippina should be arranged at once, in the public interest; and that other uncles should likewise be free to marry their nieces, though this had previously been counted as incest. The wedding took place without delay, but no other uncle cared to follow Claudius' example. (Suet. Claud. 26.2)

The marriage ceremony took place on January 1st 49 when Agrippina was thirty-four and her husband nearly sixty. Her son from her first marriage was still alive; he was called Nero and was soon adopted by the emperor. Agrippina made herself an indispensable consort to an increasingly feeble emperor. She was proclaimed Augusta and it was plain to all that her son would succeed while Claudius' own son Britannicus would be passed over as too young. Claudius died suddenly after a banquet in 54 CE, and the gossips claimed that he had been poisoned by his wife.²⁰ She certainly took immediate control with the support of the prefect of the palace guard, Afranius Burrus, and her son's tutor, the senator and philosopher, Seneca. Nero, then aged sixteen, was proclaimed the new ruler but Agrippina evidently intended to be the real power behind the throne.



However, Agrippina's ambitious plans for the future did not go quite as she had anticipated. Initially, in the first months of the reign, she is portrayed on the coinage as her son's equal,²¹ but neither Nero nor his advisers were happy with this situation and were determined that the Augusta's position be reduced. Her decline was dramatic and is borne out on the coinage where she is at first relegated to a position behind her son and then disappears altogether as she was forced into retirement. Nero soon found that he could no longer bear even the presence of his mother at a distance; she had to be removed permanently. Moreover, Nero had fallen in love with Poppaea but was still married to Claudius' daughter Octavia and his mother now protected the emperor's wife against the new mistress.

Nero ceased delaying his long-meditated crime. The longer the reign lasted, the bolder he became. Besides he loved Poppaea more every day. While Agrippina lived Poppaea saw no hope of his divorcing Octavia and marrying her. So she nagged him incessantly. He was under his mother's thumb, she said – master neither of the empire or of himself. Finally he ... decided to kill Agrippina. His only doubt was whether to employ poison or the dagger or violence of some other kind. (Tac. Ann. 13.57)

Agrippina was far too alert for poison or the assassin's knife to be successful, so an entirely novel scheme had to be devised. Nero invited his mother to dinner as a gesture of reconciliation. The emperor and his suite were at Baiae on the coast for a holiday and Agrippina was staying nearby in her own villa. She arrived rather suspicious, but the evening went well and she left with two friends at midnight in a boat provided by her son. When it reached the open water a signal was given, and the cabin ceiling collapsed killing one of the friends, but a strong couch prevented Agrippina and the other friend from being crushed. This friend dashed out to call for help but was murdered, and as the boat began to sink Agrippina slipped overboard in the confusion and swam ashore.

Back at her villa she sent word to Nero that she had survived an unfortunate accident. In reply the Emperor sent a troop of soldiers to finish her off.

A menacing column arrived and ... surrounded her house and broke in. Arresting every slave in his path Anicetus came to her bedroom door. Here stood a few servants – the rest had been frightened away by the invasion. In her dimly lit room a single maid waited with her. Agrippina's alarm had increased as nobody ... came from her son. If things had been well there would not have been this terribly ominous isolation, then this sudden uproar. The maid vanished. 'Are you leaving me too?' called out Agrippina. Then she saw Anicetus. Behind him were a captain, Herculeius, and Obaritus, a centurion of the Palace Guard. 'If you have come to visit me', she said, 'you may report that I am better. But if you are assassins, I know that my son is not responsible. He did not order his mother's death'. The murderers closed around the bed. First the captain struck her on the head with his staff. Then as the Guards officer was drawing his sword to finish her off, she cried out 'Strike here!' – pointing to her womb. Blow after blow fell and she died.

This was the end that Agrippina had expected for years. The prospect had not daunted her. When she asked astrologers about Nero they had answered that he would become emperor but kill his mother. Her reply was 'Let him kill me just as long as he becomes emperor!'. (Tac. Ann. 14.8–9)

'Hunc sui finem multos ante annos crediderat. Agrippina contemptseratque. Nam consulenti super Nerone responderunt Chaldaei fore ut imperaret metremque occideret; atque illa 'occidat' inquit 'dum imperet.'

Finally we come to the tale of Zenobia, Queen of the city of Palmyra, some two hundred years later during a period of great instability in the Roman empire, and when it all but broke apart into many separate states. Palmyra lay on the great trade route between Syria and Babylonia, a fertile oasis in the desert which divided the Romans from the empire of the Parthians to the east of the Euphrates river. In the middle of the third century it was governed for the Romans by Odaenathus who from 260 declared himself a king though he continued to be loyal.²² In 267 Odaenathus and his eldest son were murdered by his wife Zenobia, who proclaimed their young son Vaballathus emperor in outright opposition to the government at Rome. At first Zenobia was triumphant as her army conquered almost the entire eastern half of the Roman empire from Asia Minor in the north to Egypt in the south. Eventually she was defeated by the emperor Aurelian who besieged Zenobia at Palmyra and where she surrendered to the victors. On Aurelian's return to Rome, Zenobia was exhibited in the Emperor's triumphal procession through the streets of the city in 274 CE.

She was led in a triumph so magnificent, the likes of which the Romans had never seen. For in the first place, she was adorned with gems so huge that she laboured under the weight of her ornaments; for it is said that this woman, courageous though she was, halted very frequently saying that she could not endure the load. Moreover, her feet were bound with shackles of gold and her hands with golden fetters, and even on her neck she wore a chain of gold, the weight of which was born by a Persian clown. Her life was granted to her by Aurelian. (The Thirty Tyrants, 30. 24–27, Historia Augusta)

On the one hand, Zenobia is ascribed beauty and intelligence and on the other hand audacity and cruelty, many of the characteristics usually attributed to exceptional women in antiquity. Again she features as that rare

woman of action who at first outwitted the men but who was later overcome and humbled. She did not suffer death for her ambitions however, and in fact was pardoned by the Emperor who gave her a pension and a villa. She is supposed to have later married a Roman senator and lived a long and prosperous life.²³ She therefore had more in common with Artemisia, that cunning Queen of Halicarnassus, than with Cleopatra the last Queen of Egypt.

CONCLUSION

The earliest literary sources appear to assign a passive role to women, yet are less prescriptive in their judgements about their activities or behaviour. This might well reflect a time in world history when social and behavioural patterns were still much less defined than they are now. Later writers in antiquity tend to account for a woman's exceptional actions in a heroine portrayal, which is mostly in the military sphere, by asserting a direct connection with what they considered to have been essentially masculine attributes. Where a woman was characterised in a whore portrayal there is, nevertheless, usually the coupling of what might be classed as a dishonourable activity with much more worthy facets. The characterisation either as whore or heroine is therefore not clearly delineated, although the portrayal of one or the other seems soon to have settled down into a stereotyped form. This could have occurred as a result of later and inferior writers employing earlier sources without much artistic innovation.

Stereotyping or the use of topical elements ('topoi') in the narrative body of a work were an acceptable, even a necessary component of any literary composition in antiquity just as they are the usual ingredients for a good whodunit or a romance in modern fiction. The role of women in many historical works, especially those which were meant to entertain, became as topical as the various activities ascribed to their male counterparts: it was part and parcel of the genre. The writing of history in the Ancient World was very different to its composition today, for invention and inclusion of anecdotal material was allowed to writers, and was very much demanded by their readers and their audience, male and female alike.

The evidence, such as it is, shows a degree of freedom of action among women of a certain class – the political élite – which probably did not extend down to the bottom of the social scale. Moreover the histories of the Graeco-Roman period obviously tell about exceptions to the rule, for these were more interesting to an audience or a reader than the norm. Hence perhaps also the tendency to portray in one extreme or another, which would cause delight or mild consternation among the readership. Still, in order to write a successful history the whore or heroine component had to be taken on board by the writer. Yet that also suggests of course, that what is called history may not be history at all; and as Moses Finely so rightly pointed out:²⁴

there will always be one vital piece missing – what the women would have said had they been allowed to speak for themselves.

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NOTES

1. Thirty thousand lines in all, but there have been doubts about the authorship especially the *Odyssey*. *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1970²) 525.
2. Translated extracts, where they are not my own, are taken either from the Loeb or Penguin Classics editions.
3. Odysseus' father Laertes was still alive and features towards the end of this epic. He had clearly abdicated in favour of his son who had become king after him. This form of kingship was not dynastic. However, we are told elsewhere that Telemachus did indeed become king after Odysseus, securing the family line.
4. Hesiod also says that Hope remained as a solace for Humankind, though just why Hope should have been in a jar full of evils is not revealed, unless this concept too is an evil, in that it is an illogical process, Morford & Lenardon (1991) 70–73.
5. Herodotus gives the total number of ships in the Greek fleet, Hd. 8.82, and notes that 180 of these were Athenian, Hd. 8.44. There were also an unspecified number of light galleys, Hd. 8.48.
6. Mardonius the king's brother-in-law was left in charge of the army, Hd. 8.107, and was defeated and killed at Plataea in the following year, Hd. 9.61. He also says that Xerxes had been badly frightened by the victory of the Greeks.
7. Crawford (1974) 28–35.
8. Cornelia mother of the Gracchi who died about 100BC.
9. Livy's work extended to at least 142 books which covered the entire history of Rome, from 753 to 8 BC.
10. Evans (1994) 28–34.
11. 'De morte tamen eius nulla quaestio acta', cf. Cicero, *De Amicitia* ('On Friendship') 5.10–14.
12. A Vestal found guilty of the crime of 'unchastity' was sentenced to entombment alive. Thus, if the goddess chose, she might be released before death, Plutarch, *Life of Numa* 10; *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 1116.
13. Crawford (1974) 455, no. 433/1 (*Libertas*), the moneyer being

M. Brutus in ca. 54; 487, no. 480/4 (Venus), the moneyer being L. Aemilius Buca in 44.

14. Crawford (1974) 487, no. 480/2a minted by M. Mettius in 44.

15. She claimed that she was the mother of Caesar's son, whom she named Caesarion, Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 54.4; 81.2–82.1.

16. Cleopatra was certainly ruthless. She fought a civil war against one brother, Ptolemy XIII, her husband, and he was killed in battle in 47. She ordered the assassination of another brother, her co-ruler Ptolemy XIV, in 44. Her own son Caesarion=Ptolemy XV was killed in 30.

17. The children of Antony were brought up in the household of Augustus, and his descendants included the emperors Caligula, Claudius and Nero. One of Cleopatra's daughters was married to Juba, king of Mauretania, Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 87.1–4.

18. Agrippina also wrote and published her own autobiography (*The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 31), which was consulted by Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* 4.53.3; Furneaux (1886) 2 and n. 7.

19. Messalina was also noted for her debauchery. Her end is told by Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* 11.12; 11.26–38; *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 675.

20. It was said that he died from eating poisoned mushrooms offered to him by Agrippina herself, Suetonius, *Life of the Deified Claudius* 44; Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome* 12.67.

21. Mattingly & Sydenham (1962) 145 and n. 2: "For the first time in the history of the Empire the portrait of a living royal lady is placed together with that of the reigning emperor on the coinage."

22. On Palmyra, Odaenathus and Zenobia see, for example, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* 746, 772, 1145–6; Newark (1989) 52–54.

23. *Historia Augusta* (Thirty Tyrants) 30.27, states that she was presented with an elegant villa by Aurelian at Tivoli near Rome. She is also said to have had daughters who married into noble families, and that her line was not yet extinct in the fifth century.

24. Finley (1972) 125. It could be noted that Cornelia and Agrippina are therefore truly exceptional in that they both wrote and circulated their works, and it is a tragedy indeed that these publications did not survive. There may have been, and there probably were, other literary works by women.

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THE CONSTRAINTS OF ROMAN MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE

Marc Kleijwegt

The perspective on Roman society that is available to us from literature, law, and the arts is mainly that of the well-educated upper-class male. This means that we study women in Rome as they were perceived by men. Moreover, the women who receive most of the attention belonged to the upper classes. This necessarily puts restrictions on what we can hope to achieve in trying to recover the outlines of female experiences. The situation, however, is not wholly desperate. For example, there are a number of female writers, like Sappho and Sulpicia, whose works have survived, although in much fragmented form (in the case of Sappho) or hidden among the writings of a male poet (as is the case with Sulpicia whose poems have survived as part of the corpus of Tibullus). Further, there is a wealth of information on women contained in lexicons from late Antiquity. The advantage with this sort of material is that bits of information are related without an immediate context, such as the fact that Plato had several female disciples or that the first scientific treatise on wet-nursing was written by a woman (the work itself is no longer extant). Furthermore, there is the possibility to deconstruct references to women from their male-biased environment by way of focusing on the behaviour of the women and thus bypassing the stereotypical judgemental qualifications offered by male writers. The behaviour itself can tell us what the extent was of subvertive attitudes devised by women and it enables us to at least speculate on the motivation behind it. Moreover, since some stories are without any obvious parallel in other literature in the way they represent women, there is the real possibility that historical behaviour stood at the basis of the account.

There is a final and even more challenging way of confronting women in the Roman world. Mediterranean society in the past and in the present has been frequently described as an honour and shame society. The exact implications of this characterization need to be spelled out briefly. For our theme it is important to note that married life engulfed women in a set of codes of behaviour. Transgressions not only affected her own reputation,

but also that of her husband and that of her paternal family. Adultery, therefore, represented more than a breach of the marriage; for the male it meant that his esteem was significantly reduced because he had lost 'face'. Recent studies have advanced our understanding of women in ancient society by drawing on anthropological research in contemporary Mediterranean societies. This trend has been more influential for the study of women in classical Athens than for Roman women, but there is much in the methodology that can be applied equally fruitfully to Roman society.¹ One of the positive results of these comparative studies is that male ideas on female behaviour have been identified as prescriptive rather than normative. The idea commonly found in ancient Athens and Rome that, ideally speaking, (upper-class) women should stay at home to avoid encounters with other men, was discovered to hinder their movements only to a slight degree. It was established that women are (and were) particularly apt at manipulating these social codes to their own advantage: being found out is worse than violating the code in the first place. Male talk about female behaviour is sometimes merely an expression of male bravado, whereas reality is shaped differently. A quote from one of the most imaginative accounts of gender issues in ancient Greece may help in illustrating my point:

'The modern study of women's place in men's ideologies and their perspective on men's ideologies has had an extraordinarily beneficial effect on our comprehension of ancient societies. The more we learn about comparable gender-segregated, pre-industrial societies, particularly in the Mediterranean area, the more it seems that most of men's observations and moral judgments about women and sex and so forth have minimal descriptive validity and are best understood as coffeehouse talk, addressed to men themselves. Women, we should emphasize, in all their separate groupings by age, neighborhood and class, may differ widely from each other and from community to community in the degree to which they obey, resist, or even notice the existence of such palaver as men indulge in when going through their bonding rituals' (Winkler, 1990:6).

This chapter has two aims. The first is to offer as much as possible an insight into a society that is distant both in geographical terms and in time. My second aim is to discuss those structures of behaviour that might be able to evoke immediate parallels with contemporary situations. Its overall

objective is to explore how social codes attached to marriage and divorce may have affected the position of women. It is to be stressed that thoughts about marriage and divorce in a pre-industrial society such as Rome are varied and complex.² To discuss all of these aspects, or even to give proper weight to a single individual item, lies beyond the scope of this survey. This will necessarily lead to simplifications of issues that in reality are vastly complex, but I hope to be able to give at least a few glimpses into the fascinating fabric of Roman social behaviour. In the section on marriage I have focussed on cases which fall outside the normal routine (as if the routine was ever documented in 'uncontaminated' form so that it can be safely isolated!).³ This was done for two reasons. First, these anecdotes are used as an illustration of what the Romans themselves thought was important about married life, and how 'doing the right thing' was of eminent value. Second, it is through describing the limits of what was thought possible that we may better understand how a culture manipulates its own concepts. This is crucial for an understanding of any society in which marriage is investigated. Marriage exists as a legal concept and as a social phenomenon, but its dimensions are changed continuously through the personal demands and expectations of the people who shape their lives in accordance with what society expects them to do. Thus we can assume the existence of a norm of marriage, even though individual behaviour may diverge from those requirements.

Anecdotes about the Roman version of divorce are generally less spectacular. Divorce, and more specifically a string of divorces, as a social phenomenon, was a matter of moral condemnation. Specific cases, however, only attract major attention when they concern members of the imperial family, that is when the breaking up of a marriage inevitably entailed political implications affecting the whole fabric of society.⁴ Stories about specific cases concerning less high-powered individuals are less explicit about the moral implications – if blame was apportioned, more often than not the husband was also criticized – and basically record a fact of life. Because of the Romans' interest in antiquarianism, we possess a record of the first divorce in Roman history, and we are particularly well informed about the famous case of Carvilius Ruga, who was the first Roman to divorce his wife for sterility (Watson, 1965). The study of these cases is insufficient for an exploration of divorce. This section is therefore shaped differently. A series of important issues has dominated recent research on

divorce. Among them the frequency of divorce has been the most important. The emphasis having mainly been on the senatorial aristocracy, the overall impression is that the rate of divorce was relatively low,⁵ in spite of the overexposure in our sources of a number of ambitious women (Treggiari, 1991b). It should be noted, however, that the evidence includes a vast number of unknown cases, where the dissolution of a marriage may have been either the result of divorce or of the natural death of the husband. More recently scholars have explored the divorce formulas used in the second-century dramatist Plautus in order to understand the early history of the female right to initiate divorce (McDonnell, 1983; Saller, 1993; Rosenmeyer, 1995). I will mainly focus on the legal implications of divorce for the position of women. This part of the study will be characterized by a certain amount of ambivalence. On the one hand, free access to divorce procedures for women impresses upon us a notion of flexibility as a characteristic of Roman marriage. Especially when compared to the strict legislation on divorce known from the Middle Ages, a study of divorce in Roman society can easily develop the idea that women possessed more freedom. However, I will attempt to show that such freedom as there was, was demarcated by the fact that the status of being married was essential to the reputation of women.

Before we come to these issues, however, it is necessary to briefly sketch the social legislation of the emperor Augustus. Its interest lies mainly in the transformation of the playing field after the establishment of the Principate (31 BCE), replacing a system of oligarchic government by one man rule. The question of married or unmarried status and whether marriages produced children or not became the concern of the government. With the advent of the Principate, the power of one individual who dictated political life enabled the government to deploy the full array of the administrative machinery in order to uphold its legal rulings. At issue here is not merely to determine whether Augustus's legislation successfully transformed the mentality of his subjects – which is questionable –, but also to explore its symbolic effects. In fact, Augustus's intervention into an important aspect of domestic politics equipped married life and motherhood with a strong ideological aura. His political programme ensured that a woman's reputation became more stoutly defined on the basis of her ability to produce children.

MARRIAGE, REPRODUCTIVE POWER, AND SOCIAL ENGINEERING

As part of his legislation to reconstruct the state after the destructive civil war of the late first century BCE, the emperor Augustus (27 BCE-14 CE) made a serious attempt to regulate married life of the upper classes. This type of legislation was not new, since the Romans had always equated the disruption of society with the breakdown of married life, and especially with the unchecked behaviour of women. It must be said, however, that the scope of Augustus's programme penetrated more deeply into domestic life than any previous measures had done. It has been recognized by modern scholars as the first example of social engineering in history (Cohen, 1991b).

The Julian law dates to 18 BCE after which various modifications were introduced, which resulted in the Papian-Poppaean law of 9 CE. It seems clear that the original law had introduced penalties against men and women who were unmarried at an age at which they were expected to be married, or childless at an age when they could have been parents. It formulated rules about the intermarriage of different classes and introduced rewards to encourage parenthood. For example, to parents of one child by allowing one year's seniority in public office or the right to inherit each other's whole estate or to take under the wills of people outside the sixth degree; three children exempted a father from various legal duties in Rome (four in Italy, five in the provinces), three enabled a freedman worth 100,000 HS to exclude his patron from inheriting; three children released a freeborn woman, four a freedwoman, from guardianship.

What inspired Augustus to initiate these measures? The general picture is clear: Augustus was of the opinion that members of the upper classes married too late, and, consequently, produced too few children. By laying down minimum ages at which people should be married (20 for women, 25 for men), he attempted to achieve two aims: first, to create a more stable hereditary upper class, and, second, to stamp out immoral behaviour. The programme was ambitious and probably beyond the powers of any pre-industrial government, it was certainly beyond the powers of Augustus. Developments between the introduction of the first law in 18 BCE and 9 CE are not fully clear, but there are signs of aristocratic discontent which necessitated the emperor to implement some modifica-

tions. It is not recorded how women reacted to the measures, but in the light of aristocratic unwillingness to have families, rewards for female fertility sanctioned by the state may have simply been ignored. Formal opposition has not been recorded in much detail, and most of it may have proceeded in an informal capacity. It is striking to note, however, that when transgressions are reported, they concern the Augustan laws on intermarriage and adultery. For the year 19 CE the historian Tacitus reports on the behaviour of a senatorial woman called Vistilia:

'In the same year the senate passed stringent decrees against female immorality. The granddaughters, daughters and wives of Roman gentlemen were debarred from prostitution. A woman called Vistilia, belonging to a family that had held the praetorship, had advertised her availability to the aediles, in accordance with the custom of our ancestors who believed that an immoral woman would be sufficiently punished by this shameful declaration. Her husband Titidius Labeo was also requested to state why, when his wife was obviously guilty, he had refrained from enforcing the statutory penalty. He alleged, however, that the sixty days allowed him for consultation had not expired. It was therefore decided to take action regarding the woman only, and she was deported to the island of Seriphos' (Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 2. 84; trans. M. Grant).

By inscribing herself on the aediles' list of prostitutes, Vistilia had attempted to remove her private life from the regulation of the law by exploiting a loophole. In the end, however, her ingenuity did not protect her from prosecution and she was convicted of adultery. In Suetonius' account of the same episode it appears that Vistilia had not been the only woman to 'protest' against restrictive legislation in this way. We must infer that flouting of the law had become so flagrant and frequent that the government had to act and that Vistilia was made an example of because of her high birth and family connexions.

The Augustan legislation on marriage and the family appropriated for the government an area that had traditionally belonged to the family council. Even if the laws were occasionally evaded, or perhaps generally ignored, their symbolic power was enormous. It established the precedent, first of all in Roman history, and later transmitted to other societies, that family matters were the state's business. Augustus used every possible means to

communicate his ideas. He employed members of his own family as a model of what he had in mind, making a public display of Germanicus, Agrippina and their children to encourage the unmarried and childless. Having children was now a `desideratum', which was made more attractive by the awarding of privileges that enhanced men and women's legal powers. We find references to the *ius trium liberorum* (`the privileges awarded to a woman who had produced three children or more') in literature and on inscriptions. Their proper evaluation is an intricate affair, since we lack autonomous female authorities expressing an opinion on the consequences for their lives. However, there can be no doubt that some women were able to improve their legal status thanks to the ability to bear children. This discussion gives us some form of insight into how the position of women could be affected in Roman society. Benefits for women were normally not enforced through protest against forms of legal injustice. They were not realized as the direct result of a concern with the improvement of women's legal position, but as a spin-off of developments primarily affecting the position of the whole family.

EXOTIC TABLEAUS OF MARRIAGE: INDECENT PROPOSALS AND FEMALE INITIATIVE

The rules of an aristocratic marriage may be briefly outlined as follows. Marriage in general was a private arrangement, which did not require state interference or official registration. A valid marriage involved two individuals above the age of twelve (for girls) and fourteen (for boys).⁶ In the case of people under paternal power, male representatives of both families were also present. In the end several witnesses signed the marriage contract, which contained important clauses with regard to dowry and other financial arrangements. It was paternal power, and not age, which was the decisive factor in whether the marriage partners were allowed a free choice. It was possible, at least in theory, that a forty year-old woman had to consult her father for permission to get married, whereas a younger woman, whose father had died, might be able to make an autonomous decision. Very young girls were protected against unscrupulous husbands through the intervention of a legal caretaker, in most cases a male relative. The exclusion of the state allowed families to develop their own strategies. A woman who was financially independent had more power to negotiate a deal that favoured her own interests,

emotionally and financially, than others who were less affluent. In most other cases, political imponderables as a rule outweighed sentimental motivations. Conjugal love was not uncommon, but the practice of arranged marriages made emotional issues strictly subservient to other criteria.⁷ Moreover, if love between partners became excessive it was frowned upon.

Two texts may serve to illustrate the workings of male codification that is prevalent in stories about marriage in the Roman world. They were written by Plutarch, a Greek writer, who, although relying on Roman sources, adopted a predominantly Greek perspective on Roman affairs (Swain, 1995; 1996). His background and foreign perspective have the advantage of enabling us to approach the material in the manner of an anthropologist. In the first century BCE a Roman aristocrat, Marcus Porcius Cato, was married to Marcia, 'a woman of reputed excellence'. Within Cato's circle of friends there was a certain Quintus Hortensius, 'a man of splendid reputation and excellent character'. This man wanted to be more than a mere associate of Cato and consequently investigated the ways through which to bring his whole family and line into community of kinship with him. He attempted to persuade Cato to give him his daughter 'as noble soil for the production of children' (similes based on the female body as a plot of land to be 'developed' are common in Greco-Roman literature). Porcia, however, was already married and had borne her husband two sons. To his credit, Hortensius was aware of the absurdity of his request, but, he argued, according to the law of nature it was honourable and good for the state that a woman in the prime of youth and beauty should neither quench her productive power and lie idle, nor yet, by bearing more offspring than enough, burden and impoverish a husband who does not want them. Moreover, community in heirs among worthy men would make virtue abundant and widely diffused in their families, and the state would be closely cemented together by their family alliances. And if Bibulus [Porcia's husband] were wholly devoted to his wife, Hortensius said he would give her back after she had borne him a child, and he would thus be more closely connected both with Bibulus himself and with Cato by a community of children.

Cato rejected the request, considering it absurd for Hortensius to propose marriage with a daughter who had already been given to another. Undismayed, Hortensius subsequently boldly asked for Cato's wife, since

she was still young enough to bear children and Cato had heirs enough. For a proper understanding of the context, it should be noted that Hortensius' request was not inspired by a crisis in the marital relationship between Cato and Marcia. Cato is said to have felt true affection and respect for his wife. Furthermore, she was pregnant with his child at the time. Notwithstanding this, Cato agreed to the proposal, but stipulated that Marcia's father Philippus should also express his consent. The latter did so on the condition that Cato himself would be present at the wedding and join him in giving the bride away. It is further reported that Marcia bore Hortensius a child, after which she was returned to Cato who accepted her in marriage again.

Another story presents a different scenario:

'A few months later there was a show of gladiators and since at this time men and women used to sit all together in the theatre, with no separate seating accommodation for the sexes, there happened to be sitting near Sulla a very beautiful woman of a most distinguished family. Her name was Valeria; she was the daughter and a sister of Hortensius the orator; and so it happened that she had recently been divorced from her husband. As she passed behind Sulla, she rested her hand on him, pulled off a little piece of wool from his toga and then went on to her seat. When Sulla looked around in surprise, she said: 'There's no reason to be surprised, Dictator, I only want to have a little bit of your good luck for myself'. Sulla was far from displeased by this remark; indeed it was obvious at once that his amatory propensities had been stirred. He sent someone to ask discreetly what her name was and inquired about her family and past history. After this they kept glancing at each other, constantly turning their heads to look, and exchange smiles. And in the end negotiations began for marriage. This was all innocent enough, perhaps, on her part; but, however chaste and worthy character she may have been, Sulla's motive in marrying her was neither chaste nor virtuous; he was carried away, like a boy might have been, by a good-looking face and a saucy manner – just what naturally excites the most disgraceful and shameless sort of passion' (Plutarch, *Life of Sulla*, 35. 3–5).

Just like modern readers, an ancient audience was very rarely happy with long-spun tales praising the ordinary and the average. The stories that were circulated about particular marriages tend to focus on spectacular

cases. This presents a serious methodological problem. If we want to set up a model of Roman marriage, a workable definition of principles shared by a majority of people, we must acknowledge that this is not readily available. The stories recounted above are not primarily concerned with the practice of marriage itself, but with the wider means for which the concept might be used, for instance as a vehicle for moral judgement. To us, they imply a confrontation with the exotic, thus defining the relativity of our own values. The story about Hortensius and Cato alerts us to the importance of marriage in cementing alliances between different aristocratic families, although the form it takes here – bride-lending – is somewhat peculiar, even to Romans who understood the weight of this issue.

Plutarch, who reports the story in his biography of Cato, is somewhat embarrassed by the sincerity with which the project was considered by the male parties.⁸ Modern readers would perhaps associate it with the artificiality of a Hollywood-script where the husband has to be enticed with a vast amount of money to part with his wife for one night. Yet, the standard ingredients of the typical Hollywood product, sexual lust and money, are conspicuously absent from Hortensius' motivations. Cato, Hortensius, Bibulus, and Philippus belonged to the Roman upper class and their marriage ideology was designed along the lines of specific political desires: continuation of the family line, the maintaining of socio-political status, and, if possible, expansion of their political network. The story provides an extreme example of the dominance of patriarchal politics. The two women, Marcia and Porcia, even though they are of central importance to the arrangement, only figure in the story as 'speechless objects'. It is not disclosed whether they were consulted on the matter at hand, and it is unlikely that this was the case. The absence of any emotional response on their part ostensibly confirms their concurrence with the overarching importance of male political friendships, even when they were seen to be infiltrating the domestic sphere. The only person, who, on Cato's request, was approached for consultation was Marcia's father Philippus. This is strictly within Roman legal principles. 'Patria potestas', the legal power of the father, enabled a Roman male to interfere in his children's lives, even when they were adults and already married.

In the second case we see a woman taking the initiative in seducing one of the most powerful politicians of his generation. It is of paramount impor-

tance to realize that this is not your typical girl-meets-boy scenario, or the Roman version of a story-book romance highlighting the desirability of a passionate love affair. There is a message behind the entertaining facade which is disclosed at the end. Sulla is supposed to have been carried away by a school-boy's passion, giving in to an infatuation that was hardly respectable in any man, let alone a man of Sulla's age and calibre.

Numerous stories from the Roman world deal with the topic of debilitating love. The great general Pompey is said to have been passionately in love with all the women he married, an image which seriously detracted from his reputation as an able politician. When passion rears its ugly head in an older man, as in the case of Sulla, it becomes laughable. The account of him falling passionately in love with a woman he had never met before signalled to a Roman audience that the politician had lost all sense of decorum and was incapable of sound judgement.⁹

If we focus on the women involved, the outcome is different in each event. The women of Cato and Bibulus are silent partners in a bold project, whereas Valeria takes the initiative in her endeavours to entice old Sulla into marriage. The discrepancies might be traced back to the differences in status of the women concerned. Marcia and Porcia were both married and, though not within the legal powers of their husbands, they fully conformed to the marriage ideology of the aristocracy, where male initiative outflanked female desires. Valeria is referred to as recently divorced, and she might have possessed more freedom than a married woman. However, we must be constantly aware of the fact that these are stories which are primarily concerned with male behaviour. Valeria's role might have to be redefined in terms of literary requirements: the story of Sulla needs an independent woman to seduce him, which makes his passion even more ridiculous.

Not all evidence is of such complexity, although we must always be aware of patriarchal 'traps'. In recent scholarship much attention has been devoted to the marriage of Cicero's daughter Tullia to the somewhat rascally young politician Dolabella. The case is a remarkable one since Tullia and her mother Terentia seem to have conducted the negotiations together with their friends but without the interference of the head of the household. It has even been suggested on the basis of this example that marriages were, 'if anything, particularly 'women's business' – primarily,

one supposes, the business of mother and daughter' (Dixon, 1988:215). This statement cannot be accepted without serious qualifications. In a letter to Appius Claudius Pulcher dated to 3 or 4 August 50 BCE, when he was in Side (Cilicia), Cicero wrote on the case as follows:

'As for me, please for a moment put yourself in my shoes, imagine you are I; and if you have no difficulty in finding what to say, I won't ask you to forgive my embarrassment! I should indeed wish that the arrangement made by my family without my knowledge may turn out well for my dear Tullia and myself, as you are charming and kind enough to desire. But that the thing should have come about just when it did – well, I hope and pray some happiness may come of it, but in so hoping I take more comfort in the thought of your good sense and kind heart than in the timeliness of the proceeding! And so how to get out of the wood and finish what I have begun to say I cannot tell. I must not take a gloomy tone about an event to which you yourself wish all good luck; but at the same time I can't but feel a rub. On one point, though, my mind is easy – you will not fail to realize that what has been done has been done by others. I had told them not to consult me since I should be so far away, but to act as they thought best. But as I write, the question obtrudes itself: What should I have done if I had been on the spot? Well, I should have approved in principle; but as for the timing, I should have taken no step against your wishes or without consulting you' (*ad Fam.* 3. 12. 2).

In spite of the liberal appearance of how the matter was handled, we can detect a tone of unhappiness in Cicero's writing. The letter, however, is mainly an example of Cicero's self-justification as far as the political implications of the marriage are concerned. He does not object to Dolabella per se, but he indicates that his timing of the arrangement would have been different. The main reason for Cicero's defensive tone was the valued political friendship of Appius Claudius Pulcher, his predecessor as governor of Cilicia and a senator of high standing. Cicero had initially hoped for a marriage partner from the Claudian family, and if this desire had previously been communicated to Appius, this might have caused additional resentment from the latter. To make matters worse, Dolabella attacked Appius Claudius Pulcher in legal cases on two occasions in 50 BCE. The announcement of the engagement, therefore, came at a most embarrassing time. With this political background in mind, one might

rightfully wonder about Cicero's attitude in allowing the women of his household a free hand in the negotiations. The construction was first of all determined by his own absence from the scene of the negotiations, and, secondly, not handled to his satisfaction. Instead of regarding marriage negotiations as 'women's business' (with all the implications of the men being excluded altogether), it would be more proper to identify marriages of sons and daughters as the domain of husband and wife together, with the possibility of conflicting opinions. No doubt, each family would have developed a particular strategy, depending on the weight of internal and external factors.

THE DYNAMICS OF DIVORCE

Statistics on divorce and remarriage are unavailable for the Roman world. The evidence, consequently, is mainly anecdotal. Women who remarried several times figure prominently in historiography, but they have been selected for their immoral behaviour and cannot stand as examples of what was typical. The same distortion applies to the majority of the literary sources. One might be able to put together a substantial anthology of misogynist quips. Two examples will suffice: 'No woman need blush to break off her marriage since the most illustrious ladies have adopted the practice of reckoning the year not by the names of the consuls but by those of her husbands. They divorce in order to re-marry. They marry in order to divorce' (Seneca, *On benefits* 3. 16. 2); 'She who marries so often does not marry; she is an adulteress by form of law' (Martial, *Epigrams*, 6. 7. 5). Female immorality occupied a pronounced place in male fears. Marriage was one means through which women's behaviour could be checked, but access to divorce was thought to encourage moral depravity.

From the earliest times husbands had the right to divorce their wives for matrimonial offences: adultery, poisoning the children and substituting keys, that is failing in their duty to be good keepers of the home.¹⁰ In the third century BCE the famous case of Carvilius Ruga established the precedent that husbands could divorce their wives for sterility (Watson, 1965). In most cases the right of women to divorce was universally accepted, especially if both husband and wife agreed on one. Since mar-

riage was based on the common consent of both partners, this also established the corollary that either partner could break the union. Just like the husband, the wife had to have due cause. Sexual misconduct is the reason most commonly mentioned. Bringing mistresses into the matrimonial home was just cause for divorce, as well as attempted murder or wife-beating.

The sphere of informal arrangements that characterized marriage also applies to divorce. Sometimes a verbal formula was used to initiate the proceedings, but this was not a necessity. Other evidence suggests that a letter, to be delivered by a freedman, was a sufficient precondition. However, since the letter need not be read or understood by the recipient, this was another legal technicality that could easily be dispensed with. All that the law seems to have required was an intention to divorce. A marriage with a third party made by one of the partners, for example, in itself legitimated the dissolution of a marriage. The law accepted this procedure, because it clearly signalled an intention to terminate the previous marriage. The frequency of divorce might easily be mistaken for freedom and flexibility, especially when compared to the strict regulations laid down by the medieval church. Equal access to the procedures, however, is no guarantee that it was made use of in the same degree by husband and wife. Since a woman stood to lose more than her husband through the dissolution of a marriage, she might not have pushed for a divorce as vigorously as her husband. Her position as mistress of the household which centred around the social life of her husband would disappear. The respect that came with her established position in society as the wife of a member of the upper classes evaporated. Divorce might have been able to award more freedom to women, especially the freedom to choose her next marriage partner, but in the meantime her social esteem was reduced because of her loss of marital status. Through a divorce she also missed out on the social esteem that was allocated to widowed women. Divorce actually led to an insecure road ahead. Women still of child-bearing age and with good connections remarried creditably enough, but an older woman might have had more difficulty in finding a new husband.

The legal effect of divorce was normally considered to be the physical separation of the marriage partners and the restoration of dowry. The husband was expected to repay the dowry when his financial circum-

stances allowed him to do so. He was much inconvenienced when the money had been invested in land or business. The most common formula entailed repayment in three annual installments. Since the dowry was needed for future plans of remarriage, any delay in the repayment negatively affected a woman's chances. The husband was also by law entitled to retain specific amounts on account of children, fault, expenses, gifts or things taken away. These clauses might be perfectly legitimate, but they show to what extent a husband was able to influence his wife's future life, in case he desired to do so. A severely reduced dowry jeopardized her chances of maintaining her social status. Some of the clauses will surprise modern observers, and especially the stipulation about the amount deducted for the maintenance of the children. It presupposes that the children remained with the father. This trait is bound up with his legal and social position as the head of the household. A few days after the birth of a child, the father had to declare in public that he officially accepted the child as his. Through his *'patria potestas'* all children remained within his legal power until he died or chose to emancipate them.

For the woman the right of access to the children must have depended on the atmosphere in which the divorce had been processed and on the socio-political activities of the husband. Exceptions are always worth observing. Octavia, ex-wife of Mark Antony, took his children with her to her own house when he finally sent her notice of divorce in 32 BCE. The children of whom she then took charge were her two daughters by Antony and his younger son by his previous wife Fulvia, who was dead. Antony was in no position to look after young children. After his death in 30 BCE, she brought up his three children by Cleopatra too. She already had three children she had borne to the dead Marcellus. This situation was created by special circumstances, which left some women in a position of a care-taker for children from various marriages, some not even her own. Access as a right, however, did not exist and for some women it must have been difficult to see their children. Most divorced husbands remarried surprisingly quickly, thus giving his children a stepmother to look after them. In practice this would have implied an even more strict exclusion of the natural mother from the children's home.

In summary, we may be entitled to assume that divorce left most women in an extremely vulnerable position. The dowry which was initially created

to protect the economic position of women, was liable to be reduced by expenses and costs calculated by the husband. Roman law only provided general rules on how husbands had to conduct themselves in these matters and there were no specific guarantees to protect the women. A harmonious settlement depended on the goodwill still existing between husband and wife, or rather on the generous attitude of the man, and this may indeed have been forthcoming in some cases, but insolvency provided an attractive escape route. Even though Augustus implemented a new general framework which introduced the state as a player in the overall regulation of married life, the daily business of marriage and divorce was still a matter left outside the scope of government intervention. As far as women are concerned, what is lacking in Rome, and indeed in most pre-industrial societies, is attention for their legal and socio-economic position beyond their role as members of families. The whole of Roman society, with all its written and unwritten laws, was heavily slanted in favour of men, or at least in favour of families under their headship.

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NOTES

1. The prime example is Cohen (1991a). The most influential anthropological study is Herzfeld (1985).
2. Cf. Treggiari (1991a) 205–29.
3. Although indispensable for a proper understanding of the institution, legal requirements set out by lawyers should not be mistaken for a definition of marriage.
4. The best example of such a case is the emperor Nero's divorce from Octavia, his wife and step-sister; for the political implications, cf. Baumann (1992) 203–8.
5. Cf. Raepsaet-Charlier (1981–1982) who gives a survey of all known cases.
6. On the role of the dowry see Saller (1984); Gardner (1985).
7. This statement is made in spite of recent attempts to explore the 'birth' of conjugal love in the first century BC: Dixon 1991. This should be read in conjunction with Saller (1994) 4–5; 112–4.
8. The anecdote is discussed by Stadter (1995) 234–6, who emphasizes that for Plutarch Cato's behaviour and lack of sensitivity led to his isolation from other political grandees and, ultimately, to the downfall of his cause.
9. Other examples of such behaviour are discussed by Stadter (1995) 225–7.
10. The following survey of Roman divorce is based on the excellent discussion in Treggiari (435–83).

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MOTHER RIGHT VERSUS PATRIARCHY

Grazia Weinberg

What does a woman do when her husband is away from home and is not expected to return for a long time? Let us say, for argument's sake, that his absence will be generally regarded as a social necessity, be it on a mission as in times of war or for economic reasons as in the case of migrant workers in South Africa who leave their families behind to seek employment in the big cities. Does she continue to perform her duties as a wife and mother, kindling the fires of the homestead on behalf of the father? Will she remain faithful to him? Throughout the ages, and not only in Western societies, men have prized the constancy of an exceptional wife and have sung the praises of her sufferings and tribulations. This account we find in Homer's *Odyssey* as well as in a beautiful poem by JJR Jolobe, 'Umzalikazi' ('The Mother'),

*Do not cry, my baby
Your mother suffers other miseries,
Do not hurt her heart
She cannot be happy without you
Wipe away those tears, my baby.
[...]
The fruit is delicious, bitter is the seed!
We will toil baby, and be happy,
Waiting for the return of Mthethwa's father.
The morning star was shining when he left,
He will come back at sunset.
Wipe away those tears, my baby!*

(Jolobe, 1962)

More often, however, in his absence, the man is plagued by the fear that the solidarity of the family may be endangered by the behaviour of a wayward wife. This fear is essentially male in nature and has given rise to myths and legends dealing with the father's return and the heroic attempt to restore order. But order, on these terms, cannot be restored without betraying its masculine bias. Such is the theory of many feminist writers, who have seen in the Greek myth of Clytemnestra a classical example of the conflict between male and female principles of reality.

During an interview in 1986, the Italian feminist writer Dacia Maraini, author of the play *Dreams of Clytemnestra*, expressed the following thoughts on the character of Clytemnestra:

What I intend to show in my play is that Clytemnestra is a loser, because her type of rupture with the world of the father is bound to fail, because our patriarchal society cannot forgive a woman who has freed her sexuality. Indeed, I think the myth of Clytemnestra has been created exactly for this purpose. In the myth, especially as Aeschylus portrays it, Clytemnestra is condemned not because she has killed her husband but because she has put herself in the place of her husband.

(Sumeli Weinberg, 1993:183, my translation)

On the surface, the above statement seems to imply that the author's treatment of the myth of Clytemnestra deals chiefly with the motifs of revenge and power in the long and hard battle fought between the sexes. And indeed a feminist play cannot do otherwise. The exposure of past injustice against women is what prompts the writer in the first place to turn to classical themes for material. It is also important to remember that the myth of Clytemnestra involves intricate family relationships which span a number of generations and which are defined by bloody killings rather than by tender affection. Feminists have always held the view that the subjugation of women begins within the intimacy of the home. But the discovery of the nature of this suppression and the effect it has had on our society will ultimately lead Maraini to question man's very notion of order and justice.

Even in the hands of Attic tragedians such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides who have been the chief promulgators of her myth, Clytemnestra remains a complex and enigmatic figure and cannot be conveniently accommodated as her husband's murderess. Her tale, simply told, 'by virtue of its very simplicity, is endowed with seemingly inexhaustibly dynamic quality. It has become a well-known text, both transparent and opaque, but one which is layered with an infinite virtuality of abstraction... a familiar terrain ever available for redeployment' (Bevan, 1993:3–4). A brief reminder of the status of Clytemnestra in mythology could give us some interesting pointers in this direction.

She is married to Agamemnon, son of Atreus, and king of Argos, after he

slays her first husband and new-born child. The house of Atreus is guilty of accumulated atrocities where children kill their parents and parents kill their children and feed upon their flesh. Says Robert Graves in his book on myths that, from the beginning 'Clytemnestra had small cause to love Agamemnon' (Graves, 1967:52). Her twin sister Helen's elopement with Paris sparks off the ten-year war between the Greeks and the Trojans. Clytemnestra's feeling of rancour towards her husband could not have abated when, against her will, in order to ensure the success of the Greek army, Agamemnon, the Commander-in-Chief, sacrifices their daughter Iphigeneia by slitting her throat on the alter of Artemis. On his return, she murders him and his mistress Cassandra with the help of her lover, Aegisthus. Her son, Orestes, is ordered by Apollo to avenge his father's death and is in turn relentlessly pursued by the Furies, or the Erinnyes, for having spilled his mother's blood, but is in the end acquitted of his crime.

The nature of the complexity of Clytemnestra's character is partly due to her psychological make-up and can be directly observed, as we have seen, from the circumstantial evidence of her plight as a woman and as a mother. Hers, however, is not a case study. Tempting as it may be, this line of interpretation will ultimately reduce her potential as a signifier. And though Maraini is concerned with the exposure of the fate of women under patriarchy, she would guard her reader against the danger of such over-simplification. For her, the story of Clytemnestra is, and will always remain, a myth, and 'at the very least our understanding of myth in the postmodern world has become proteiform in the extreme' (Bevan, 1993:3).

The author's 'redployment' of myth in *Dreams of Clytemnestra* is akin to what Adriana Cavarero calls an act of 'theft'. Cavarero is a respected classical scholar and one of the leading philosophers of sexual difference in Italy. In her book, playfully entitled *In Spite of Plato*, she describes the urge to confront 'the entire system of Greek philosophy and the global horizon in which it operates [...] since the philosophy of antiquity posits itself at the onset of our history, making its mark on the destiny of the so-called "West"' (1995 :4). Her *modus operandi*, therefore, consists

... of investigating the traces of the original act of erasure contained in the patriarchal order, the act upon which this order was first constructed and then continued to display itself. ... I will steal feminine figures from their context,

allowing the torn-up fabric to show the knots that hold together the conceptual canvas that hides the original crime.

(Cavarero, 1995:5)

Maraini's attempt in her play to initiate this process of feminist deconstruction of an ancient tale is as direct as Cavarero's. Her method of stealing 'feminine figures from their context' finds expression at the level of artistic discourse, thus opening it to multiple readings. It is a method with a purpose, made necessary by the absence of a female voice in the ethos of our present society. Maraini frees the figure of Clytemnestra, a product of male imagination, in order to reread her in the light of her own experience. And she invites her readers to do likewise. Indeed, *Dreams of Clytemnestra*, while drawing mainly on Aeschylus's trilogy, *The Oresteia*, is an ordinary tale about an Italian family of poor Sicilian immigrants living near Florence in the seventies. The play's intertextuality is openly and deliberately re-inforced by the creation of two distinct levels of reality: the world of the Aeschylean sub-text, which is functional only at the level of dreams, and the world of interpersonal relationships which mimics the first for the atrocities perpetrated, be they only on a psychological plane. While the oneiric level is conveyed poetically, and relies chiefly on allusion, the other, based on a daily, prosaic, and even vulgar language, is the carrier of the dramatic action. The effect of this juxtaposition is both startling and refreshing for the manner in which it defamiliarizes the old myth. Maraini cements the relationship between these two dramatic complexes by retaining the list of classical names for her characters.

What is more interesting in this case, however, is the way in which the act of rewriting is inscribed in the text, thus making the 'theft' of the figure of Clytemnestra overdetermined. On the one hand, as the palimpsest presupposes, the author's reappropriation of the classical drama must be seen as an act of erasure of the original writing, and thus the means of giving new signification to her character. On the other hand, by drawing attention to her indebtedness to an earlier work, Maraini's intertextuality also functions in reverse: as a way of uncovering in the Aeschylean text the previous act of erasure alluded to by Adriana Cavarero and committed at the birth of our civilization. On the political plane therefore, Maraini's discourse on the condition of women in our society is a far cry from the crude attempt to reinstate the supremacy of a feminine order.

Instead of opting for the cumulative effect of linearity as a way of replacing the old with the new, her argument remains distinctly circular in that the promise of a better future, out of the present impasse, is via a return to the past. In this respect Maraini's vision echoes philosopher Giorgio De Santillana's understanding of what is truly revolutionary:

Generally, in modern times the word revolution implies the irreversible. It has brought along with it true History. Which, in truth, is none other than an escape forward. However, there is also an old meaning, still hidden from us and known only to authentic revolutionaries: and that is, a return to the origins. Our thoughts have turned to it since archaic times, and it is called palynogenesis... Every apocalyptic vision is a way of linking the end to the beginning so that time can once again become meaningful. (1985:20, my translation)

Past and future are thus irrevocably linked in Maraini's work since the way out of the stalemate created by the polarization of the sexes is to transcend patriarchal dualism based, as she perceives it, on a split between the body and the mind. Two verses taken from one of Maraini's poems, 'Head of Medusa', sum up the author's commitment towards this form of regeneration:

*Voglio tornare indietro/verso l'allegria del futuro.
(I want to turn back/towards the happiness of the future.)*

(Maraini, 1987:79)

What then is the true nature of 'the original crime' committed against humanity that Maraini is trying to unearth by repossessing the figure of Clytemnestra? How is it linked to the split between body and mind? Luce Irigaray's central thesis in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference* (1993), which has inspired both Cavarero and Maraini, is that philosophy, and hence society and culture, are founded on an ancient matricide. For Maraini the story of Clytemnestra as represented by Aeschylus contains this matricide:

It took Aeschylus, who was acquainted with the Eleusinian mysteries, to relate to us the most cruel of family tales. He told us how Orestes, pursued by the Furies for having killed his mother, considered to be an unpardonable sacrilege in ancient society, asked to be judged by the tribunal of the gods, a tribunal made up entirely of men with the exception of Athena who, born from the head of Zeus, had no knowledge of the maternal womb. In defending Orestes, Apollo's speech to the tribunal is new and astonishing: Orestes, says the young

god, should not be condemned because he did not strike the sacred beginning of life, but only a vase which contained the male seed. The mother is no longer at the origin of life but only a container of someone else's life. It is the father who conceives, who bestows the breath of vital energy. The mother's task is to nourish and nurture the child from birth on behalf of others.

(Maraini, 1996:30, my translation)

In Aeschylus, the dramatic conflict of the entire Trilogy rests on the notion that if Orestes is culpable of matricide, he is also the avenger of parricide. He is at the same time both guilty and innocent. Such was the power of these two principles, the maternal and the paternal, in Athenian society that the voting of the tribunal of the Aeropagus is split in half. To remind us of the awesomeness of the deed, in Maraini's play, as in Euripides's *Electra* (1931), Orestes is initially beset with doubt and shrinks from the horror of matricide. He is portrayed, moreover, as a homosexual, placed by his otherness outside the sphere of male conformity, not yet hardened by the privilege of gender, and driven to action by his sister Electra, the self-elected guardian of their father's honour and his law. In the ancient Aeschylean play, Apollo's speech and Athena's deciding vote acquits Orestes of his crime and puts an end to the funereal concatenation of family killings. With this resolution, the work of Aeschylus, both historically and ethically, is seen as a triumph for cultural evolution, marking the passage in Athens from an archaic society, bound by fate and the law of necessity, to one dominated by the forces of reason. It marks also the moment of transition from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society – a society based ultimately on the concept of justice.

The view that myth is the preserve of the collective memory and hence of history, and that Mother right preceded Father right in ancient Greek culture, found its most famous exponent in the nineteenth-century Swiss jurist and historian of Roman Law, Johann Jacob Bachofen. Like his feminist counterparts, Bachofen too, in his book on *Mother Right* (1967), traces the origin of patriarchy in the Aeschylean text which, he says, re-enacts the struggle between the Apollonian and the Demetrian principles, that is, between the rational faculties of man, represented by Apollo the god of enlightenment and prophecy, and the corporeal, tellurian forces embodied by the prototype of the earthly mother, Demeter, 'the mother, the Great Mother...', says Cavarero, '[whose] figure... is the foundation of

the feminine origin of life' (Cavarero, 1995:57,71). Bachofen, a contemporary of Nietzsche, sees in the struggle the source of all greatness, since in his desire for power man expresses his own uniqueness. The passage from Mother right to Father right reflects, therefore, society's advance to a higher order as it liberates the human spirit from the 'paralyzing fetters of a cosmic-physical view of life' (Bachofen, 1967:236). Critics, right up to our own times, have further elaborated Bachofen's view, calling The Oresteia 'a feat of Western civilization: a dialectical struggle, a conflict between Will and Necessity, which establishes the law and justice above the brute force of nature' (Fagles, in Aeschylus 1977:22).

Feminists like Maraini, while they would naturally not discount the essential function of rationality in any given culture, would however contest the validity of Bachofen's evolutionary theory of society by questioning the fundamental assumptions of the Aeschylean text. And here I draw on Roland Barthes' definition of myth as a 'type of speech defined by its intention... much more than by its literal sense...' (1993:124). Maraini argues that the Aeschylean resolution is based on a compromise and it betrays the author's indebtedness to his historical time. The most obvious and clamorous example, as already indicated, would be Apollo's speech to the judges in defence of Orestes. Let us look at it more closely:

*I will tell you, and I will answer correctly. Watch.
The mother is no parent of that which is called
her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed
that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she
preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interfere.
I will show you proof of what I have explained. There can
be a father without any mother. There she stands,
the living witness, daughter of Olympian Zeus,
she who was never fostered in the dark womb,
yet such a child as no goddess could bring to birth.*

(Lattimore in Aeschylus, 1953:158)

According to Bachofen, Apollo's speech in championing the right of the begetter ushers in the law of the new gods to which Apollo and Athena belong:

The child's predominant connection with its mother is relinquished. Man is

raised above woman. The material principle is subordinated to the spiritual principle. Thus marriage for the first time attains its true height. For the Erinyes... failed to honor Hera's decree, the sacred marriage bond. Clytemnestra's infringement of it was nothing to them: in their eyes it could not excuse Orestes' just, though bloody deed. In this sense father right is tantamount to marriage right, hence the starting point of a new era, an era of fixed order in family and state... .

(Bachofen, 1967:161)

Linked to the marriage bond is Bachofen's concept that 'The close relation between child and father, the son's self-sacrifice for his begetter, require a far higher degree of moral development than mother love' (Bachofen, 1967:79). But the marriage bond can also be seen as a way of controlling birth and woman's reproductive function thus limiting her power. By contrast, says Cavarero, men have chosen death as the site of their power: 'Since death takes away life, they find in death a place they regard as more powerful than life' (Cavarero, 1995:68). The shift in perspective from the order of birth to the order of death, however, betrays man's fear of nothingness and his obsessive desire 'to endure, to survive' (Cavarero, 1995:7).

As we all know today, Apollo's argument rests, if you will permit me the pun, on a genetic misconception. Yet, in this instance, his error throws light more on the symbolizing power of language than on the nature of ancient beliefs. Indeed, it is through language that the Aeschylean discourse establishes its own self-referential reality aimed at the stabilization of the patriarchal symbolic order. Critics like Philip Vellacott (in Aeschylus, 1969:18) choose to read Apollo's far-fetched theory as a counterbalance to the implacable demand of the Furies, and hence of Mother right. Between these two extremes, Athena's intervention, in the name of her father Zeus, can be seen as the most enlightening solution to all the bloody violence. According to Robert Graves, this solution was widely favoured by the priests in their intent 'once and for all, to invalidate the religious axiom that motherhood is more divine than fatherhood' (Graves, 1967:63).

What these critics fail to note, however, is that Apollo's speech is a perfect example of the 'juridical invasiveness' (Cavarero, 1995:77) of man-made law in blind support of the father's political order. That in essence Apollo's assumptions had already found their roots in Greek society is confirmed by Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigeneia. She is his child before

Clytemnestra's. And the mother has to play by the father's rules. The displacement of the mother is thus a foregone conclusion, and maternity becomes an issue of public law when the son, Orestes, is called upon by Apollo to avenge his father and is acquitted by Athena of the crime of matricide. In the Aeschylean text, therefore, thanks to the presence of Apollo and Athena, the male perspective has found its own symbolic space. But, according to Adriana Cavarero, citing Luce Irigaray,

the place from which this gender speaks, a place that uproots humans from their maternal origin and therefore from physis, produces metaphysics as its supposed accomplishment. Metaphysics ... is what permeates the language of Western culture, as it has developed beyond the ancient matricide: it is the adventure of a 'spirit [that] in its perfection ... destroys its first roots. Its soil has become culture, history, which successfully forget that anything that conceives has its origin in the flesh'.

(Cavarero, 1995:69; Irigaray, 1993:109)

What then of woman's place? What then of Clytemnestra's 'sovereign subjectivity of her maternal power' (Cavarero, 1995:78)? There is yet another device used in the Aeschylean plays which links them strategically to their ideological premise. While it is important to remember that Aeschylus's treatment of Clytemnestra is both powerful and moving, it is also true that the strength of his presentation makes the resolution even more awe-inspiring for his audience. Nicole Loraux says, 'Tragedy certainly does transgress and mix things up – this is its rule, its nature – but never to the point of irrevocably overturning the civic order of values' (Loraux, 1987:60). In her book, Loraux explores the symbolic space given to women in Greek tragedies when taking their own lives or when being murdered, a symbolic space which, she concludes, differs in the case of men and women. Clytemnestra is killed by her son, Orestes, when he strikes her in the throat. According to Loraux, men 'seldom die from being struck in the throat' (1987:52). A woman's throat, on the other hand, is not only a strong point of feminine beauty but also the point of greatest vulnerability. Sacrificial throat-cutting applies to women who die by the noose at their own hand, but more specifically to those who are immolated as virgins or, like Clytemnestra, have their throats slit as a sign of the application of the blood law.

And these deaths, for a Greek audience, were laden with religious values (1987:14). Loraux's theory aims specifically at revealing the way in which,

through death, violent death, women gain mastery over their own fate and acquire a glory seldom achieved by Athenian women who in the main lived in anonymity. Think of Clytemnestra boldly offering her breast for Orestes's knife. By making Orestes kill his mother in this manner, Clytemnestra – a 'manly-woman', as the Chorus calls her in the first play of the Trilogy, *Agamemnon*, for having defiantly 'stepped in her husband's role' (Fagles in Aeschylus, 1977:44) – achieves in death a stature which must have been as awesome as that of any tragic hero. And indeed her tragedy is that of outraged motherhood. Yet, Loraux points out, by distinguishing between the masculine and female way of dying, the possible blurring of the sexual divide achieved by this glorification of woman is annulled and social order is once again restored. And order in the Aeschylean logic is that 'justice is matricide' (Fagles in Aeschylus, 1977:40).

In *Dreams of Clytemnestra*, Maraini attempts to recreate a space for that blighted heroine by uncovering the effects of her murder in modern patriarchy. It is a murder, as her play reveals, which not only took place long ago, but still continues today, as long as there are women, like Clytemnestra, who defy the marriage bond and openly take charge of their own sexuality. Maraini shows how the deep-rooted malaise in the relationship between the sexes is proportionate in degree to the absence of the Mother from public life. In so doing, she ventures, as Cavarero would say, into 'the realm of thought to which men entrust their eternal and ultimately immortal essence, allowing the body, by now separate, to face its transient destiny' (1995:70). This split between mind and body is reflected, as I have mentioned earlier, in the choice of the two dramatic complexes in the play: the modern and the ancient. While Clytemnestra, now an ordinary Italian housewife, suffers the same indignities as her tragic double, the sub-text of the Aeschylean world acts as the medium of the repressed, of the unconscious, hidden seat of her knowledge of the ancient wound.

The play begins with fragments of lines taken from a speech by the ghost of Clytemnestra in the Aeschylean *Eumenides* in which she calls the Erinyes to awake and to revenge her death. It is also the ghost which haunts the modern Clytemnestra in her sleep:

Sleeping. What do I need of you! Sleeping!
Just as you abandon me for dead

*I hear myself called murderer... in shadow
I live in shame: you know the guilt that
haunts me, I who from childhood have
suffered what I have suffered, and no god
remembers me, slaughtered by a matricidal hand.
Look with your heart, at my wounds -
for man sees in sleep only, by day
his eyes look without light.*

(Maraini, 1994:185)

In this passage, the act of 'seeing' or 'knowing', conveyed by the juxtaposition of light and dark, is intentionally reversed by the author. This, for her, is the state of affairs in our world: 'man sees in sleep only', only, that is, when the forces of the irrational are let loose, and not 'by day', in the realm of Apollo. Indeed, modern society is not the promised land ushered in by the Aeschylean concept of justice which, as Fagles points out, 'turns the darkness into light' (Fagles in Aeschylus 1977:71). Nor is the advent of Father right, as Bachofen would have it, 'the starting point of a new era, an era of fixed order in family and state', which, paradoxically, owes its existence to the rigid application of its laws and the submission of woman into sameness, a reflection of the male vision of life.

Maraini's reversal of dark and light, contrary to what it may seem, is not the pitting of two opposing forces against each other: reason vs the irrational; the author's world view vs the Aeschylean; the Erinnyes vs Apollo, male and female. As I intimated earlier, she avoids the pitfall of needless confrontation. Starting from the premise that, since in today's world woman's space is defined by a lack, an absence, the only way forward is to recover that lost Mother, and the route to the origins. And 'the Furies are our origins' (Fagles in Aeschylus, 1977:38), and theirs is the symbol of dual power of vengeance and regeneration. The destructive force of the Furies should act as a healthy reminder of the fragility of our institutions and provide the active principle for a truly dynamic society. Yet, by placating the wrath of the Furies and by placing them within the confines of the city, Athena, in the Aeschylean drama, has effectively diminished their powers. Men, therefore, in their desire to go beyond the limitation of the flesh, have appropriated woman and have cast her in their own image. And, in negating the true space of woman, they have, as a consequence, compromised their own.

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REACTION TO PATRIARCHAL SOCIAL CODES AMONG EMASWATI

Sisana Dlamini

INTRODUCTION

Like women in all other societies of the world, women amongst emaSwati find themselves placed in a context that is predominantly controlled by a strong patriarchal system. This paper aims at highlighting patriarchal codes that feature in various social structures of emaSwati. Proverbs and other sayings in the Swati language that reveal gender differences will form the basis of the discussion. From there, I go on to discuss other social codes that are seen to restrict a woman in this society. It is evident however, that such codes could not exist for long without a reaction from the affected group. This paper will therefore proceed to focus on some of the reactions to patriarchal domination that have been observed in the history of emaSwati. I look at how traditional society has reacted to gender-enforcing codes, and then conclude by focussing on some of the reactions encountered in modern emaSwati society.

HOW PROVERBS ENCODE GENDER CONSTRAINTS

When defining a proverb Guma (1985) says:

A proverb is a pithy sentence with a general bearing on life. It serves to express some 'homely truth' or a moral lesson in such an appropriate manner as to make one feel that no better words could have been used to describe the particular situation.

Another definition is given by Mutasa in his article in Sienaert (1994) in which he asserts:

... these witty sayings are pots that contain the age-old wisdom of the traditional people. They are philosophical and moral expressions shrunk into few words. They contain the fundamental truths about life in general and human nature in particular which people have observed.

Proverbs therefore are generally accepted as expressions of truth in the eyes of a particular society. Such truths may have been established over many long years within a society before they are accepted as proverbs. As such, they reflect the beliefs, perceptions, attitudes and generally the mores of a particular society. In this section, proverbial sayings will serve as a window for peeping into Swati society, and observing its norms and values regarding women. Proverbs by their very nature have existed in the language for a long time; their use by a speaker displays a good knowledge of the Swati language. The proverbs that are of relevance in this chapter are those that refer to gender relations. Other expressions that are also significant in this review are those that are used in a discriminatory manner in the Swati language.

As we will see from the examples below, proverbs are sometimes employed as patriarchal codes to enforce the secondary and submissive role that is expected of women in Swati society.

In Swati society there is a habitual attitude of not feeling at ease with a beautiful woman. She is usually feared for her ability to attract men. This fear of the power of feminine beauty is revealed in the proverb: *Likhiwa lelihle ligcwala tibungu* which may be translated as 'A fine fig is full of worms'. This proverb is derived from the fact that when one picks a beautiful fig there is some likelihood of finding worms inside when one opens it. The warning that this proverb issues is that you must be careful when you come across a beautiful woman. The possibility is that she may have a bad character. Such an expression is used to warn men who may be tempted to fall for such a woman.

HOW PROVERBS MAINTAIN PATRIARCHAL MARRIAGE

Marriage in this society is considered to be a very serious undertaking, especially for the woman. At the same time it is an institution that every woman is expected to enter into. In Swazi culture marriage is not just a union between husband and wife but also a link between two families who, through the marriage, are starting a complex interrelationship that is bound to continue for a long time. The old women related to the bride start preparing her long before the wedding day. Their main concern is

that she learns to accept all the difficulties that she will encounter in marriage. It is a concern which stems from the fact that the bride is sent out to the other family as their family's ambassador. Her failure in marriage becomes their failure too, as it proves that they have failed to bring her up in the proper manner. As they advise her about marriage they tend to use proverbs that will highlight the fact that marriage is a time of hardship.

Hence they will quote a proverb like: Ekwendzeni kukamkhatsali. This saying may be translated as 'Marriage is a place of problems'. The warning in the proverb is that no matter how strong one may be as a single woman, once one gets married that will change. A similar proverb is Umendvo ngumkhumulansika ('Marriage pulls down the pillar'). This expression means that the young woman may be proud and fastidious before marriage but once married she will surrender her pride and be tamed. Another proverb relevant to marriage is Kwendza kutilahla ('To marry is to throw yourself away'). The saying refers to the fact that a girl cannot tell beforehand how her marriage will turn out. One other proverb similar to this one in meaning is Umendvo awufunyelwa ligundvwane ('No one can spy out a rat before getting into marriage'). The grim message here is that troubles that may be in store for the woman in marriage cannot be detected beforehand.

All these statements of traditional wisdom are shared with the bride who is about to get into this lifelong contract. If the young woman tries to explain how she thinks she will eliminate some of the problems said to be awaiting her in marriage, the older more experienced women may use this proverb: Akunalichalachala lelehlula sidvwaba ('There is no woman so proud that she can defeat the loin skirt', the loin skirt being the garment traditionally worn by married women). This saying emphasizes that the bride should not take things lightly, because in marriage she will encounter obstacles that will force her to surrender whatever attitude she has, and will force her into tameness and submission.

The old women continue using such language even after the newly-wed woman may have been sent back to her parents' house for cheeky behaviour. The old and experienced people will say Umendvo uyancengwa ('You must beg for marriage'). The message being driven home by this proverb is that a woman has to humble herself in a marriage if it is to be a success. Another popular expression is Emendvweni kukagoba gagu ('In

marriage even the most spirited girl calms down'). Again the lesson communicated is that the woman must accept marriage as it is. These expressions, hammered into the mind of each young woman in Swati society, are used as a means of taming her and making her understand that she has to accept herself as the secondary figure in the marriage.

Schipper (1991) acknowledges this function of proverbs by saying:

Proverbs reinforce women's images and justify the roles ascribed to girls, wives, widows, and so forth. Their picture presented in proverbs is used to legitimize the roles and functions of women.

Although this conclusion was made about Ashante women, it also applies to women in Swati society.

ESTABLISHED WORD-USAGES WHICH DISCRIMINATE AGAINST WOMEN

There are also various uses of words and linguistic expressions in the Swati language that illustrate a certain widespread perception of women, in which we can see the attitude of the Swati people to a woman of their society.

Let us consider the example of a boy and a girl who are born to the same parents and who live in the same family. If the girl is discovered to be going out with two different men she is despised and called by cruel names. She is expected to behave herself so that she will be good material for the man who will pay lobola and marry her. In this case we can see that the lobola and pride are the motivation that make parents keep reminding their daughter about the necessity for good behaviour. Who would want to purchase second-hand material? Her misbehaving can never be accepted, as it would affect the amount of lobola that her father gets from whomever decides to marry her. On the other hand, if her brother within this same family is seen to be dating more than one girl, he gets praised for it. He is called *inganwa*, a name that places him above other young men who just have one girlfriend.

If this young woman falls pregnant before marriage she becomes a disgrace to the family. Swati society still holds onto the belief that all women

should get married. Hence a child born before marriage is also called by bad names. The child is called umlanjwana yet there is no name for the child born to her brother out of wedlock. The young woman herself ends up being called lijikamlente ('the one who just throws her leg'), umjende-vu ('something that may not be enjoyed by anyone') or libondza-lisuta ('the one whose system has become loose'). These insulting expressions are used to warn every girl, especially every young girl, not to follow in the footsteps of the unfortunate young woman who has failed to conform to the prescribed norms.

DISCRIMINATORY TRADITIONAL CUSTOMS

An interesting thing to look at is the marriage ceremony itself. The red clay (libovu) that is smeared on the face of the bride is significant in the Swati culture. It is strongly believed that this clay cannot be used more than once on the same face. The implication is that a woman cannot be married more than once in her lifetime. The significance given to this libovu can be interpreted as a means of depriving women of the choice of moving out of a marriage once they have entered it. When one looks at the fact that this clay is not applied to the male partner's face, though he is also involved in the marriage, it implies that he is exempted from this commitment. In other words, the commitment is one-sided in that it is binding on the woman but not binding on the man. Indeed, he can marry as many wives as he likes after this one. One can therefore see this practice as one of the forces used to control women and make them succumb to the subservient role that society expects them to play.

If a married woman has an illegitimate child within her marriage, it is a serious offence. Even though traditional society would prefer to keep the matter a secret and not speak of it at all, when the child has to be referred to, it is called ligoya (wild cat) or *livezandlebe* (the one who protrudes and is seen by the ears). What is of interest is that when the husband has a child outside of the marriage, by a mistress, that child is brought home to be accepted and cared for by the married wife. She is expected to be joyful that she can be of service to her husband. If she shows some dissatisfaction, society reprimands her and reminds her that 'Wakutsatsela kutsi utewulondvolota tintsandzane takulelikhaya'. This

means 'You were married to care for such orphans'. In other words, you as the woman he married should be able to appreciate your duties.

EmaSwati also emphasize that *buhle bemfati busemtini wakhe*. That may be translated to mean 'the beauty of the woman is in her home'. In other words she can only be judged by what she does in her home and for her family.

The patriarchal ideology of this society is being furthered and enhanced by modern technology. On the Swazi Radio station there is a programme conducted by typically conservative men. The two men are there to read and respond to letters sent to them by people seeking personal advice. In most cases the problems that they handle are connected with marital relations. The arch conservative of the two, often referred to as 'Jim Gama', is trusted greatly by traditional society. In most of the cases he deals with, he manages to discredit women and enforce the patriarchal ideology. The radio programme is not surprisingly very popular among the conservatives who still insist that things must be done in the traditional way. If a man is found to have married according to Western civil law, he is despised and called by names. He is considered a fool as this type of marriage does not allow men to engage in polygyny.

PROTEST AND CRITICISM

The most important questions that come to any mind at this point of our discussion is: 'Are the women of this society content with the roles which are imposed on them? What have they done to show their dissatisfaction?' It is of interest that traditionally women in this society were silenced by being told 'Tibi tendlu atishanyelelwa ngephandle' ('Dirt from inside your house should not be swept outside'). This is a reference to the expectation that as a woman you should not share your problems with an outsider. In this way women were deprived of the freedom of voicing their feelings about their own lives. Even in the traditional meetings they did not have the freedom of expressing their views. If a woman had something to say, something that needed to be heard at a traditional meeting, she would talk about it to her husband during the night when they were alone. The husband would then voice it in the meeting as his own view.

FOLKSONGS VOICING WOMEN'S PROTEST

However, nothing could stop them from protesting about the difficulties they encountered in their lives. Since time immemorial the women of Swati society have always given voice to their feelings and observations, and have expressed how they perceived themselves and the world around them. The folk songs that are sometimes referred to as traditional songs have been used as a channel through which the women could communicate their feelings, especially about those issues that pertain to their marriages and their status in society. The folk songs are songs that are composed and transmitted orally. Harap (1949) has this to say about the songs:

Folk song, further, is made and sung in response to functional needs, from lightening of work and protest against oppression to recreation of common people. On the whole, therefore, folk song genuinely expresses the values of the people in class societies.

Although these songs may be created for purposes of entertainment they also can be used as a spear for fighting with a person who is in power. Talking about this role of folk songs, Finnegan (1970) observes that:

This indirect means of communication with someone in power through the artistic medium of song is a way by which the singers hope to influence while at the same time avoiding the open danger of speaking directly.

In each case the singer or performer is one of the womenfolk and she sends out messages that concern other women. Hence they may be taken as a means of protest, used with the hope of effecting change.

Let us look at few examples of songs traditionally performed by married women:

	Nans' indvodz'ingishaya bo!
Chorus	Mshaye ndvodza
	Iv' emagam' ekutjelwa bo!
Chorus	Mshaye ndvodza
	Iv' emagam'emcamelo!
Chorus	Mshaye ndvodza.
	('Here is a man beating me up – oh!

*Beat her up, husband!
 He has heard a rumour – oh!
 Beat her up, husband!
 He heard a rumour about a pillow – oh!
 Beat her up, husband!')*

The woman singing this song conveys the message that she is being beaten up by her husband for a rumour about an extra-marital affair. The group of women who join in the chorus line are ironically saying she should be beaten up. The general result is to raise questions about a society that believes a woman should be beaten up if she misbehaves. The chorus is devised as a way of deliberately expressing disapproval. The use of irony as a technique here forcefully expresses the women's complaint, and ridicules society for believing that women should be beaten up. Wife-beating is a serious problem, aggravated by the fact that there is no legislation in Swazi society which protects women from being assaulted by their husbands.

Their culture sanctions it and polygyny is consequently a common institution amongst emaSwati. The most disturbing thing about it is that it often results in women entering a world of jealousy and uncertainty, since one wife may be pushed aside to make room for another. Though a wife cannot openly show her dissatisfaction, when she is among other women she may then sing songs like this one:

*Ngeke ngithule mine
 Chorus Hhawu suka thula mfati
 Ngeke ngithule
 Ngithulel' umfati
 Umfat' efika
 Angemuk' indvodza
 Indvodz' ingeyami
 Chorus Hhawu suka thula mfati.*

*('I will not keep quiet!
 Oh no woman, keep quiet!
 I will not keep quiet,
 Keep quiet for a woman,
 A woman who has just come
 To take away my husband.
 Oh no, keep quiet woman!')*

In this chant the senior wife expresses that she is tired of the husband who is clearly showing more love for the new wife. The chorus sung by the group of women sarcastically echoes the societal expectation that respect and dignity should be maintained at all costs. This chorus thus also (like the last one) ridicules a society that makes such severe demands on the senior wife. The song protests against these demands mainly because a large number of married women are affected by such rivalry. The statement that the frustrated woman must keep quiet is just an irony for 'Say it loud and clear!'

In most cases the world is made to understand that women who are in polygynous marriages are content with the situation. But their being silent about it is often just to impress the world, as it is taboo in African culture openly to show jealousy.

Let us also look at this other song that expresses the anger of a woman.

Vila lenja!
Ukhutsala ntsambama
Emasimu alele
Wena ukhutsala ntsambama.

'You lazy dog!
You only get active at night.
The fields are not ploughed.
You only get active at night.'

This is a song that reveals how the woman feels about a lazy man. In effect she is losing her temper and no longer has control over what she says. She ridicules the man who just sits the whole day long and then boasts of having energy in bed. The language used in this song expresses her disgust. She is able to utter such insulting words under the protection of orature; no single individual can be identified with or held responsible for the lyric as it is owned by all the womenfolk of her society. The composer is unknown. The singer benefits from this feature of folksong as it frees her to express her views without fear of being confronted. The woman in this song is calling the attention of a society that thinks men are superior, to the fact that this is not always the case. She also calls for a

shift from thinking that men are superior beings, because some of them do not even take their responsibilities seriously. People should not be classified by their sex but by their personalities.

WOMEN'S SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

However, these oral songs have not been very effective in bringing about the required change as the people in control of power have conveniently ignored the messages they bear. The emphasis on human rights in recent years in Swaziland has paved the way for organizations that fight for the rights of women. It is worth mentioning that the emergence of women's organizations in the Swazi kingdom has met with great criticism from the conservatives. The significance of these organizations is that they speak with one voice on behalf of women, who hardly had a chance to voice their feelings openly in the past.

To mention a few of them: there is the Swaziland Women's Action Group Against Abuse, usually referred to as SWAGAA. This is a women's movement that aims at protecting a woman against abuse of any nature. Another support organization is the Women and Law in Southern Africa Research Project. Employees of this office conduct research into the feelings of women about the different customary laws that are often oppressive of them. They also look at the existing Western equivalents and then combine the two to arrive at a documented law that suits the women of the present day. This may be taken as a great stride towards liberating the women of Swati society. Besides the fact that some of these organizations have professional legal employees who at least can give sound advice to women who need it, they also give practical legal assistance when it becomes necessary.

CONTEMPORARY VOICES OF PROTEST

The step taken by the oldest daily newspaper in the country to create a forum for women's views, is regarded as an important move towards freedom of expression. There is a column dedicated to women every Tuesday. At least women in this society may now write about their feel-

ings and views. There is hope that the complaints may eventually receive attention from those in power. Let us look at a few of the letters that have already been published in The Times of Swaziland.

On 6 June 1995 there was a piece with the title 'How long will women be subjected to discrimination?' Among the points made and questions raised in this letter are the following:

- Why can't women be allowed to take out loans just as their husbands can, without their spouse's consent?
- Our custom allows a man to have as many wives as he likes and he is also free to dump a woman (kumngcwabaphila).
- A woman's case in siSwati will only be tried in the presence of her husband, but the husband's case goes on without his wife.

These few points illustrate clearly enough that women in Swati society are serious about the changes they want. Another interesting letter is the one published in The Times of Swaziland of May 9, 1995. Here is part of that letter, which had the title 'Who said there is no discrimination against women in Swaziland?'

The scale of equality is especially out of balance in our imbalanced Swaziland. The side marked 'woman' is weighed down with responsibility while the side marked 'man' rides high with power.

The fact that such letters are published, to be read by the nation, shows beyond doubt that the idea of change is gradually being accepted in this society. The King, Mswati III, has also responded positively to the call for change. He called for representatives of the various women's organizations that exist in his country, to come and report to him after the Beijing conference. In the The Times of Swaziland of 12 May 1996 a report on that meeting has the title 'Jubilant after historical meeting'. In the report it is stated that the King had called on these representatives of women. He also congratulated the women for their success in business. The paper confirms how happy these women were in the words 'There was excitement written all over their faces, yet fear of not being understood and so many 'What ifs?' were being muttered'. However, it is also mentioned in this report that there were people who did not approve of the meeting.

The words ‘ ... after all, women were already being called all sorts of names, ranging from crazy to mad, and lunatics who wanted impossible change, so the last was for the king to agree with that analysis’ say it all about the general attitude of society towards women.

CONCLUSION

From this discussion it is clear that many attempts have been made to maintain a patriarchal ideology amongst emaSwati. It also becomes clear on the other hand that women are becoming ever more prepared to fight this battle to their utmost. It has been through their struggle and efforts that some improvements have taken and are taking place. These are the same women who, prior to this time, had only the traditional folksongs as their means of expression, and of communicating their views on the oppressive issues they encountered.

Today these very women are able to speak out through the organizations that exist to support them in the struggle. Important though such organizations are, one cannot underestimate the critical role of the folksongs, as a mechanism to challenge the patriarchal ideology that prevailed. These songs also offered a kind of therapy or counsel for the women of this society, who otherwise might easily have succumbed to the tensions and ills of being systematically discriminated against. The question that keeps coming to mind is: ‘What did our sisters in cultures that did not have folksongs use for challenging the patriarchy that seems to have existed in all societies?’

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WOMEN AT WORK

INTRODUCTION TO 'WOMEN AT WORK'

Jeannette Malherbe

The work that women do covers the whole spectrum of organized and informal labour. They are in the professions and business, they are a major element of wage labour, they work in their homes and fields. Yet their work is typically unseen (as in the work done in the home) and undervalued (as in the nurturing professions of teaching, secretarial work and nursing). As wage-earners in the industrial economy, women fill the lowest ranks and only rarely rise to managerial positions. 'Most Black women are employed as domestics, which remains the hardest kind of work with the longest working hours. An appreciable proportion of gainfully occupied women are in the nursing and teaching professions; in recent years there has been considerable growth of Black women workers in industrial employment. We have witnessed too, in recent years, the spectacular presence of Black women in executive positions, spectacular because there are so few of them that they stand out as a spectacle. The overwhelming majority of businesswomen are pavement vendors just eking out an existence' (Mandela, 1990:8).

The four essays here are studies of the marginalization and oppression of women in their work: in the very structures of organised labour, the trade unions; in the professions of nursing and teaching; and in the daily tasks which fall to the lot of rural women as a result of the migrant labour system. Saranel Benjamin discusses the gender relations and attitudes towards women to be found in the trade unions, and amasses some startling facts (e.g., the high incident of sexual harassment at leadership levels) and figures (e.g., of females at various levels in the hierarchy) to prove that, like all the other major institutions of our society, trade unionism is a product of, and is maintained as an ongoing project of, the patriarchy. These findings are discrepant with the liberational nature of trade unionism, and moves are being made to eradicate sexism and restore to trade unionism its true character of striving for equality for all.

In the traditionally feminine profession of nursing, there are discriminatory and dominating attitudes that aim at keeping women in an ancillary role,

and making the field of health care the preserve of male authority. In her analysis of the nursing profession, Val Ehlers describes the formative influences on it of the church, the military and economic forces, to explain the ruling image of 'the good nurse'. This is someone in a stiffly starched cap and uniform who follows orders unthinkingly, reveres the male doctors who give the orders, has no purposes or interests of her own (least of all in money) but exists to serve others and the noble profession of nursing. The manipulations by which this image is implanted in the minds of trainee nurses and becomes the norm, and the obstacles that are put in the way of anyone who tries to empower nurses to reject it, are made clear.

Then there is the analysis of gender attitudes in education, both toward girl pupils and women teachers, and how these attitudes contribute to the maintenance of high rates of illiteracy among Black women. Miriam Lephalala and Pinkie Mabunda record how things stand for African women in the teaching profession, and in education in general. They trace the low status and negative self-esteem of women teachers compared to their male colleagues to factors in traditional culture. For instance, girls are trained to serve their brothers and male relatives food in a submissive manner, usually on their knees, which creates in them a feeling of inferiority and subservience to males. The syllabuses and text books do nothing to correct this impression, and so women come to think that education is not for them but their brothers. The low literacy rates among black women, especially in the country districts, is an index of this attitude. Basic literacy programmes for rural women give them not only the ability to read, but also the belief that they have a right to education, and have as much self-worth and dignity as the men in the community.

Finally there is the desperate marginalization of rural Black women living alone with their children because their husbands are away working in the cities. The daily demands of finding the means of survival for themselves and their families from the earth is organized as informal collective labour. Mpumi Rulumeni-Ntlombeni has a sharp eye for the small details of survival strategies, for the fact that 'income' is not reckoned by these women in monetary terms. Her description of the daily economies they practise, and of the spirit of communal self-help that prevails among them, is not explicitly gender related. But in the second part of the essay, the author records the results of a survey on decision-making: who makes the deci-

sions, and about what kinds of household questions they make them. It emerges that the rural women who manage to support their children and themselves in the absence of their migrant husbands, and often without adequate or even any support from them, will still defer to them before taking any decisions.

The essays assembled in this section, focussed as they are on the conditions of women and the relation between the sexes in the workplace, reveal situations that need immediate and practical attention. Saranel Benjamin in discussing patriarchal constraints in the trade unions, poses the questions: How shall we deal with the curious anomaly of trade unionism: that it fights for women's rights in the workplace but denies them equal rights in trade union structures? What can be done to make husbands more comfortable with their wives' attending union meetings? How can the presence of women in leadership positions in the unions be increased? Then, with regard to health care, Val Ehlers brings home the difficult issues like: What are we going to do to train our nurses to be proud, self-confident and independent workers? How can we counter the weight of centuries of paternalistic tradition in the nursing profession?

The position is no better for women teachers, as the paper by Pinkie Mabunda and Miriam Lephala shows, and here the reader is made aware that the need for change is doubly urgent: not only are women teachers in lowly positions and burdened with low self-esteem in the educational setup, they have to operate with patriarchal curriculums. These are the combined conditions in which the rising generations of girls and young women are being educated. In Mpumi Rulumeni-Ntlombeni's study of how rural women survive without money, and of their very limited decision-making powers, the questions that the reader is left with are about the deep structures of society and traditional life, and the intransigence of the problem. Indeed, the female community of Bolotwa (the site of this paper) do not question their lot, and their survival strategies speak of courage and strength of spirit. There is only a background murmur, supplied perhaps by a reader aware of other ways of life, or suggested perhaps by the extraordinary results of the survey on decision-making in the community which the author records, that things might be different. This is the dilemma of development feminism: in the context of 'developing communities', how far does or should the agent of change follow an agen-

da extrinsic to the situation? Is meaningful change possible otherwise? By putting these questions on the table, the authors bring the facts of gender injustice to the reader's attention, and at the same time, motivate the imperative for change.

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PATRIARCHAL CONSTRAINTS ON TRADE UNION WOMEN

Saranel Benjamin

INTRODUCTION

Trade unions have always played a liberating role and been associated with terms such as 'democracy', 'freedom' and 'the struggle for human dignity'. The institution of trade unionism gave practical effect to these words which otherwise seemed a distant ideology beyond the reach of the mass of people – the workers. So it would seem contradictory to be addressing an issue like women's oppression within a movement that was at the forefront of the liberation struggle in South Africa. But somehow patriarchy has a way of infiltrating every sphere of life, the trade union movement being no exception.

The trade unions have always been involved in trying to achieve recognition, participation and equality for all in the workplace. Unfortunately, the recognition of the status of women within the trade unions has not been achieved nor has there been maximum participation of women in the trade unions. The inequality that trade union women are subjected to within the trade union still exists. This, as we shall see, can be laid at the door of patriarchal attitudes and beliefs.

WHAT IS THE PATRIARCHY?

The definition of a 'patriarch' is the paternal leader of a family or tribe (American Heritage Dictionary, 1976). Extending this to 'patriarchy', we might say that it is a social system where leadership and power are confined to the male line. In today's world, patriarchy has coloured the belief system of society at large. It has dictated the way our religions have been interpreted, the way our culture has been defined, and the way we speak, act and think about the world, including ourselves.

Socialization and the conscientizing of members of the community has taken place through the propagation of male-dominated beliefs.

Patriarchal society is characterized by unequal power relations between men and women where men are socialized to use 'power-over' behaviours in relation to women as a group (McKone, 1993). The propagation of male-dominant attitudes has permeated almost all cultures to such an extent that the subservience of women to men, and the suppression of women by men, has become an unquestioned customary way of life.

The social organization in which we exist not only propagates the dominant male principle informally, but actually institutionalizes it, so that it becomes a part of the social realm, featuring in legislature, religious codes, and health and educational practices. The dominance of the male principle has caused the female principle to be weakened or 'censored' so that it has given rise to what Mugo calls a 'negative silence' (1993). This 'negative silence' has given birth to what we know as cultural silence: subservience on the part of women. Women have lost control over their voices, their creativity, their self-will – their whole person – and thereby have lost their identities as human beings equal to men. Patriarchy makes men the reference point or the standard measure by which society fixes a woman's worth. Hence women become defined as an extension of, an appendage to men (Mugo, 1993). A woman is not seen as a complete entity in her own right but is given an identity based on her role and character in relation to the dominant male.

PATRIARCHY IN THE ECONOMY

In patriarchal systems, all women suffer similar gender injustices but it is their difference in social class that makes the degree of their suffering different. Where patriarchy occurs in a capitalist society, the women from the working class suffer the worse forms of discrimination and abuse. Mugo states that 'the economic system is set up in such a way that [women] are deprived, impoverished and dehumanized by a breadline, marginal type of existence' (Mugo, 1993). In a South African context, it is fair to say that the majority of working class women are black women. Hence the black South African woman has to overcome a three-tier oppression, viz. sex, class and race. Moreover, most South African women maintain the home, do the cooking and the cleaning within the household. This work has remained invisible and the only recognition that it has

received is that the work is a woman's 'natural lot' (Baskin, 1991:370).

For a trade union woman, her oppression in the categories of sex, class and race is given definition through patriarchal constraints. Seen at their most primary level, patriarchal constraints for a trade union woman are labour roles; they take the form of a woman's compound shift where she plays the role of mother, housekeeper, cook, worker and trade unionist.

Patriarchy continues to make its presence felt in the positioning of women in the economy. Since women are not physically as strong as men, historically they were the ones to stay home and be the carers and nurturers of the family whilst the men went out and hunted for food. In modern times, conditions have changed and men no longer have to hunt for food.

Women however, though they may no longer stay at home, are still labelled as the nurturers and care-givers of men and children. Throughout time, this philosophy has remained. It has extended itself into education, employment and the economy. In school, girls are socialized into taking subjects such as home economics, typing and cooking classes, while boys are socialized into taking subjects such as technical drawing, woodwork, science and advanced mathematics. In tertiary education, the majority of women take courses in nursing or teaching, thus preparing themselves for the caring and nurturing professions whilst men choose courses that prepare them for managerial positions, or professional careers as doctors and lawyers.

A woman's work is not recognized in the formal economy – that is the factories, shops and farms. Women make up the majority of workers in the clothing, domestic-work and service sectors and also constitute a large proportion of the farming, food-processing, footwear and textiles workforce. However, women, regardless of the sector in which they are found, are guaranteed to be performing the lowest-paid jobs. Women are also more likely to be found in temporary employment where they are paid less than the minimum wage. Statistics show that this trend is on the increase. There was a 32% growth between 1965 and 1985 in the number of black South African women involved in menial work, in unskilled labour such as cleaning and nursemaiding, and fewer women became directly involved in production (Baskin, 1991:370).

PATRIARCHAL TRADE UNIONS

Having identified how women are placed in the national economy, we find that this placement is reflected in the position of women in the trade unions. The number of women who have been integrated into the labour movement is almost proportional to the number of working women in the formal economy. Based on official statistics women constituted 23% of the formal workforce in 1960, 30,6% in 1970, 36% in 1985 and 41% in 1991 (Trade Union Research Project, 1994:71). It is estimated that in 1993, 23% of South Africa's workforce was organized in trade unions, and that less than one third of trade union members were women (O'Reagan and Thompson, 1993:25).

Because women constitute the minority of union membership, they are never the first priority. It was only when unions had firmly established themselves on the shopfloor that they began to attend to issues such as gender equality and started to take some kind of initiative to draw more women into the unions. Unions that have had women membership since the early eighties have managed to accomplish important agreements with their employers. In 1983, the Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa (CCAWUSA, formerly SACCAWU) signed the first maternity agreement with OK Bazaars; the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) managed to win an equal pay package for grade 4 machine operators at Dunlop; CWIU also got a manager fired for sexually harassing a woman worker (Isaacs, 1995b).

But what has happened to the women within the unions themselves? There is no denying that the achieving of maternity benefits, of equal pay for work of equal value, of safe and healthy work environments, by unions in negotiation with employers, is important for women workers. But in weighing up the position of women in the union movement, this achievement must be seen together with what is happening internally, within the unions themselves. We find, on close examination, that the democratic rights that have been achieved by the unions for their women members in the workplace are not paralleled by democratic rights for women within the unions.

BARRIERS AGAINST WOMEN IN THE TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

It can easily be said that there is an attitude developing within the union movement that women's issues are just that – issues that concern only women. What compounds this attitude is the feeling that women are subservient creatures who do not need or require that much attention. If women stayed home and looked after the children and did the housework, they wouldn't be having the problems that have been associated with formal employment and subsequently with the unions. This attitude has permeated the trade union movement and has resulted in the following barriers against women in the unions.

GETTING WOMEN'S ISSUES TAKEN SERIOUSLY

The first barrier to women trade unionists was that they are in the minority in terms of union membership. As mentioned above, one of the historical reasons for gender inequality in the unions is that there were never enough women members for their special concerns to be made union priorities.

The figures for the two major trade union federations, the Congress of Trade Unions of South Africa (COSATU) and the National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) show a weaker presence of women. Since 1985, women have made up 35% of COSATU's membership (Dove, 1992) and in NACTU, women constitute 40% of the membership (Mofokeng and Tshabalala, 1993). The reason for less women being organized into the unions was that women had the sole responsibility of taking care of the children and the household. This was securely endorsed by the patriarchal attitudes towards the family and household. There have been several reports of husbands and boyfriends of trade union women who have stopped women from attending union meetings or have even dragged the women out of the meetings. There have also been reports of women being physically assaulted for attending union meetings.

It has been debated at COSATU congresses whether to set up separate women's structures within the federation and within the federation's affiliates. In 1987, COSATU set up a women's forum. However, its status was

relegated to subcommittee level under the National Education Committee. None of the male comrades took the women's structure seriously. In fact it was seen as an easy way to get rid of trade union women's issues.

Women were the ones who took the responsibility for organizing the forums on their own. They were forced to pull in women who were already committed to being either shopstewards or organizers. Hence it was difficult to give the forums their full attention. Also, fewer and fewer resources were made available to the women's structures. Some of the women who took up positions lacked any knowledge of how a union worked or how to get women's issues onto the agenda. Therefore, issues that were seriously affecting the women in the unions were being ghettoized and were not receiving the necessary attention. Women's forums were made to report to regional education forums and regional office bearers who would then take the reports, recommendations and requests to the regional executive. The regional education committees and the regional executive are both male-dominated and almost all regional office bearers are men (Dove, 1992).

THE SCARCITY OF WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS

The second obstacle in the path of trade union women is the representation of women in leadership positions, or rather the lack thereof. The under-representation of women at leadership level became obvious in the early eighties. It was only fully addressed in COSATU in 1989 where it was recognized that this under-representation was a crucial issue. The same problem persists in NACTU.

Statistics show that although 36% of COSATU's membership are women, only 14% are shopstewards at the lowest level (Dove, 1992). In total, COSATU has 590 regional office bearers that constitute the second-level leadership. Of the 590 regional office bearers only 77 are women. However, the South African Domestic Workers' Union (SADWU) causes a distortion to the true figures as they are an all-women union. But if we remove SADWU from the picture, of the 590 regional office bearers only 8% are women and that, in terms of numbers, is 47. On the third tier of

leadership, COSATU and its affiliates have 95 national office bearers. If we again remove the SADWU members, we see that only 8% of these national office bearers are women, ie. 8 women. In the highest level of leadership of COSATU we find that no general secretaries or union presidents are women. We also find that in COSATU's nine regions all the regional secretaries and chairpersons are men. The statistics are understandable in unions where there are few or no women members but they become unacceptable in unions where the majority of members are women (Naledi, 1994). In NACTU, the situation is not as bleak – in its highest level of leadership, there are two general secretaries, two presidents and three vice-presidents who are women (Mofokeng and Tshabalala, 1993).

According to Dove, the reason why women don't get elected to leadership roles is because of historical and cultural disadvantages. The election of more men into leadership positions by both men and women is actually a reflection of the unequal power relations that exist between men and women in society in general. We have seen that it is traditional for women to be the least educated, most unskilled and the least secure workers. They have less confidence than the more educated, articulate and skilled workers, usually men, when having to face management. In terms of leadership, society has always assumed that men are more commanding, authoritative, never admitting weakness or defeat whilst a woman's style of leadership tends to be more co-operative, accommodating and self-critical, born out of the patriarchal belief that women ought to be subservient (Dove, 1992).

Being a trade union organizer requires long hours, sometimes with inadequate transport facilities and difficult accommodation in areas that one has to visit. It is perceived that this job is too dangerous for women and therefore most organizers are men. Again, this is caused by a blind prejudice that exists in our society. Because of this, women who apply for such jobs are discriminated against by the male-dominated employment committees who will decide that she is not up to the job (Dove, 1992). There are no affirmative action policies in most unions to ensure that women get employed as organizers, even in those unions where there is greater potential for women trade unionists.

The consequences of the lack of representation of women at the levels of leadership are that education and training, the higher levels of debate and the decision-making structures become inaccessible to women. As a result of this, women never get the opportunity to develop themselves or prepare themselves for leadership roles through the use of skills training. Also, the lack of women at the most influential levels of leadership gives rise to what Dove calls 'gender-blind' demands (Dove, 1992) where demands are made without referring to the situation of women. Within the union itself, because women are not represented at leadership levels, the issues that affect women do not get put on agendas and never get dealt with (Dove, 1992).

In a survey done by the International Labour Organization on 14 unions in 1993, it was found that :

- 9 out of the 14 unions had a formal policy on gender equality;
- only the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU), the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) and the Chemical Workers Industrial Union (CWIU) had executive committee compositions which reflected the proportion of female membership;
- CWIU was the only union which reserved seats for women on its executive;
- 10 unions had women's committees; the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) and the Financial Union (SASBO) did not have any;
- not a single union had negotiators who were trained on equality issues;
- SACTWU had the highest percentage of women on negotiating teams, followed by CWIU (Isaacs, 1995a).

The women from COSATU as well as NACTU have repeatedly called for the introduction of proportional representation through the implementation of a quota system. This system should be used as a mechanism to ensure the participation of women in leadership and decision making. Proportional representation in terms of the quota system would reserve seats for women at the different levels of leadership. However, the issue of proportional representation has sparked off a furious debate. Many unions argued that women must stand for positions and be elected on

merit. They felt that the reservation of seats for women would result in tokenism. At the 1994 COSATU congress the proposal for proportional representation was not accepted. Instead a resolution was passed on building women's participation and leadership within COSATU (Isaacs, 1995a).

SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE TRADE UNIONS

The third and final barrier facing women in the trade union movement is the issue of sexual harassment. According to the Sexual Harassment Education Project, it is estimated that six out of every ten women are sexually harassed in the trade unions. This high incidence is characteristic of the imbalance of power that exists between the men and women in the unions.

Another aspect to sexual harassment is what Dove calls 'bed politics' (Dove, 1992) – a tactic devised by the men in the trade unions to scare off women from leadership positions. Some men in the unions feel that women who assert themselves in order to get elected into leadership positions need to be 'tamed'. They would encourage a man at the same level of leadership that the woman is standing for, to seduce her on the presumption that this would give him power over her. Many men in the unions abuse their positions of power to take advantage of a woman sexually. This not only undermines the position of women in the unions but also creates tension and hostility between the women in the unions. Sexual harassment has come up repeatedly and it has been often cited as the biggest problem facing women in the unions today.

SOME GAINS

On the other hand, to the advantage of women in the unions, there have been a small number of localized but positive gains won by trade union women. Some of these include:

- The South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU, formerly SA Railways and Harbours Workers Union), the Food and Allied

Workers Union (FAWU), the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU), the Paper, Printing and Allied Workers Union (PPAWU) and the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) have given the women's forums direct access to constitutional structures in the unions;

- SAMWU has achieved proportional representation of women at a national level;
- The Commercial, Catering and Allied Workers Union of SA (CCAWUSA, formerly SACCAWU) has integrated parental rights and training issues into its collective bargaining programme and has also designed gender sensitization courses for its male office bearers;
- the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has given gender issues priority on its agendas;
- the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) has made sexual harassment, childcare and AIDS key union issues;
- the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU) has achieved proportional representation on its structures and its members are now participating in COSATU's women's forums;
- COSATU has drawn up and implemented a CODE OF CONDUCT on sexual harassment and has initiated a series of training programmes for its affiliates around sexual harassment (Isaacs, 1995a).

CONCLUSION

We have found through numerous studies on the trade unions that:

- the employment structure of the unions is biased in favour of men in that men are occupying the higher paid, more powerful positions and have easier access to upward development;
- women are under-represented in decision making structures of the unions, despite some unions having a majority of women in their membership;
- unions' gender structures have not been given the necessary resources and assistance to allow them to operate effectively;
- the trade union environment is not conducive to the active participation of women;
- women members face sexual harassment from male fellow members (Dove, 1992).

The barriers facing women in the unions that have been discussed here are not the only ones, but at present they are the most crucial. What these barriers do, is enforce gender constraints on women within the trade unions, constraints which are essentially no different from the barriers women face in the workplace, in the family and in the community. The philosophies of a patriarchal system have infiltrated the mindsets of both men and women so that men are defined as the dominant creatures and women accept this premise.

In the trade unions, patriarchal belief-sets have ensured that men have the right to maximum participation in the unions and access to all levels of leadership. They have also ensured that the majority of women do not get organized into a union, that they do not get the rights to participate at any level in the union and they are not given access to leadership roles. Worse still, men suppress women in the unions in the most primitive way, by using their power over women in sexual terms. No violation can be worse.

It would seem however that the women in the trade unions are overcoming the subservience and docility that was placed on them by the patriarchal beliefs in society. They are striving to break the constraints that they face in the union movement. So far, we have seen that trade union women have been successful in getting women's issues recognized and accounted for. But as far as patriarchy goes, we know that it affects the way people think, act and speak. Therefore the fight is far from over – the battle to change people's mindsets regarding gender in the trade union movement has just begun.

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HOSPITALS, PATERNALISM AND HEALTH CARE IN THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA – A PERSPECTIVE ON HOSPITALS AS PATERNALISTIC INSTITUTIONS

Val Ehlert

INTRODUCTION

The concept of paternalism will be defined. Then military and missionary hospitals will be discussed as paternalistic institutions, followed by references to paternalistic political and economic influences on hospitals and health care in the RSA. Paternalism in training schools for doctors and nurses, as well as in hospitals and health care services in the RSA will be illustrated, followed by suggestions for improving health care for the RSA's population by recognizing and addressing paternalism in the RSA's hospitals and health care systems.

'Pater' is a Latin word meaning 'father', thus paternalism implies fatherly control which 'limits the freedom of the subject by well-meant legislation' (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1967). This implies that paternalism embodies a principle of altruistic kindness, to the extent of meeting another person's needs even against the wishes of that person; or refusing to acquiesce in his or her wishes for the person's own benefit – as judged by the paternalistic person (Childress, 1982: 12). A paternalistic person makes decisions on behalf of other persons for the other persons' own good, with or without consulting them, and with or without their permission, in the same way that parents decide what their children may or may not do.

'Acting in the patient's best interest' could be regarded as the most important prerequisite of all medical interventions. In no other way can health care workers justify pushing needles into people, cutting them with knives and blades, exposing them to harmful radiation, pouring fluids into their veins and suturing their bodies with needle and thread. All these, and other actions are justified because they are directed towards '... helping those in need of aid' (Häyry 1991:3). All health care professionals, including nurses, can and do act in paternalistic ways – not only towards their patients/clients but also towards each other both interprofessionally and

intraprofessionally. However, the best known paternalistic behaviours in the health care system, usually operate between doctors (presumably well educated domineering men) and nurses (presumably less well educated subservient women). As more and more females do become doctors, and as a limited number of males do become nurses, it might be linguistically more correct to refer to 'parentalistic' behaviour rather than 'paternalistic', but for the sake of this paper the word 'paternalistic' will be used.

A hospital is usually regarded as an institution where the sick and wounded receive medical treatment and nursing care. Throughout the world, including the RSA, hospitals have been established as a result of military, religious, political or economic considerations. The paternalistic influences in each of these types of hospitals will be briefly addressed.

MILITARY HOSPITALS

The military structure of a country might be the most male-dominated paternalistic societal institution in the entire country. The ultimate purpose of the military could be seen as organized killing, in sharp contrast with the healing, nurturing and caring services of female nurses (Roberts and Group, 1995:101). Yet wherever men fought wars, nurses followed to tend to the sick and wounded, often in tent hospitals and with limited equipment. Indeed the Crimean War offered the historically noteworthy opportunity to Florence Nightingale to prove to the world that nursing care could succeed in reducing the death rate at Scutari from 42% to 2.2% within six months (Dolan, 1969:215). Although Florence Nightingale never challenged paternalism in the hospitals or health care systems, she brought about this dramatic decline in the death rate at Scutari not by rendering nursing care to individual patients only, but also by managing to obtain and control supplies, improving the diets, establishing and maintaining drains and sanitation. Moreover, she submitted regular reports to the appropriate authorities and to the media of the day. She used at least the mechanics of economics, politics and management (usually regarded as male attributes) in addition to her nursing actions (typically regarded as 'caring' female attributes). Lavinia Dock, one of the first nurse feminists, stated: 'Women's autonomy had been lost...when men took control of the health care systems in the seventeenth century, bringing general contempt

to the nurse and misery to the patient until Florence Nightingale came to the rescue' (Roberts and Group, 1995:81).

Statistics of the Crimean War illustrated the significance of providing adequate nursing care to the sick and wounded. On the other hand, statistics from the South African War (1899–1902), waged between the British and the Boer forces, illustrate the disastrous effects which could result from absent and inadequate health services, including nursing services. These statistics, it should be kept in mind, refer not to wounded nor to sick soldiers, but to healthy women, children and elderly people concentrated into camps spread throughout the Boer Republics. They became ill and died as a result of lack of basic amenities, exposure to the cold and to infectious diseases, and to a lack of nursing and medical care. A total of 27 927 deaths (including 5 553 children) were recorded in the concentration camps. The actual number of deaths might have been much higher as recording of deaths commenced after the camps had been established for an unknown time, and ceased before all the camps had been vacated. Many deaths could have been prevented if more doctors, medical supplies and trained nurses had been available. Much illness and many deaths could have been prevented by merely isolating patients with measles, diphtheria or typhoid from all other people, by regularly cleaning the camp hospitals and by improving the diets of the people in the concentration camps (Searle, 1970:220–224). 'It became necessary to bring back medical officers who had retired ... these hospitals were not always properly organized or supervised... Moreover, there was a tendency to treat the hospital too much like a barracks and to regard the patients too much as soldiers and not enough as patients' (Searle, 1970:185). This militaristic paternalism, ordering patients and nurses as to what to do, and failing to obtain the necessary medical supplies, contributed towards the high incidence of deaths during this war waged on South African soil.

During the First World War, nurses could be regarded as leaders of all women, but during World War II, '...the nurses, who paved the way for other women, fell behind them, probably in large part as a result of their subordination to physicians' (Roberts and Group, 1995:132). However, the long term positive effects of World War II included that female nurses became fully commissioned for the first time in history, implying that nurses could really manage the nursing care rendered by themselves and by the

enlisted corpsmen (Roberts and Group, 1995: 13). For the first time in history, nurses with the ranks of officers, were not compelled to take orders from soldiers who were officers.

In military hospitals, paternalism reigned, and continues to reign supreme, nurses having to accept orders not only from the doctors but also from army officers, with ranks more senior than those of the nurses concerned – which could not always be in the patients' best interest. Similar paternalistic developments took place, and probably continue to persist, in many missionary hospitals.

MISSIONARY HOSPITALS

As more and more missionaries entered Africa, more and more missionary hospitals were erected. Although these missionary hospitals rendered health and nursing care to the local populations, the ultimate aim was to reach peoples' souls to convert them to Christianity through tending to their health care problems. Ministers of religion, or priests, were often the unofficial, but sometimes even the official, overseers of these missionary hospitals. Nurses from both the Anglican and the Catholic sisterhoods helped to establish nursing services in this country. Indeed the first South African nurses were trained by an Anglican nun in Kimberley. To be admitted to the training school, the young women had to be '... ladies in every sense of the word and God-fearing women above all else' (Searle, 1970: 143). Although these sisterhoods rendered major contributions to the people of this country, they also instilled in nurses the so-called female virtues of obedience to authority, hard work, little if any remuneration and '... the grace of a special dedication of lives devoted to their fellow-men ... a concentration of all their energies on the highest conceivable objective – enthusiasm and absolute faith in what they were trying to do' (Searle, 1970: 152). Nurses trained at Kimberley started training schools all over the country, promoting these attitudes of humility, service and unquestioning obedience among their nursing students and staff. These teachings ensured that 'good' nurses obeyed orders from doctors and missionaries – another form of dual paternalism in some South African hospitals, serving to disempower nurses. With the attitudes of obedient ladies strongly entrenched in many nurses even to the present day, it

could be understood why so few nurses in the RSA seem to be able and willing to voice their professional standpoints; and equally few to join or even to attend feminist activities in the RSA. This apparent lack of professional assertiveness among nurse leaders in the RSA, becomes especially visible in the political arena.

HOSPITALS AND POLITICS

Health could be regarded as a political decoy when hospitals and/or health care facilities are established in communities not supporting the ruling party just prior to political elections. The message could be communicated to all voters that the ruling party cares for them by providing health services, and thus deserves their votes.

Another political use of hospitals is to name a hospital after a political figure. Whether or not one opposed apartheid, if ill, and referred to the currently known Pretoria Academic Hospital, but previously called 'H F Verwoerd Hospital', one would hear and see the name H F Verwoerd on numerous occasions throughout one's hospitalization, implying that the master of apartheid was instrumental in providing medical and nursing care when one really needed it.

After the African National Congress (ANC) came to power in 1994, free health care for all mothers and children up to five years of age was announced. This was certainly a commendable political step to take, but it could have been so much more commendable – and feasible – if the health services, and especially the nurses responsible for providing most of these services, had received prior notification, improved staffing of health facilities, increased budgets and especially increased supplies of medicines. This 'free health service' might disempower and disillusion many nurses who need to render services to many more people, without the necessary staff, facilities, equipment or drugs. The only way in which nurses could prove their need for more staff, more equipment and more medicines, would be to compile statistics of the work loads before and after the announcement of free medical services. Unless nurses can succeed in statistically proving their increased workload, health care planners will continue to assume that the services cope with the available facilities and equipment.

Since politicians determine health care policies, allocate health care budgets and decide where and when health care facilities will be expanded, they influence the health care system both directly and indirectly. Unless nurses, who constitute the largest number of health care workers in the RSA, begin to understand their role as nurses and as females in both the paternalistic health care system and in the paternalistic general political system of the country, they cannot begin to improve the situation for the nursing profession in the RSA. It could be impossible '... for female nurses to implement expanded roles if they are unaware of or unwilling to recognize the social constraints imposed on them because they are women' (Roberts and Group, 1995: xi).

In the case of nurses these social constraints include the previously discussed paternalistic military, missionary and political decisions being enforced on the health care providers. However, paternalistic economic considerations continue to exert an increasingly important influence on all health care services, including nursing services.

HOSPITALS AND ECONOMICS

Health care and hospitals have become big business in many developed countries, especially where prepaid medical insurance schemes virtually guarantee health care providers and hospitals to be paid for services rendered to their members. The RSA is no exception with more and more private hospitals arising in all cities and even in the larger towns of the country.

The only reason why people get admitted to hospitals is to obtain nursing care – otherwise they could get discharged from the operating tables. Hospitals, including private hospitals, are established by doctors, business men or politicians to offer nursing care to patients. Yet nursing care is not reflected on patients' hospital accounts. Patients pay per day per bed, for medicines, bandages, minutes spent in theatre and get separate accounts from the surgeon, anaesthetist, pathologist, radiologist and physiotherapist – but no account from nurses or for nursing care. When discharged patients feel dissatisfied with their nursing care, they blame the nurses, but when they perceive the nursing care to have been of a high standard

they attribute this to 'good orders from the doctor(s)'. Nursing care thus becomes invisible, and of no economic consequence, not only to the patients but also the hospital managers who may regard the hospital's rate of bed occupancy and the maximum occupation of the operating theatres as generators of the hospital's income. However, without nurses to provide nursing care, the hospital beds and the operating tables would not generate any income whatsoever.

Nurse managers in some institutions, not only in the RSA but also in the USA, still do not compile nor control their own budgets, even though the nursing service manager controls approximately 80% of the personnel budget of most hospitals (Roberts and Group, 1995:198). Nobody can manage a service without money, without a budget. However, if nursing service remains economically invisible because hospitals do not charge for nursing services, then hospital managers might be excused for regarding nursing services as being the major expenditure of the hospital, without bringing any money to the institution – when indeed nursing is the only reason for hospitalizing patients.

Nurses need to realize that in addition to being committed to service and to the welfare of their patients, they also need to become expert with regard to economics and accountancy. With such competencies they could demonstrate the worth of nursing care, in rands and cents, for a specific institution, otherwise nursing will remain invisible economically, and unable to claim its share of the health care budget of any institution, or of the country as a whole. Unless nursing managers can succeed in these aspects, nursing services will have to remain satisfied with the inadequate budgetary handouts received from health care and hospital administrators as calculated by them with, or even without, consultation of the nursing service managers. In addition to paternalistic military, missionary and political issues, paternalistic financial decisions influence the quantity and quality and affordability of the RSA's health services.

HOSPITALS AS PATERNALISTIC INSTITUTIONS

Hospitals and other health care services, whether established for military, religious, political or economic reasons, seem to harbour at least two

paternalistic systems, making decisions on behalf of patients, and issuing orders to nurses and/or patients. Depending on the type of hospital, the nurses receive orders not only from doctors, but from army officers, missionaries, politicians or economists, or a combination of these paternalistic authorities. Thus the nursing profession has been aptly described as itself being '... sick, suffering from an illness caused by the medical and hospital care it had received over many years' (Ashley, 1977:70). Unless nurses become aware of, and address, these paternalistic influences, the nursing profession and the health care system of the RSA cannot reach independence, and might remain crippled by paternalistic authoritarianism, making decisions not only affecting nurses and hospitals but the RSA's entire health care system. The feminists of the RSA could be of assistance to the nurses of the RSA in this regard, provided some mutual co-operation could be established between these two groups of women.

One of the reasons why the nursing profession in the RSA seems to fail to recognize the paternalistic influences on the health care system, might be that the majority of nurse leaders have been trained in paternalistic hospital training schools.

PATERNALISTIC HOSPITALS AS TRAINING SCHOOLS FOR NURSES AND DOCTORS.

Hospitals exist to provide nursing care. Thus hospitals with schools for training nurses can provide nursing care (rendered by the student nurses as part of their 'practical' training) at extremely low costs.

Numerous problems arose out of this apprenticeship approach to the training of nurses, as each hospital could offer as much or as little training as its administrators wanted to offer. Although there were many commendable hospital schools for training nurses, exploitation of student nurses did occur. In most hospital schools paternalistic attitudes prevailed in requiring subordination of authority, obeying all hospital rules, being loyal to the hospital and in conducting themselves as worthy members of the noble profession of nursing. The apprenticeship system under which nurses trained in the RSA, and in other countries including the USA '... instilled a strong faith in superiors, a desire to cooperate and a tendency

to think less of oneself and one's own needs ... and promoted dependability and efficiency in carrying out assigned responsibility' (Styles, 1977:8). In this way student nurses were isolated from the mainstream of the country's education system and from other students. As an isolated group of students, constantly subjected to paternalism in hospitals, nurses became socialized with the idea that they existed to serve other people (doctors and patients) and an institution (a hospital). 'In nursing, it became obvious that it would be improbable, if not impossible to prepare assertive, independent nurse practitioners if they were socialized to be dependent females' (Roberts and Group, 1995:xi).

Although the South African Nursing Council (SANC) proudly announced major improvements in the RSA's system of nursing education, with major changes taking place since 1983, independent research is awaited to confirm the success of these changes. The problem which remains in nursing education, is that student nurses are still being trained in paternalistic hospitals, and taught by professional nurses themselves trained by an approach resembling apprenticeship training – enforcing a respect for rules and an obedience to authorities – with its inhibiting effects on stimulating questioning minds in an effort to obtain true professional autonomy. In this way paternalism in most hospitals of the RSA could continue to exist.

All nursing education, including courses offered by universities, needs to be revised, democratized and liberalized. Nurses do follow undergraduate and postgraduate courses at most South African universities, but their choice of subjects is usually limited to a variety of nursing courses with optional subjects from the social sciences, especially sociology, though sometimes psychology, philosophy and anthropology are also offered. Empowering women, including nurses, requires a liberal education. It is time that each nursing department at the various RSA universities, realizes that nurses need knowledge of economics, education, politics, languages, law, accountancy, physical sciences, and possibly many other disciplines, to become empowered to negotiate effectively with policy makers, hospital and health care managers, and with doctors. As no one person can be an expert in all these diverse fields, each nurse who pursues university studies at great personal cost, should be enabled to choose alternative subjects suitable to his or her unique situation, interests and/or abilities.

Nurses doing the BACur degree at Unisa, were previously forced to do Sociology II, but they will be able to choose from among a number of courses offered at this university to be taken up to second year, even up to third year level, should the individual student prefer to do this, with the implementation of the modular system as from the year 2000. This would seem to be the most efficient and quickest way in which nurses could acquire more expertise from various fields; become more empowered and reduce the influence of paternalism in the health care services in the RSA. However, paternalism continues to influence health care practices in the RSA in various ways.

PATERNALISM AND HEALTH CARE IN THE RSA

Most health care services are rendered by nurses throughout the country, but especially in Primary Health Care (PHC) facilities. Unless PHC providers recognize and address paternalistic influences limiting the effectiveness of their daily health care practices, the effectiveness of the entire country's RSA's PHC remains unlikely to improve.

According to the ANC, the RSA's national health service must be driven by the PHC approach (ANC 1994:45). However, all health care professionals, including nurses and doctors, still spend much more time in hospitals than in PHC facilities during their training. This might be attributed to the ease of supervising large numbers of students in hospitals and the difficulty of doing so in scattered PHC facilities, or to the greater comfort experienced by the paternalistic decision-makers because they acquired their clinical experiences mostly in hospitals.

Another major problem in the PHC arena appears to be the lack of accurate information about the actual costs involved in realizing a governmental commitment to provide adequate PHC services (Broomberg and Rees, 1993:275). If PHC is the focus of the current health care services, then it should also become the focus of the students' training programmes, otherwise newly qualified health care professionals could regard primary health care as irrelevant, or perhaps as peripheral to their training, and thus to their professional practices. This conception might contribute to the large numbers of qualified doctors and nurses leaving the RSA, who completed the major part of their training in large hospitals but are expected to function in

PHC settings subsequent to obtaining their qualifications. The reduction of mortality and morbidity rates in the RSA might be more dependent on improved education for women, access to clean water and adequate food supplies than on health care services as such. However, in an effort to provide PHC services to the RSA's people, medical students are legally required to render one year's community service upon successful completion of their training – another paternalistic decision influencing the health care services in the country. Although similar community service is not yet legally required from nurses, in many parts of the country the only available nursing posts are in rural PHC services. This forces many newly qualified nurses to accept these PHC nursing positions in the RSA or to seek nursing appointments in foreign countries, where health services' requirements might match their training experiences more closely than those inside the RSA.

Some problems encountered in rendering health care to the population of the RSA, especially PHC services, could be attributed to the paternalism prevailing in many hospitals, medical and nursing schools. According to paternalistic medical approaches, the doctor not only knows best, but may function within a Westernized medical paradigm, with little or no exposure to any other culture, or any other health care system. Such an attitude could create tensions between what the patient (who might already have consulted traditional healers) expects and what the doctor believes the patient needs (in terms of his/her education in Western medicine).

Conflicts between medical paternalism and patient autonomy cannot benefit any health care system. Health care professionals who come from cultural backgrounds different from those of their patients need to accept and respect the patients' cultures to achieve any success whatsoever with treatment and health education. This can be a most difficult achievement in the RSA with eleven official languages and numerous subcultures. To complicate health issues further, many doctors working in the National Health Services are foreigners coming from countries such as Cuba, and Spanish is NOT one of the RSA's official languages.

Nurses who are familiar with patients' cultures could play a major role in providing health care and health education acceptable to individual patients, and benefitting their health, by both accepting and respecting cultural taboos and practices such as not eating eggs while pregnant; preparing and eating

indigenous foods, foreign to Westerners, such as mopani worms; consulting the traditional healer prior to visiting the clinic or doctor; requiring the traditional healer to perform certain rituals prior to undergoing surgery; and accepting the importance of the forefather spirits in disease etiology.

Especially in the field of maternal and child health care, nurses conversant with both the Western medical paradigm and the local culture, could render valuable inputs in educating not only the patients/clients but also the other members of the medical team, including doctors. Health education approaches which accept and respect cultural issues, such as the importance of a large number of children to many families, decidedly have a much better chance of achieving success than those who discredit the importance of cultural issues. 'Child spacing' programs, enabling families to have as many children as they wish but also spaced as they desire, seem to be much more acceptable than programs advocating fewer children only.

Nurses who are knowledgeable about both Western medical treatment and traditional health can identify cultural practices which enhance health status, such as breastfeeding a baby for two years; not drinking water from a source covered with green algae. They will recognize customs which have no effect on health care such as placing 'weaning bracelets' around the arms of toddlers in the process of being weaned, and those which definitely threaten health and possibly even life, such as rubbing cow dung into the umbilical stump of newborn babies; or male (and even female) circumcisions being performed under unhygienic conditions.

Health education efforts should not only decry those traditional practices which threaten health but also reinforce those which enhance health. However, it is unlikely that paternalistic health care workers will succeed in doing so; they are more likely to tell patients which practices should be discontinued 'for their own good'.

With the help of nurses, it should be possible to determine the real beliefs concerning AIDS (acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome) in each community. Most health education efforts concentrate on the necessity of practising safe sex with only one partner – a rather paternalistic way of telling people that abstinence is good for preventing AIDS, but that sexual relations with only one partner is also acceptable for ensuring health. This

is a foreign concept to many traditional Africans who have been practising polygamy for centuries. The use of condoms to prevent the contraction or spread of AIDS, is an emotional issue requiring much research to make health education more meaningful to specific target populations. Women in most cultures including those where female condoms might be available, would seem to be at the mercy of men's willingness to use condoms for the protection of both partners against AIDS. However, many people might find it incomprehensible to use condoms, to prevent contracting AIDS, which causes deaths mostly from tuberculosis or pneumonia (as a result of the impaired immune system). There is no obvious connection between not using condoms and dying from respiratory tract infections, unless the intricate etiology of AIDS can be understood. Mere paternalistic health education approaches like telling people to use condoms for their own good are unlikely to succeed in changing people's behaviour.

In order to render an effective primary health care service to any specific community, nurses need to recognize and address paternalistic issues not only relating to the health care system, nor only to doctor's orders, but also those affecting men and women in the community concerned. If men are the primary decision makers concerning the size of their families, it would seem to be inappropriate and ineffective to direct family planning motivation talks to women only. Unless paternalistic issues are recognized and addressed (preferably with community participation) the best efforts in rendering PHC services may amount to a mere waste of time and effort. However, health services will benefit more people in the RSA, if paternalistic issues could be recognized and addressed effectively by the health care workers and the communities concerned.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING HEALTH CARE FOR THE RSA'S POPULATION

Wildavsky (in Muff, 1982:256) maintains that 'Medical care alone does not equal health. The best estimates are that the medical system itself affects about 10% of the usual indices for measuring health, i.e., where you live, how well you live, how long you live. The remaining 90% are determined by factors over which doctors have little or no control, such as individual life style, social conditions, and the physical environment'.

More (paternalistic) hospitals and more (paternalistic) doctors might thus not succeed in providing health care accessible and acceptable to the RSA's entire population, but more effective PHC services can succeed in attaining this goal. Such services need re-organization of the available (wo)manpower and funds. Since most PHC workers are nurses, this source of womanpower needs to be empowered to render PHC services. Empowerment of nurses involves that nurses need to change their attitudes towards themselves and towards the nursing profession – which could be facilitated by a more liberal nursing education. The link, apparently lacking in the RSA, between nursing and feminism needs to be established. Nurses in the RSA have not been involved in feminist issues and movements, probably due to their training in paternalistic environments which did not sensitize them to feminist (nor to paternalistic) issues.

Many nurse leaders in the RSA still seem to be influenced by Victorian ideas about 'nice women' who should be 'ladies', often seeming to be subservient when assertiveness is needed to solve nurses' problems. Nurse leaders, and many nurses, have not seemed to view political activism as either a virtue or a necessity.

The spokespersons for the RSA's nurses frequently appear to be trade unionists not nurses. Perhaps this apparent failure of nurse leaders to lead the nurses in effectively voicing and negotiating their problems, could be attributed to the ineffectiveness of nurses' pacifying pleas made to economically motivated and politically powerful males. 'Conciliatory attitudes and behavior... prevented any accurate analysis of their real social and political problems as women dealing with a system of paternalism' (Styles, 1977:14). What the nurses of the RSA seem to need most is to acknowledge that the majority of them are women, and need to cope with women's problems in a paternalistic health care system. Unless the nurses can succeed in doing this, it seems unlikely that they will be empowered to solve their professional problems. Empowerment, which could be defined as '... the idea of personal strength facilitated through interaction with others', might enable nurse leaders to define and control situations, rather than merely responding to problems (Porter, 1991:181).

Not all inter- and intraprofessional relational problems will disappear with paternalism (Mitchell and Oakley, 1986:240). However, male-dominated,

economically-motivated medical practitioners and politicians will need to be convinced of the merits of empowering nurses to render more effective, acceptable and accessible PHC services. This could be the most effective cure for what ails the South African health care system. Once the paternalistic influences in military and missionary hospitals as well as in political and economic decisions affecting health care services in the RSA are recognized, then greater emphasis can be placed on women's health issues in the RSA. 'Unless women's health needs are met, their capacity ... will be constrained and they will be unable to realize their own potential as human beings. Many more will die prematurely and even more will have the quality of their lives diminished... women's right to health ... must be a central concern, not only in feminist politics, but in wider campaigns for sustainable development, political freedom and economic and social justice' (Doyal, 1995:232).

CONCLUSION

Nurses, predominantly female in the RSA, need to recognize and address the paternalistic influences pervading military and missionary hospitals as well as political and economic decisions affecting health care services in the RSA, in order to enhance the effectiveness of nursing services rendered in the RSA. Provided the RSA's nurses can be empowered, and can successfully change their attitudes towards themselves and towards the nursing profession, and towards all other health care professions, they can render more effective health care services. 'Ultimately, the basic struggle will be accomplished when women's values are translated by nurses into organizational contexts that force a change from patriarchal structures to ones that value the human in all people. Until ... women in nursing control their own profession ... there will continue to be nursing shortages, professional disunity and lack of autonomy ... If the services of nurses are essential, then they must be given the authority to do their jobs, the recognition and respect for what they really do, the freedom to do all they can do, and the economic support that rewards them fairly' (Roberts and Group, 1995:335).

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PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTS IN BLACK SOCIETIES, AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN EMPOWERING ILLITERATE WOMEN

Miriam Lephahala and Pinkie Mabunda

INTRODUCTION

The idea that the education system is gender impartial is a myth. Research has shown that gender stereotyping and discrimination in educational institutions are widespread. Of major concern is the fact that this is still rarely consciously acknowledged by society. A number of cultural and structural factors affect the status of African women in education. The three major underlying factors that have been identified are socialized stereotyping of traditional gender roles, the associated attitudes of both males and females and adult illiteracy. These function at three levels: the societal, the individual and the organizational levels.

Female oppression is a social practice that is perpetuated by sexual stereotyping from the time of childhood through to adult life. Society plays a major role in ensuring that children are brought up to maintain this cycle of gender oppression. This is one of the main factors which has contributed to the high levels of adult illiteracy in South Africa. About 45% of the adult population of South Africa is illiterate. Illiteracy is slightly more common among women than men. It is higher in rural areas than in urban areas. Jay Naidoo, speaking at the launch of a report entitled 'Key Indicators of Poverty In South Africa' indicated that, among other things, South Africa has a high rate of adult illiteracy, at 39%, compared to similar middle-income countries such as Thailand, Poland, Chile, Brazil, Malaysia and Venezuela (Sowetan, 1995: 12).

In this paper we examine the position of African women teachers from a historical perspective. We firstly look at how gender discrimination is expressed, maintained and transmitted to new generations through subordinating practices in African societies. In addition, the effect that these underlying patriarchal societal values and beliefs have had on the woman as a teacher will be examined. Lastly we address the question of why

women teachers should be involved in empowering other women, and offer some practical guidelines as to how this can be done.

PATRIARCHAL PRACTICES AND THEIR EFFECTS IN BLACK SOCIETIES

TRADITIONAL SOCIAL PRACTICES

Individuals, being the products of their societies, will inevitably be influenced directly or indirectly by the social practices of their communities. In traditional African culture, gender is regarded as the primary determinant of role expectations and behaviour in individuals. However, these expectations are based mainly on stereotyped sex roles.

Culturally, the differences between males and females were and are still widely assumed to be natural and hence not amenable to change. It is assumed that women are born with 'natural roles' and should be reared to fulfil these roles from childhood. The Sotho proverb 'mosadi ke tshwene o lewa mabogo' is the dominant cultural view of women in African society. This proverb, which means a woman's status and worth in society can only be determined by her ability to do her housework and raise her children efficiently, sums up the traditional African perception of women.

Parents are the major transmitters of culture in any society. Children are socialized at a young age to learn that power and prestige are awarded on a gender basis. Girls are made aware, from a very early stage, that boys have greater access to the benefits of power and prestige because of their maleness (Carmine, 1996:3). Girls are, for example, expected to wait on their brothers from early childhood. This enforces the division of labour along gender lines.

Customarily parents would go to great lengths to ensure that their sons received an education, the argument being that as breadwinners, boys would need to earn a living for themselves and their families. On the other hand, educating a girl was not considered as important because a girl would get married and have a man supporting her financially. In many

cases if a girl was lucky enough to be allowed to go to school, the chances of her completing her schooling were quite slim. For instance, if parents were forced, due to financial constraints, to choose which of their children could continue with schooling then preference was usually accorded the boys. In other cases, a girl's schooling might be sacrificed because with both parents having to work, she had to look after her siblings. These girls learnt from an early age that their primary role in life was to help with domestic chores and look after their siblings (Mwawenda, 1994:146).

In several instances, girls were denied an education or withdrawn from school on the grounds that they had to get married. It was argued that schooling would limit these girls' chances of getting married because they would be a threat to their husbands. Parents argued that the girls' independent ways of thinking, which they would develop from schooling, would make them challenge their husbands' authority. Carmine (1996:2) describes marriage as 'an institution created by and for the system of patriarchy in which men are given power over women'. This definition fits in with the traditional cultural view of marriage in most African societies. According to custom, when a man pays lobola for a woman he makes her his sole property and she has to obey him. The man has the right to administer corrective chastisement if the woman fails to obey him. She is also not allowed to complain about it but is expected to endure hardships in silence in order to keep her family intact.

Traditionally, a woman is regarded as a minor. She has to remain under the authority of a male throughout her life. As a child, she is under the authority of her father. Later on, as a grown-up woman, she is subjected to the authority of her husband. Custom makes certain that she remains in this subordinate position even after her husband's death. Thus, in the event of her being widowed, one of her male in-laws is expected to take over as her guardian.

THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

Schools, according to Sutherland (in Te Groen, 1989:554) reinforce what children learn about gender roles in the family situation. They emphasize gender stereotyping by transmitting predominant social values that put

girls and women primarily in the role of mothers and wives. They also shape children's and adolescent's gender identities by making girls and boys experiences of schooling distinct.

Research has revealed that most text-books and other learning materials reflect the stereotyped view of gender roles in society. The learning material is deeply rooted within a patriarchal understanding of knowledge and learning. The impression given is that the world is composed primarily of men. Hence, these books convey a subliminal message that women are inferior and that the division of labour in gender terms is not flexible. Research studies done on most South African school text-books used in primary and secondary schools, revealed that women are rarely mentioned in these books. If referred to, the women were then marginalized or depicted as subordinate to men in low-status or 'women's' positions emphasizing their domesticity. Men on the other hand were depicted prominently in high-status positions with an overwhelming emphasis on their economic power and public role. Girls would thus emerge from school with the implicit understanding that the world is a man's world in which women take second place.

Teachers, being the products of their own societies, are also most effective and influential transmitters of patriarchal ideologies. They transmit these stereotypes through verbal and nonverbal messages which reinforce the perception that women are subordinate to men. The male-oriented curriculum within which girls are educated, subtly channels them into traditional feminine roles. For example, it has been common practice for girls to be advised to take subjects that are related to their gender. In a comparative study on subjects taken by boys and girls, Truscott (1994) found that most African girls studied subjects that prepared them for lower-paid jobs. Boys on the other hand, were encouraged to take on the manly or difficult subjects.

The school maintains gender role stereotyping by denying the importance of women and ensuring an unequal outcome of formal schooling. However, not all schools use the same stereotypes and not all teachers attach equal importance to the transmission of gender stereotypes. Furthermore, not all these stereotypes are successfully imposed on all children (Te Groen, 1989:554).

GENDER REPRESENTATION IN TEACHING

Societal expectations about and stereotypes of women's roles are carried over into the occupational settings such as teaching. Narsi (1990:16) argues that the history of women educators in South Africa is based on a patriarchal ideology which pervades all spheres of life. For instance, although black women are the largest group of professional women workers in South Africa it has been found that very few studies have been done on them (Kotecha, 1994:22). For decades teaching has been characterized by legislated discrimination along the lines of gender roles in which male leadership is assumed to be a prerogative. As a result, mobility into higher ranks has been much more difficult for women than men in the teaching profession.

The teaching hierarchy is dominated by men in both primary and secondary schools. In 1994, for instance, although women made up 76% of all teachers in primary schools, they occupied only 46% of principalships, 48% of deputy principalships and 58% of the heads of departments while 75% of them remained in ordinary teacher posts. At secondary schools they occupied only 10% of principalships, 26% of deputy principalships and 36% of heads of department (Kotecha, 1994:24).

Salaries in the teaching field have until fairly recently also been determined along gender lines and not on the principle of equal pay for equal work. Women earned far less than their male counterparts. Married women teachers were forced to be dependent on their husbands by laws which denied them housing subsidies and medical schemes because of their marital status. Their participation in the labour market is viewed as a secondary and temporary role (Te Groen, 1989:553).

Despite changes in legislation a strong culture of male dominance still prevails in the teaching field. Female teachers contend that they are not listened to nor are they expected to speak up for themselves. Young women teachers in Gazankulu cite the patronizing attitude of their male colleagues who treat them unprofessionally by referring to them as 'my little girl'. They are not supposed to question that. Only their husbands may complain on their behalf if they choose to (Kotecha, 1994:29).

In her study of discriminatory practices in schools, Sebakwane (1993:91)

found that women teachers in the Northern Province were usually assigned to teach subjects which were held in very low regard by their male colleagues. They could only teach the prestigious subjects if no male teacher was interested in teaching the subjects. They were assigned non-teaching responsibilities which were regarded as inferior by males. Management, administration and planning tasks regarded as intellectual and creative, were not easily available to them.

Although the ideas and perceptions forged in an all-male world have been mistaken for a universal reality for decades, women should realize that they play a pivotal role in education. They need to confront social norms which regard teaching as 'only professional mothering'.

In the second part of the paper we look at how these social practices have contributed to perpetuating illiteracy among women and how women teachers can address this problem.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN TEACHERS IN EMPOWERING ILLITERATE WOMEN

In this section of the paper the role of women teachers (in spite of the hardships and constraints discussed above) in empowering illiterate women will be dealt with. The causes of illiteracy among black women, reasons for promoting and providing literacy classes, constraints on literacy initiatives and then possible strategies that teachers could use to address the problem of illiteracy will be briefly examined.

Adult illiteracy has been identified as one of the major factors perpetuating the stereotyping of gender roles in Black societies. The increased emphasis on nation building and participation in democracy by the South African government (as seen in the Reconstruction and Development Programme for instance) seeks to mobilize people and the country's resources towards the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future, and has made people become aware of how illiteracy hampers the progress of individuals, community structures, development projects and training programmes. Motivation for adult literacy is currently high under conditions of political change, democracy, urbanization and pressure for jobs. The scale of illitera-

cy will remain high for some time – that is, until the formal school system is completely effective and school attendance is not affected by the disruption of family and community life by social conditions.

Important research questions in this context are:

- What are the main causes of illiteracy among black women and how do these influence the social status of these women?
- What role can women teachers play in promoting and providing literacy programmes for these women?
- What constraints could be expected in running these projects and which strategies could be used to avoid and overcome these constraints?

The primary value and importance of examining these questions is the insight it will lend to women teachers' awareness of the illiteracy problem among fellow women in their communities, and the encouragement it will give them to initiate and couple literacy classes with other relevant skills projects in order to empower other women.

Entire communities are already exposed to daily unemployment, poverty, malnutrition, morbidity, famine, inequalities and oppression – patriarchal and economic. The adverse effects of high population growth and the high illiteracy rate become more apparent every day as evidenced in our pavement dwellers, street children, teenage pregnancies, abandoned babies and children, overcrowding, slums and squatting. There is a concern that African women will still remain part of the population explosion problem instead of becoming part of the solution. It is no good pointing at a woman walking along the road with a child in either hand, a child on her back and pregnant with yet another and say, 'There goes the silhouette of Africa' and think this problem is hers alone. It is up to literate, educated women to do something about this.

REASONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF LITERACY AMONG WOMEN

Achieving literacy could be one of the first steps in a process enabling women to take control of their own lives, to participate on a more equal basis in society, and eventually to free themselves from economic

exploitation and patriarchal oppression. Other social and economic effects of achieving high female literacy rates include an enhanced readiness to send children, including daughters, to school, and readiness to participate in economic organizations.

In terms of personal change, the effects of women's literacy include a release from fears of humiliation and powerlessness, a strong increase in confidence, and readiness to influence family decisions. In addition to these social, human and economic effects, there are many other reasons to challenge women teachers to take action in promoting the literacy education of women. The sole fact that a mother's level of education has a positive effect on her children's progress in school, should be a strong enough argument. Literate women experience liberation from isolation; they become integrated into a newer reference and support group.

In the literacy class, the woman becomes able to manage new skills, which give her a potential new role in the family. The mastering of new skills may also give her greater opportunity for paid employment, leading to relative economic liberation. With improved educational opportunities, better training and development of skills, women will be able to enter the labour market more easily.

Preliminary findings from a questionnaire sent out by the World Young Women's Christian Association to all of its member associations confirm such liberating effects of literacy. The responses show that women who received literacy training are more respected in the community and at home. They have better skills in their search for jobs and can therefore earn higher salaries. They realize that some jobs which are traditionally considered to be for men only are for them too. They have better capabilities to run small businesses and keep records on their own. They are strengthened in leadership roles in women's groups. Their political awareness, participation and organizational skills are enhanced.

In spite of the many reasons for women to participate in literacy classes, the multiple traditional roles of black women and new roles prevent them from regular attendance and efficient learning. The most immediate practical constraint is time. As has been mentioned earlier, female learners are overburdened with domestic tasks. One other effect of women's relative

isolation and deprivation of literacy is that, as compared to men, they have had very little exposure to languages other than their mother tongue. This problem is especially salient when literacy is taught in a second language, as is often the case in South Africa.

Another important constraint is that women are discouraged by the attitudes of the male teacher in adult education centres. Husbands at times even completely forbid women to take part in literacy classes because they are afraid that if women learn more than themselves, it may expose their own ignorance, and above all it may challenge their power positions within the family.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES

Women teachers have been accused of contributing to their own subordination. Professor Gourley contends that

'Women must take responsibility for some of the behaviour men exhibit, because every single man for sure had a mother. What was the mother doing that she brought up a chauvinist?' (Newton, 1994:19).

Women need to change their vision of themselves instead of supporting the 'natural role' thrust upon them by society. There is no fixed way forward. South African women teachers must start involving themselves in a hands-on programme aimed at other women, a programme comprising:

- teachers teaching women to read and write;
- teachers helping women acquire new skills that can upgrade family life and open up new economic opportunities for them;
- teachers making women aware that a woman's place is where she chooses to have it.

Teachers should, however, guard against adopting a patronizing and superior attitude. This discourages interest. A democratic and involved attitude, treating learners as equal adults and creating an atmosphere of confidence, is found to have a positive influence on attendance and results. Activities in the programme should be prioritized according to the needs

of the women and their context. Awareness of the accomplishments of successful literate women should be raised. In addition, organized visits by national women leaders committed to empowering women act as a strong motivating factor.

Consideration in all development projects should be given to making an element of women's literacy integral to projects. Successful examples of literacy programmes show the importance of making women aware of their problem and encouraging them to participate in literacy programmes. In setting up the incentives for literacy programmes, teachers should use creative organizational and mobilizational approaches, showing that literacy is a tool for empowerment and focussing on themes which stress equal rights, the need for women's emancipation and equal participation in all spheres of society.

The following are two examples of successful programmes that we could adopt as models for our communities:

- On a typical day in the literacy program in Mexico, women become initiators, planners and implementors. Through the help of the teacher, they are now able to list the problems they face, to generate and prioritize discussion topics, and to oversee the programme as a whole. The building in which the lessons are conducted was built through their initiatives. The women learn to cook fish nurtured in an aquaculture system they helped to develop.
- In Thailand, literacy efforts are challenging the prostitution business, which routinely exploits thousands of illiterate and impoverished women. With the help of The Laubach Literacy International Support Programme, a Thai women's organization is pilot-testing a literacy programme that includes skills training, consciousness raising, and development of new income generating ideas, with the goal of enabling poor women to find alternatives to prostitution.

CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that, although, the importance of women is increasingly being recognized in Black societies, their subordination to men at

work and home is still largely in practice. Therefore, South Africa needs a lifelong education and training programme that is provided in many different ways, at different stages in the socialization and working stages of a woman's life, a culture marked by a commitment to a flexible gender-sensitive approach that uses whatever combination of strategies appropriate to women's needs, demands and circumstances to challenge this subordination. Women's literacy, as part of lifelong learning, is about bringing women as individuals out of the shadows and promoting equality in societies.

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SURVIVAL STRATEGIES OF RURAL WOMEN

Nompumelelo Rulumeni Ntlombeni

INTRODUCTION

This essay explores how rural people survive despite the fact that many women are not working and men who are migrant workers seldom send money home. However, limited financial resources do not result in rural people starving to death. We begin by outlining how African communities survive and go on to show that behind these communal strategies, there is a collaborative spirit; there is a shared will to survive and tackle the development issues facing rural people.

Rural women may not have attained high levels of formal school or college education but they clearly exhibit substantial knowledge of the natural resources with which they interact. They know exactly what plant to use for specific medicinal ends and what plants may be used as vegetables. In order to assess the contribution they make to the survival of their families, the family's income will be looked at. The term 'income' will not be restricted to earnings in monetary terms but will also include non-monetary items like the contribution that is made by women through their labour, to keeping their families alive.

COMMUNAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Disadvantaged or marginalized groups anywhere in the world survive on collective unity or solidarity, and find strength in their consciousness of being part of a group. Due to the poverty of their material circumstances they cannot survive on individual initiative only. They have to stick together on selective survival issues and unquestioning conformity is expected from everyone.

The most pervasive and fundamental collective experience of African people is their sharing of a common context and lifeworld. The experience of their shared environment is integrated into all aspects of their lives on a

daily basis (Mbigi et al, 1995). In rural villages there is no such thing as permanent job security based on continuous skills acquisition but those who have got the skills must pass them on to others. Rural people might be unemployed, especially women who are housewives, widowed and unmarried, but they are never without food. There is what is called group solidarity on vital issues, and this is central to the survival of African communities (Mbigi et al, 1995).

African communities survive through group care and not through individual self reliance. Village life is characterized by rituals and ceremonies to celebrate achievements and to share misfortunes. These rituals are also part of the communal sharing and recognition of the life experiences of others. Although there is tremendous participation and consultation among all members of the group, the position, authority and expertise of some pre-eminent individuals are respected. This brings elements of order and stability into the typical African tribal village (Cloete, 1992).

ILLUSTRATIONS FROM A SPECIFIC COMMUNITY

BASIC NEEDS – NATURAL AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Bolotwa at Idutywa has a large community which is not economically self sufficient. Most males are migrant labourers who provide at best an irregular source of income to the women who are left behind. 68% of all homesteads have at least one migrant worker. The women from other homesteads are pensioners. The little money they get has to be budgeted for clothing, foodstuffs and groceries, hut construction and basic agricultural products. Food has to be bought since the maize harvest is sometimes not sufficient because of drought.

Every household has a right to a garden. In 1993 only 10% of all households could harvest from either the garden or mealiefields because of drought. Despite drought these people had to survive. One must bear in mind that the mealie is the staple food of the region. From it, the local people make samp by stamping or crushing it roughly. They also make mealiemeal by grinding the mealies finely. With the mealiemeal they make a variety of foodstuffs like amarewu, stiff pap or porridge. If there is an

individual without a mealiefield, the people in the community will offer her a part of their land so that she can also plough it so as to get mealies. They will even offer that particular person some help in working the land, and maybe plough for her. This help is often offered to unmarried women who do not own fields but have children to feed.

During the rainy season, to supplement their diet, women collect the leaves of certain wild plants which are edible and they use these as vegetables. They also gather plants which can be used to cure various ailments, including depression, headache, stomach cramps, muscular pains and menstrual cramps. Since women are also collectors of plant materials used in preparing herbal cures, their ethno-botanical knowledge extends to the types of macro- and micro-enurements in which different plants thrive. Since the cost of western style health care is high it has been suggested that a large percentage of the rural population will continue to rely on the indigenous cures that are provided by women (Jonathan, 1989). This knowledge is passed down to the children.

Elderly women know exactly which grass should be used for making grass mats and brooms. They sell these grass mats and brooms to local shops and in the town. They also cut grass for roof thatching and sell it. By doing this they are supplementing the pension payment which they receive bimonthly.

The remittances the rural women get from their migrant husbands in the towns, are never enough. They have to survive in the period after the remittance has run out and before the next one arrives, when there is no money at all. During this period the family will depend on the neighbours or on the extended family system for survival. The common practice which keeps them going is exchange of products. This simply means that if one has got samp and she needs sugar, she simply takes samp to the person who has sugar and she gets sugar in exchange. An alternative to this exchange of products is that a person will simply go and ask for a particular commodity from a person who has got it, on the understanding that the second woman may then also come and ask for something she needs when she does not have it.

Young women are able to sell their labour to people who need some

help, people in employment like teachers and nurses, and this helps them to get some few cents. They may also give their labour for non-monetary gain and this is known as communal help. Unquestioning conformity is expected from everyone. Failure to comply with these survival techniques is met with ruthless measures.

The person who is in need of communal assistance announces that she needs help. If she wishes to build a hut maybe, she will have to make mud bricks, and so she calls for communal help. This help is commonly asked for and given for such activities as collecting firewood, harvesting, ploughing and plastering. In return the one receiving assistance has to cook for the people who are there to help her.

ECONOMY MEASURES

Women at the village of Bolotwa have to be very economical because the money they get from their husbands is not a regular income. Occasionally, the uncertainties of remitting the money, by post or a personal bearer, force the wife and mother to leave her children alone and go to the husband's workplace in a far-away town or city, to make sure of getting the money. If she decides that she needs more, she will remain there at her husband's workplace until she has collected enough.

When trying to be economical, rural women have to look for natural resources for making fire. They collect dry cow dung, the droppings from pigs, goats and sheep, weeds and maize cobs for making fire. They have to keep this collection for rainy days. To keep maize cobs away from being eaten by goats they have to plaster the heap of cobs with cowdung. Ash from firewood, cowdung and horse droppings are also used as manure in the vegetable garden.

Women are always expected to keep the home fires burning whilst the men are earning an income away from home. Rural women often have to walk some few kilometres to fetch water for cooking and bathing. They have to spend time gathering firewood for cooking and collecting cowdung for smearing the floors. Since the men are not staying with the women, during their absence the women go to the extent of building the huts themselves.

They make the bricks and then the builder will just build the house. The stones for the foundations are collected by the women, and after the hut has been built women have got to plaster it inside and outside and white-wash it. The women are aware of the exact season during which building is suitable. The safe time for building is usually the dry season between June and August.

Undoubtedly it is women who hold together and maintain the fabric of rural society, their diverse talents creating an environment in which life is possible, by making available what a human being needs basically: water, food and accommodation. Furthermore, rural women are essential elements in the structure of the country's economy, especially that of the large industrial centres. It is clear that if women were to leave their places in the home, the economy in its present capitalist configuration which depends on migrant labour sources, would collapse (Collins, 1990).

RURAL WOMEN AND DECISION-MAKING

Women in the rural areas have only limited decision-making powers, despite the fact that they are the ones who are always at home taking care of the homestead. There are however some instances where they are allowed to exercise their own judgement.

On children's education, 43% of women said that they decide about children's education on their own, 27% said the husband decides and 16% said that both husband and wife take the decisions. 14% of the women told us that male relatives like brothers-in-law make decisions about their children's education.

Regarding decisions about buying, selling or slaughtering of livestock, 24% of the women said they decide about selling of livestock. All the women decide on slaughtering chickens. 40% of women said the decisions on slaughtering, selling or buying of the livestock depends on the man. 16% mentioned that they take decision together. 14% indicated that male relatives decide about those issues.

Decisions about the cultivation of land were made by women in 41% of cases; in 24%, the decisions emanate from husbands. 16% of the women

said the decisions were taken jointly by husband and wife and 8% said it was the decision of female relatives like the mother-in-law.

As far as expenditure on food and fuel goes, 70% of the women decided about this issue on their own and only 6% said it was the husband's decision. 8% indicated that both of them decide. 16% said the decision was made by relatives.

Decisions about the acquisition of land were made by 20% of the women on their own while 33% said it was the husband's decision. 14% said it was the decision of both husband and wife; 20% said it was the decision of male relatives.

70% of the women decided by themselves about expenditure on household furniture; 8% of the women said husbands decide. 10% said both of them make the decisions in this area. 6% said it was male relatives and 6% mentioned that it was female relatives who made the decisions here. In the matter of building rondavels or new houses, 40% of women decide for themselves; in 14% of cases it is the husband's decision, in 26% both decide and in 20% of cases, male relatives choose what will be done.

As far as institutionalized decision-making structures in rural communities go, every rural area has got its chief or headman who controls the people in that area. If there is a need, he calls a meeting commonly known as 'imbizo'. Historically these were never attended by women but in recent years women have been allowed to come and have a say in these izimbizo. It has not been a very popular change. Men complain that women hardly talk in these meetings. Women feel that there is no point in having a place in these meetings because the men do not take any serious note of what they have to say. One woman told us that there are still some meetings where they are not called. Other women felt that they cannot speak freely or oppose what is said at an imbizo because sometimes it is said by their in-laws, and culturally the in-laws must not be opposed.

According to customary law in South Africa, women are legal minors and cannot own any property and this is what rural women believe still to be the situation. They are not aware of their new legal status that guarantees gender equality.

CONCLUSION

Women fulfil significant social tasks such as the transmission of abilities and skills necessary for survival in the rural environment, and the maintenance of the values and traditional beliefs of a society. But the work she does – gathering food, cleaning, cooking, sewing, etc. – has very little status and no pay in return (Epstein, 1971, cited in Jordan, 1994). It is really only men who earn money and enjoy the high status and economic power that goes with it. Women contribute a great deal indirectly to the family income; their hard work saves the family money, but it goes unnoticed and unrewarded (Arens, cited in Nelson, 1979).

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CHURCH AND GENDER

INTRODUCTION TO 'CHURCH AND GENDER'

M Kleijwegt

In this section we have three essays which deal with religious constructions of gender and the stereotyping of gender roles. The study by Helen Cairns challenges the standard interpretation that in the Pauline writings confirmation can be found for the early Church's emphasis on the woman's submissive role. She shows that this view amounts to a misrepresentation of key texts and is based on a misunderstanding of the social and cultural context of the Hellenised cities of Asia Minor in which the early Christian communities were situated. It was in Asia Minor in the first century CE, in stark contrast to classical Athens and Rome, that Jewish and pagan women played a leading role in public life. Cairns points out that women had a leading role in the spread and survival of Christianity. The key text (1 Timothy 2:8-3:1a) in which Paul urges that he will allow no woman to instruct must be viewed within its immediate context. This must be sought in the strong female cultic presence at Ephesus in the form of the worship of Artemis. Cairns holds that women who joined the Christian Church in Ephesus introduced ideas, taken from the cult of Artemis, which were incompatible with the teachings of the Church. She goes on to trace the way in which female prominence in the early Christian communities in Asia was weakened and eventually completely eroded by patriarchal moves in the Church - ecclesiastical restructuring which edged women out, and the ascetic practices which identified women as evil temptresses.

Joan Millard's essay on the life and achievements of Charlotte Manye Maxeke is a fascinating account of the struggle for educational and religious emancipation for blacks and black women in particular situated at the turn of the twentieth century. Maxeke's life is much more than a story of racial and gender oppression; it is a good example of what can be achieved by one person of determination against all odds. Millard points out the relevant aspects of her career - her involvement in choir singing which enabled her to visit Britain and America, her studies in America, her leading role in religious affairs in South Africa. Maxeke always strived for the betterment of her people and of black women in particular, and can

be viewed as a role-model for women today. The last paper in this section, by Christina Landman, deals with the victimization of women by other women. Landman points to the millions of copies of manuals of personal piety written and bought by Afrikaner women. The portrayal of woman in these books is that a guilt-wracked creature whose only salvation lies in being submissive and subservient to God and her husband. Based on a series of vivid representative examples she shows how the reading of such piety manuals leads to the internalisation of a mind-set which is mainly conducive to perpetuating the patriarchal codes prevalent in the Afrikaner community. Landman subsequently places this phenomenon in a wider context of women using culture against women in Africa.

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WOMEN LEADERS IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Helen Cairns

INTRODUCTION

This chapter stems from a Masters' dissertation submitted in the subject Biblical Studies in November 1995. The title of the research was 1 Timothy 2:8-3:1(a) – Women's ordination in the light of the Christian self-definition of women in Ephesus. A part of this research included an appraisal of the status of women in Asia Minor. Historically, Asia Minor was subject to successive cultural influences from other geographic areas, particularly Rome, Greece and Palestine. The focus of the appraisal was the Jewish community established in Ephesus. The premise is that a variety of forms of Judaism existed which were shaped not only by Hellenization and Romanization but particularly by the cult of Artemis. There is much to suggest that women were emancipating themselves from the bonds of patriarchy not only in the wider society but also in the cults and the Judaeo-Christian church of the first century.

THE PROBLEM: WHY ARE SO FEW WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP AND DECISION-MAKING POSITIONS IN THE CHURCH OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY?

Women make up more than half of the membership of the church universal and yet they have been excluded from meaningful participatory roles for centuries. This was not the case during the earliest origins of the church where women were encouraged to be equal co-workers for Christ. In this paper I would like to outline some of the problems and paradoxes regarding the status of women in antiquity as it appears through the window of the text of 1 Timothy, especially verses 11 and 12 which the Revised Standard Version translates in this way:

'Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.'

TEXTS TAKEN OUT OF LITERARY AND SOCIAL CONTEXTS AND INTERPRETED TO ACCOMMODATE MALE TRANSLATORS AND COMMENTATORS

The interpretation and application of the above and related texts¹ impacted on the universal church throughout history, including the twentieth century, and has led to the exclusion of women from ministry and leadership. This is incongruous as Christianity was a prime mover in abolishing the social distinctions between Jew and Gentile, owner and slave and male and female. Commentators have often used this text as proof that a woman's place was in the home ('barefoot, pregnant and in the kitchen') and if she had any function in the church, apart from being supportive of, subordinate and submissive to her husband, it was to make tea and arrange the flowers. For example Kelly (1963) and Reuss (1969) reach the conclusion that Paul is admonishing women who neglect their housework and that women's salvation was dependent upon their acceptance of their motherhood role. Moo (1980) reasoned that women are excluded from important ministries such as preaching, church administration and leadership because they

'... must not engage in activities which have the effect of disrupting created sexual role relationships and should never regard tasks such as raising children and managing homes as second-rate. Indeed, it is in devoting herself to such activities consonant with her created role that the Christian woman experiences the salvation to which she has been called.'

I do not agree that it was Paul's intention to exclude women from ministry or for that matter to keep them in the permanent seclusion of the home, nor was it the intention to establish a pattern for church structures but rather to affirm the identity of first century Christian women. Christianity was diametrically opposed to the prevailing patriarchal patterns of life in antiquity (Cairns, 1995:173–176).

THE LITERARY CONTEXT – THE WORLD WITHIN THE TEXT

A literary-communicative approach was used to construe the world within the text. The problem with New Testament letters in particular, is that they reflect only half of the original conversation in which both the author

and recipients '...shared a common knowledge of the specific persons, places, and behaviours referred to in the letters, but we are often ignorant of those specifics' (Malina, 1990:7).

This letter intended 'to do' something rather than simply 'to say' something to the hearers – in fact I maintain that this was a unique type of letter – a letter of social reconstruction. A main theme was the justification of Paul and Timothy as identity shapers – in other words to prescribe beliefs, values and norms for those who share 'in Christ' as contrasted to those who were 'outside Christ'. The purpose was thus to create a new identity for Christian believers. The text makes reference to various categories of women: older women, older widows, younger widows and young unmarried women.²

In this text Paul addresses a group of women, God-fearers and Gentiles, a group of wealthy widows likely to be the benefactors or financial supporters of this community and especially of itinerant charismatics such as Paul and his travelling companions. What were these first century Christian women like? What was the nature of the society in which they lived?

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT: THE WORLD BEYOND THE TEXT, ESPECIALLY THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS WORLD

The presupposition is that the recipients of this letter were in Ephesus, Asia Minor (1 Tm 1:3). The culture in Ephesus, Asia Minor, was a product of successive influences from Judaism, Hellenism and Romanism. It was only towards the middle of the third century CE that Rabbinic Judaism and Catholic Christianity had emerged with more or less separate identities from a common source or matrix. It is commonly agreed that towards the end of the first century CE Christianity in Ephesus was hardly recognisable as distinct from Judaism (Moxnes, 1980:7). Horsley (1992:122) is of the opinion that Christians could not have been 'visible to non-Jewish outsiders as anything other than a charismatic Jewish group.'

HELLENISTIC WOMEN

Greek society was hierarchical and the master of the *oikos* was the head of the family or *kyrios*. Women could not own anything themselves and in

their husband's absence on account of either death or military service they looked after his property. The *oikos* also included outsiders, either slaves who were quickly assimilated into the family, or visitors. Women led secluded lives and their chief contact with the world outside their homes came through both the duties of their sons or their husbands as well as religious activities (Webster, 1973:53). Not only were women active in the cults of women and goddesses and in the cults where male deities were worshipped, but men were often excluded from mystery plays, agricultural and fertility rituals. An example is the cult of Despoina where women had access to the cult all year while men could enter only once a year.

Witherington (1986:6) warns that it is not possible to generalise about the status of women particularly in places like Athens where there were three categories of women: citizens, concubines and companions. The concubine's position was midway between wife and companion. Her main function was to care for the male's personal (especially sexual) needs. Companions were more than just sexual partners; they had to be well-versed in art and philosophy. They had few civic rights but enjoyed a great deal of social freedom and access to education. What about wives? Marriage was monogamous. This can be seen as an advantage over Judaism where polygamy was frequently practised. Witherington (1988:6–9) maintains that wives were valued solely for their ability to produce heirs as can be deduced from this quote from Pseudo-Demosthenes:

'Mistresses we keep for the sake of our pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our person, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.'

Similarly Euripides portrays their domestic plight:

'Surely of all creatures that have life and wit, we women are the most unhappy, who first must buy ... a husband ... but gain for our lives a master!'

It may be deduced from the following that women were more educated during the Hellenistic period. Swidler (1976:18–19) provides the following data:

- In Hellenistic Egypt there were more women who could sign their names than men;

- The Hellenistic novel was written for the female reading population;
- Plato's writings argued in favour of equality for women with men. At least two female disciples of Plato were known;
- Theophrastus, a follower of Aristotle, also had a female disciple as well as a female opponent;
- Women played a prominent role in the school of Epicurus as disciples and as teachers (343–270 BCE);
- The Stoic philosophers promoted the status of women. They stressed the worth of the individual woman as well as the need for her education and strict monogamy as well as the 'notion of marriage as a spiritual community of two equals'.

The polis was a male-dominated association where men made all the decisions affecting the community (Boardman 1991:201). It was characteristically composed of predominantly all-male groups, associations and clubs. Women had very little say in the affairs of Athenian society. Inscriptional evidence indicates that Macedonian women were better off than their counterparts in Athens. They had cities named after them and were sometimes given the honour of 'inheritable civic rights'. Some women founded clubs and participated in social organizations. Women here functioned as both 'politarchs' and 'wage earners'. The popularity of Hellenistic queens also '...had an influence on Macedonian women who were not of royal blood ...' (Witherington 1988:13).

Undoubtedly most Greek women continued in their traditional roles without education or opportunity to exercise authority outside the sphere of the home yet there are indications of emancipation of women from bonds of patriarchy. Macedonian women were no longer restricted. Women's freedom and social mobility had a great effect on Asia Minor and Egypt as Hellenisation continued to spread to the East.

ROMAN WOMEN

Behind the culture of Rome was the extraordinarily developed culture of the Etruscans which accorded women pre-eminence (Swidler, 1976:22). The Etruscan women enjoyed male company and reclined at banquets alongside men, attended dances, concerts, sports events and even

presided at boxing matches, chariot races and acrobatic displays. Their cultural heir, the Roman woman was mistress in her own household and shared the responsibility of the religious cult with her husband. State-supported religions included the Vestal Virgins and the oriental cults such as Isis and the Magna Mater. Vestal Virgins owned property and had certain powers and privileges not granted to other women, for example, they could remit the sentence of a prisoner. They were considered so trustworthy that they were entrusted with important documents for safe keeping.

The different cults³ catered for different stages of a woman's life. They were used by Rome '...to promote socially desirable behaviour'. In his social reforms Augustus promoted those cults which encouraged chastity, childbearing and fidelity. Another possible motive for the promotion of cults was to eliminate public and private situations where women were independent of men. If this was a motive of Augustus, we can detect a counter movement in the thrusts for emancipation of women.⁴

It is suggested by Witherington (1988:21) that Roman men feared the cults of Isis in particular as, unlike the traditional cults which were designed to promote the needs of the state, these cults promised healing, blessing, understanding and sympathy thereby meeting the religious and emotional needs of women. Increased trade and contact with the East facilitated the introduction of oriental religions, particularly the cults of Isis and Mithras and, in due course Christianity. Prominent Roman women were converted to the Christian religion. Although Balsdon (1962:248) maintains that the earliest converts to Christianity came from the lower social classes, there were at the very least two women of distinction. One of them, Pomponia Graecina, was the wife of Aulus Plautius, commander of the force which invaded Britain (Tacitus, *Annals of Imperial Rome*, 13,32,2). The new deities were intimately concerned with the personal life of the individual and quite unlike the Roman gods, who were like powerful absentee landlords from whom the best that you could hope was that they would leave you alone if you paid your rent correctly and at the proper time.

Isis benefited the lower classes and women most of all as they were given the same status as others and equal status with men as can be seen by a number of inscriptions. The following remark by Witherington (1988:22) is pertinent:

'it is certainly more than coincidence that the rise of the cult of Isis in the later Republic period coincided with the increase in women's liberation in Rome. It is likely that these two trends fostered and furthered each other, and it was perhaps in reaction against this that Augustus undertook his ill-fated attempts at moral and religion reform.'

The society of imperial Rome included many educated and capable women who were knowledgeable in literature and current affairs. Roman women were definitely in advance of their Greek and Egyptian counterparts, who had few political rights. We find the names of women who were running for office on the walls of Pompeii. Women were involved in business and social life. However, even if women were deeply involved in civic and legal affairs they were not allowed to vote or hold public office. Women in Rome had more freedom than those in Greece who in turn had more freedom than those in the East (Swidler, 1976:22–26).

Balsdon also points out that although no woman ever ruled, Roman women were immensely powerful behind the scenes. The most influential matrons appeared to be the wives of the emperors, for instance, Livia, the wife of Augustus, was renowned for her administrative abilities and her financial investments in property in Asia Minor.

A hundred years or more before the end of the Republic women rebelled against a marriage system in which they were fettered to their husbands, unable to throw off the chains. 'They rebelled too, against a senseless austerity... Women emancipated themselves ... They acquired liberty ... it is a thousand pities that there survives no woman's record of her own outlook ... Few women wrote books and of the books written none have survived' (Balsdon, 1962:17).

WOMEN IN ASIA MINOR

There is little doubt that the women of Asia Minor in the first century had firstly been influenced by Hellenism and then to some perhaps lesser extent by Romanism. Jewish and other influences also played a role. The extent of such assimilation of cultures is indeterminable. It is posited that Asian women were a unique amalgam of these cosmopolitan forces, yet they remained distinctly Asian (from Asia Minor). Very little has been writ-

ten about the everyday life of women in Asia Minor. Usually researchers have not gone beyond an examination of cultic life.

In Asia Minor women were granted more rights and prominence also due to the growth and spread of the cult of Isis into the region. 'It was a manifestation of a general Egyptian attitude that a woman should be accepted as a man's equal in most respects' (Witherington (1988:13–16). Trebilco (1991:14) points out that this attitude is best reflected in the cult of Amon where a woman could hold office and such a woman was called a 'god's wife'.

The primary deities in Asia Minor were feminine. Maternal and fertility aspects featured prominently. The fertility-promoting qualities of Artemis played an important part in the lives of women, ensuring their physical safety during childbirth. Cultic statues emphasized features such as giving birth. Artemis, Cybele and Isis were goddesses who claimed to provide protection during childbirth. Paul claims similar 'salvation' for the initiate to Christianity – preservation in times of giving birth (1 Tm 2:15).

The cult of Artemis in Ephesus stood as the bastion of feminine supremacy in religion for the first three centuries of the Roman Empire (Kroeger & Kroeger, 1992:50–51). During festivals and holy days women who were usually confined to their household became actively involved in public processions and festivities. Artemis is referred to as the goddess who has 'lordship over supernatural powers' and was also acclaimed Kuria Soteira and heavenly goddess. Although the Artemis religion was not forced on the people it was the focus of everyday life. This cult and its activities epitomized the cultural and religious spirit of the city. The goddess owned land and water estates in the city's extensive territorium and the revenues were used in the upkeep of the cult. This cult provided Ephesus with economic security; it was also a treasury and a major tourist attraction (Kroeger & Kroeger 1992:54). Artemis' supporters were not expected to belong exclusively to their cult in the same way as Jews were. It was often politically, socially and economically expedient to align with other cults. By association with other deities those divine attributes that Artemis did not possess could be borrowed and assumed (Horsley, 1992:155; Meyer & Sanders, 1980:106; Rietzenstein, 1978:184).

This factor is a key to understanding the text in question. Artemis was the

supreme supernatural power in Asia Minor. The women addressed by Paul were converts to the Judaeo-Christian faith but hung on to their beliefs in the powers of Artemis. Segal (1977) maintains that Paul was branded a heretic by Rabbinic Judaism for preaching about two powers in heaven – Jahweh and Jesus Christ. The Gentile women accommodated a third power – Artemis. It is highly likely that the debates and ‘other doctrines’ referred to in 1 Timothy 1:3 allude to arguments over which deity was pre-eminent or from which one the other emanated. It is this debate that Paul wishes to silence in order to qualify the nature and identity of adherents to Christianity.

Arnold (1989:122) points out that very little attention has been paid to the impact which this cult could have had on New Testament writings. He avers that this is an oversight as his study on Ephesians shows how the author emphasized ‘powers’ as a reference to the domination of the Ephesian mind and spirit by the overbearing cultic activities of the city’s goddess, Artemis.

Women were active in social, political and financial services to their city, as is indicated by the inscriptions honouring them. Van Bremen (1983:225) observes that: ‘Women thus seem to have encroached upon the traditionally sacrosanct male-dominated sphere of public life and city politics’. Not only were they active in many spheres of public life in Asia Minor, they could attain the leading position of *strategos* within the city. Women were also involved in the federation of cities which were responsible for the imperial cult and also discussed matters of general interest concerning the administration of the province. We also find a woman with the title of *Asiarch* which was the foremost title in Asia. Trebilco (1991:124) points out that the prominence of women was most noticeable on the west coast of Asia Minor which would include Ephesus.

From this brief comparison between Roman women and women in the rest of the Roman Empire, it may be noted that Roman women had ‘both more and less freedom’ than women in other parts of the ancient Mediterranean. This would depend on which aspect of their life is used as a comparison. Women were considered to lack the knowledge to deal with affairs beyond the home. It may be true that they had considerable power behind the scenes, but they nevertheless, did not compare

favourably with their counterparts in Asia Minor, who were able to hold political offices (Witherington, 1988:18–23). Although the majority of women were probably content to retain their roles of domesticity within the household, the society of imperial Rome included some women who were both influential and educated. In fact, wealthy women seem to have created problems for their husbands, as Plutarch's comment illustrates: 'All other men rule their wives; we rule all other men, and our wives rule us.'

There was evidence of change in the social position of women especially among the more educated, elite sections of society. It is not surprising that Christianity with its egalitarian emphasis appealed to women who now sought equal association with men in cultic activities, which involved not only preparing meals but sharing them, not only administration of their household but naturally administration of the household cult and civic affairs.

WOMEN IN JUDAISM

The following facets of Jewish life are drawn from researchers who have focused on life in Palestine. It is assumed that some of the information will also apply to the distinctly Jewish communities in Ephesus.

In spite of the diversity of the religious climate it would appear that there was a growing attraction felt among the educated section of the population for monotheism and the many gods in the pantheon came to be regarded as attributes of only one god. Bauer (1971:89) posited that the communities established by Paul in Asia Minor were mostly Gentile. It is therefore very likely that large numbers of Gentiles either adopted a monotheistic faith or incorporated Jahweh into their own pantheon of gods. Christian groupings were Judaistic (though not in the same light as Judaism is viewed to-day). Judaism was inclusive by nature and encouraged proselytes from the Graeco-Roman cults, both men and women.

Women occupied leadership roles. They were honoured in tomb inscriptions with the titles *mater synagogae*, *presbyterissa* and *archisynagogissa*. Although an exception rather than the rule, it is certain that women func-

tioned at all levels of Jewish society particularly in Asia Minor (Brooten, 1982). It is evident that some Jewish communities in Asia Minor provided women with an unusually prominent place within synagogues. A woman archisynagogos had a say in the community's activities as the Jewish synagogues did not only embrace worship but all aspects of Jewish life. It would appear that during the first century women held offices in the synagogues and were given more equal treatment than in later centuries when synagogues separated men and women. Trebilco (1991) and Brooten (1982) examine titles given to Jewish women. Brooten (1982:5–95) cites nineteen Latin and Greek inscriptions in which women are named as 'heads of synagogues', 'leader', 'elder', 'mother of the synagogue' and 'priestess'. Although scholarship has tended to accord these titles honorific status, Brooten asserts that they were functional. Six ancient Greek inscriptions have been found in which women bear the title *presbytera/presbuteres/presbyterissa*.

This improved status of women was not dependent upon their relationship to men. They did not gain it second-hand through either a husband or father who was a priest. It is also clear from Acts 16:12b–14; 17:4 that women were involved in synagogues. Paul and Silas went to Philippi where as usual they looked for a synagogue, the term here is *proseuch* (Ac 16:13; 16). They knew where to find a gathering of female believers, at a place near the river which was convenient for baptisms. Men were obviously not excluded, as some of the households would have undoubtedly included males (Ac 16:15). Brooten also suggests that in the light of so many women joining Judaism, women may well have constituted the majority in some cases. The attraction of so many women may indicate the relaxation of restrictive practices. Scholarship should revise its attitude towards ancient Judaism or some of its forms and consider the appeal to women that these may have had. Perhaps women were attracted to Jewish Christianity due to the presence of active Jewish female title-bearers as this form of Judaism was less restrictive than the other forms.

New Testament references point to the participation of women in the services which would have been impossible if they were in a separate room, a gallery or behind a screen (Ac 16:13–14; 17:4). On the other hand, in traditional Jewish circles, the Talmud did not permit women to pray or say grace or a benediction over men. In addition women and slaves could

not be included in the number required to recite the Common Grace. The Talmud ((bBer.47b) states: that '...an infant in the cradle may be counted for the zimmun' (the number needed for the recitation of the grace when three or more are together for a meal). However women were not counted for this purpose. Therefore in these synagogues women were regarded as having less status than a male child or a slave.

A typical example of the misogynist attitudes prevalent in Jewish literature is provided by Ben Sira who advises men to look out for women as they have only one ambition which is '...to lead men astray sexually'. The concept of sexual sin was found in the Pseudepigrapha, where the Book of Adam and Eve (Swidler, 1976:47) was probably composed in the first century CE by a diaspora Jew and the prevalent idea that sexual sin was the mother of evils already prevailed. The focus is on Eve as the primary sinner and source of death. Other books such as the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and the Book of the Jubilees focused on the sin of fornication and the need to avoid women out of fear. In spite of the improvement of women's status in other cultures, Jewish literature 'continued to show negative attitudes' (Swidler 1976:29–54). Women were treated with suspicion and blamed for male weaknesses in respect of sexual arousal.

Jewish women seldom appeared in public especially in the cities. When a Jewish woman ventured out in public, she always had her head covered with only one eye exposed. Going without a head-covering was considered so shameful that it was grounds for divorce without the obligation to pay the *kethuba*.

It was forbidden for a man to talk to a woman in the street. Even a husband was told not to talk too much to his wife except to procure sexual favour. In conversations, the wife addressed her husband as 'rabbi', a form used by slaves and disciples meaning 'my master', whereas the husband addressed his wife as 'my daughter'. Women did not usually eat with men when there was a guest present and similarly they did not serve men. However, they did take part in the preparation of meals. There are possible indications that these customs changed with Christian revision because at the agape meal women were present. In the light of the preceding information from Swidler (1976) it is concluded that in certain sections of this tradition women led a harem existence, secluded from society.

The practice of polygamy was prevalent among the Jews and effected a severely inferior status for women as they were treated as property and owned in much the same manner as slaves (Swidler, 1976:144–148). The wife was considered the husband's possession and therefore adultery by the wife constituted a damage to and violation of his exclusive right to her. Adultery was considered one of the three capital sins (idolatry and murder being the other two) and hence merited the most severe punishment, namely death. The usual punishment was stoning, burning and strangulation.

Generally in Judaism women were barred from participating fully and actively in cultic life because of natural bodily functions such as menstruation and childbirth. During this period of uncleanness it is likely that another member of the extended family would have to take over the duties of preparing the food or alternatively the family ate its ordinary food in a condition of cultic uncleanness. It is probable that this type of restriction was not so strictly enforced in Christian circles.

Swidler (1976:32) argues that the fact that no biblical literature was written by and for women, is in itself an indication that women were regarded as being of a lesser and inferior status to men. Biblical writings also often denigrated women. All this contributed to a woman's lack of self-worth. Moreover there was the fact that a female's existence was viewed in the light of her relationship with and usefulness to a male. Samuel ben Unya said that a woman before marriage was merely a shapeless lump only transformed into a useful vessel by marriage. Rabbi Hirsch wrote that women should not be allowed to visit the market place due to a fear of misbehaviour of the men. As a result many men would lock up their wives within the confines of the house. Hillel, a prominent Rabbi of the first century CE, said: 'Many women, much witchcraft'. Other Rabbis said that women possess four traits: they are greedy, eavesdroppers, slothful and envious. The best-known Rabbinic teaching indicating the misogynist attitudes of the rabbis is the daily prayer: 'Praise be to God that he has not created me a Gentile! Praise be to God that he has not created me a woman! Praise be to God that he has not created me an ignoramus!' This is by no means an obscure prayer as there are at least three separate direct quotations of this prayer in ancient rabbinic collections.

Women were considered to have inferior status, the same as children or

slaves. Women, children and slaves were grouped together as they were all less than full Jewish citizens. A woman's status was equal to that of a child and even a male child had more rights than she did. Acquisition of a woman included three components, namely money, documentation and sexual connection. On the other hand a slave was acquired by money and documentation only.

In marriage, women were often treated as possessions or sex objects; their status and economic stability depended on their husbands. In the event of his death a widow had to be taken in and supported by a husband's closest relatives. This led to a large number of women in a household. The majority of Jewish women were illiterate and like their Roman counterparts destined to live out their lives in the seclusion of their houses. Strict rules and regulations regarding a woman's appearance and behaviour in public meant limited freedom and contact with men, even her husband.

It may be concluded that the status of women was not equal to that of men but that there was severe female inferiority and intense misogyny in both civil and religious areas of life. Judaism did not follow the pattern of the societies and cultures around it but ran counter to the trends of Hellenism and Roman cultures. The new form of Judaism, namely Christianity, that emerged in the first century would no doubt have been particularly attractive to Jewish and non-Jewish women who, according to Broton, were already involved in significant cultic and civic positions in the more emancipated localities such as Asia Minor.

EVIDENCE OF WOMEN'S EMANCIPATION BOTH IN CIVIC AND CULTIC CIRCLES

The fact that a few prominent women were able to rise above their station in life is truly remarkable. It is significant that this occurred particularly in Asia Minor. It is unlikely that there was much upward social mobility for women in Palestine. The rigid form of Judaism formed the matrix and engendered an opposite form of Judaism – namely Christianity. There was no obvious sudden schism but the genesis of a type of Judaism that was on the opposite end of the spectrum from that described above.

Paul was the shaper of a 'distinct religion' and was one of the exponents of 'anti-Jewish' aspects of life. His sentiments found fertile ground among the Diaspora Jewish communities, some of whom found Jewish practices restrictive and difficult to maintain far away from Palestine. One might label this freer and more liberal strand of Judaism Pauline Christianity. Baptism was common for proselytes into the Jewish faith. However, it is noteworthy that Paul includes an allusion to gender in this ritual as outlined in Galatians 3:27–28. The baptism formula which was pronounced on a woman's entry into the Christian faith was not gender-specific. This definitely had implications for Christian women. It meant they could remain single or assume roles other than wife or mother, or obtain a new status based on their serving function. In Galatians 3:28 Paul talks about equal rights of Jews, slaves and women. After initiation they are all free. In naming these people Paul targets the 'disenfranchised' in Hellenistic cities, slaves and women. In this inverted symbolism, slaves and their masters were social equals 'in Christ'. Paul does not advocate the abolishment of slavery however. He simply redefines slaves' identity in terms of their relationships to other members of the community.

'In Christ' there were no distinctions between male and female, a statement that could strike at the heart of the value system whereby all persons in the Mediterranean world were classified according to the values of 'honour and shame' that distinguished male and female. This hierarchical, patriarchal family structure was inverted in the relationships of the church or 'the household of God'. In everyday Mediterranean life, women had certain spheres of influence mainly connected with the home and household affairs. Women were 'embedded' in men's honour and value system – this system, to some extent, still functions and is perpetuated in our own society today. However one must caution against modern attempts to understand this statement of Paul in terms of modern egalitarianism instead of a liminal or transitional status of the entrant into the church.

Perhaps the most shocking and unusual ritual but, at the same time, liberating activity among Christians was the celebratory meal, the eucharist. Feeley-Harnik (198:2–10) notes that food is '...one of the principal ways in which differences among social groups are marked.' Thus social differences either in gender, age or social class can be seen in differentiated dietary rules. Yet Christian men and women ate and drank together,

though women may have been served by men. Rohrbaugh (1991:146) construes the Christian community as having been socially inclusive to an unusual degree, thus running the risk of being rejected by other '...social networks on which their positions depended'. He also concludes that if '... the Christian community provided a social haven for the poor, it occasioned social disaster for the rich'. The usual status markers and differences between rich and poor were withdrawn. In addition, the fact that the benefactor was willing to take on the role of a servant represents a new concept of leadership and patronage.

Fiorenza (1978:158) perceives the significance of the church gathering within the home (the sphere of women) and it is within this location that equal opportunities for women were provided. She adds that wealthy women were notorious for opening up their premises and houses to Oriental cults and their associated worship (1 Cor 16:19; Rm 16:5). The use of the symbolic forms such as 'household of God' and 'body' serve to establish a quality of social relations that is based on a mutuality of affection and responsibility rather than on the power of superordinate over subordinates. Paul and others founded a community but once it was established they moved on leaving it in the hands of the 'owner of the house'. The structure of the administration evolved from the roles (offices) performed by the individual members and only later became 'vested in the office' (Petersen, 1985:159–237).

Brooke (1992:257–277) argues on the basis of 1 Corinthians 11:2–16, that Paul's primary intention was not to enforce a subordinate role on women. Pauline Christianity brought a new understanding of the 'basic patterns of creation'. Women are not subordinate to men but have a 'mutual claim, and even a mutual rule over each other'. Paul advocates a '...mutual authority, a notion which is a far cry from most Jewish and pagan attitudes to marriage, where man is the dominant partner'.

IN THE LIGHT OF THESE CONTEXTS HOW SHOULD THE TEXT BE UNDERSTOOD?

Within Christianity women were accorded administrative and other functions within the context of the cult or worship. This included prophesying

and teaching, at the very least teaching other women. However, some of the teaching propounded by certain women was considered erroneous by Paul (1 Tm 2:12). A pronouncement in 1 Timothy was made to counter the incorrect teaching on one of the following issues: the implications of a creation order, an over-emphasis on celibacy as a means of heightened spiritual experience on the part of women or, as Kroeger and Kroeger (1992:103), advocate that women were forbidden to teach that woman was the 'originator of man'.

In Pauline Christianity women were not only accepted as equal, but they also had a sense of worth and recognition that may not be overlooked. Monogamy and prohibition of divorce were to women's advantage. In marriage relationships instead of submission on the part of the wife alone, Paul now advocates mutual submission of both husband and wife thereby curtailing the husband's authority. Paul addressed all members of the community including women when he used such terms as 'the brethren' which was inclusive of women. Women were active at all levels within the Christian congregations. Nympha in Colossians 4:15 would have functioned alongside men in the 'fullest' capacity. Women became co-workers with Paul (Ac 18:18). Apollos in Ephesus was instructed by husband and wife. The wife is mentioned first (Ac 18:27). Other female co-workers include Tryphaena and Tryphosa (Rm 16:12); Phoebe (Rm 16:2); Euodia and Syntyche (Phlm 2:2-4); Junias (Rm 16:7). The role of women in the Pauline movement is much greater and much more nearly equal to that of men than in contemporary Judaism (Meeks 1983:81). It was not until the second century that roles became fully institutionalized. Paul's co-workers had a wide range of functions: letter-writing and -carrying, encouragement, establishment of house-churches, teaching and evangelizing. In the end, women were actively involved in the ongoing ministry of the early church and all offices/functions/leadership roles were available to all Christians.

On examination of the roles played by Christian women in the wider society as portrayed in Luke-Acts we note that Lydia (Ac 16:14-15) played an important role as a benefactor. She probably '...belonged to a number of active working women of relatively low status, but who had the opportunity to enhance their status through their own work and initiative'. There is also a member of the elite, Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. Luke portrays them as patrons who serve (Lk 8:3).

The Christian groups were probably made up of members from many different groups, elite and non-elite (Moxnes, 1991:267). Christianity would have been an unusual institution in the first century as it afforded social mobility on an upward scale. Usually the elite and non-elite members of the city did not mix. Meeks (1986:113) maintains that '[w]omen did play a very large part in the mission and patronage and leadership of the Pauline groups. In fact as a result the second century leaders...wrote pseudonymously to reaffirm old Aristotelian rules of wifely submission...'

Bearing in mind the amount of attention given in this discourse to women, it becomes increasingly unlikely that such a liberating and encouraging document for women would have been written in the second century, at a time when the male elite were attempting to put women back in their place. In this letter Paul makes some liberating statements with regard to further education for women and promotes their roles in the household as those who are worthy care-givers, deacons and servants in the 'household of God'. There is no doubt that the dominant force within the culture of Asia Minor was androcentric in nature and that the text itself was also a product of this society. But behind the male voices there are shadows of a very large number of women congregants who were actively involved in all levels of leadership within the church of the first century.

RELEVANCE FOR WOMEN TODAY

It is now evident that past studies and views of history have been more interested in the chief figures of the New Testament rather than in the communities they represented or on whose support they were dependent. It is also

'... a typically modern assumption that it was the individual geniuses (mostly male) who were the producers of text and the motors of change which has undermined consideration of the circles and groups responsible for the transmission of traditions and production of texts and the several circles of females who figured prominently' (Elliott, 1993:12).

Women were definitely shapers of the Christian communities in Ephesus and elsewhere since they were shapers of the text. They received, inter-

preted and utilized the text for the purposes of defining the community and their own sense of identity. It is clear that at the time of this letter to Timothy which was written around 59–64 CE there was no hierarchical structure for the church but rather a growing number of first century Jewish and non-Jewish households which were particularly hospitable to Jewish itinerant teachers like Paul and his co-workers. They brought disturbingly revolutionary ideas on behaviour and societal norms and deities. Paul turned the ancient world's value system upside down. People at the bottom end of the social scale – servants and women – were treated in a different way, as equals.

Paul enjoins silence for certain wealthy Gentile patrons in Ephesus, not to exclude them from teaching the gospel of Christ but to convince them of the Christ's salvational qualities, at the core of their beliefs as Christians. It was with great difficulty (if they managed to do so at all) that these women relinquished belief in a feminine fertility deity with the stature of Artemis in exchange for a male god, and gave up propounding and promoting the excellence of Artemis. This is what Paul countered in 1 Timothy 2:8–3:1a. Perhaps women today can empathize with Ephesian women in their need for female as well as male qualities in a deity. In the twentieth century many women have the same need to find a feminine side of God. It is a thousand pities that 'As long as what is considered sacred is always in the image of men, a whole aspect of what divinity is for women is not accessible to us' (Bolen, 1984).

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NOTES

1. I Corinthians 11:3-15; Ephesians 5:21-24.
2. For further information I refer to chapter six of Cairns (1995).
3. There were cults for young girls, pregnant mothers and cults to encourage marital fidelity, as well as cults for prostitutes who worshipped a god of sexual relations.
4. Witherington (1988: 20) cites Dio Cassius for the assertion that the attraction of the traditional cults was fading and the influx of Eastern religions, such as Isis, Serapis, Cybele and Attis *were providing new religious roles for women*.

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CHARLOTTE MANYE MAXEKE – AGENT FOR CHANGE

Joan Millard

A REMARKABLE WOMAN

Charlotte Manye Maxeke (1871–1939)¹ was a woman whose influence was felt in the lives of the people with whom she came into contact. She helped to make history in the era in which she lived. Maxeke was dedicated to her church, but she was equally dedicated to educating her people and working for their social upliftment. She may be called the ‘Mother of Ethiopia’ because of her involvement in the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa. However, she can also be called a ‘Mother of Africa’ because of her work leading to social transformation for the people among whom she worked. For both of these roles she received international recognition. She was also the founder in 1913 of the Bantu Women’s League, the forerunner of the African National Council’s Women’s League.

Charlotte Maxeke was a person who grasped the opportunities presented to her and made the best of what was offered. In this respect she was unusually fortunate because the opportunities usually afforded an African woman at the end of the 19th century were limited. Practically the only avenue of employment open was domestic service. Maxeke, however, trained as a teacher and then received a university education. She also received recognition for what she and her husband achieved together. Although they worked together on many of the projects she became more widely known for her work than he did.

HER EARLY YEARS

Charlotte Makhomo Manye was born on 7 April 1871 near Fort Beaufort in the Eastern Cape (McCord, 1995:195). Her father, Lange Jan Manye, came from a heathen family belonging to the Sotho chieftdom of Ramogopa. Their home was at Blinkwater, near Soekmekaar. Her mother’s

family came originally from the Mpo people who lived in Pondoland. Chased from their homeland by Shaka, the Zulu king, the Mpo moved south to the land of the Xhosa and became part of the Mfengu nation (ibid.:8). Many years before Charlotte was born, her father travelled south to the land of the Xhosa in search of guns for his father. When he reached the Eastern Cape, Lange Jan met Charlotte's mother, who was a school teacher. Lange Jan went to night-school to be educated and worked during the day. In time he became a foreman on the road gangs in Port Elizabeth and a lay preacher in the Presbyterian Church and in due course he married Charlotte's mother (ibid.:10–11).

Charlotte was the eldest of a large family. She and her sister Katie attended school in Uitenhage where her teacher was the Reverend I Wanchope (Skota, 1965:195). Charlotte was a good scholar and was sent to high school at Edward's Memorial School, Port Elizabeth, where her teacher was Mr Paul Xiniwe. Xiniwe was the conductor of her school choir as well as of the church choir. Both Charlotte and her sister Katie became choir members. The church connection of both her teachers had an influence on her life and her family was also very religious.

By the time Charlotte finished school the family had moved to Kimberley. Here she became a teacher and began a career in education that would last a lifetime. Katie was the better singer but both sisters joined the choir of the Presbyterian Church. One night the choir, named the Jubilee Chorus, sang at a party given in honour of a Mr Howell from England. Mr Sinamela, the choir director, and his choir members were invited to tour England. Although Mr Sinamela decided not to go to England, a new director, Mr Balmer, was found.² The year was 1891 and Charlotte was twenty years old.

The choir, renamed the 'Kaffir Choir' by Mr Howell, sang to groups of people all over Britain. They even sang to Queen Victoria at her summer palace on the Isle of Wight. While in England the two sisters learnt to speak English fluently, with a British accent. They toured England for two years with the choir before returning to South Africa. Charlotte was promised a visit to America but Katie was glad to be home again. After some years in domestic service she became an interpreter and a dispenser for Dr James McCord, the American Board missionary in Natal. She never

left the mission church but became a valuable member of the missionary team.³

EXPERIENCES IN OTHER COUNTRIES

While she was in Britain Charlotte met a number of people who impressed her and influenced her life. She met Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffragette, who at the time was fighting for women's rights. Someone gave her a book about David Livingstone, the missionary, which told of his love for the African people. She met a woman medical student from West Africa who showed her that a black skin had to be that colour to be protected from the sun if you lived in Africa. For Charlotte, who had been told that blackness was a sign of the 'curse of Ham,' this was a revelation. These people gave her a sense of pride in her Africanness. She also met two African-Americans, the Bogee brothers, who told her about colleges for black people in America, in particular Wilberforce University. Charlotte determined to go the America to further her education.

After her break at home with her family Charlotte was invited to join an American choir, the Orpheus Singers. While in America Bishop Derrick of the African Methodist Episcopal Church helped her to enter Wilberforce University, Ohio, where she obtained a BSc degree, the first African woman from South Africa to do so. She also became acquainted with the teaching of Booker T Washington, the civil rights leader.

There were other students from South Africa at Wilberforce University too. The other South Africans were all men. Women were seldom considered eligible for higher education. Some of the students who later joined the AMEC in South Africa were James Tantsi, Charles Dube, Henry Msikinya, Marshall Maxeke, and Edward Tolityi Magaya. These people formed an educated nucleus for the new church in South Africa (Skota, 1965:159).

During her time in America Charlotte met a number of AMEC women who helped to form her thinking. These women were achievers who made a mark on their community. At the 1884 AMEC Conference in America it was decided to license local women preachers. The men acknowledged that 'female evangelists were becoming very numerous'

(Dodson, 1981:285) so they decided to allow them to become recognized preachers. These preachers included women like Lena Doolin-Mason, whose preaching converted 1 617 'souls,' and other women preachers like Mary Palmer, Emma Johnson and Melinda Cotton. In spite of these concessions women did not have equal status with men in the organization of the church. It must be remembered that at this time it was virtually unknown for a woman to become an evangelist in South Africa. At the turn of the century the Methodist Church in South Africa had a few women 'lay agents' or evangelists like Sarah Jane Ngoro at Mafikeng and Eliza Gqosho in Johannesburg, but this was a rare phenomenon.⁴

THE AMEC COMES TO SOUTH AFRICA

It was Katie who first told Mangena Mokone (1851–1931) about her sister Charlotte's experiences in America. He was her father's cousin,⁵ a Methodist minister based in Pretoria in 1892. In October of that year he resolved to leave the Wesleyan Methodist Church because he resented the fact that in the Transvaal separate Synods for black and white ministers were held. He had other complaints too – lack of understanding from the white ministers, no family allowances for African preachers, poor wages and overwork being some of them. He left the Methodists and founded the Ethiopian Church, an inter-tribal truly African church.⁶

Now Katie excitedly read him Charlotte's letters which told of a church controlled by black Americans which was called the African Methodist Episcopal Church. It sounded very like the Methodist Church they knew in South Africa, although the Manye family themselves were Presbyterians. However, the AMEC was free from mission control and all the leaders had been black. The opportunities for education that had been offered to the South African choir members opened the eyes of the people who read her letters to new possibilities for the future. Mokone, the Supervisor of the Ethiopian Church, listened to what Charlotte had to say in her letters. He suggested to the Conference of the Ethiopian Church that they amalgamate with the American church. Charlotte acted as a go-between in the negotiations.

On 31 May 1895 Mokone wrote to Bishop Turner of the AMEC in

America as well as to Charlotte Manye. Charlotte returned his letter and sent Mokone a 'Book of Discipline' (Tantsi, 1968:5). In 1898 Bishop Turner of the AMEC visited South Africa and the amalgamation became a *fait accompli*. Charlotte became one of the pioneers of the AMEC in South Africa. Coan (1961:96) in his study on the AMEC in America and South Africa, remarks on the important role played by Charlotte Manye in helping to unite the AMEC and the Ethiopian Church.

In the early days of the AMEC in South Africa Charlotte Maxeke was afforded special status. She was asked to deliver lectures such as a missionary talk she gave to the annual Conference in 1901.⁷ Charlotte was thrilled to be asked to speak and 'congratulated herself on the rare opportunity afforded her ... to speak to her own conference for the first time in her lowly life'.⁸ However, she was never ordained and never obtained official status as a leader. In spite of her qualifications she was prepared to acknowledge her 'lowly status' as a woman even though few of the men in the church could match her intellectually.

As a member of the AMEC Charlotte learnt the importance of working out her spirituality through social action. At the 1901 Cape Conference the delegates were told that 'the aim of our church ... is to educate the head, the hand and the heart'.⁹ Bishop Coppin of the AMEC in South Africa would later tell the 1903–1905 Native Affairs Commission that their church taught the people theology, but because so many of their members were poor and without their own land, they also taught them how to make a living.

MARRIAGE AND EDUCATIONAL WORK

In 1903 Manye married the Rev MM Maxeke,¹⁰ a fellow graduate from Wilberforce University. He was one of the South African students that Charlotte had been responsible for recruiting. Campbell writes that 'Charlotte Manye played an instrumental role in extending the 'privileges of Wilberforce' ' (Campbell, 1989:269). Marshall Maxeke and James Tantsi, both teachers, arrived at Wilberforce in 1896 to further their studies. Charlotte and Marshall got to know each other as they shared their common interest in how to help other black South Africans gain the sort of education that they themselves received in America.

Marshall Maxeke was born in 1874 at Middledrift in the Eastern Cape. He received his training at Lovedale Institution but later moved with his family to Johannesburg. Here he became a lay preacher and a teacher. At Wilberforce he received a BA degree and was ordained a minister of the AMEC in 1903, the year he returned to South Africa.

The Maxekes worked together as missionaries for the AMEC. At first they served at Ramogopa, near Pietersburg in the Transvaal. This was a poor and underdeveloped area. Charlotte's father still lived there and he joined the AMEC Church which Marshall started. Charlotte worked as a teacher. Later Enoch Mamba, a headman at Idutywa, invited the Maxekes to establish a school in his 'location'. Mamba had had a dispute with the Cape Administration who were unwilling to provide him with a school for his people. As teachers, the Maxekes became part of the growing presence of the AMEC in the Eastern Cape (Campbell, 1987:26). Marshall Maxeke became a pastor of the AMEC and principal of the Lota High School. Educating the African people continued to be a priority for the Maxekes and in 1908 they founded the Wilberforce Institute for the AMEC at Evaton in the Transvaal. This is now known as the RR Wright Theological Seminary and trains the ministers of the AMEC.

HER INFLUENCE IN DIFFERENT SPHERES

But education is not the only area for which Charlotte Maxeke is remembered. She left her mark on many areas of South African life. In 1913 Maxeke was a founder and the first President of the Bantu Women's League. This was an initiative to try to improve the lot of African women. In 1918 Maxeke led a deputation of women to Prime Minister Louis Botha to protest against the pass laws. When the first constitution of the African National Council was formulated in 1919, women were excluded from becoming full members. Her husband was a founder member of the ANC from 1912 and the Bantu Women's League worked alongside the men's organization (Walker, 1982:33, 37, 38).

As President of the Bantu Women's League she was asked to speak at many meetings. In 1921 she addressed the 'Women's Reform Club', a group of white suffragettes in Pretoria. She was the first and last African

woman to be singled out by the suffragettes and although she brought to their attention the pitiful conditions of African women in the towns her speech was met with indifference (ibid.:38).

CHARLOTTE AS SOCIAL REFORMER

In 1925 she read a paper at the General Missionary Conference. Her paper, entitled 'The native Christian mother', showed her concern for African mothers. She drew attention to the difference between the spirituality in action of the early missionaries and the example shown by missionaries of her day. The early missionaries had inspired people to live as Christians because 'they were as pillars' (of their faith).¹¹ If African church members knocked on the doors of present day missionaries they were told to 'Go round to the kitchen'. She continued: 'People today have no time for anybody who is in trouble'.¹² She drew attention to the difficulties faced by women who left the rural areas to find work in the cities. She told the audience: 'Don't talk religion ... live it. ... We need people who understand the Gospel, who understand how to live it'.¹³ An emphasis on the importance of family life was close to her heart and she spoke again at a Student's Christian Association meeting in 1930 on the home as the centre of family life and the woman as the keystone (Roux, 1964:357). She was appointed to act as a Probation Officer, the first African woman to be given such a post. Her work in this post brought her into constant contact with people who had suffered disruption of family life. In 1930 (Karis and Carter, 1972:344)¹⁴ Charlotte Maxeke spoke out against the problems facing urban Africans and said:

There are many problems pressing in upon us Bantu, to disturb the peaceful working of our homes. One of the chief is perhaps the stream of Native life into the towns. Men leave their homes, and go into the big towns like Johannesburg, where they get a glimpse of a life such as they never dreamed existed. At the end of their term of employment they receive the wages for which they have worked hard, and which should be used for the sustenance of their families, but they waste their hard-earned wages, and seem to forget completely the crying need of the family out in the veld. The wife finds that the husband has apparently forgotten her existence, and she therefore makes her hard and weary way to the town in search of him. ...

In Johannesburg and other large towns, the male natives are employed to do domestic work, in the majority of instances, and a female domestic is a rarity. ... Bantu wealth is gradually decaying. As a result there are more and more workers making their way to the towns and cities such as Johannesburg to earn a living. And what a living! The majority earn about three pounds ten shillings per month, out of which they must pay twenty-five shillings for rent, and ten shillings for tram fares ... Many of the Bantu feel, and quite rightly too, that the laws of the land are not made for Black and White alike. ...

Charlotte's work as a probation officer brought her into contact with the people she was describing and she was able to 'render very useful service' to many Africans in need of help.

In 1928 her faithful service to the AMEC brought its own rewards and she was sent to America as a delegate to the General Conference. As part of her 'living-out' of the Gospel, Charlotte remained a loyal member of the AMEC but she also involved herself in social action. Her efforts to get others to join the AMEC were fuelled by the hope that they would benefit in the same way as she had from their association with that church. Charlotte Maxeke's spiritual experience as a Christian guided her in her work for social transformation. What she did for the African people of her time must be remembered with gratitude and admiration.

In 1935 the National Council of African Women superseded the Bantu Women's League. Charlotte Maxeke was the first President but the job of running the organization was given to Ms Mina Soga. The same year, Charlotte was invited to address the All Africa Conference in Bloemfontein.

The statements she made to conferences and government commissions leave us with a number of unanswered questions. What changed the generally accepted perception of missionaries in South Africa as 'selfless pillars of the faith' to 'racist church organizers'? Was this a fair judgement? The problems of migrant labour and poor wages for domestic work that Charlotte struggled against, remain with us. How long will these remain problems for South African society? Charlotte Maxeke died in 1939 but the work she pioneered opened the way for other women to become aware of their potential to achieve too.

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NOTES

1. Skota (1933:77) states that Maxeke was born on 7 April 1874. She was older than her sister Katie Manye Makanya who was born on 28 July 1873 (McCord, 1995:10) so although Skota was personally acquainted with Charlotte Maxeke he did not record the date of her birth correctly.
2. Skota (1965:195) refers to the director as Mr Bam.
3. Review of McCord (1995) in *The Star*, Johannesburg, 21 August 1995:12.
4. Supplementary Resolutions of the *Minutes of the Transvaal and Swaziland District Synod* held at Johannesburg in January 1899 – ‘List of agents’.
5. Coppin (1903:26); this bishop of the AMEC calls the Manye sisters Mokone’s nieces.
6. The name ‘Ethiopian’ was chosen for a number of reasons – Psalm 68:31 reads ‘Ethiopia (Cush) shall stretch out her hands to God’. Ethiopia was one of the earliest parts of Africa to be Christianized (Acts 8).
7. *Minutes of the Cape Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* held at Cape Town, December 1901.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid
10. The Rev Marshall Maxeke was born in 1874 in Middledrift, Cape. He attended Lovedale Training College. The family later moved to Johannesburg where Maxeke became friendly with ZJ Tantsi. Maxeke and Tantsi accompanied Bishop Turner of the AME when he returned to America after his visit to South Africa. Maxeke and Tantsi studied at Wilberforce University where Maxeke won the Rush Prize and gained his BA degree with honours in classics and mathematics. He also passed his theological examination and was ordained an elder in the AMEC. He compiled the first Xhosa AMEC hymn-book (Skota, 1933).
11. *Report of the General Missionary Conference* 1925:129.
12. Ibid.:130.
13. Ibid.:133.
14. Document 51c, ‘Social conditions among women and girls’ is an address by Charlotte Maxeke to the Conference of European and Bantu Christian Student Associations at Fort Hare, 27 June to 3 July 1930. (Published in *Christian students and modern South Africa*).

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WOMEN USING CULTURE AGAINST WOMEN

Christina Landman

THE HIGH PRICE OF CULTURE

'Have you become more like a child today?' Maretha Maartens, a local Afrikaans lay author on middle-aged religiosity, piously and continuously asks her white female readers in her series of best selling books.¹ On those women who answer the question in the negative, and who are thus not conforming to the woman-child ideal of Maartens, she inflicts severe religious guilt. Such women, she tells people with an already high incidence of depression, cause their own misery as well as that of society by disturbing the ordained relationships between woman, man and God.

During the past five years alone, white women in South Africa have bought approximately two million books on piety written by local Afrikaans women and men.² For the concerned researcher this means that more than one book per white woman has been sold, and that every white woman in South Africa potentially owns one. These books emphasize that God favours female helplessness and especially favours a female consciousness of guilt at the dishonouring of biblically defined stereotypes.

A 'secular' bookstore like the CNA is dependent for a third of its income from religious books of this nature and it maintained these high sales figures even during a time when groups of Christians boycotted the store for selling pornography.³ One has, therefore, to ask the question why hundreds of thousands of women buy books in which the blame for the misery in their lives is attributed to their personal sins and their inability to conform to childlike and dependent behaviour. Why do harassed, bored and depressed women buy these books? Why does this piety sell so well? The answer is simply this: women are thus empowered, with the sanction of religion, to try to control the people in their private worlds with traditional female behaviour. Women who have not been socialized to exercise overt power are led to believe, to put it in a vulgar way, that God will guide them in getting what they want (or rather what they need⁴) by pleasing their men.

These strategies based on the manipulation of stereotyped cultural behaviour, are of course more true of an older generation white women in South Africa than the present one. But the younger generation still suffers because of it. An older generation of white women bought pink books on religion and raised daughters who today cannot be found in Parliament, are not prominent in managerial positions and lack skills in public facilitation. Because they have been taught, through the privatization of their piety, to please individuals, even this younger generation is in general unable to facilitate group decision making except in areas of homemaking.

The relevance of this heritage for our theme is this: although the younger generation has more space in which to come out of the closet, they have inherited another characteristic from their foremothers which effectively keeps them from having a public voice. They do not allow each other to move out of the private sphere of female behaviour. A strong feature of female interrelations, legitimized by religion, is the practice of keeping other women culture-bound.

THE GOOD WOMAN OF BIBLICAL TIMES

Examples from the textual history of (*inter alia*) Christianity can both substantiate and explain this phenomenon. An early example is the Book of Proverbs in the Bible. In this Book, Wisdom is portrayed as a woman, and yet there is no other book in the Bible in which women use culture against other women more explicitly and disempoweringly than in this Book. In the last chapter of this compilation of wisdoms (chapter 31), the mother of King Lemuel warns her son against politically active and sexually empowered women. This mother (if it was indeed a woman who wrote these instructions) shared men's fear of women's (albeit covert) political power and their using their sexuality to obtain it. Marrying a foreign woman may bring a group of women into your court who will form a coalition against you, undermining your power and eventually overthrowing you in favour of another king, she warns her son. In the second part of this chapter then the activities of a woman of worth are described. The description includes household and economic activities which a woman from the upper middle class performed during these times with the help of her highly trained servants, and it excludes activities related to public

politics and sexuality. A man will do well to possess Woman Wisdom, is the message of the Book of Proverbs; so also a man who owns the woman described in Proverbs 31, will lack for nothing – a woman, that is, who is hardworking but highly stylized in terms of public life and sexuality (Fontaine, 1992:151).

SUPPRESSED VOICES IN EARLY CHRISTIANITY

Suspicion of women's potential power in the fields of politics and sexuality also influenced the early Church Fathers' decisions on whose writings were to be included in the Biblical canon. Many women won the favour of the Church Fathers by denouncing their sexuality through asceticism and virginity, yet for political reasons their works were excluded from the Christian Testament. Some of the voices of these – exclusively upper class – women are available to us in apocryphal form.

One of these women from an upper class society in Asia Minor, whose story moved too far into the public empowerment of women and was suppressed by the Fathers, was Thecla, a disciple of Paul (Clark, 1983:78ff; McGinn, 1994:800ff). The Acts of Paul and Thecla, written in the second century, tells the story of Thecla who was converted by Paul in the Asian city of Iconium. She decided to disregard the expectation of her culture that she get married, much to the dismay of her fiancé who had her condemned to be burnt alive in public. On the appointed day virgins, that is young eligible women, brought wood and hay in order to burn Thecla for her anti-cultural behaviour. However, God had chosen to demonstrate in Thecla a new female culture, that of Christian virginity, and sent a hailstorm to quench the flames. Paul then left for Antioch with Thecla as his newly acknowledged disciple. In Antioch the rejection scene between Thecla and another man who took a fancy in her was repeated; this man likewise had her condemned for culture-unfriendly behaviour. This time Thecla was condemned to fight the wild beasts in the arena.

Now follows one of the most amazing descriptions, if not the only one, extant in early Christian literature, of female mass behaviour (Jensen, 1990:86–92). The women in the arena reacted to every move of Thecla, who was brought into the arena naked, obviously to ridicule her new reli-

gious commitment to virginity. According to custom the women spectators sat together in a group, but at the beginning of the show they were divided in their sentiments. Some of them revelled in Thecla's condemnation and shouted: 'Bring that woman who committed sacrilege!' Others sided with Thecla and her right to free choice, shouting, 'Away with the city for this lawless deed!'

A lioness was sent in against Thecla. The lioness lay down at Thecla's feet. The crowd of women cheered. A fierce male lion was sent in. The lioness fought him and both died. The women wept for the lioness. Thecla then baptized herself in a pond of killer seals. The women flung petals into the arena and the air was filled with a multitude of perfumes. When Thecla was released by the governor after a host of miraculous events, and was told to put on her clothes, the women cried out loud, now no longer in two voices but 'as with one mouth' in support of Thecla. Thecla's story is told in the second century AD as the story of women taking a communal stand on culture, albeit in conversion to a specific faith.

Thus the cult of Thecla was established in Asia Minor and it spread rapidly, much to the concern of the Fathers. In response, it is said, they created the cult of a very individualistic mother Mary, a woman on her own, a model of woman without sexual or political power or friends, to suppress the cult of Thecla and the power Thecla exercised over women. The Acts of (Paul and) Thecla therefore are not to be found in the Bible the Fathers gave us, although Thecla complied with their criterion for inclusion, which was discipleship of Jesus or Paul. Instead, we find in the Bible a well represented backlash mentality against the power of strong individual women and women's groups. That these may have occurred even earlier than the Thecla entourage is suggested by (inter alia) the much earlier text of Timothy (1 Tim 2:12) who warned women thus: 'I do not allow a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence...'.⁵

WOMEN, POLITICS AND SEXUALITY DURING THE MIDDLE AGES

During the Middle Ages two themes persisted within the overall theme of women, politics and sexuality. The first was the exemplary worth of the asexuality of religious females. The second was a common agreement that

women's religious salvation should not have any social or political consequences (Borresen, 1993:14).

However, this paper does not deal primarily with the problem of strong and achieving women who threaten men and with the cultural prohibitions installed by male hierarchies to keep such women out of the public arena, although it has been an established phenomenon since at least biblical times. The main thesis of this paper is that strong and achieving women do not always empower other women but may threaten them, and that other women may react by invoking cultural prohibitions against them. This theme, due not so much to a scarcity but to the type of sources available, is difficult to trace through medieval times.

One may read the *Regulae* written by Claire of Assisi (d 1235) and the one written later by Brigitta of Sweden (d 1375) either for their democratic and optimistic views on communal womanhood (Borresen, 1993:65, 72) or for their acknowledgement of a gender hierarchy in the Creation and their acquiescence, albeit unconscious, in the suppression of women under male authority. The fact is that the individualized voices of women from the Middle Ages, who spoke either on their own behalf or on behalf of some few other exceptional women, were voices from the upper class, voices of women who had rare access to literacy and were hardly threatened by other women in a competing society. This absence in the literature of women evaluating other women, whether negatively or not, is significant for our theme because it points to the ultimate individualization, desexualization and depoliticization of (literate) women. It indicates in short their total conformation to a religious culture in which women's use of political and sexual powers was seen as anti-religious and only the lone voice of a woman talking to her God was permitted.

THE REFORMATION AND THE REDISCOVERY OF PERSONAL GUILT

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was an effort to return Christianity to the values of the earliest Christians as (partly) described in the Bible. These early views on women, attributed in the Bible to Paul and Timothy, were honoured by the Reformers whose cultural ideas on women after 16 centuries still corresponded to those of

their forefathers. Consequently, until recently, Protestantism did not develop a class of women schooled in theology or at least informed about the socio-political consequences of religion. As far as women's skills in theologizing are concerned, Protestantism therefore was a step backwards from the learned women in the medieval nunneries.

Apart from rediscovering 'primitive' Christianity, the Reformation also brought about another shift in religious discourse by rediscovering personal guilt. The early Christians served God through martyrdom; when Christianity became the accepted religion, Christians suffered for God through asceticism; when asceticism was made unpopular by the Reformers as 'good works', personal guilt was rediscovered as a means of winning God's favour. This theological discovery was popularized during the seventeenth century as pietism. Although the authors of pietism were almost exclusively male, women were very much attracted to their guidelines for internalizing guilt.

WHITE FEMALE PIETY IN SOUTH AFRICA

The piety of personal guilt strongly influenced South African women in the following way. The Dutch pietists, the 'oude schrijvers' of the seventeenth century, lost their European audience during the eighteenth century and their surplus books were sent to the colonies. In South Africa, Hester Venter (b 1750) claimed conversion to pietism simply on reading the title of a book by one of these Dutch pietists, namely *Het gekrookte riet* – 'The broken reed' – by Smijtegelt (Venter, 1852:6). It was these books of the 'oude schrijvers', of Smijtegelt and a'Brackel, the only reading matter she possessed apart from the Bible and the *Kerkbode*, which Susanna Smit (1799–1865) packed in her wakis to accompany her on the trek northwards. For decades those few white local women who could read were exposed to the idea that God was very hard to please and very quick to recognize sinners. It influenced these women's view of other people, also (presumably) their view of other women. They 'excelled in self-humiliation and in self-hate to please their demanding male God. This poor self-image ... developed amongst these women into a negative view of all people' (Landman, 1994:118).

However, since local pietism regarded defamatory remarks about other

people (except blacks, moral transgressors, and other children of Satan) as ungodlike, the women suppressed their anger against other women. Hester Venter (ibid.:1) described her anger towards her sisters who not only overshadowed her socially, but also took a major share of their mother's inheritance, leaving her with very little, arguing that she was the youngest. However, she immediately pointed to her own guilt in experiencing this anger; she envisaged herself on the roadway to hell and almost lost all hope for her salvation. Women were angry at women using culture against them, but piety kept them from expressing anger; on the contrary, piety forced them to blame women's cultural victimization on themselves.

Was this internalization of guilt, this pessimistic view of humankind and the passive acceptance of other women's exploitation, transferred from white female piety to black women converts on the mission stations and in the girls' schools? Benigna van Groenekloof of Mamre, 'een verhaal voor de Christen Kleurlinge van Zuid-Afrika door een hunner leeraars' is one of the earliest texts on local black women's religious experience in South Africa. It tells the story of the fears of the women converts in a Moravian settlement at Mamre in the second half of the eighteenth century. Without naming their sins, these women shared the fears of losing their souls to damnation and expressed their conviction that no human endeavour could save them except a belief in the redeeming power of Jesus Christ. Like the white women, the black women were left 'helpless but guilty' (Schilder, 1987) by their religion. But did their religion also leave them isolated and exploitative of other women? In the text of Benigna there is a communality evident amongst the black women which not even the white male author of their stories could suppress, a communality which later became more evident in the mothers' unions (and the manyanos) formed amongst black religious women (Labode, 1992).

The textual history of religious women in South Africa points towards an individualized God-talk for white women and a societal spirituality for black women. However, a difference in class may actually account for this difference which seems to originate in racial backgrounds. The white women were from a literate middle class while the black women were workers who organized themselves into religious communes for survival purposes. White women were in competition for male favour and would use types of covert power, like culturally disempowering one another, in

order to gain power in this 'survival of the fittest individual' game, while black women workers could hardly afford this luxury.

A (POST-)MODERN QUESTION

Making a general deduction from already over-generalized assumptions, leads us to believe that the phenomenon of women using culture against other women is a very old one, since we discovered it in the Bible, but that the question of why and how women engage in such a practice is a modern one, since the women's voices available throughout history were those of individualized upper class women who were in dialogue with God about their souls and not with other women. One can actually assume that it is a post-modern issue since 'solidarity' feminism does not address it and blames only men for the cultural harassment of women.

It furthermore seems that this is a phenomenon to be addressed mainly amongst white women since black women display much more of a communal attitude. And yet it is women from the Third World, representing a broader spectrum of female voices from different classes in society, who put the question of women using culture against other women on the table. In 1995 Kenyan theologian Musimbi Kanyoro published an article entitled 'Cultural hermeneutics: an African contribution' in a World Council of Churches publication (Ortega, 1995:18–28) in which she made the following statement:

Another point that needs to be confronted is that the practice of institutionalized cultural violence has ensured that women are not only victims but also, more often than not, perpetrators. Who enforce inhuman rituals on widows in Africa and Asia? Who are the excisors of the female? Who are the instigators of divorce or polygamy in the case of wives unable to give birth to children or specifically to male children? These are areas of women's violence against women. We have to break the vicious circle of women violating other women in the name of culture. We cannot continue to bemoan the socialization we have had when lives are at stake... Women must come of age, confront ourselves and also address women as the cause of oppression. This is not a refusal to address male oppression, but rather a way of empowering women to remove the log in our own eyes so that we can see clearly the log in other people's eyes.

What does this phenomenon look like in the broader setting of recent times? and can feminism deal with it? I shall refer to two instances of this phenomenon, one 'public' and the other 'private' (granted that the distinction between public and private is a patriarchal one). In a public setting (like Unisa) where a comfortable career and life are linked to hierarchical adaptation, women are tempted to have themselves empowered against other women to gain ruling class popularity. Regularly it is liberated women, even feminists, who empower themselves at the cost of other women, by claiming that human rights are contextually determined, that women should blend into the culture (the ethos) of their working environment even if that ethos places women in opposition to other women. 'Cultural' (hierarchical) solidarity, they claim, is more important than female solidarity.

The same argument, that it is more important to be an Afrikaner or a black or a colleague than to address women's liberation corporatively, also disempowers women in the private sphere. When Purity Malinga⁶ at a research meeting of the Faculty of Theology and Religion at Unisa pointed to lobola as one of the reasons for violence against black women since it reduces women to the property of men, she was accused by the black men in the audience quoting women for using feminism 'to divide black into male and female'. As Kanyoro has pointed out with reference to African cultures and myself pointing to Afrikaner societies, it is women, happily and ignorantly fenced in by female subcultures, who perpetuate cultural habits and female stereotypes to acquire acceptability in the male dominant culture.

What can feminism do to liberate women from this subcultural behaviour? Feminism with its ideals for sisterhood is, of course, embarrassed by this phenomenon. Refusing to acknowledge this as a problem, some feminisms emphasize that differences exist between women and allow for women's freedom to be culture-bound (Ackermann, 1996:136–148). However, Kanyoro is one and probably the first theologian who acknowledges that this problem will not go away and that feminists need to strategize against it. Kanyoro then works consciously on a strategy of cultural criticism, or what she calls 'cultural hermeneutics', which means rereading the Bible with a critical eye towards the role culture played in determining women's behaviour. To recycle these old stories may seem futile to secular feminists. However, the Bible is the only text shared by women in Africa who come from diverse cultures; it is, furthermore, one of the few texts of religious

history in which the phenomenon of women using culture against women is described; lastly, black women see many similarities between their own cultural constraints and the constraints prescribed for women of biblical times. This is also the reason why this paper took its starting point from the Bible. Rereading the Bible then as a source book for evidence of cultural manipulation is an important liberating task for religion feminists.

Other religious feminists, like Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995), go beyond the Bible to retrieve an aboriginal religiosity which testifies, it is claimed, to a sisterhood which existed in African cultures before the coming of Christianity. Christianity is not hereby rejected but encouraged to adapt its teachings in the light of this newly discovered (pre)history from the time when cultures were women-friendly.

Religious women in Africa have therefore contributed this to the 'female culture' debate: rereading contexts and retelling stories will give a voice to women of all classes of society and contribute to female development and support systems. These two possibilities, rereading common (con)texts (like the Bible) and retelling history within the genres of both cultural criticism and cultural reconstruction, were also discussed at the last meeting of the Circle of African Women Theologians⁷ as the two means of fostering female solidarity.

CONCLUSION: MAKING THE CONNECTION

Present generations of white Afrikaans women have been the victims of the *volksmoeders*, women who in previous generations controlled the morals and the politics of the nation from behind the scenes while keeping other women bound to a female culture of non-participation in politics and decisionmaking. This tradition of the *volksmoeders* is at present perpetuated by women like Maretha Maartens who use naive pietism to manipulate women's spirituality towards unhealthy forms of covert control of God, men and other women. Black women again have to deal with their own type of *volksmoeders*, as Kanyoro has pointed out, who exercise physical control over other women through cultural practices. English-speaking South African women may well still have Queen Victoria as their prototypical *volksmoeder*.

What do volksmoeders look like in the academic world? Who are the academic women who exercise control over other women by using patriarchally based practices of power behaviour? These volksmoeders fall into two groups, both of which can be called 'upper middle class' since they comprise graduate women. The first group consists of professors who have succeeded within the hierarchical system and have conformed to its culture. They are an exclusivist group who do not have any real commitment to other women and who are therefore usually chosen by existing liberal authorities to represent women. The second group are 're-entry women' who confront women younger than they but who occupy positions higher than theirs, with a culture of reference towards older women. Competing in patriarchal hierarchies thus keeps women from bonding when in fact it should be an occasion for their consolidating.

Retelling their stories, renaming their experience, and reclaiming a common tradition are practices recommended by Africa's women theologians for effecting solidarity amongst women. 'Rebonding' should be added as a fourth category. Rebonding presupposes a culture of mutuality amongst women; mutuality is the basis for equal, life-giving and transformative relations amongst women. Mutuality 'is a relational process in which all persons, or parties, are empowered, thereby experiencing themselves as able to survive, affect others creatively, and make a constructive difference in the world around them' (Heyward, :155–156). In mutual relationships culture is not used as a means of control; on the contrary, a culture of sharing power to the benefit of all develops.

Previously it was not regarded as politically correct to explore the phenomenon of women using culture against women because of the support it seemed to give to the sexist and antifeminist argument that 'women anyway cannot stand each other' and that 'it is against the female character to work with one another'. However, when the investigation into women taking opposing sides on culture emanates from women themselves, and an answer is sought in processing mutuality as a possible remedy, it becomes an important exercise in self-criticism and self-knowledge – and in reconstructing female solidarity.

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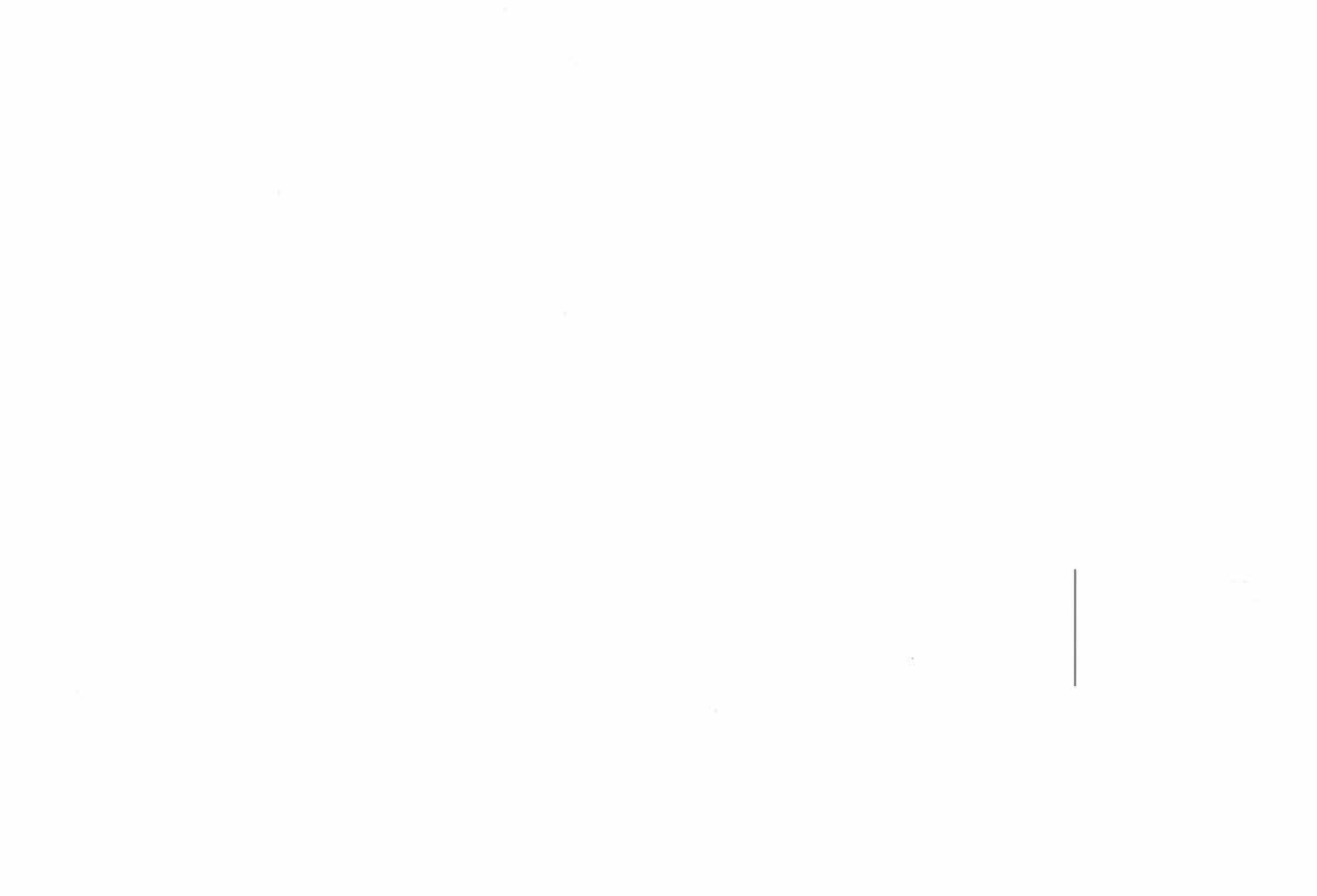
NOTES

1. For example, *En daar het stilte gekom*: 44. Also translated into English.
2. Numbers released by CNA.
3. In 1995, when pornography became accepted in a pre-legalized form, the CNA still earned 27% of its income from these books.
4. Frugality in asking is recommended. 'Hy het gesorg. Ek het gevra, maar nie vër verby die eiergeld nie. Jy moes bietjie vra, dan kom hy dit nie agter nie' (Groenewald, 1995:30).
5. See for a more detailed discussion of this text the chapter by Cairns.
6. Malinga is a lecturer at the Theological Education by Extension College in Johannesburg.
7. Held in August 1996 in Nairobi, Kenya.

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**FEMINIST FICTION
AND
FEMININE FICTIONS**



INTRODUCTION TO 'FEMINIST FICTION AND FEMININE FICTIONS'

J Malherbe

The writers in this part all look at the intersection of fiction and gender issues. If we take fiction in the sense of creative and imaginative interpretations of reality, then there are at least two kinds of fiction of interest to the gender-sensitive reader. Firstly, there is critical feminist fiction in which oppressive stereotypes of women are exposed, and disempowering patriarchal mechanisms are displayed, and challenged by alternative visions of strong women who resist and reject the gender codes by which society seeks to socialize them into the 'proper' role for women. Examples of this kind of writing are to be found in the novels of Maria de Zayas, Mda and Vapi. Then secondly, there are the feminine fictions, imaginative and often alluring creations of women in the medium of language or visual images. They are fictions because they are not an attempt at realistic portrayal of any actual woman, but are rather an ideal presented for readers and viewers to aspire to and to construct their own identity in terms of, e.g., the 'good little girls' of the book *Little women*.. Such images are primarily figments of the masculine imagination (whether created by male or female writers). They succeed to a great extent in conditioning the mindset of both men and women, and are thus a powerful means of maintaining the existing power relations between men and women in society.

The essays here are all studies of one of these two kinds of fiction. The essay by Yolanda Gamboa gives the reader a rich and detailed picture of the gendering codes at work in seventeenth century Spain, a society as harsh as any have been in subordinating women. Church, state and cultural norms worked together to maintain the masculine 'code of honour' which prescribed strict limits on women's behaviour. The ideal of womanly excellence, the 'normative woman', was defined in relation to the masculine honour principle, and as a result, the boundaries of what was acceptable in a woman were severely confining. The physical expression of this psychological and emotional confinement was women's being contained in the private space of the home. De Zayas' work is full of images of containment and limitation; of women being savagely forced into a tiny

space, their freedom being taken away, their mouths being shut to imprison their voice. These are images that speak to us and move us today, and make us aware of the prevalent codes of 'manly honour', of 'proper womanly behaviour', and of that powerful tool of women's disempowerment: confinement to the home, to one's inner being, and banishment from open, public places where one can speak and be heard.

The ideal of normative womanhood is central to Thabazi Ntshinga's paper on the Xhosa women writers Mda and Vapi. She takes a close look at what traditional Xhosa society prescribes as proper behaviour for a woman in certain circumstances, and for a man, and for the correct relations between them. She shows how it is women who play the primary role in transmitting traditional attitudes and values to the children of a community. The fact that it is women who choose to maintain and pass on the customary views, supports Ntshinga's claim that there is nothing intrinsically bad for women in the traditional feminine roles. As illustrated in the two novels she analyses, it is rather the abuse of tradition and its misinterpretation by people with selfish motives, that results in the oppression of women. Nevertheless, the suffering that women go through as a result of the distortion of tradition is strongly presented by Mda and Vapi, whose women 'articulate their felt realities as against what is prescribed to them by the male-dominated tradition'. Here we find not so much explicit critical comment on gender relations, as a statement of the anguish women may suffer simply as a result of being women.

The second two papers in this section deal with feminine fictions: constructions of women's identity designed to manipulate the reader or viewer in a way that will serve not their own, but other people's interests. In modern urban life, we are constantly exposed to advertising, to pictures and text that try to convince the readers of some idea, or make them want to buy something. Amanda du Preez' frame of reference is the field of current advertising, specifically the four ads for the 'Sissy Boy' brand of jeans. She takes the 'femme fatale' stereotype as the basis for an analysis of this set of ads. The femme fatale is that dangerous and devastatingly sexually attractive temptress of men who seems to have complete power over them. This is of course a product of the male imagination, and not any real woman, but it nevertheless manages to get complicity from many women who want to be femme fatales, perhaps because of the promise

of power it holds out. This makes it possible for skilful manipulators of the media to sell jeans by peddling the femme fatale image while at the same time seeming to offer women freedom from typically 'feminine' constraints. This essay is an exposé of the complex motives and values that underly a particular set of adverts. The lesson we learn is to look more closely and critically at adverts in general, to ask ourselves if we are being manipulated, not for our own good, by them, and especially, how advertising contributes to the powerlessness and subservience of women in a patriarchal consumer society.

Feminine images of another sort, the 'good little girl', are the subject of the final piece in the group. This picture of how females should be is, no less than the femme fatale, a product of men's fancies, supported by those women who would please men at all costs. Even more than the femme fatale, this is a disempowering piece of patriarchal manipulation, designed to ensure that women will read their role in life as to serve men and have no 'selfish' purposes of their own. By way of illustration, Myrna Machet talks about three children's classics: *Little women*, *A little princess*, and *Beauty and the beast*. She shows first how the stories feed a specific syndrome in our society, the 'good girl' syndrome. The good girl is a cultural archetype with core values of nurturing and self-sacrifice. If a woman is to find happiness, she must put aside her own desires, interests and ambitions in order to nurture her husband, father, brothers and ultimately her children. 'A woman's highest reward is to be loved and to spend her life in the service of others'. Having shown the presence of this syndrome in the books, Machet looks at the film versions to see if any progress towards dismantling the 'good girl' image has been made in the more advanced technology of a presumably more advanced society. Unfortunately, no real progress has been made, in spite of some cosmetic changes in the filmed stories to satisfy the gender lobby.

We tend to accept the normative idea of what is proper for women, because that is the existing norm and it is what we have been socialized to recognize as what women are. People look at adverts like the Sissy Boy jeans ads, and read books like the three children's classics, usually without realizing the gendering that is taking place in the process, and without being critically aware of the manipulative moves being made on their attitudes and values. They have been conditioned to accept the present patri-

archal status quo in all its manifestations. This is the value of gender studies - that it raises our critical consciousness of oppressive gender manipulation and gives us with the means and the motivation to challenge that conditioning. No one who reads the essay *The good girl syndrome* for instance will be able to read the children's classics to young people in future without trying to show them the manipulative conditioning (of both girls and boys) that is taking place, and to encourage them to resist the oppressive gender coding the stories contain.

Fiction is an especially potent medium both for gender coding of the negative, patriarchal kind, and for the feminist critique of oppressive attitudes, expectations and images. It is potent because in fiction we meet our dreams and unformulated desires; novels show us what we could be rather than what we are. They give us ideals to aspire to; advertisements for instance show us dazzlingly beautiful images of how we might look, in a matrix loaded with desirability. We are not inclined to be critical of fictions. After all, they are not a truth claim and they do not make a statement of fact which could invite challenge; they are hypotheticals which whisper 'Imagine a world in which things were like this' or 'Would you not like to be like her?' If we are to guard against being the unconscious victims of such persuasion, we must maintain a gender-critical awareness, and this is done in the reading of essays like the four here.

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GENDER CODING IN THE NARRATIVES OF MARIA DE ZAYAS

Yolanda Gamboa

BACKGROUND

In this paper, I look at the constraints on women in the patriarchy of early modern Spain, as reflected in the novels of the popular woman writer of the time, Maria de Zayas. I propose that these constraints take effect thanks to the operation of certain social codes (which I call 'discursive practices'), namely the discourse of Honour, the discourse of the Normative Woman, and the discourse of Enclosure into private spaces. I suggest that such gendercodes were (and still are today) expressed, maintained and transmitted by the church, the state and the family. However, I reveal that despite censorship, strategies for change are formulated, often by voices which are veiled by irony, voices like that of de Zayas, which lay bare the purposes of social codes used to confine and disempower women.

The parallels between the operation of these gender codes in seventeenth Spain and in contemporary South Africa are striking. The discourse of Honour is matched by the code of masculine strength and mastery so prevalent in traditional society, and both depend in large measure for their definition on the complementary code of feminine subservience and dependence, which is a part of the discourse of the Normative Woman. Evident in the institutions of both seventeenth Spain and contemporary South Africa (and indeed any patriarchy) is a set of prescriptions as to what is becoming for a woman, what her proper character and sanctioned behaviour are, and what the appropriate place for womanly activities is, viz., the home. The last discourse, that of Enclosure, has been extensively discussed in feminist theory in the form of the damaging and disempowering (to women) public / private dichotomy, gendered as public – masculine, private – feminine. Social codes regarding women are still maintained through church and state, and the family has gained new significance in this role via television and the media. There are thus lessons to be learned from early modern Spain, and applied in our present society.

The early modern world and particularly early modern Spain was a period of social transformation where the discursive practices of the Church and State competed for hegemony against dissenting voices. On the one hand, the Catholic Church, at this time involved in the process of Counter-Reformation, was reviving dogma and helping to spread it by means of educational religious literature. On the other hand, the early modern state, in its process of transformation, was modifying the concept of secular authority from that of absolute monarchy to one of monarchic-seigniorial alliance, enabling it to become stronger while gaining acceptance by a wider sector of the population.

Based on modern arguments regarding the architecture of gender, like those of Mark Wigley, and studies on the social discourses of the Renaissance, like the work of Peter Stallybrass, one could say that the means of achieving the social transformation required on both fronts was the encouragement of the 'discourse of honour' which relied heavily on the 'Law of the Father', on a 'normative concept of Woman', on the 'generic division of space', and also on 'architecture'. Peter Stallybrass, commenting on the social practices of the Renaissance and aware that, in the Renaissance, the family was thought to be a microcosm of the State, and the house, the means of controlling what was regarded as 'uncontrollable' women's nature, has observed: 'the normative Woman could become the emblem of the perfect and impermeable container, and hence a map of the integrity of the State' (Stallybrass, 1986:129).

This apparently harmonic, hegemonic discourse had a number of fissures which were revealed, on occasion, by a few dissenting voices. At a time when censorship was strict, though, such voices are to be found often veiled by irony or by the language of the marginalized of the time.

One of these dissenting voices is that of Spanish seventeenth century woman writer Maria de Zayas who was a popular and prolific writer. Her two volumes each comprising 10 short novels (or 'novellas') within a frame narrative in the tradition of the Italian Decameron, namely, *Novelas amorosas y ejemplares* (Amorous and Exemplary Novels) and *Desengaños amorosos* (Amorous Deceits), were published in 1637 and 1647 respectively. And in general there is a significant difference between the two volumes: the short novels contained in the second volume, published ten

years after the first, are richer, more complex, more modern, and more relevant for the situation of women in today's world. That is the volume I will more often address.

ENCLOSURE INTO PRIVATE SPACES

In a number of her short novels Zayas portrays heroines imprisoned in space. However, as Amy Williamsen (1991) has mentioned, there is a marked difference between the first volume, where 'Zayas explores the comic possibilities of this architectural sign (being, the house)' and the second volume, where she 'portrays the house as an instrument of torture employed against women' (ibid.:646). Examples of a space that contributes to women's torture abound. Among them are: the enclosure of women in a small room before raping or killing them; the creation of an artificial, unlivable entrapment to punish women; and last but not least, the creation of a fortress-like house which is yet unable to deny access to tragedy.

Both Marcia Welles (1978) and Elizabeth Ordóñez (1985) have suggested in their different ways that Zayas' preoccupation with enclosures anticipates Gilbert and Gubar's assertions regarding the 18th century Gothic Fiction: for Gilbert and Gubar 'the house becomes a sign for the 'architecture of patriarchy' which represents the entrapment of women by male-dominated social institutions' (Williamsen, 1991:646). Welles has concentrated on the grotesque aspects of Zayas' fiction whereas Ordóñez has alluded to the symbolic entrapment in male-dominated institutions. On the one hand, commenting on the grotesque aspects of Zayas' narrative, Welles notes a similarity between Zayas' techniques and those sought in the Gothic novel which she expresses in the following terms: 'If at the aesthetic level the intent was the elevation of the spirit through amazement and terror, at the psychological level such chilling details, which prefigure the effects sought in the Gothic novel of the late eighteenth century, provided for the description of intense bodily sensations' (1978:304). On the other hand, Ordóñez's concern that the lives of the characters in a female-authored text usually offer a commentary about the writer's own relationship with the text, has led her to affirm that 'anxieties about spatial confinement may encode, then, anxieties about authorship in textual traditions similarly restrictive to women' (1985:5).

However, in her stories, Zayas does more than note that the house is a sign of patriarchy. She goes on to reveal the fissures of the house, and consequently of the discourses that have constantly 'housed' women, and thus she questions the discursive practices of both Church and State. But before we get to her stories we shall have to observe how they relate to the discourses of her time, namely, to the honour code, the normative concept of 'Woman', the generic division of space and architecture.

THE CODE OF HONOUR

The 'honour code' was a strict social code which regulated not only societal relationships but also the intimate relationships between men and women. According to Gustavo Correa (1958) honour was a twofold concept which included both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. The 'vertical' concept of honour implied a stratification of society and was inherent in the position of an individual on the social scale. The highest social classes were therefore the ones with the most honour even from birth. The 'horizontal' concept of honour, on the contrary, was based on the complex social relationships among the members of a given community and therefore used to rest on the opinion people had of a person. The horizontal concept of honour ended up representing fundamental values of Spanish culture. A man's value was directly related to his 'manliness' ('hombria') (ibid.: 103). Signs of his manliness were his ability to get women, as well as the perpetuation of himself as husband and head of the household, which assured the integrity of the family.

What Correa is referring to here is none other than the 'Law of the Father' to which Wigley refers in the following terms: according to him the primary role of the house, and of architecture, is the control of woman's sexuality. Its role therefore 'is to protect the father's genealogical claims by isolating women from other men. Reproduction is understood as reproduction of the father. The law of the house is undoubtedly no more than the law of the father. The physical house is the possibility of the patriarchal order that appears to be applied to it' (Wigley, 1992:336).

However, necessary for the man's 'manliness' was the woman's 'virtue', 'which refers to the purity and morality of her conduct' (Correa, 1958: 103;

note that due to the unavailability of translations, all quotes in English from Correa, De León and Zayas are my own). Female virtue also assumes the 'normative Woman'. The lack of virtue in a woman would threaten the integrity of the family in revealing the lack of manliness on the man's part. The same way a wife's conduct would attest the husband's lack of manliness, a daughter or a sister's conduct threatened to disintegrate the purity of the caste and the moral integrity of the family. Consequently, during the Renaissance, 'the virtue of chastity was assured by the woman's being closed off, immured in her house, while the open door and the open mouth were taken to signify sexual incontinence' (Scolnicov, 1994:7).

Given the prevalence of the 'honour code' in the community, a literary genre emerged, that of the 'Wife-Murder Comedia', a theme also found in narrative, although less often. The most popular exponent of this genre is sixteenth century dramatist Calderon de la Barca. His *El médico de su honra* ('The doctor of his own honour') portrays the husband, who suspects his wife of adultery, killing her by letting her bleed to death (*sangría*), a procedure often found in the literary works of the period. An example of a wife-murder story which presents a number of parallels with Calderon's play is also present among the short novels contained in Zayas' second volume, *Desengaños*. It is the third novel of the volume and is entitled *El verdugo de su esposa* ('His wife's executioner').

Another example of an honour story is Zayas' chilling eighth story, *El traidor contra su sangre* ('Traitor against his own blood') where the heroine's brother, in their father's absence, takes more than the usual responsibility for his sister's honour. A brief summary is in order. The sister has a suitor of whom her father does not approve because, despite his money, his family is descended from the peasantry (this, by the way, illustrates 'vertical' honour, and alludes also to 'horizontal honour' or the possibility of transcending social class by merit in a mobile society). She continues seeing him, especially at night through the window, and hopes eventually to marry him. Her father and brother plan to send her to a convent in order to pay less dowry for her. The brother, especially, fears that if she were to marry, his inheritance would diminish. Consequently, when their father is away and having found that his sister keeps on seeing the gentleman, he takes her to a 'retrate', an isolated room within the house, stabs her to death, locks the room and escapes.

The action is excessive not only because wishing to marry does not involve offence on the sister's side, but because the brother acts in the father's absence and without his consent. The presence of the 'retrere', the room where the action is executed, which would later be known as a 'closet', associates with it the man's space since that room, initially no more than a writing desk where the man kept all family and crucial documents, according to Wigley (1992), was created as the first masculine private space: 'The first truly private space was the man's study, a small locked room off his bedroom which no one else ever enters, an intellectual space beyond that of sexuality' (1992:347). From a different perspective, though, it could be read as a statement of the brother's anger because the sister, in trying to arrange her own marriage, had transgressed her brother's power and therefore his space, in venturing into the public sphere. Moreover, locking her up in that room, when the lock and the key are symbolic in themselves ('male control is expressed by the physical oppression of lock and key' – Scolnicov, 1994:69) means to 'literally closet away the abject domain from the spatial representation of pure order' (Wigley, 1992:344).

THE CONCEPT OF 'NORMATIVE WOMAN'

However, for the honour code to work discursively it had to rely on a normative concept of woman. The idea of the 'Normative Woman' was provided for sixteenth century Spain by its educational religious literature. I mentioned in my introduction the Church's reformatory efforts at that time, but I will now be more specific.

Following the meeting of the Council of Trent, where the Catholic Church defined its dogma, the publication of religious books proliferated in Spain. This took place mainly during the sixteenth century, giving way to a proliferation of profane literature (Zayas among them) at the end of the sixteenth century and into the seventeenth. According to R.O. Jones, the Counter Reformation corresponded to the intent of reviving the traditional culture by a Church intent on moulding and directing such culture in all its aspects. The teachings of humanism were incorporated and education was considered vital for the task the Church had set itself (Jones, 1983:123). Representative authors of this tendency were: Pedro Malón de

Chaide, whose *Conversion of Mary Magdalene* (1588) presented a moral alternative to the profane books written in his time; St. Theresa (1515–1582) whose religious books of a didactic nature explain the way of virtue and prayer by means of her own mystic visionary experiences; St. John of the Cross (1542–1591) who expresses personal mystical experiences in his poetry, and Fray Luis de León (1527–1591), whose book *La perfecta casada*, an educational manual for the married woman, deserves especial attention.

La perfecta casada ('The perfect married woman' and by extension 'The perfect woman') is, I believe, the best source of the concept of Normative Woman of the time. First published in 1583, it was intended as a biblical comment on the poem of Solomon and, on another level, inscribed within the tradition of Renaissance conduct books and specifically marriage books. It attempted to regulate all spheres of a (married) woman's life, indicating what the 'perfect' (understood as normative) woman at all times should be. The justifications for all the conclusions regarding women proposed in this book are undebatable; they are either examples taken from literature or the Bible as if they reflected reality, or they are premises sanctioned by reference to God, nature or 'what is natural'. One of these 'natural' arguments is the explanation of the 'Law of the Father': 'It is true that nature ordered men to marry not only so that their names and lineage be perpetuated in their descendants but also so that they themselves were preserved through them' (de León, 1992:93).

ENCLOSED BODY, CLOSED MOUTH, LOCKED HOUSE

The 'Normative Woman', says Stallybrass, is like Bakhtin's classical body: 'her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house' (Stallybrass, 1986:127). Therefore it is not surprising that the discourse on this theme devotes attention to the three elements: body, mouth and house. I propose a comparison between *La perfecta casada* and Stallybrass' article regarding 'the woman as body enclosed'. A contraposition of a few quotes relative to those three focal points of attention will reveal that De León's discourse follows the traditional arguments regarding women.

Linked to the idea of the 'enclosed body' is that of measure, a way of con-

trolling the uncontrollable. It is derived, says Stallybrass, from 'the assumption that woman's body, unlike the prince's, is naturally grotesque. It must be subjected to constant surveillance precisely because, as Bakhtin says of the grotesque body, it is 'unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits' (Stallybrass, 1986:126). De León constantly alludes to the fact that women are more frail and more prone to go astray. For instance, in the following passage, he believes work is the solution for them: 'since woman is more inclined to pleasure and more easily softens and falls prey to idleness, then work is more convenient to her' (ibid.:125). On other occasions Fray Luis de León notes the inferiority of the woman and her need to behave accordingly: 'woman's class, in comparison to her husband's, is humble, and measure and modesty are woman's natural talents' (De León, 1992:176). Similarly, and quoting a Renaissance book of good conduct by William Whately, Stallybrass notes that woman's obedience is necessary, her duties being: 'first to acknowledge her inferiority: the next to carry her selfe as inferior' (Stallybrass, 1986:126).

Wigley also relates the origins of these arguments by mentioning the long-held ideas that the woman 'on the outside' is considered implicitly sexually mobile and more dangerously feminine; and that women lack internal self control, internal boundaries and therefore 'must be controlled by being bounded. Marriage, understood as the domestication of a wild animal, is instituted to effect this control. As the mechanism of, rather than simply the scene for, this control, the house is involved in the production of the gender division it appears to secure' (Wigley, 1992:335 – 336).

The idea of the 'closed mouth' is represented in the constant insistence on the need for women to be silent. Again, De León justifies this on the basis of nature: 'nature did not make the good and honest woman either for the study of the sciences or for difficult businesses but for one and only one simple and domestic business, thus it limited her understanding and, consequently her words and reasoning' (De León, 1992:176). Stallybrass provides the reasons behind this statement: 'Silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to women's enclosure within the house' (Stallybrass, 1986:127).

'The locked house' is justified by De León as a divine mandate, saying that

'the end for which God ordered the woman and gave her as company to the husband was so that she kept his house' (De León, 1992:180). He also justifies woman's need to stay enclosed based on her nature, saying that God provided women with little strength so that they stayed in their corner (ibid.:181). He is very specific regarding the space allowed to women, which is tremendously limited, as will be clear from the following quote: 'When telling the woman to go around her house he wants to show her the space where she should move her feet and, also the length of her steps, (which is to say, figuratively, the scope of her life) which should be restricted to her own house and neither the streets, nor the squares, nor the orchards, nor other people's homes' (ibid.:180). The requirement that a woman be present at her house at all times, in all its corners, implies that the only task allocated to her is that of surveillance of the house, meaning not only the building but all the servants and inhabitants within it. Moreover, although De León wants the surveillance task to appear as her duty, the reality is, as Wigley notes, that 'the house is literally understood as a mechanism for the domestication of (delicately minded and pathologically embodied) women' (Wigley, 1992:332). In enclosure, the woman is the one exposed to surveillance mechanisms rather than the one effecting them.

Both the honour code and the normative concept of woman relied on a generic division of space where its monument, the house, as mentioned previously, would ensure 'The Law of the Father' and thus 'the father's genealogical claims' (Wigley, 1992:336). 'The generic division of space' which separates by means of opposing terms, the house from the non-house and thus the private from the public, is at once ancestral and an ongoing phenomenon in Western culture, and its origins can be found in Hellenic culture. Hellenic culture associated the inside of the house with the quiet goddess Hestia (and therefore venerated it) and the outside entrance with the mobile God Hermes. According to Scolnicov (1994:6): 'the structural division of space into the interior and the exterior of the house carries with it social and cultural implications. Gender roles are spatially defined in relation to the inside and the outside of this house'. However, according to Wigley 'opposing male mobility in the exterior to female stasis in the interior [...] at once naturalizes and spatializes gender' (1992:334). Moreover, he claims that 'the spaces literally produce the effect of gender, transforming the mental and physical character of those

who occupy the wrong place'. Wigley's original thought consists in reversing the usual parallel between gender and architecture, proposing on the other hand that a different division of space could have produced a different gender, that is to say, that space is a product of gender as much as gender is a product of space.

THE NARRATIVES OF MARIA DE ZAYAS

Zayas who, like Wigley, also questioned the establishment, reveals, to put it metaphorically, the 'fissures' of the house and the discourses housed within it. On a number of occasions Zayas' stories illustrate the lack of security of the house, given the invasions effected on women by both outsiders and insiders. The security of the house walls is particularly questioned in the fifth and sixth stories of her second volume. In the fifth story, *La inocencia castigada* ('Innocence punished') the protagonist, Inès, enchanted by a diabolic magician, leaves her house at night, unlocking it herself, in order to keep tryst with a man who is in love with her. In the sixth story, *Amar sólo por vencer* ('To love in order to win'), a man, dressed as a woman and pretending to be a maid, manages to enter the house and eventually win the favours of the youngest daughter, who decides to escape with him, only to be later abandoned.

These two occasions are testimony to the fact that, as Wigley suggests, space itself is insufficient since 'boundaries are only established by the intersection between a walled space and a system of surveillance which monitors all the openings in the walls' (1992:338). Moreover, aware that their surveillance mechanisms have failed, the male protagonists of both stories take drastic measures: in the fifth story, the protagonist's husband and sister-in-law devise a small chimney-type structure where the protagonist, by way of punishment, is made to live standing up for ten years until she is eventually rescued. In the sixth story the father, angry at his daughter's usurpation of his honour and 'genealogical claims' (Wigley, 1992:336) constructs a wall that falls on her head and instantly kills her. Having the wall, a symbol of the house's boundaries, fall on the head of the protagonist, which is the most important element of the body, constitutes a manifestation of anger which, ironically, takes the form of the failed surveillance mechanism. The father, thus, admits his failure and 'the text seems

to suggest that such extreme implementations of the honour code may lead to the erosion of the social structure itself' (Williamson, 1991:646).

The security offered by the house walls is even more questionable when invasions of women's space are caused by some of the insiders themselves and sometimes even by very close friends or relatives. The first and last stories, placed not surprisingly in the most significant positions of a volume, are a case in point. In the first story, *La esclava de su amante* ('Her lover's slave'), the respected son of a family who lives in the same house as that of the protagonist, makes her enter his room in order to rape her. The event is described in the following terms: the protagonist, Isabel, is walking towards the room of the gentleman's sister who is a very good friend of hers, in order to get dressed for a Carnival party. She never manages to reach that room though, because as she enters the corridor, the man, waiting at the door of his own bedroom, greets her and shortly after pushes her inside. The rest is left for the imagination of the reader, although its symbolic description, I believe, makes it clear: 'He pushed me inside and locked the door with the key. I know not what happened to me since the shock deprived me of my senses in a deadly swoon' (Zayas, 1983:137). The presence of the Carnival alludes to the masking of the public space, the space in which the private and subjective have no room (Wigley, 1992:377). The lock is itself symbolic of male oppression but also of the sexual act. Moreover, the fact that the event renders her speechless, given what we now know of rape cases, is very telling in itself.

The last story, *Estragos que causa el vicio* ('The ravages of vice'), is an exaggerated version of the 'invasion by the insider' theme. In this story, a man has built a fortress-type house where he keeps all his household members locked up (and they include his wife, his wife's sister and a number of both black and white servants). When the circumstances of his love life get out of control (he is emotionally involved with both sisters) his rage makes him kill all of the household members except the protagonist, who manages to escape to tell the story. Whereas such situations are crude in other stories, in this 'house of horrors', given its magnitude, the situation is ironic. It manifests that a woman is never safe from her lovers, brothers or other relatives, not even inside the supposedly secure structure of the house. It notes, as Wigley does, that 'architecture is precisely not about the transparency it advertises' (Wigley, 1992:379) and it cer-

tainly leaves the reader with the question of whom does the house protect.

I believe economic motives dictated the enclosure of women in seventeenth century Spain. An empire that had been decaying for two centuries, it required the presence of men in a variety of wars started against neighbouring European countries. A country progressively losing its male force required women permanently enclosed in the home for the procreation and raising of the men to be employed in the needed political enterprises. However, as Zayas's stories reveal, the discursive practices of the Church and State, given the insecurity of the house (and therefore of the discourses which housed it) proved insufficient. The family was unable to reproduce the mechanisms set in place for the modern state. One wonders if the surveillance methods did not function or if they were questionable from the start.

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RESIDUAL 'HERSTORY' AS EMERGENT CULTURE

Thabazi Ntshinga

BACKGROUND

The history of African women's literature started long before they became literate. Their literature was oral, rooted in storytelling and the African folktale tradition. Because African women rarely gained access to written expression, their folk culture often went unrecorded. When they began to write creative works, they looked back to their foremothers to recreate the old stories. They drew from the orature of their African culture. They envisioned their (African) foremothers whose use of oral traditions and storytelling had passed cultural values down from generation to generation. The framework of this paper is therefore the concept of cultural continuity, and its thesis is that the passing on of cultural values, mores and history from one generation to the next takes place to a great extent in what is traditionally a woman's domain: the activity of storytelling.

Taking the example of two contemporary women novelists, Vapi and Mda, this study also explores how the literary voices of African women articulate their felt realities rather than what is prescribed for them by the male-dominated tradition. Orature and, consequently, literature are regarded by Gay (1992) as part of many women's struggle to communicate, converse, and pass on values to their own and other children, and to one another. Consequently, the use of orature as a method of education and the orality of the writing style of each author are explored. Traditional sayings and customs are often referred to in this study. It is necessary to understand the oral voicings that have preceded the works written by the two women, for these voicings are part of a cultural preparedness in the writers that is expressed in generational and cultural continuity in the works themselves.

With regard to the oral transmission of customs and values from one generation to the next, it is women who most often fulfil the role of tale-teller and instructor. Igbo sociologist, Mere (in Gay:1992) comments on this

aspect of women's role in their society and says that women are the primary and most constant agents of child socialization. Furthermore, women as agents of this education are the mainstay of oral tradition. Even a problematic study such as that of Taiwo (1985) corroborates Mere's point by stating that:

The folk tale is used in a more dramatic manner to initiate children and adolescents into their cultural heritage ... The leader of the performance may be a man or a woman. But it is often the woman who plays the part because she is not as tired after the day's work as the man.

It is ridiculous that Taiwo attributes women's role in imparting cultural values to the children, to their not being as tired as their men. I would suggest that rather than attributing women's primary role in cultural education to the fact that they have a less strenuous day than their male counterparts, Taiwo might have commented on the nature of women's defined role in family and community socialization.

Generational continuity is not specifically African, since women from all traditional societies and some modern ones have produced unwritten volumes for their children and children's children; still, there are identifiable values and traditions that flow throughout the African context. Just as the biological and social ties of mothers to their children continue in altered forms after the umbilicus has been cut and the child has been weaned, so pre-colonial ideas about women span the spaces between past and present, and bring ancient African ways to the New World. Not only have ideas from and about African women before Westernization continued for generations, but the way in which women have passed on their cultural heritage has endured. By telling the history of their peoples to the rising generations, Black women throughout Africa have kept their heritage alive.

SOME CONTEXTUAL QUALIFICATIONS

There is little research material specifically on the manner in which women produce and pass on their tales, tales which in turn get encoded in their writings. As this kind of study of African women's literature invites multifarious

comparisons, it has been necessary to set boundaries to contain the research within some framework. The first limitation is linguistic: only works written in isiXhosa (which is the researcher's first language) are considered. The second limitation is one of genre: work in only one literary form, the novel, is examined. This second limitation deserves some discussion.

Many have argued that, even more than the novel, the short story and the play are the most useful of literary genres in terms of reconstructing social values and as vehicles for social change. Moreover, the world as represented in these forms often reflects a given culture dialectically and in more direct ways than in a form such as poetry. In an African context, drama as performed art is oral in nature and emphasizes the relationship between the playwright and the audience. According to Awoonor (1975) drama is an indigenous art form. The short story has been seen by African writers and critics alike as an expansion of the African folktale, and it clearly retains its oral antecedents.

Although it is harder to make these kinds of connection with the novel, a European genre, African critics such as Julien (1992), Chimweizu (1993) and others, have suggested that the modern African novel has evolved from the African epic in terms of structure, content, and the world it creates. Moreover, Russian theorist Bakhtin (1981) has also argued that even the traditional European novel incorporates oral antecedents. For much of the literature of Africa, the debt to orature is so evident that Gay (1992) made a neologism of the two terms to convey the idea: 'oraliterature'. By this, she means to refer to written creative works which retain elements of the orature that informed them.

In particular, the works chosen for discussion here, Mda's *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana* and Vapi's *Litshona liphume* are oraliterature. They reflect the authors' aims of recreating the orality of the spoken word and the active presentation of the oral tradition within the confines of a book of fiction.

LITERARY STRATEGIES OF WOMEN ARTISTS

Evans (1983:13) notes that African women writers use specific literary strategies to communicate their concerns and warns that 'the critic who

deals with such multi-talented artists as women, must at least be conversant with the modes of the artist's expressions.' Farrer (1975) also contends that in order to build a sound theoretical foundation for the study of women in society, research designs and study objects must consider women's creativity and expressive behaviour. This paper is an attempt towards that goal, and it is to these expressive strategies that we now turn.

CHOICE OF TITLE AND THEME

Mda's title – *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana* ('fork-tailed drongo', a bee-catching bird) – is a folkloric title borrowed from a well known folktale in which the bird, intengu, saved two girls from a cannibal by constantly calling: '*Ntengu-Ntengu Macetyana kaz'abantwana babantu aba benze ntoni na?*' meaning 'Shame, shame what have these poor souls done?' In the folktale every time the drongo poses the question, a miracle happens, and the children are saved. Mda, an African woman who grew up in a culture of tale-telling, is continuing to tell her foremothers' story in the present generation. In her story, Nanziwe, a sixteen year old girl, has to leave home and get a job so as to maintain her widowed mother and little sister. Her brother, Sithembile (literally meaning 'We are hoping') leaves for Johannesburg immediately after his father's death. He never contacts his home and the family loses hope of ever getting help from him. Nanziwe therefore has to shoulder the responsibilities of an heir who could one day come back home to claim his rights.

The title may therefore be read as expressing the author's wonder and surprise at this unjust treatment of women and children. This wonder and surprise become more vivid when Mda relates how Mathabo is battered for no reason by her husband, Nanziwe's brother, Phelane, whose real name is Sithembile. She says:

Uza kuxela imini yile, Mathabo uvelaphi ngobusuku? 'Andi ... ' Bhu ngebhanguza esemandlalweni njalo. Jwi phaya ibhunguza hlasi induku. 'Vuka, uxele uvelaphi?' Bhu kwakhona ... Kowu! yabuyela kwasemfazini imdubha nje ngoku nangamanqindi, imbhula ngenduku, ithi isemagxeni ibe isemilenzeni iyithoba nje naphi na.

(You are going to tell the truth, this is the day. Mathabo, where do you come from at this hour? 'I don't...' Bam! with a big fighting stick whilst still on bed. He threw the kierie away and quickly picked up a stick. 'Get up and tell where you come from.' Bam again ... He! He got back to the wife, beating her up even with fists, thrashing her with a fighting stick from the shoulders, legs, all over.)

(Mda, 1989:76).

It should be remembered that it is Xhosa traditional practice that the eldest male child automatically becomes the heir by right of birth. He takes over the responsibilities of being head of the family – takes over, that is, both the advantages and the hardships of an heir in the African sense. These include advantages such as owning land and other property/ies, and hardships such as caring for and providing for the extended family. That is what *indlalifa* (an heir) traditionally speaking means.

It is of interest to realize that in real African traditional culture, an irresponsible son would be deposed from his position and be deprived of his rights as an heir. It is only the corruption of culture that allows 'heirs' like Sithembile to become heirs at all. There has consequently been an emergence of new and interesting terms in Xhosa women's discourse such as *lphila* derived from *ukuphila* (to live), a literal opposite of *ukufa* (to die), which is the root of the word for an heir, *indlalifa*. The term *iphila* is used by contemporary women to refer to their informally acquired status as breadwinners and therefore as the economic providers for their parents, children and siblings, while the 'rightful' heirs, just like the Prodigal son of the Bible, do nothing but wait for their fathers to die so that they can squander what 'rightfully' belongs to them.

But one issue is clear: tradition has always secured the position of males, and traditional society in contemporary times makes it even worse by securing the position of our brothers regardless of ability. By echoing the drongo, Mda perhaps hopes for a miracle to happen so as to save the harassed women and children.

Despite his wayward and irresponsible behaviour, Sithembile is not called to order by the community. In traditional Xhosa culture, a man who beats up his wife would be challenged by another man of his age to an open

fight so as to demonstrate his physical strength appropriately, instead of taking advantage of women. The challenging party would hope to teach him a lesson never again to take advantage of a woman. The challenge can be seen in the same light as the intervention of the drongo in the folktale: both correct an act of injustice to a woman. A woman-abuser would even be fined in a traditional court to pay a sheep or goat which would be slaughtered and eaten by members of the community. The offender would also be invited to join in enjoying the spoils of his fine. In this way he would be washing the wounds of his victim and as well accepting that he now has a court record. In this way the community would be intervening just like the drongo in the folktale.

Vapi uses the title *Litshona liphume* ('The sun sets and rises again') to encourage widows and orphans who might suffer any kind of victimization, to resist and wait patiently for deliverance. A title such as this contests the image of 'typical' African mothers and daughters as weak and fearful with a dead-end destiny which is brought upon them through manipulation of traditional customs by today's man. Under such titles African women writers strongly articulate the anguish of defenceless women. Vapi's character Siphokazi is an orphan, who is traditionally supposed to be adopted and cared for by her uncle, Xakekile. He however, together with his wife, instead mock the girl (Siphokazi) for being so poor and needy. Xakekile's aim is to get rid of her and therefore of the responsibility of providing for her, and at the same time earn himself some profit (lobola), by arranging a forced marriage for her. Through the character of Xakekile's wife, the author explains:

Kaloku, ntombam sinoyihlomncinci, uyise kaNomalike njengabazali bakho abakhoyo ngoku kufuneka sihlafunile ngawe xa ungasebenzi nokusebenza kuba ke besimelwe kukuba sixhapse imilomo yeyamagxa akho imali. Ke ntombi, ndize kukuxelela ukuba siza kwendis.

(So my daughter, your uncle, Nomalike's father, and I, as your parents that are still alive, have to earn something through you, especially since you are not even employed. We are supposed to be made comfortable by your earnings. So, girl, I have come to tell you that we are marrying you off).

Vapi (1994:55–6)

Such a statement can be interpreted as an expression of that 'dead-end

destiny' that awaits many unprotected female minors. The supposed protectors of orphans are overcome by greed and plan to exchange their responsibility for gain. If Siphokazi were to get married, Xakekile and his wife would be relieved of the guilty conscience of knowing that they were supposed to nurture her. Instead, they would gain a lot of *ikhazi* (cattle from lobola) especially for a girl that had been through higher levels of learning. Strangely enough, this couple had a daughter of their own, even older than Siphokazi, Nomalike. Why did they not force her to get married?

Siphokazi, however, gets tired of suffering and fights for a better life. She decides to liberate herself from poverty and works very hard on her studies. She fights fiercely to get a decent job rather than being a domestic worker. She is content in her belief, which is articulated by the title of the novel, that good will triumph. Although society makes her suffer and victimizes her by denying her the jobs she qualifies for, she will fight for deliverance. She believes strongly that after darkness comes the light, that is, the sun may set but it always rises again. Indeed, in the end she does get a decent job and creates a better lifestyle for herself.

These two writers are voicing their concern about the corrupt uses of tradition in victimizing women. For example, Nanziwe in Mda's novel never gets married to her fiancé Diliza because his corrupt brother is interested only in getting lots of money from Miya, that is Diliza, and anyone else that would be prepared to pay for an innocent girl like her. The trust that Nanziwe has for a brother she hardly knows, has a cultural base. Sithembile is her own brother and can, therefore, do no harm to her. Rather he would fight tooth and nail to protect her, according to Nanziwe's understanding of what a blood relative is (*isizalwane segazi*). After all, who in a foreign environment like Johannesburg, would be responsible for her wedding arrangements, if not her own brother, in the absence of immediate family elders?

Unfortunately, Sithembile abuses the tradition and 'auctioneers' his sister to the highest bidder, Kimundu who hails from Kampala. Nanziwe does not know Kimundu's background. She breaks her engagement to Diliza because of the lies about him spread by her brother, and she marries Kimundu, a businessman successful by foul means, who acts as security for

Sithembile's business concerns and family when he (Sithembile) is in gaol. The marriage is thus seen to be arranged by Sithembile for purely selfish security reasons. Yet when all fails, Nanziwe becomes the victim of fate and has to accept that she brought her catastrophe upon herself. Vapi's Siphokazi has to make the same act of acceptance and take the blame when she and her siblings starve. Did she not refuse to get married when a chance presented itself?

In her discussion of Afro-American literature, Audre Lorde says that:

... (this) literature is certainly part of an African tradition that deals with life as an experience to be lived. In many respects it is much like the Eastern philosophies in that we see ourselves as a part of a force, we are, for instance, to the air, to the earth. We are part of the whole life process. We live in accordance, in a kind of correspondence with the rest of the world as a whole. And therefore, living becomes an experience, rather than a problem, no matter how bad or how painful it may be. Change will rise endemically from the experience fully lived and respondent ...

(Lorde, 1983:266)

This is very much felt in African writing. Readers see in the works of authors like Mda and Vapi, that life is not a turning away from pain, error and suffering, but a process of seeing these things as part of experience and learning from them. This is a particularly African characteristic and it is evident in the best of African literature (much of which is produced by women).

Mda's Nanziwe does not turn away from her problems in despair, but fights for survival. After long suffering she gets back home, re-organizes herself and starts all over again. The same happens to Vapi's Siphokazi, whom a sexist society relegates to domestic work as cook, nanny, maid, etc., and denies entrance into security employment. Society channels her into a familiar void when the crush of modernity eradicates the avenues which partially liberated her foremothers. For instance she can no longer survive on the wild vegetables and fruit that used to sustain her foremothers (*intlolokotshane, amagaqa ombhongisa nawesiphingo*). Siphokazi perseveres because she knows she is more than what she is made out to be by those who use culture against women. This is how African women see themselves: strong, influential and capable, and not as the weaker sex.

Both titles *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana* and *Litshona liphume* express an attitude of being able to cope with pain and suffering. In Mda's *Ntengu-ntengu macetyana*, after long suffering, Nanziwe emerges a mature, experienced woman who does not give up on life. During her difficult times she keeps on hoping that a miracle will happen, just as the drongo performs a miracle to save the children from the cannibal. And, just as the children run as fast as they can when the drongo's miracle gives them a break from the cannibal, Nanziwe neither gives up in despair nor leaves everything to a miracle. She knows she has to do something to save herself; she has to be ready so that when a miracle happens she will take the right step. She learns deep lessons about life during her hard times and in her suffering, always keeps the hope of deliverance alive.

In Vapi's *Litshona liphume*, Siphokazi knows deep down in her heart that there is no unending hardship. She does not run away from her problems but fights on, believing that just as her troubles have come, so will they dwindle one day and happiness will replace them, provided she keeps on fighting and hoping for the best.

DIDACTICISM

One underlying principle of African literature which contrasts with preferences in some other cultures, concerns didacticism. Dorsey (in Evans, 1983:172) highlights the importance of didacticism and says:

From even the most trivial anecdotal jest to grand works of poetry and fiction, the Black audience demands a meaning, a message.

This principle is well-illustrated in folktales which, above and beyond their function of entertaining, also have a didactic aim. With regard to the oral transmission of customs and values from one generation to the next, it is women who most often fulfil the role of the tale-teller and instructor. Women are the primary and most constant agents of children's socialization. Furthermore, women in fulfilling the role of educators are the maintainers of the oral tradition. As a requirement of purely literary form, didacticism may not be necessary, but certainly it is quite natural, especially to women writers who in a way find it proper to take on their tradi-

tional role of educators and to voice their heritage. Both writers, Vapi and Mda, use female characters to illustrate the passing on of cultural mores and value systems to the children.

Mda articulates the important African cultural practice of showing respect to strangers in her narration of Nanziwe's reception in Queenstown. MaGaba, a domestic worker, gives Nanziwe a place to sleep although she does not really have enough space to accommodate her. Moreover, she is expecting visitors, a party of her friends, to come for a drinking spree. Though she is reluctant, she still takes Nanziwe in because it is traditional to take care of strangers. Mda articulates this tradition when she says

*Kunzima kuba kaloku (umntu) akayonkunkuma, yona
iyabuthwa iye kulahlwa!*

*(It is difficult to neglect a stranger because a person is not
like rubbish which can simple be thrown away).*

(Mda, 1989:9)

Vapi as well makes use of orature as a method of education via a female character, MaMiya. When Xakekile crookedly arranges a marriage for Siphokazi, he and his friends get a lecture on tradition from MaMiya, a family elder.

Indawo yokuqala nina baseMantanjeni, nditsho kuni Malihambe noMalingemingam, ndiyaqala ukunibona ekhapha oko ndanigqibela ngalaa mhla nabeka ihlaba edlakeni likayise kaSiphokazi. Ukuba ibiziindwendwe zakhe eziya, ngezikulo kaZwelibanzi umzi, yaye ngezisaziwa ngabafazi basekhapha Izithethi zaseMaXesibeni zemicimbi elolu hlobo ndiyazazi. Nithi kutheni zingekho nje apha phakathi kwenu?

(In the first place, you from Mantanjeni, I mean you Malihambe and Malingemingam, it's the first time that I have seen you here since the day of Siphokazi's father's funeral. If these people had come for Siphokazi, they would be here in Zwelibanzi's home, and the family women would know about their presence ... I know the family spokespeople who decide important issues of this family. What do you think is the reason for their absence?)

(Vapi, 1989:66)

Here, MaMiya is definitely fighting the corruption of tradition by those who use it for personal gain.

The underlying principle contained in Mda's novel is an important one which is also illustrated in a Xhosa proverb: *Isisu somhambi asingakanani*, literally meaning the stomach of a traveller or stranger is not big, it is easily filled up. This proverb is understood to mean that it does not take much time and energy to satisfy someone in need. The lesson being taught is that of kindness to strangers, a lesson which would be relevant in encouraging South Africans to treat tourists well so as to promote tourism in this country. The reader identifies and accepts the lesson easily since it has its foundation in a popular proverb.

Vapi's message is clear: traditional Xhosa women have recognition and a voice, no matter how minimal it might be. The lesson is that women have a role as educators and voices of the heritage. To ignore women in important family decisions is corrupting culture. This is illustrated in MaMiya's insistence that family women should have been consulted in Siphokazi's wedding arrangements if cultural norms were considered at all in this matter. By using an elderly female character, Vapi motivates the reader to accept the lesson of consulting women in important family decisions, instead of ignoring them on the pretext that culture does not require their recognition. The choice of a character of MaMiya's age is in keeping with the traditional role of grandmothers and mothers as transmitters of customs and values.

FOLKTALE IMAGES

In both language and content there are certain elements that appear to characterize the style of African women writers in general, and Xhosa women writers in particular. Their language is often formal, but filled with very graphic concrete images. Both of the writers under review tend to have favourite images, and even favourite times at which they repeat these images without negative effect. Vapi, for example, uses the same metaphor whenever she portrays liars and cheats:

Afika la marhuncu eengcuka ezambethe ufele lwegusha

(Then came these greedy wolves in sheep's skin)

(Vapi, 1984:63)

Uthi wakugqiba ukuba yingcuka, nangcuka le yaziwa nanguthathatha uzithi khatha kufele lwegusha.

(When you are the worst wolf that is known by everybody even small children, and you cover yourself in a sheep's skin.)

(ibid.:69)

Such constant reference to a wolf leaves the reader with a vivid image of the type of character Xakekile is. Vapi further says:

*Inene ubuqholo obu bengcuka uzithe wambu ngabo buseza kukujikela.
(Really one day this disguise of a wolf that you are covering yourself with, will eventually turn against you).*

(Vapi:1989:69)

In some cases the use of repetition allows the writer an opportunity to create some rather startling and impressive effects, as evidenced in Vapi's story . She says:

Ngale mini ndandiququzela ndiqueza ndixela isikhukukazi sitshiswa liqanda.

(On this day I was busy, moving about like a hen about to lay an egg).

Waququzela, equkeza exela isikhukukazi sitshiswa liqanda.

(She busied herself, moving about like a hen about to lay an egg).

(ibid.:42)

This kind of repetition leaves no doubt about the high level of energy and enthusiasm of the character being sketched.

Vapi also uses deadly weapons to create graphic images of destructive, critical, negative words. She talks of iimbokotho zamagama (ibid.:13). (Big, destructive words, ready to crush).

Again she says:

... *ekhupha iimbumbulu zamagama*

(... *emitting bullet words*).

(ibid:14)

Mda derives her favourite images from folktales. The image of the Jewish woman and her dog is the same as that of the cannibals like Nomehlwa'mancinane in folktales. She says :

... *gqi isiqukrukazi sejudakazi esisifuba singumthwalo, sirhuqa injana emqolo usitywetywe unesisu esiburhuqa phantsi.*

(Suddenly there appears a stout Jewish woman with a broad chest pulling a small dog with a flat back and a stomach so low that it touches the ground).

(Mda, 1989:4)

When MaGaba, the Jewish woman's maid hides Nanziwe in her room, to save her from the dog, the night, and above all, the employer, since she (MaGaba) does not have a right to keep a stranger on her employer's property, the resultant image is the same as that from the folktale of Intengu. In this tale, two girls lose direction and land at Nomahamle's home. They are shocked to learn from her that her mother is a cannibal. She hides them away. They are scared of the night, the dog at the doorstep and as well the mother of the home who happens to be a cannibal.

Mda alludes a lot to folktales. She says of Johannesburg, through the mouth of Nanziwe:

Aye kwaseRhawutini eliya laginya umnakwabo.

(She must go to the same Johannesburg that swallowed her brother).

(ibid.:15)

It is generally cannibals in folktales who swallow people and animals. She further says:

Akacingi ukuvuma umama nam andifuni kuya apho kukho izigebenga.

(My mother would never let me go to where there are murderers).

(ibid.:16)

Mda alludes also to the tale of the wolves who gave up the hope of getting grapes from a high grapevine and consoled themselves by saying: 'The grapes are sour anyway'. Diliza (Miya) gives up hope of reaching Sithembile in Randfontein in the same way as the wolves in the tale.

Wayeka uMiya ngelokuncama kweengcuka zigoduka.

(Miya stopped in the same way the wolves gave up the sour grapes).

(ibid.:55)

Vapi as well uses the same strategy of alluding to folktales for vivid images. In the dialogue between Siphokazi and her friend, Nokusasa, Nokusasa remarks that the local people refer to Siphokazi's parents as:

... (z)iintaka eziphuma amasi

(... birds that excrete buttermilk).

(ibid.:24)

Siphokazi's parents earn this description because they give generously to needy people who come to ask for any available edibles in their home. In the folktale of a bird that excretes buttermilk, the family that keeps the bird is saved from hunger by asking the bird to excrete milk, and the family feeds from that rich milk.

African proverbial language and the storytelling tradition are the main sources for the imagery of these writers.

The images that appear to be favoured most by both writers express traditional values and mores. The wolf metaphor used by both writers, for example, expresses the importance of honesty and reliability. In Xhosa tales the wolf is always dishonest and unreliable, it always disguises its identity so as to victimize someone or gain some benefit by foul means. The wolf's lies often turn against their author, and he is always caught out by his own tricks. If he fails to deceive others, the wolf will even lie to himself, saying for instance that whatever he did not succeed in getting was not worthwhile anyway. The lesson given through the image of the wolf is that dishonesty rebounds against its author. Constant liars cheat

only themselves because people, even children, in a community can see through their lies.

AFRICAN COSMOLOGY

Vapi employs mythology that is a study unto itself, and yet her work can be read by anyone with enjoyment and understanding. She uses mystical powerful totems like the snake, *uMajola*, a totem of the Jola clan. She explains the ritual that accompanies the birth of a child. The baby gets a ritual bath; she undergoes a purification and gets protected from evil spirits, the supernatural snake acting as liaison between ordinary people and the ancestors. The ritual of a drumming song, and especially the accompanying dance, are a celebration of African roots. MaNgwanya makes supplication to the ancestors for their pardon of offences committed against them, intentional or not.

Vapi has the ability to blend an acceptance of the supernatural and a profound rootedness in the real world at the same time. This is indicative of traditional African cosmology, or the way in which African people looked at the world. Morrison explains the belief in magic by Black people as follows:

We are very special people, very down-to-earth, even shrewd people. But within that practicality we also accept what I suppose could be called superstition and magic, which is another way of knowing things.

(Morrison, 1983:342)

To blend those two worlds together at the same time is enhancing not limiting, and that kind of knowledge has a very strong place in Vapi's work. Mda on the other hand does not reflect the African cosmology as strongly as Vapi.

CONCLUSION

Vapi and Mda's feminine sensibility runs deep. The womanliness of their stories is evidenced by references to children, family, home and the con-

cerns of the ordinary woman. The single most striking feature of these women's Xhosa novels is their home- and family-centredness. Their values, their subjects, and their principal characters are drawn from the everyday life of traditional communities, from the daily life and work of ordinary people: the business of growing up, courtship, marriage, having children and earning a living. Both novelists find images and actions to express their profound ambivalence about women's position in society. While they assert that women are to be praised for their goodness, they both show themselves to be caustic observers of the realities of women's existence.

This does not however mean that the concerns of women writers are entirely different from those of their male counterparts; rather, the manner of production and the focus of their material reveal a different aim. They speak for the formerly unvoiced members of the community – the wife, the mother, the grandmother, the widow, the young child. By attending to the unheard ones, these women writers show their caring and suggest an 'alternative mothering' process, in which they reconstruct residual herstory as emergent culture. The suggestion made here has gender-specific ramifications. The textual background of women's stories for example is the constant discourse of the community of women, advising, instructing, commenting, sympathizing and gossiping. Their voices are a community chorus. This kind of collective talk is part of oral social structure, and it surfaces strongly in women's writings. The works examined in this study not only attest to the continuation of the African cultural heritage, but also clarify how these values have been and are being passed on by women through the generations.

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GENDER ROLES AND ADVERTISING

Amanda du Preez

I am an advertisement of a version of myself – David Byrne

THE FEMME FATALE

I am feeling today like a confused Chief-Inspector Morse, or a fumbling Detective Colombo who has arrived too late at the murder scene of a beautiful young woman, known only as the mythical figure of the *femme fatale* or the deadly female. Let me introduce you to our murder victim: The *femme fatale* is the icon created by men during the *fin de siècle* (late nineteenth century) to prove women's so-called naturally devious nature. Men could flirt symbolically with the icon of the *femme fatale* without standing a chance of losing anything significant during the interaction. The *femme fatale* has become a fetish, a male projection of the fear of femininity and simultaneously the fascination with femininity.

However, all that is left of the *femme fatale* on the eve of the twenty-first century are fading traces and glimpses of her once glorious existence. The clues to her identity are well-hidden in the sheets, on the walls and in the closets of this once feared and yet adored figure. She is not resting quietly in peace; instead she continues to appear in magazines, on TV-screens and on silver screens, like a ghost, an apparition, that haunts and teases her audience. In fact, the *femme fatale* of the *fin de millennium* has staged her own death and continually restages her own death. The *femme fatale* of the late twentieth century has become a 'disappearing body', a living-dead Houdini.

In an attempt to trace the clues left by the *femme fatale*, I shall use the work of the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, analyst of contemporary culture, to throw some light on the 'disappearing body' of the *femme fatale*. Baudrillard has fleshed out the theory of the so-called disappearing body as part of his 'resuscitatorial ideology of the simulacrum' (Kroker, 1992). Central to Baudrillard's theory is the assertion that the real things

of the world have been replaced by the 'hyper-real' (Andersen, 1995:93). Culture has become little more than a 'hallucination of the real', a 'simulational' world characterized by an endless series of copies of previous forms. Meaning is lost to the extent that it is no longer possible to make a perceptible distinction between the real and the hyper-real. In Baudrillard's terms: TV is the world.

According to this ideology of the simulacrum, the moment when the *femme fatale* or any other image appears, whether in a photograph or on a screen, is also the exact moment of her disappearance or symbolic death. The moment she appears is when she becomes an empty shell – a commodity – a selling line for jeans. The *femme fatale* has attained the status of a pure sign without referent, empty, senseless, absurd; and that is exactly why she still seduces us, according to Baudrillard (1990:61–63). So although she has become 'meaningless' in the traditional sense of the word, she is still enchanting and fascinating and moreover she is still very seductive, as the *Sissy Boy Jean's* girl will show.

However, the *femme fatale* as icon no longer refers to anything symbolically. There is no dangerous creature lurking behind her smile. If she looks dangerous, it is only because she is simulating danger. She has escaped the 'terrorism of the referent' and has entered the surface play of appearances. She has become a 'look' and in this specific case she appears in the world of advertising as 'the look' of the *Sissy Boy Jean's* girl, where image has become everything.

As for fashion and appearances, what we seek these days is less beauty or attractiveness than the RIGHT LOOK (Baudrillard 1994:23). Everyone seeks their own specific look, which got nothing to do with claiming a specific existence or mode of being, but far more with performing an appearing act. So it is not: 'I exist, I am here!' Nevertheless and rather: 'I am visible, I am an image, look at me!' It seems as if everyone has become the manager of their own appearances, where appearances or the 'look' has come to mean nothing more than a special effect, with no particular significance. Yet make no mistake, power is still associated with appearances or looks.

REACTIONS TO THE ADS

At first sight, the series of *Sissy Boy Jeans* advertisements, brainchild of the Cape Town-based *Jupiter Drawing Room* advertising company (who recently won an award for them), seduce women viewers into believing they are truly liberated and invigorated. The ads convince us that this is the face of the 'New Woman' who is taking control of her destiny and sexuality. Let no man stand in her way – for if he dares he will be cut down to size literally!

However, it will be argued that this version of feminism, or rather this appropriated version of feminism, has in fact become nothing but a hard-selling line for recent advertising campaigns. 'Feminism' as portrayed in the *Sissy Boy* ads is a feminism instrumentalized and simulated by late capitalism to sell jeans. *Sissy Boy Jeans* are not alone in this; recent Edgars' jeans ads had at the same innuendos. The women we see in these ads are tough no-nonsense cyber babes with attitudes from hell. Nevertheless, it will be asked: 'Has this *femme fatale* type become a role model for young women?' If so, I would argue that feminism, any version of feminism, is in trouble. More importantly, what happens to feminism in the age of simulations?

The slogan of the *Sissy Boy Jeans* ad is: 'Wear the pants!' I will suggest that it is not the *Sissy Boy* woman who is wearing the pants, but the late-capitalistic system underpinning the advertising business. The metaphorical pants are still worn by the same system that has worn them for decades. It should not come as a surprise then to learn that the advertising business in South Africa, as elsewhere, is still male dominated. Men create this ad for women. A 'feminist' vantage point is added to lend a politically correct flavour. How liberating this type of feminism can be, remains an open question, and an issue at the focal point of this discussion.

WHAT IS ADVERTISING?

Let us kick off with some general notes on advertising. According to Diane Barthel in *Putting on appearances: Gender and advertising* (1988), advertising is about appearances, or simulations in Baudrillard's terms. If

we accept that advertising is indeed about appearances, what we see in ads is not the product as such, but rather the idea of the product. To put it metaphysically, the product appears to us as projected idea. When we buy a product, we buy into that simulated idea or into the 'look' of the product.

Furthermore our identity, in as far as the term 'identity' is still applicable, is expressed by and through the products we choose. It is almost as if the product becomes an extension of ourselves. By selecting products that suit our identities, or what we think our identities are, we try to create individual appearances. We are 'putting on appearances' so to speak. Ironically the more we try to create an individual appearance and identity, in other words the more we put on appearances, the more we start to look alike. The crowd of models in the Peter Stuyvesant ads is a good example. They all claim an individuality but they all look amazingly and boringly alike. They are all well-shaped, tanned, sexy, cool, trendy, etc. Ironically, telling the one from the other is almost impossible. So much for individuality.

The products that we buy are also linked in our minds by advertising to instant change and diversion from boredom. When we buy a product we assume or rather we hope that suddenly, nothing will be same again! We buy a specific look when we buy a certain product. When we buy Revlon makeup for instance, we secretly hope to transform ourselves into a Claudia Schiffer or a Cindy Crawford. But that hope is obviously to no avail. You may ask: 'But who wants to look like Claudia or Cindy?' The fact that makeup is a multi-billion dollar business suggests that millions of women aspire to look that way.

Stuart Ewen in *All consuming images* (1988) argues that these standards of perfection that are created by models in ads, invite the viewers to compare themselves with what they are presented with. Soon the viewer/consumer realizes that she or he cannot live up to that standard of air-brushed perfection, which only exists in the world of advertising. This failure to live up to the expectation of perfection ultimately leads to the 'loss of the self' according to Ewen. The consumer has been tricked into desiring something external to his or her own subjectivity or 'authentic sensibility'. The consumer then suffers from 'mediated desire' (Andersen, 1995:104), which is a state of yearning that is not the consumer's or sub-

ject's own, but has been instilled by an admired Other, for instance a smiling Cindy Crawford who looks like a million dollars. The consumer's own desire has been mediated and compromised, and in the end the consumer is alienated from his or her selfhood, according to Ewen.

An interesting and rather disturbing fact is that the advertising industry is still dominated by men. So men, usually white men, are the creators of ads, while women on the other hand are the users of ads and consumers of products (apparently 80% of all goods are sold to women). Obviously this relationship of men as the creators of ads and women as the consumers of ads can be depicted as a power relationship. The creators of ads, create the needs of the consumers. This is a powerful position to be in.

ADVERTISING, GENDER AND SEX

Diane Barthel (1988:6), in *Putting on appearances: Gender and advertising*, indicates that advertising is not only about 'putting on appearances' but it is also about gender, seeing that gender forms part of advertising's social structure and psychology. Advertising promises a specific gender appearance and the *Sissy Boy Jeans* ads are such a case in point. Baudrillard goes a step further. He associates a gendered quality with advertising. According to Baudrillard (1970:213) advertising as such assumes the role of the female seducer and manipulator. In other words just as a female seductress latches onto the desires of others, so advertising latches onto the desires of her consumers. Baudrillard typecasts advertising as a 'feminine' activity. The male creators of advertising seduce female consumers by means of the so-called feminine activity of advertising.

This suggests how complicated the gender relations of advertiser and reader are. According to this view, women are seduced by their own traditional gender quality, namely femininity. Advertising, as a male-dominated activity, wears the mask of femininity to latch onto and capitalize on women's desires. However, did these desires exist before the seduction of advertising took effect? Or were women's desires responsible for creating advertisements?

Advertising does recognize the weaknesses and needs of the consumer

and its strategies depend on initially catering for these needs. But the modernist and utopian concept of personal identity as an independent entity, is unveiled by advertising as a false fantasy. Advertising influences our identities just as our identities influence advertising. We are not closed-off entities but rather inter-relational and fluid structures that are influenced and influence simultaneously. A mutual mimetic relationship exists between ad and consumer and this is perhaps one of the important reasons why advertising is so successful.

By this, I am not suggesting that the advertiser creates the need for men and women to feel sexually viable for instance, just as advertisers do not create the insecurities that people have about being able to love and being loved. These are core insecurities that cut right through to the heart of self-esteem and identity. What advertisers do though, is to keep these insecurities and needs intact by capitalizing on them. Women especially, thanks to stereotyped role models, fall prey to the advertising world's suggestions and appearances.

In tackling the topic of sex and advertising we may ask: 'Does sex in advertising sell?' And the answer is: 'Sometimes'. We may also ask: 'Does sex in advertising attract attention?' And the answer is 'YES'. 'Does sex in advertising influence people?' 'YES, and vice versa.' In other words consumers also influence the sex in advertising. This is a truly mimetic relationship.

When advertisers link a product with sexuality they lock into people's deepest fears of being unloved. Advertisers offer their products and images as the ticket to love, but what they're really providing are more masks for people to hide behind. We may add that when advertisers use sex in ads they also capitalize on and reaffirm old stereotypes. It is exactly these stereotypes hiding behind the attractive face of the ad that I want to challenge. What has happened recently in South African advertising is the appropriation of feminism by a late-capitalist logic. In explaining this point of view we will start with the first example of the Sissy Boy Jeans ads.

THE SISSY BOY SERIES OF ADS

In the first ad of the campaign Sissy Boy is a demolition babe who has

taken the phallic hammer in her own hands and demolished the kitchen sink. It reminds one strongly of the lyrics of a Eurythmics song entitled *You have placed a chill in my heart*. In this song Annie Lennox sings of '... a woman just too tired to think of the dirty old dishes in the kitchen sink'. No more 'barefoot and pregnant' in front of the kitchen sink! It also reminds one of another feminist saying: 'You start by sinking into his arms and end up with your arms in his sink'. Sissy Boy does not sink into suburbia for she is free and in control. Sissy Boy is a no-nonsense girl. She has liberated herself from all repressive systems. Or could this be the inverted face of those old repressions?

The text accompanying the ad is very witty, aggressive and apparently very woman friendly. It reads as follows:

... some generally untalented and specifically psycho son of a bitch and all I can bring myself to say is up yours space cadet, life's just too damn short for this unshaven macho crap and if you ever get the urge to speak to me again just hold your breath and you might get over it because if I have anything to do with it you won't speak to me, my sister, my answering machine or my dog for the rest of your tragic life.

The fact that we see Sissy with the metaphorical phallic hammer in her hands is an attractive image due to its androgynous qualities. Here we have a female armed with a traditionally male weapon. Visually she combines both feminine and masculine gender qualities. She is dangerous and armed.

Sissy's makeup is vampire-like, with black circles around the eyes, compares favourably with the *femme fatale* visual type created during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Sissy shares visual characteristics with the mythical figure of Salomé as she was portrayed by the fin-de-siècle artists of the previous century. Salomé was interpreted by the avant garde artists of the Symbolist movement specifically as the decapitator of men. She seduces and devours. Salomé is sometimes depicted with knife or sword in her hands to demonstrate her deadliness. Sissy Boy with the hammer in her hand hints at the same message. Sissy differs from her nineteenth century sister though, because she supposedly embodies the liberation of women. While Salomé was a male fantasy created by men to

prove women's devious nature, Sissy on the other hand is created by the *fin de millenium* culture to turn woman into a liberating sign in order to sell a commodity.

But will women be liberated by an ego-phallo-carno-logo-centric contrived image or sign such as *Sissy Boy*? Is it possible that women's liberation will come through exactly the deconstruction of male fantasies of the *femme fatale* type? Is this what the *Sissy Boy Jeans* ads are doing? – namely deconstructing the old male fantasy of the *femme fatale*? If so I support them wholeheartedly, but it seems more as if they are promoting *femme fatale* behaviour as liberating. Camille Paglia, controversial virago, supports the theme of *femme fatale* behaviour because she suspects all women of being born devious and dangerous, in other words being born *femme fatales*. In *Sexual personae: Art and decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990:13) Paglia asserts:

The femme fatale is one of the most mesmerizing of sexual personae. She is not a fiction but an extrapolation of biologic realities in women that remain constant.

It will be argued here that women are neither born as victims nor are they born as vixens. If anything they are born androgynous, nothing more and nothing less, although societal and debilitating gender roles have made them less for ages. Elisabeth Badinter (1992:111) in her book *The Unopposite Sex* asserts our androgynous nature: 'We are born androgynous, then we assert our gender. And then if we are secure in our identities, we become androgynous again'. Therefore those who consider the *femme fatale* type as a liberating role model should be warned; it may just be the other side of the victim coin.

The second *Sissy Boy* ad in the series plays with the 'size issue'. The text reads:

'So he told the world HE got YOU. He told them it was HIS charm, his wit, his intellect. He told them you were lured by HIS great looks. Then he even told YOU how wonderful he was. It's called exaggeration. Like promising to move heaven and earth for you. Particularly the earth. Well, tell him there's one little thing he forgot to enlarge upon. Tell him to enlarge THIS'.

'Enlarge on this!' challenges a very seductive and scarcely-clad *Sissy Boy*. She indicates a smallish size between her thumb and forefinger. The man in the background indicates a much larger size stretching from one hand to the other. We also see a subtle small airbrushed penis on the man's pants. The airbrushed penis falls exactly between the woman's fingers. It is suggested that *Sissy Boy* has the man eating out of her hand so to speak. But could this be a Bobbit thing? Could this be Loreena sizing up her old hubby? (– with good reason, granted).

The Freudian overtones are obvious – men are lacking in size and in any case they stand to lose whatever they have. How does the old 'castration fear' and 'penis envy' theory fit into this ad? If you are one of those women who think castration leads to liberation, think again. Castration is part of a patriarchal and repressive system. I am not convinced that women are 'natural born castrators'. How free are women when they fall into a patriarchal mindset? Anyway, what does size have to do with anything? If you argue that he is less of a man because of his size, chances are that you have been in macho-chauvinist company too long.

In the third ad in this series we see how *Sissy Boy* invites the viewer to sex. She is dressed to kill, her pose is inviting and the mouth is simulating a Marilyn Monroe pout. The text affirms the message: 'He'll also need something skin-tight to slip into'. We are further informed that with every pair of jeans you buy, you will receive a free condom just in case you need it. By the looks of *Sissy* she will definitely need the condom. Chances are that you will also need a condom if you buy the jeans, at least that is the implication. Is this the face of the liberated female? Taking control of her own destiny and very importantly of her own sexuality? *Sissy Boy* seems to be in absolute control. She uses condoms and promotes safe sex by putting a cap on it.

The trade-name *Sissy Boy* itself also hints at other possible meanings. Is she a gender- bender? An androgynous cyberbabe? She is a boy but also a sissy; is she a weak boy? a cry baby? a deformed male? The name *Sissy Boy* is definitely being used ironically. But could she be a male fantasy? She is awfully slender and elongated, almost phallic in appearance. This slender androgynous form overlaps with the late nineteenth century femme fatale. The unnerving boyish-girlish figures of the late nineteenth century echo

Sissy Boy's ephebian character. Could Sissy Boy be the reincarnation of male obsessions and fears in a late twentieth-century guise?

On the other hand, she may very well be a Baudrillardian 'symbolical transsexual', 'a fatal sign-slide between the genders', who suffers from 'amnesia on the question of the sexual referent', as the meaning of the sexual referent is effaced by the cold light of the 'obscenity of communication' (Kroker 1992:79). In other words she has become indifferent about gender identity.

In the last example of the *Sissy Boy* Jeans ads under discussion we see a female hand with the sign for masculinity ♂ swinging around her little finger. The copy reads: **(man)- i-pulate**. On the righthand side we see the small dancing figure of *Sissy Boy* joyously celebrating her victory. She encourages women to manipulate, exactly that which women have been accused of for centuries. Women manipulate when they want their way, we are told from a very tender age. Men are warned against lustful women, because they seduce and play games to get what they want. And now *Sissy Boy* encourages us at the dawn of the twenty-first century, to behave in exactly the stereotypical way that feminists have denied and fought against for decades.

But what does manipulation mean in an age of appearances and images? In an age of indifference, manipulation can only be simulated. We are seduced into believing that we can still manipulate when in actual fact all that is being manipulated are signs without symbolic reference. *Sissy Boy* does not refer to a hidden symbolic temptress behind the scenes. What you see is exactly what you get: an image, a look, an appearance.

But do not be mistaken; appearances are still associated with power. The cultural construct of the *femme fatale* assigns women the power to control men, even to destroy them, by using their beauty and ability to compel men's attraction. Yet this form of power remains within the bounds of patriarchy. A woman who chooses to exercise that power is confined to the given categories of attraction and appearance. Hopefully non-patriarchal forms of womanly power would look much different.

Even if the *Sissy Boy Jeans* ads appeal to women's desire for success and

power, the commodity itself cannot satisfy these yearnings. One does not become independent, successful or powerful by wearing *Sissy Boy Jeans*, even if you believe these are the ingredients that will make you happy. Social and economic power cannot be brought within the realm of consumables; in other words it cannot be purchased. It will have to come through political, social and economic change.

The *Sissy Boy Jeans* ads create the image of the androgynous vixen in the late twentieth century. The sign-slide androgyne that appears in the *Sissy Boy* ads is witty and very intelligently presented, but she may just be the face or the look of late capitalism. The liberating moments of the masculinized female have been co-opted by late capitalistic strategies to sell a product, but it still has to be debated whether becoming masculinized is truly liberating for all women. Should we embrace the coy *Sissy Boy* type or should we be sceptical about what is really sold to us? Can capitalism wear a more attractive look than *Sissy Boy*? I doubt it. I conclude: Wear these pants but do not expect instant liberation. The femme fatale is dead, murdered – long live the image of the *femme fatale*!

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THE GOOD GIRL SYNDROME

Myrna Macher

INTRODUCTION

I begin by discussing the role of children's literature in socializing children into the norms of society. I then examine what is meant by the 'good girl syndrome'. The values and norms of certain classics, namely, *A Little Princess*, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Little Women*, will be examined, in particular the manner in which the main female character is presented. These will be compared to the recent films of the books to see if the films too reflect patriarchal values and endorse the 'good girl syndrome'. Finally the implications of these books and films for girls today will be explored.

THE ROLE OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN SOCIETY

Society exists through the communication of significant symbols. People create their social reality which is as real as the natural physical reality. In primary socialization the individual becomes a member of society through the mediation of the objective world by significant others, for example parents. Through this mediation, the world which has been created and accepted by the section of society to which the child belongs, is internalized and becomes a meaningful and social reality. In order to exist, a society must share a common view of reality, one which has been legitimized and is passed on to their children through socialization (Berger and Luckman, 1967).

Literature reflects the significant values and norms of a culture. Although the relationship of literary patterns to the larger culture is complex and not clearly understood, it is assumed that these patterns reflect, in significant and meaningful ways, the attitudes and shared experiences in society (Albrecht, 1953). Children's literature has always been invested with strong moral and social values (McClelland, 1976) as it is an important means of socializing children to accept the dominant cultural norms and values.

Children's books reflect the society and social values of their time. The simplified manner in which children's books are written make these books a magnifying glass under which one can study the attitudes of a particular society at a particular time (Egoff, 1982; Hollindale, 1988; MacLeod 1975; Nimon 1988; O'Dell 1978). As MacLeod (1975:93) states:

However little they may deal directly with social issues, they inevitably convey a good deal about prevailing social attitudes and problems. To be sure much of what they reveal is outside the conscious intention of their authors ... But social attitudes are so much part of the fabric of life in any era that it is impossible to exclude them from literary efforts.

In fact, this reflection of values will often not be noticed by the reader because the world reflected in the books so closely mirrors the reader's world. This is a very powerful force in shaping behaviour as its persuasive force is hidden. By supporting tradition and inhibiting change, literature has a great potential impact on society (Sutherland, 1985).

An example of this is gender stereotyping. Until the 1960's the prevalent gender roles were accepted in society and this acceptance was reflected in children's books. Girls who did not accept the role were depicted as tomboys and this was accepted until they were of a certain age and then they were shown conforming to society's expectations. There is the example of Jo in *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888). Jo's rebellion against society was accepted until she was an adult and then she is shown trying to conform to the traditional role of a woman. At no time was she encouraged to look for an alternative role to this traditional one. Since the 1960's this gender stereotyping has been questioned and many authors have made a conscious effort to reflect and promote new attitudes. Whereas previously the attitude of authors to gender stereotyping was one of acceptance, the new attitude is one of advocacy and will remain so until these new attitudes are generally accepted in society (Hoffman, 1984).

Children's literature is also used as a form of social control. Those in power select and publish works that affirm those values which they believe will result in a better society or maintain the status quo. Children's books are perceived as an important tool for controlling children's minds.

What children read is too important in its potential for society's good or ill to be made purely a matter of aesthetic considerations (Egoff, 1981). Children's books play an important role in maintaining the existing social structure by 'moulding future adults who will accept it' (Council on Interracial Books for Children 1976:2). Although books in themselves are not the cause of the ills in society, such as sexism, they help to condition people to accept the maintenance of these attitudes. They achieve this by encouraging children who read these books to think that this is the way things are.

Children's books reflect what different people at different times, who are members of various cultural groups and societies, think children ought to know and believe. They embody assumptions about the nature of childhood and the nature of the society with which the children must come to terms, particularly the beliefs and values that give meaning to experience. The values and assumptions contained in children's books will vary according to the cultural context in which they are written.

THE 'GOOD GIRL SYNDROME'

The 'good girl syndrome' is an amalgam of various attitudes, norms and values which society generally attributes to a good girl and tries by various means to inculcate in young girls and women. Many of these so-called 'womanly' attributes are essential if men are to retain their dominant position in a patriarchal society. They also contrast with the values regarded as manly.

The 'good girl syndrome' focuses on the values of self-sacrifice and nurturing for a woman. If she wishes to find ultimate fulfilment, it will entail suppressing her own desires, ambitions and interests in order to nurture her husband, father, brothers and ultimately children. Her highest achievement is to care for others at whatever cost it may entail for herself personally. A woman's highest reward is to be loved and to spend her life in the service of others. The superiority of the male and the social systems that enforce these attitudes are never questioned. Aggression, individuality, and ambition are regarded as the male preserve and are not encouraged in female characters.

This character is often shown as rebelling against the patriarchal social system initially, but ultimately is made to see that the path to fulfilment as a woman entails the acceptance of her role as a nurturer. She is required to suppress her own desires and ambitions and find a 'meaningful' role within the patriarchal structures. The validity of these structures is never queried.

The essence of the 'good girl syndrome' is contained in the saying: 'Behind every successful man, is a woman'. The woman's place is behind the man not beside him, that is, she is both inferior and invisible. By suppressing herself she helps her man attain success but does not share in the lime-light that the success may bring. She is happy in having helped him and does not need the glory that success will bring.

MYTH

Barthes (1972:117–142) contends that certain signs and symbols of mass culture serve a similar function to myth in primitive culture. These portrayals serve both to justify the ways of the sociocultural system to people, and to offer plausible structures for the apprehension of everyday life. Modern 'myth' naturalizes and thereby makes acceptable whatever is historical, ideological and artificial for a populace of 'myth consumers'. The power of myth rests on the interplay of structure and message. When a message is automatically implied in its metasignification, it becomes more subtle, subliminal and ultimately more effective at glossing over an intentional concept. In today's society, there are a range of texts of popular culture – television, radio, films – which are a source for maintaining ideological control and legitimacy. Institutions sustain a selective cultural tradition which conceals the ideological character of that selectivity; they present as natural a particular way of seeing the world and human nature and relationships.

The 'good girl' is presented at the deepest structural level as a mythological character, that is, she is a cultural archetype, a comprehensive representation of certain collective properties and aspirations (Barthes, 1972; Eco, 1979). The central character is tested by a variety of obstacles and overcomes them in an almost superhuman way by suppressing her natural

impulses and desires. Although the stories deal with her trials and tribulations in everyday life, at the deepest level the message of the story is the triumph of the central character who achieves happiness and fulfilment by becoming a 'good girl'.

A LITTLE PRINCESS, BEAUTY AND THE BEAST AND LITTLE WOMEN

I have chosen to discuss *A Little Princess* by Frances Hodgson Burnett published in 1905, *Beauty and the Beast* and *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott published in 1867 as all three have recently been filmed. They all have in common the presentation of the central female character who is tested and has to overcome obstacles, and ultimately triumphs and finds fulfilment either in marriage (Jo in *Little Women* and Beauty in *Beauty and the Beast*) or riches (Sara in *A Little Princess* and Beauty in *Beauty and the Beast*). What is of concern is that in the films, surface elements may have been changed to conform with a new awareness of feminism but the deeper, more influential structures have not been changed so that the message to girls today remains unchanged.

A LITTLE PRINCESS

The main character in *A Little Princess* is Sara Crewe, a motherless little English girl in India who has an abnormally close relationship with her father. He calls her 'little missus' and treats her as a junior wife rather than as a daughter. She and her father 'were the dearest friends and lovers in the world' (Hodgeson, 1994:237). When she is nine years old she is sent off to boarding school where her doting father ensures that she has every possible luxury. From the beginning she is depicted as a gentle, nurturing girl who befriends the little scullery maid called Becky, a younger motherless girl, called Lottie, and a plump, rather stupid girl called Ermengarde who is very unhappy. She is superior to all of these characters but cares for them almost like a little mother.

Sara, an extremely imaginative little girl, pretends to be a princess. Part way through the book, the owner of the school, Miss Minchin, is informed

that Sara's father who has invested his money in a friend's diamond mine has died, leaving Sara penniless. Miss Minchin, who is the antithesis of Sara, heartlessly informs the child that she will now have to start working for her living, and move into one of the attic rooms. The horrors of being penniless and friendless in the Victorian period are vividly presented. However, Sara in spite of this tries to remain a true 'princess' and uses this as an imaginative refuge from her hardships as well as to help her always to behave as a princess. 'Whatever comes', she said, 'cannot alter one thing. If I am a princess in rags and tatters, I can be a princess inside. It would be easy to be a princess if I were dressed in cloth of gold, but it is a great deal more of a triumph to be one all the time when no one knows it' (Burnett, 1994:145). She bears hardship with stoic courage. Her poverty is alleviated by Ram Das, the male Indian servant of her father's friend. They live next door to Miss Minchin's school and Ram Das observes Sara's misery. In order to give his employer, who is ill, something to distract him they take various comforts to Sara's little attic room.

Her father's friend who has been gravely ill recovers both his health and money, and tracks Sara down. Sara is rewarded for her saintly good behaviour by being once again fabulously wealthy and the centre of attention. Miss Minchin is suitably punished by losing her star pupil and having her 'crimes' made known to other parents.

The story has the format of a fairy tale in which the main character is tested through hardship and is rewarded in the end. However, unlike male characters who overcome hardship through action and initiative, the female character overcomes hardship through endurance and courage in the face of adversity. She is ultimately rewarded with riches and a strong male protector who is happy to grant her every wish.

Miss Minchin, the only woman in the book with any real power, is portrayed as heartless and mercenary. The other women in the story who were kinder and more sympathetic to Sara's dilemma do not have the influence or resources to help her.

Sara is firstly given status by her father who is very wealthy. When he dies she has no male protector and loses her status. Sara has no control over events but is presented as a victim who is ultimately 'saved' by men. Even

charity offered to her in the form of sixpence is offered by a little boy. She ultimately has her status restored through her father's friend. The men in the story are shown to largely control the power and money and Sara is validated through them.

A LITTLE PRINCESS: THE FILM

The film of *A Little Princess* was released in 1996 by Time Warner Communications. This was a very loose adaptation. The film is set in New York and the historical period has been changed to that of the First World War. Sara's ability to fantasize (one of her strongest characteristics in the book) is largely watered down in the film. Her fantasy that she is a little princess is made that of her father who says 'all little girls are princesses'. This diminishes the meaning as in the book being a princess is used by Sara as a means of controlling her behaviour and ensuring that she always behaves like a princess. The film also changes the character of the little scullery maid to that of being a coloured girl, which gives the film racial overtones. The implication is that the child is treated poorly because of her colour and of course Sara rises above this petty racism. The stories which Sara is so good at creating are also turned into Indian stories with a strong romantic overtone, which gives the film a multicultural character not present in the book. Many of these aspects are an anachronism as the attitudes are out of keeping with the period being portrayed. The father in the film is not killed but suffers from amnesia and for some unexplained reason the English Government seizes his estate leaving Sara penniless. The gentleman living next door takes pity on the father and brings him to his house where he miraculously recovers his memory and recognizes Sara. He regains his estate and Sara and the coloured scullery maid become best friends and go home to England with him.

Miss Minchin somehow loses all her money as well as the school and becomes the assistant of a chimney sweep. Sara also encourages Amelia Minchin to run away and marry the milkman, a meaningless addition to the story.

The character of Sara is also changed. In the book Sara is a fanciful, almost perfect, motherly little girl whereas in the film she is a rather forceful and

independent American girl who never hesitates to assert herself and exemplifies the self-sufficiency and self-assurance admired by Americans. The imaginative magic which sustains her through the Victorian horrors of poverty is not present in the film, nor are the horrors of Sara's virtual starvation and cold convincingly depicted. Sara remains a healthy and glowing child right through the entire period of hardship. Her relationship with her father is also changed to a normal 20th century loving relationship.

The film is now politically correct: multi-racial and multi-cultural, with the main character a female. In the film although much changed Sara is still the 'good girl' but this time the good American girl. She is politically correct, assertive and independent. Although on the surface it appears that many of the paternalistic elements of the book have been changed these changes are very superficial. The underlying structure still reflects many chauvinistic and paternalistic elements. Women are represented as victims of circumstances who need to be rescued and validated by a man. Sara is again rescued by the male servant and the man next door and of course ultimately by her father. The coloured scullery maid is likewise rescued. Miss Minchin is now shown in the service of the little chimney sweep – a male of course who orders her around autocratically. Amelia, Miss Minchin's sister, is rescued by marrying the milkman and running away with him. The school is ultimately purchased by the next door neighbour so viewers are assured that the girls are now in good male hands. Even the stories which Sara makes up all now have a romantic theme – similar to Mills and Boon – whereby love triumphs over all and the woman is saved by the man.

Miss Minchin, the only female character with any power, is ultimately defeated and demeaned.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

The story of *Beauty and the Beast* (Perrault and D'Aulnoy, 1991) is a classic fairy tale and contains elements common to many fairy stories: the mysterious lover, jealous sisters, and an enchanted castle where every wish is gratified. It is also a stereotypical love story in which a beautiful,

good young girl is sacrificed to save her father but finds love (and incidentally riches) in the end.

Fairy tales initially reflected lived experience, with a slant towards the tribulations of women, especially young women of marriageable age (Warner, 1995: xix). At the period (1756) when this story was first written by Beaumont many women were totally powerless and could be married off to strangers at a very young age. Stories of the 'Beauty and the Beast' type feature a husband to whom a young woman has been sacrificed at her father's wish (Warner, 1995:219). The story of Beauty and the Beast assumed a female audience who expected to be given away by their fathers to men who might strike them as monsters (ibid.:278). The story holds out the hope that although the bridegroom may appear to be a beast, underneath he may be a prince. At its heart is the issue of the character and purpose of marriage.

The version of *Beauty and the Beast* that I have used is that of Perrault and D'Aulnoy (1991) which is virtually identical to that of Beaumont. In the story a wealthy merchant loses all his money and is forced to go and live in the country with his six children. Beauty, the youngest daughter, 'was not only prettier than her sisters but very much nicer' (Perrault and D'Aulnoy, 1991:95). One of the merchant's ships comes in and he goes to meet it. On his way back he gets lost and he wanders into the Beast's castle where he finds food and shelter. The next day as he is about to leave he picks a rose which is all Beauty has asked him to bring back from his travels, in contrast to her sisters who have asked for jewels and clothes. This angers the Beast who tells him he must now die. The Beast allows him to return to say goodbye to his family and tells him that his life will be spared if one of his daughter's will give up her life instead. Beauty insists on going in his place. She has a dream in which she is told by a beautiful fairy: 'You have performed an act of goodness which will not go unrewarded' (Perrault and D'Aulnoy, 1991:108). She is treated kindly by the Beast and finally recognizes his worth behind his ugly appearance. She decides to accept the Beast's proposal of marriage as 'he is good and that makes up for all the rest' (Perrault and D'Aulnoy, 1991:109). She finds that he is an enchanted prince and is thus rewarded for her selflessness.

Beauty and the Beast is a tale of transformation in which the male lover

(the beast) is transformed from a mysterious and threatening figure who controls Beauty's fate, to her lover. There are many versions of Beauty and the Beast. In some versions the transformation in the beast is the result of Beauty's influence and goodness whilst in others Beauty recognizes the prince in the guise of a beast. If Beauty recognizes his goodness then she is the one who in fact changes, whereas if he is transformed by her beauty and goodness then she has influenced and redeemed him (Warner, 1995:290–94). Beauty's attraction to the beast before his transformation forms the basis of much pornography featuring rape and sadism (Warner, 1995:311) as this attraction implies that women love the bestial and violent side of man. This myth is still popular today.

Even though the story no longer reflects many women's experiences it has retained its power over the female imagination. *Beauty and the Beast*, like other fairy tales such as *Cinderella*, seems to have a timeless power to speak to women. This can be seen from the number of versions both in print and in other media that have been published. Hearne (1989:90) states that entries in the standard Library of Congress computerized holdings printout at that time were more than seven feet long. The myth of the central transformation of a powerful and bestial man lies at the heart of many romances. In this myth, woman has power through her submissiveness to the male authority figures (her father and the beast who becomes her husband). He is tamed by her beauty, kindness and self-sacrifice – qualities highly valued and endorsed in a patriarchal society. Whereas when this story was originally developed it had its roots in reality, today it is rooted and made acceptable to modern woman through appealing to a more deeply hidden reality. Woman, especially young girls, are still frequently socialized to believe that happiness will be found in the arms of a strong and dominating man.

BEAUTY AND THE BEAST: THE FILM

The film *Beauty and the Beast* was released by Walt Disney Productions in 1991 and is based on the fairy story of the same name. This film is more insidious than the film of *A Little Princess* as it purports to depict a liberated woman, namely Belle, and makes fun of male stereotypes in the form of Gaston.

Belle at the beginning of the film sings a song about the provincialness of the town and that she wants someone to rescue her. From the beginning it follows the same standard formula: she wants a male to free her, 'to take her away so she can submit to his desires, which she believes to be hers' (Zipes, 1994:46). Belle is exquisitely beautiful, feisty, and is not afraid to speak her mind. She also enjoys reading, which makes her an anomaly in the provincial village where she lives. However the books she reads are all romances and fairy tales, a fact which reflects a patronizing view of women. They may be fond of books but they are not intellectual. (Of course one must also take into account that the film is aimed at children who would be able to identify this type of book.) Belle's father is shorter than she is and presented as an unworldly and helpless inventor. He is almost childlike and Belle nurtures and mothers him.

Gaston, the male hero of the bumbling villagers, wishes to marry Belle. He epitomizes all the macho male stereotypes – he is stupid, handsome, athletic, a good hunter, and pursued by three blonde Barbie doll-type women who all swoon at the sight of him. His disrespect for books (and learning) is shown by his putting his dirty boots on Belle's book. In case one misses the point that he is a chauvinist pig he falls into a pond and reappears with a pig on his head. He proposes to Belle who of course refuses him.

Similarly to the book, the father is lost and his life threatened by the beast. Belle is called on to sacrifice herself for her father and for the salvation of the Beast. The Beast is the counterpart to the evil violent male Gaston. Although uncivilized he has an erotic power. Everything about him is big and powerful – his voice thunders, his anger roars and he fills the large area of his kingdom. His obvious power and strength are emphasized by Belle's delicate structure, her wisp of a waist, et cetera. He is made lovable rather than ferocious. In fact Gaston is the brutish male who gets his just deserts.

The Beast is tamed by the love and example of Belle. He makes the ultimate sacrifice of letting Belle go to see her father who is pining for her although this will probably mean his death. Belle is once more caught up in Gaston's scheming when he tries to persuade her to marry him by having her father put in a lunatic asylum. Finally Gaston leads the town people

in a war against the Beast in order to win Belle. The Beast wins, saving Belle from Gaston's clutches. He turns back into the prince and they marry. This is another cliché – men going to war because of a woman.

This film addresses stereotypes on a superficial level but not at the deeper level. Belle is a nurturer and her sacrifice is rewarded by marriage to the prince. She moves from the provincial village to the castle in the conventionally upwardly mobile style of the twentieth century fairy tale. The Beast is a more subtle stereotype – powerful and rich – who wins Beauty in the end after having been tamed by her.

Beauty and the Beast in the Disney film production maintains the mythic-ideological notion of patriarchal rule. As a commodity produced for global consumption, not only in the form of a film but in the form of consumable spinoffs, it induces us to think according to the traditional scripts of submission and domination. This script may appear to subvert the traditional fairy tale but at the deepest level it is about the taming of women (Zipes, 1994:47). The film above all has domesticated feminism itself (Warner, 1995:312).

LITTLE WOMEN

The book *Little Women* was written by Louisa May Alcott in 1886. It is an interesting book. It is the story of four girls, Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, whose father is away at war. Their mother, called Marmee, is a strong woman who encourages the girls to be independent and use their talents. The two older girls at the respective ages of 16 and 15 are already earning their living as a governess and companion respectively. Although this is partially necessary due to their reduced circumstances, the father having lost their money some time back, earning their own living and being independent is advocated by their mother. Jo has a talent for writing and is encouraged to nurture and use her talent.

The book is episodic in character but has a unifying theme in the quest of each sister to overcome her 'burden' in life and become a 'little woman'. Meg's besetting sin is vanity and she must learn to devote herself to her family and not wish for fine things. Jo is an adventurous and high-spirited

girl whose burden is her boyish nature and violent temper. In the course of the book she learns to control her temper, to reconcile herself to being a woman and learn the domesticity, poise and grace of a 'little woman'. Beth's faults are minimal and she is in fact almost the perfect 'little woman' from the beginning. She is shy and learns partly to overcome this fault by the time she dies. Amy the youngest is spoiled and indulged and vain about her looks. She must overcome her thoughtlessness and learn to help others (MacDonald, 1983:13).

The book is a story of the four girls growing up in a close loving family, and ends when they marry (except for Beth, who dies). The book endorses strong domestic values and the primacy of home and family are emphasized. Louisa Alcott was not a feminist. She thought that women were the primary domestic influence, the peacemakers who held families together and kept men on the right path (Avery, 1994:171). The girls are constantly encouraged to be 'little women' – to be patient, loving, and self-sacrificing. This is epitomized by gentle Beth who is always thinking of others and finds happiness not in adventurous games or going beyond the home but in mothering her dolls and cats. Her self-sacrifice and generosity towards the Hummels, an indigent German family, results in her catching scarlet fever which ultimately leads to her death. But she accepts her fate patiently and bravely, thinking of others to the end. Beth is too saintly to be real but is used as an inspiration and lesson to the other characters who are more demanding and selfish. She exemplifies the myth of the 'good girl syndrome'

Amy, the youngest, states that she will marry a wealthy man as she realizes that this is her only hope of escaping poverty. Although at the end she purports to marry Laurie, the wealthy boy next door, for love, their romance is never totally convincing. Amy also embodies many of the characteristics of the 'ideal woman'. She is a lady (unlike Jo) and always behaves and looks like one. She is caring and thoughtful and at times almost as saintly as Beth. When slighted by some wealthier girls at a fair she repays their insults by kindness and generosity. She is rewarded for this with a trip to Europe. Jo's self-reliance results in her losing her chance to go to Europe whereas Amy is given the opportunity in her place. Jo, when mourning the fact that Amy is to go to Europe instead of her, is told by her mother: 'I'm afraid it is partly your own fault, dear. When Aunt

spoke to me the other day, she regretted your blunt manners and too independent spirit' (Alcott 1983:290).

Meg too is very womanly and finds her ultimate fulfilment in marriage. Jo who is initially against marriage 'discovers how much improved her sister Meg was, how well she could talk, how much she knew about good womanly impulses, thoughts and feelings, how happy she was in husband and children ...' (Alcott, 1983:406).

Jo is the most interesting character. She is initially a tomboy and does not conform. She is a talented writer and an independent spirit who says what she thinks, which frequently gets her into trouble. She is great friends with Laurie, the boy next door, but refuses to marry him. Although she gives a number of reasons for refusing him, none of them are really convincing as their relationship is so vibrant and intimate that one expects them to marry. Jo however, cannot marry him as the good girl myth requires a woman to marry someone who can be her mentor and Laurie and Jo are equals. She refuses him and ultimately marries Friedrich Bhaer – a German professor. Bhaer's intellectual superiority is clearly established as well as his moral fibre.

In spite of the independence of the girls, the social structures which dictate their dependence are never seriously challenged. The emphasis throughout the book is on the importance of marriage if a woman is to achieve ultimate fulfilment. As Meg says to Jo, 'Marriage is needed to bring out the tender womanly half of your nature' (Alcott, 1983:406). The lack of real options for women is also never questioned. In spite of being talented, Jo needs a man to help her fulfil herself as a woman and her writing talents are put aside to run a boy's school where Friedrich Bhaer can look after their minds and spiritual well-being while Jo looks after their physical well-being. It reflects the reality of girls having to give up their dreams for 'worthy but subduing marriage' (Auerbach, 1983:466). It is interesting that Louisa May Alcott was forced by commercial pressures to end the book conventionally with the girls getting married (Auerbach, 1983:467).

LITTLE WOMEN: THE FILM

The film of *Little Women* was made by Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. in

1994. The film does address many of the stereotypes of women especially through the character of Marmee. Whereas in the book Marmee's character is used to teach the girls how to be 'little women', in the film she questions assumptions and encourages them to explore alternatives. For example when the girls question Marmee as to why Laurie is able to 'do as he likes and no-one thinks the less of him', Marmee replies: 'For one practical reason: Laurie is a man – he can vote and hold property and pursue any profession he chooses so he is not so easily demeaned'.

She also tells Meg who has dressed up at Sally Gardner's coming out party that: 'If you feel your value lies in being merely decorative, I fear that someday you might find yourself believing that's all you really are.'

She tells Jo when Jo is feeling depressed after Amy leaves for Europe, 'You have so many extraordinary gifts. How can you expect to lead an ordinary life? Go and embrace your liberty and find a good use for your talent'.

The extraordinary bond between the four sisters is also beautifully depicted, showing that women can give each other strength and support. However when Amy asks Jo if she is upset about her marrying Laurie, she says: 'Jo you must tell me the truth as a sister which is a relation stronger than marriage'. This overstatement is not corroborated through the action of the film.

However, on a deeper level the film still endorses marriage as the ultimate aim for women. Amy, who at the beginning of the film states that she will never marry a poor man ends up by marrying Laurie. Her interpretation of the social reality that this is ultimately the only way that a woman can escape poverty, is endorsed at the deepest level. Laurie is after all the prize catch. Although Jo's independence is emphasized – her writing, and her leaving home to earn her keep are positive elements – these are counterbalanced by choosing the beautiful actress Winona Ryder to play plain Jo. It makes nonsense of her statement that she cannot marry Laurie because he needs someone beautiful and fashionable as a wife.

Laurie marries Amy with whom he has a protective relationship, as exemplified when he takes her to Aunt March to escape the scarlet fever. Jo

marries someone who can guide her, namely Professor Bhaer. His disapproval of her writing of romances and horror stories spurs her on to do something better and realize her true potential in writing the story of the March girls. Although his dominant role is weaker in the film than in the book, his superiority is clearly established in his disapproval of her first novel, in his richer book-learning, and his encouragement of Jo to express her opinion, for example when discussing women's voting rights. Although Jo's cleverness is indicated by the fact that she loves to read and writes stories this is undermined as it is always novels and romances.

The need for women to marry and have a protector is implicitly accepted in the film. No one ever questions the society and norms that offers no help to someone helpless, such as Mrs Hummel.

CONCLUSION

The books which were written in previous centuries reflect attitudes and values that were common for those times. However, these books have been almost continuously in print since their first publication and are still read by many girls today. It is also a matter of concern that the films, which were all made in the last five years, still reflect and endorse chauvinist and paternalistic attitudes at a deeper level. In analysing these films it is important to understand the workings of mainstream popular culture. All these films were made in America by major studios. In the early 1980's a backlash against women's rights occurred in America and continued for the rest of the decade. Women's entries into higher paying jobs stalled, the number of women in appointed and political positions declined, the status of low-income women plunged drastically, child support from divorced husbands went down by 25 percent, the number of women seeking refuge in domestic shelters rose 100 percent and since the 70's, reported rapes virtually doubled and sex-related murders rose by 160 percent (D'Acci, 1994:154-155). Looking at the situation in South Africa, where child abuse, wife battering and rape seem to have become a national pastime, there can be no question of the seriousness of the problem here.

Media, particularly popular mass cultural media such as films and television

programs, need to critique structurally inequitable social and economic positions and not reinforce them by presenting them as an unalterable fact of life. This is essential if we are to empower young women to take their rightful place in life as equal partners with men. It is perhaps unfair to criticize these films for not achieving something that they did not set out to do. They are not feminist texts and did not set out to present a feminist position. However, they are texts presented for the mass consumption of young and impressionable children and will play a role in forming the attitudes and expectations of the world. They reflect and support many of the attitudes and values that sustain a patriarchal society. Woman's issues, such as male domination and control, are domesticated even though they are the result of social institutions. The rightness of these institutions is not brought into question. In fact the social structures and woman's inferior position in them are constantly reinforced through the subtext (D'Acci, 1994:142–167). The necessity for a woman to be validated by a male is endorsed in all three films, either through marriage (*Little Women*, *Beauty and the Beast*) or having a male as a protector (*A Little Princess*). Marriage or love providing the ultimate fulfilment for a woman is also part of the subtext. Even in the relatively feminist movie of *Little Women*, Jo is never allowed seriously to consider alternatives. She needs to be domesticated, to give up her writing and become a wife and school teacher. The films also endorse a male perception of the importance of looks – all the female stars are beautiful, even Jo who in the book is plain, is portrayed by Winona Ryder, one of the most attractive box office stars at present.

Although the women in the films are all either interested in reading (Jo and Beauty) or creating stories (Sara and Jo) this talent is belittled in terms of the books they read or stories they write. They read romances and create romantic and sentimental stories. Women are obviously not allowed to be intellectual – another stereotype reinforced by these films.

As women we need to be concerned about these films and what they are saying to our daughters and sons. They are giving them a message about how the world is – what attitudes, aims and ambitions, and values they should have. They are saying to girls it is alright to be independent so long as you remember that you need to be appealing to men so you can be fulfilled through love and marriage. Marmee tells Meg in the film that looks aren't important, but the images contradict this – even a supposedly plain

character such as Jo in *Little Women* has to be played by a 'drop-dead gorgeous' star. The women are told that they should have a career but the film shows clearly that their real career will be marriage and nurturing and caring for. Finally the real message they convey is that power is in men's hands and the only way you can really win is to play their game – tame a rich and powerful man or marry money.

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