

AFRICAN WOMEN AS MORAL AGENTS: THE MORAL IMPLICATIONS
OF THE STATUS AND ROLE OF WOMEN IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

by

LIBUSENG SOPHY LEBAKA-KETSHABILE

submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree
of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

THEOLOGICAL ETHICS

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF M B G MOTLHABI

NOVEMBER 1999

ABSTRACT

Traditional ethical views have tended to define moral agency from the patriarchal perspective. Seen and defined from this perspective, it has been maintained that women are not transmitters or teachers of good morals, let alone makers of sound moral judgments. This biased stance on women and moral agency is not only prevalent in Western traditional ethical approaches. It is also found in the thinking and practice of contemporary African society.

Contrary to traditional ethical views on moral agency, both Western and African, this work argues that African women are good moral agents. They have always demonstrated moral responsibility through participation in the overall life of their society. To ensure maximum participation of all African women in society, the dissertation suggests that a process of conscientization for a liberative culture should become a priority for African society.



170.8996397 LEBA



0001761439

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1	INTRODUCTION	page 1
1.1	Statement of the problem	
1.2	Definition of concepts	
1.3	Focus and limitations	
1.4	The significance of the study	
1.5	Method	
1.6	Overview of chapters	
1.7	Conclusion	
CHAPTER 2	THEORIES OF MORALITY	page 20
2.1	Introduction	
2.2	Transmitting morality	
2.3	Deontological, teleological, metaphysical moral approaches	
2.4	Morality versus moralizing	
2.5	Female moral theories	
2.6	Summary	
CHAPTER 3	WESTERN AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON WOMEN	page 39
3.1	Western philosophical thought and women	
3.2	Pastristic Christian thought and women	
3.3	African traditional thought and women	
3.4	General	
3.5	Contradictions and limitations	
3.6	Conclusion	
CHAPTER 4	REALITIES OF <u>AFRICAN WOMEN</u>: THREE WORLDS UNDER REVIEW	page 58
4.1	The first world	
4.2	The second world	
4.3	The third world	
4.4	Conclusion	
CHAPTER 5	AFRICAN WOMEN, CULTURE, POLITICS AND ECONOMY	page 84
5.1	What is culture	
5.1.1	The negative impact of culture on women	
5.1.2	Culture of domination	
5.2	Women and politics	
5.3	Women and the economy	
5.4	Summary	
CHAPTER 6	TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY	page 113
6.1	Socialization that empowers	
6.2	Seeking alternative ways for socialization	
6.3	Developing strategies for change	
6.3.1	Conscientization	
6.3.2	Self-sufficiency	
6.3.3	Creating culture of respect	
6.4	Conclusion	
CHAPTER 7	CONCLUSIONS	page 137
BIBLIOGRAPHY		page 143

PREFACE

This study was motivated by the life experiences I share with other women in the broad African community. These experiences inspired me to inquire further into African women's moral responsibility as agents of change in their respective communities. The study revealed that African women's existence is riddled with ambiguities, ambiguities which exist as a result of the way African women are socialized. The dissertation has attempted to prove that in spite of the constraints of culture and socialization African women were able to rise above the limitations set for them by their patriarchal society. The essence of this dissertation is the articulation of their moral agency in the society that allots them an inferior position.

I am indebted to the late Professor Leonard Hulley, who was my first supervisor as well as a colleague in the ministry. I was only beginning to embark on this project when Professor Hulley's untimely death deprived me of his valued guidance and spiritual fellowship. He was a humble man who was never too busy to talk and to help. Professor Hulley was also an exceptional senior minister with whom I worked closely in several Methodist Connexional committees and at the Limpopo Synod of 1997. He is greatly missed.

I also wish to express my gratitude to Professor Mokgethi Motlhabi who took over supervision of most of the dissertation after Professor Hulley's death. He has worked diligently and meticulously with me in this project. I highly appreciate his assistance and counsel.

I further salute those women whom this study is mostly about, women in general, and also those women and men whose work - mostly in the form of books - illuminated my thoughts. Lastly, but not least, I wish to express my warm gratitude to my husband, Kenaleone F. Ketshabile, and three children, Tsholofetso, Tshegofatso and Tumelo for their company and various forms of support during the period while this work was in progress.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The traditional ethical view on moral agency is that women are not capable of being transmitters or teachers of good morals as men are said to be. Allison M. Jaggar (1991:80) points out that several male ethicists denied the fact that "women were capable of being full moral agents". This claim was originally made by Aristotle and "elaborated and defined by modern theorists such as Rousseau, Kant, and Hegel" (Jaggar 1991:80). For these theorists the "virtues of which women were capable were of a lesser kind than the virtues proper to men" (Jaggar 1991:80). The prescribed feminine virtues were those of "silence, obedience and faithfulness" (Jaggar 1991:80). The above prescribed feminine virtues serve to promote women's docility.

The other argument that is cited as a reason why women are not good moral agents is that they (women) are not good thinkers. They are said to be easily overwhelmed by emotions which prevent them from thinking thoroughly and intelligently on issues discussed. This weakness in reasoning is believed to be the reason why they have "more sympathy for the unfortunate than men" (Manning 1992:33). It is therefore believed by some traditional theorists that what is ethically normal or right for women is not so for men.

The question that this study, especially chapter two, will attempt to answer is whether these traditional male ethical

theorists, like Aristotle, Hegel and Kant, to mention but a few, believe that women's natural knowledge, regardless of their socialization, culture and experiences, is different from that of men; and whether they are unable to think and reason the same way as men?

Against these obviously conservative views, this study argues that all people, regardless of race, ethnic group or gender have the same natural intellectual faculties. However, it is in the process of growing in one's community, culture and society that this natural knowledge becomes influenced by the environment, socialization, and experiences. This is where differences in processing and articulation of thoughts come in. Given these influences that make people do things differently, this study will argue that there is no superior or inferior way of thinking.

In the book Women's Ways of Knowing (1986:4-10), Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule acknowledge the fact that the traditional argument about the thinking or reasoning capacity between males and females is based on what the architects of formal education have put forward as the reason why women and men cannot study the same disciplines. It is believed that men have a mental capacity which is able to consider the abstract and the impersonal and this, according to the theory cited above, makes them good thinkers. Women, on the other hand, are said to have a mental process which is capable to deal with the personal and the interpersonal and because of this, they are labeled emotional. These dichotomies reflect nothing but masculine values and interests.

Other dichotomies elaborated by Rita Manning (1992:15) are: "mind versus body, reason versus emotion, culture versus nature, subject versus object, objectivity versus subjectivity, the abstract and general versus the concrete and particular, and public versus private". The present study argues that these dichotomies are not divinely given but they are socially constructed to serve and to justify the status quo. "These same dichotomies can also be seen in moral philosophy, . . . : fact versus value and theoretical ethics versus applied ethics" (Manning 1992:15). What this means is that women are associated with that which is believed to be inferior: the body, emotions and nature while men are associated with that which is believed to be superior: the mind, the reason and culture (Manning 1992:15).

Historically, through socialization, men have been denied the power to experience the category that is seen as predominantly female. The reason is that if they do, they will be displaying a weakness associated with women. In the same way women were denied and discouraged to learn and to experience the category that is ascribed to maleness. This arises from the belief that it will destroy their emotional capacity (Belenky 1986:7). This is the reason why women who are not meek and mild, who are well established and excel in what they do, are said to be "like men" or that they do things "as well as men do".

Many people who make these comments earnestly feel that they are doing women a favour or putting them on par with men. Sometimes those who receive these comments become very much delighted to

be given standards above those they are traditionally assigned, and are made honorary men. Of course, this is an insult that women have to guard against. These two comments actually degrade women further. They convey the message that a woman who delights in such compliments is neither here (a woman) nor there (a man). A woman who takes delight in these types of comments does not actually get credit for what she does as a woman but as a man-like-woman, which means as nothing or nobody. Later in chapter 4 I will show how comments such as "men-like" affect the way women sometimes treat each other.

Amidst the arguments against women's moral agency, the fact remains that women, educated or not, have been the cornerstones of morality in their communities and in their homes. It is also true that just as we have male delinquents, we have female delinquents as well. Just as male delinquents do not represent men in general, so also does the same form of reasoning have to be applied when dealing with female delinquents. I am saying this because in patriarchal societies and cultures, including our Churches, one delinquent woman is taken to represent all women. Characters like those of Eve (Genesis 3), Jezebel (1 Kings 21), Delilah (Judges 16) in the Hebrew scriptures, for instance, seem to have come to represent all Christian women in our Churches. Women are refused leadership positions because, like Eve, they are perceived as the devil's entrance to men. Like Delilah¹ they are cunning and dangerous. In traditional

¹ Early Church Fathers like Chrysostom, Augustine, and Reformers like Luther and others, viewed women in a negative way. They looked at women with negative characters in the Bible and on them they built the theory that degrades all women. Throughout the history of the Church this theory has impacted upon other cultures with which Christianity came into contact.

African society this is also the standard by which women are judged. One evil woman, one adulterer, one gossip, represents all women. But David the adulterer (2 Sam 11), King Saul (1 Sam 18:10-16), who plotted the death of David and Judas Iscariot (14:10-11), who sold Jesus, do not represent men in general but themselves as individuals. The question here is, why is there a double standard of judgement on what women and men do and how they behave? Why do women carry the sins of the world while men seem to carry their individual sins?

This study will argue that women, as well as men, in their unique way have been and still are equally agents of good morals. On the basis of this tenet the study holds that there should be one standard of moral judgement for both men and women. Because of the different ways in which men and women have been socialized there are bound to be differences in what they believe in, and how they articulate and address issues. The different ways in which people do things as men and women, Black and White, adult and children, the North and the South, do not necessarily mean that some are superior and others inferior. In the same way, no way of thinking is inferior or superior to another. The way in which women and men know and express their thoughts might be different but should be seen as complementary and none of them as either inferior or superior.

1.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

The primary concepts which will be defined here and are regularly used throughout this work are "morality", "good", "right", "moral agent" and "socialization". Morality, which is the focus of this study, has to do with what is acceptable, good

and worth living for in one's personal life and in the community where one is part of the whole. Every society has, over the course of history wrestled with issues that have to do with values that are regarded as morally good. What the community believes to be good and right eventually becomes part of that particular community's culture and becomes integrated into its members' daily lives. What is good is determined by a person's actions and the outcomes of these actions.

Paul Nelson (1987:40) describes morality as a

prerequisite to any form of social organization: It is a condition of the existence . . . of any human community that certain expectations of behaviour on the part of its members should be pretty regularly fulfilled: that some duties . . . should be performed, some obligations acknowledged, some rules observed. This morality is a "public convenience" without which those aspects of social existence we value most highly would be impossible.

For Nelson morality is that which when adhered to makes co-existence possible. He further maintains that morality regulates behaviour by setting the rules of what ought or ought not to be done. Annette C. Baier (1994:94) defines morality as "a law within" that needs to be expressed or lived.

Decisions undertaken by a moral person will take into consideration the rules and traditions of the society that one is part of. This is what Baier regards as "a law within". "A law

within" does not in anyway undermine the individual's rational capabilities. Therefore, morality has to do with what is good in terms of "a law within" and the individual's rational capabilities. The concept "good" here refers to "that at which all things aim" (Lehmann 1963:167), that is, the ideal that the individuals in a society aspire to achieve within the perimeters set by the society. It is believed that a "good" person will make decisions that would produce "good" results not only for her- or himself but for her or his community as well. Goodness has to do with that which is done right and in turn produces favourable results. According to Karl Menger (1974:14) what is "good" is "that which is worthy of love or that which one ought to love".

What is "good" is therefore what is right. Lehmann (1963:189) asserts that "every man [sic] knows that there is a 'right' which he [sic] is to do and a 'wrong' which he [sic] is to avoid". Lehmann further asserts that "the right is that which commands action with the force of duty". For Lehmann the force of duty indicates the rightness of the action and the rightness of the action "expresses a respect for humanity as an end in itself and never merely as a means".

The process of teaching morality, that is, what is right and what is wrong begins with socialization. Socialization is a process through which children are introduced to the culture and traditions of their family and their social group or ethnic group. As Ronald Johnstone (1997:40) puts it, socialization is a process by which a group trains and educates its children. The socialization of boys and girls is usually intended to produce

morally good members of society. Girls are socialized to fit into what is seen as their territory, to be good homemakers and caretakers of the family while boys are socialized to be home providers and defenders of members of their families. In this way the community tries to produce and maintain an orderly community.

The carrier or an agent of good morals is expected to be good in character and conduct. He or she is a person who, though taking care of his or her own needs, shaping his or her own life, is also interested in taking care of the needs of those around him or her and shaping their characters as well. In my view, therefore, a moral agent is a non-conceited, caring, loving and giving person. He or she lives his or her life as an example to others and for the world to follow. He or she is not necessarily a perfect human being but an honest being to self and to others. Quoted by Paul Nelson (1987:118), Hauerwas defines [moral] agency as our "ability to be able to interpret and understand our dependency and through understanding integrate our dependency into a more determinate character". This determinate character is not bound by sex, religion or race.

It is also important to know where moral agents obtain their moral standards and why our moral principles differ as people. William W. Shaw maintains that there are several things that influence us to accept some moral principles over and above others. He identifies the following areas as sources of our moral learning: "our early upbringing, the behaviour of those around us, the explicit and implicit standards of our culture, our own experiences, and our critical reflections on those

experiences" (Shaw 1996:6&7). Shaw's ideas will be fully expanded in the second chapter.

Even though morality is understood as the right and wrong of human actions in daily life, what is right or wrong might differ from one cultural group to another and from one religious group to another. For example, in African culture it is disrespectful to call elderly people by their first names or to refer to someone's mother or father as "your mother" or "your father", while in some European and North American cultures examples mentioned above might not be considered disrespectful. It is wrong for Christians to cut off the hand of a person caught stealing while in some Islamic groups the practice is accepted as normal.

Also morality has to do with personal and communal justice in all spheres of life. In a society where there are diverse understandings of what is right or wrong there is a degree of tolerance, openness to criticism and willingness to learn from others. The aim of morality or ethics is to create a society free from evil or a society with minimal evil and pain. It also aims at creating harmony in the community because it binds people together in their practice of one culture, same rules and related actions.

1.3 FOCUS AND LIMITATIONS

This study will focus on African women.² My interest in African women is triggered by the fact that I am one of them. Secondly, I have lived, worked with and led them as a pastor for several years. Thirdly, I am fascinated by the ambiguity of African women's world. I have discovered that there is no cut and dry analysis of African women's experience in life. This presents an ethical challenge which has to be faced; an analysis of African women's ethical context with a view to offer some insights which will highlight their role as moral agents is of critical importance.

As in all other patriarchal societies African women have not escaped the brand of discrimination based on their gender. Although they are pillars of their homes and communities, they do not receive public recognition or appreciation for what they do. In South Africa during the political struggle women were in the forefront of the struggle together with men. Many women were left in the country to raise children when their husbands went into exile, were imprisoned or killed. But now after the struggle, when the pain of the freedom fighters is related, when prisoners tell their stories, when exiles come with a lot of experience and educational achievements to help the country, when those killed by police agents and those hanged by the former government are named, women's names do not seem to make

² The term African women is used here inclusively. It refers to all black women of African descent. I am aware that it is unrealistic for one to try to speak or write about women who belong to nine major ethnic groups in South Africa. But I really believe that there are experiences African women share in common. This is what I intend to do in this study. To write about those experiences African women share in common especially as far as moral agency is concerned.

it to the headlines. Those widows, childless mothers (whose children died in the struggle) are not given the attention that men receive. This is not amazing, because in a patriarchal society a woman's life is worth nothing or very little compared to that of a man. Very much against this thinking or the perception of many about women, African women have come to realize the unquestionable worth of their existence.

This study will endeavor to cover some aspects of moral agency that are obvious and can be traced in African women's lives. Although African women might have different cultural experiences, there is, however, a common trend that brings them together, be they educated or not, traditional or modern,³ rich or poor and so on.

Many authors on African women's status and experience have accurately reported that African women's status is regarded as inferior and that they are the poorest of the poor, the most illiterate and powerless group in all communities. But there is also another side to this story and this is what Mercy Amba Oduyoye is trying to illustrate when she says that

It is dangerous to wave the flag of innocent docility over all Africa's women. Western women, unaware of the mythic fore Sisters that inhabit the African woman's subconscious, have not been sensitive enough in their bid to globalize the oppression of women. In their zeal to speak for women from the Third World, they

³ By "modern" I mean those women who are influenced by new ideas that are characteristics of the modern world.

have often focused on cultural manifestations they have not sufficiently understood and they have thereby alienated the very people they set out to include (Oduyoye 1995:86).

It is indeed not true that all African women were or are "docile doves"⁴. Oduyoye's statement refutes the claim that all African women are perceived by outsiders as oppressed. She sees this as over generalization. Oduyoye's statement does not in any way deny the fact that there is oppression in women's lives in Africa but this is not all women's experience. The truth of the matter is that although all seem to be powerless in the face of the world, some have tremendous power within their world. They have power to lead, to heal, to support, to stand for their rights and to dominate other women at times, which is unfortunate.

One of the limitations of this study is that there is not much that has been written on African women's moral agency. This means that the study will have to depend on the limited resources that are available, including my own observations and experience as a woman. This work will try to analyse critically the historical, theological and socio-cultural materials that exist on the subject which (material) will be able to give us resources to work with and to determine African women's contribution in their communities.

To achieve this goal, the study will be confined to library

⁴ Terminology used by Mercy Amba Oduyoye in *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy* (1995:86).

research and will also draw from the writer's experience in working with women groups at the grassroots and national levels.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

There is no written work that I have come across that deals directly with the participation of African women in the formulation of ethical theories and practice in their communities. This study seeks to show that African women have been involved, along with African men, in fashioning the moral outlook and practice that they believe to be the best for the good of their communities. Ethical theories might not have been written down on paper but are imbedded in the lives of their communities. In this regard Nelson (1987:52) is correct to concede that

Since persons find themselves placed in a variety of roles, the story of one's life is embedded in the stories of those communities of which one is a part. Those communities have histories, and their stories are stretched out in time. Thus, each of us is the bearer of a tradition that may weigh heavily or lightly on our shoulders.

Chapters 4 and 5 serve as practical examples of contributions that African women have made in their societies, which are in themselves moral agency. These women are found across the spectrum. They are illiterate, literate, poor, rich, powerful, weak and so on. Their moral agency is found in their actions. It is important that women are affirmed for the good contributions they make. It is also important that they know their weaknesses

in order to work on them.

Most philosophical analyses tend to portray women as victims. This study will show that African women can be victims, victors and victimizers at the same time. The analysis, I believe, will work as an empowerment tool to those women who have looked at themselves as victims and failures to realize that there is another bright side in their lives which is not distant but within themselves. They need only confidence and the "know how" to reach it. This study will, it is hoped, help build women's confidence. It will also attempt to change the mentality of those women who participate in other women's oppression consciously and unconsciously.

Although women have been regarded as children by their husbands and men in general, as the weaker sex by their religions, and as non- or slow-thinkers by the academic world, no one can deny the power and the strength they have in raising their children, making sure that they are fed, shaping their children's moral values and managing their individual households. They are the backbones of their Churches and communities. They are also the pillars on which African economies stand. Does this sound as if African women are overall victims?

Generally the African women's world view is discounted and suppressed. African women, like women in other patriarchal societies, are denied the opportunity to grow beyond the expectations of their "masters". This study advocates and encourages African women to set their goals high, to broaden their horizon and to allow themselves to grow in all directions.

People whose world has already been mapped out for them are not able to grow or to influence others around them to a large extent. For African women to continue to be part of the needed social changes in their communities, they have to take it upon themselves to be active partners in the moral shaping of the future of Africa.

1.5 METHOD

A significant portion of this work is researched from the library, with few examples from the writer's personal experiences in workshops and with friends and community.

The method of approach is historical, analytical, critical and ethically evaluative. It is historical because it will examine what has been written about women over the course of history in the Western world and how this has generally influenced our perception of women in Africa. It will also look at African women's involvement in their communities over the years. This material will be critically analysed to show how women have either been marginalised or have explicitly shown themselves as moral agents. It will also be ethically evaluated in the sense that it will ethically judge and criticize the attitudes of men toward women.

1.6 OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter two, on "*What is morality?*" will define the term morality from different standpoints. It will also debate the issue of what morality is and what it is not from the perspective of women, contemporary men and traditional ethical thinkers. The chapter will also look at women's moral agency

vis-a-vis the traditional or conservative ethical standpoints on moral agency.

Chapter three on "*Moral philosophy and women's lives*" will focus on three different philosophical thoughts, namely, Western, Christian patristic and African thoughts. The views of these traditions will be examined and contrasted with the realities that women experience in daily life.

Two philosophers of Western thought, namely, Aristotle and Rousseau will be examined. Tertullian and Chrysostom will be examined as those representing patristic Christian thought. These four men have been chosen because of their beliefs and theories that are anti-women. Aristotle and Rousseau are more interesting because of the new trend of thought they developed about women as compared to their forerunners, that is Socrates and Plato. African philosophical thought will be examined from the perspective of its oral tradition and practice.

Chapter four, on "*The realities of African women: three worlds under review*", will focus on the ambiguities of the African woman's world. It will look at the way women are disadvantaged as compared to men. It will examine the claim that

From birth an African woman is regarded as a simple, humble creature who is to marry away from home. She is a symbol of child rearing and the material world. Her male counterpart is honored and respected as one to inherit the father's land. Because of assigned roles for males and females certain privileges are allotted

only to the male (Njoku 1980:17).

How far is this statement true? Are the ideas explicated in the statement the "given" truth or culturally constructed? In other words is it women's nature that determines their inferiority or is it culture? This chapter will look at women's realities and examine whether they verify the ideas in the statement. The chapter will also look at females' interaction with the world, culture, realities around them and among themselves. It will look at whether women's lives and their interaction with each other are dictated by their experiences in a patriarchal society. This will be reviewed under "*The first world*".

"*The second world*" of women is a world full of revenge. This is where a woman wields power over others. She oppresses because she was once oppressed. She becomes the oppressed oppressor. We often see this "oppressed oppressor's" state of behaviour in some mothers-in-law and those women who have made it against the odds to positions of power and recognition. In most cases these women make sure that other women attain their achievements with difficulty as they themselves did. This is tit-for-tat philosophy. It is a philosophy that is rife in women's worlds.

The "*third world*" is the world that is full of enthusiasm and self expression. It is the world in which women are expressing their worth and defending their rights. It is the world where the majority of women are taking their rightful place in society. A place that they have been denied for a long time.

This is the world where women deal earnestly with the

contradictions embedded in their lives. Barbara Rogers (1980:20) explains these contradictions in women's lives in this way:

Woman's image riddled with contradictions, guardians of the race, but wholly subjects of male authority; preserver of civilization, religion and culture, yet considered the intellectual inferior of men; the primary socializer of her children, but given no more real responsibility and dignity than a child herself.

Chapter five on "*African women, culture, politics and economy*" will focus on the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial political and economic realities of women. It will briefly look at the dual political systems and the agriculture-orientated economy of pre-colonial Africa and see how women were involved in them. It will also examine the involvement of women in the single political systems of colonial and post-colonial periods and the wage dependent economy of these periods. The interest of this chapter is to trace the ethical involvement of women in both the economy and the politics of their countries or their communities.

The chapter will also focus on culture and how it influences men and women's lives. It will examine the role played and the one presently being played by culture in shaping women's moral experience and lives. In this chapter, therefore, African culture, which is intertwined with African religion will be closely reviewed.

Chapter six on "*Towards an inclusive community*" will propose a

new way of socializing children, both girls and boys, in such a way that they become the best of who they can be. This chapter will propose a new way of socialization. As Chazan and Soltis (see ch. 2) argue, every human being should be allowed to own the process of moralization so that she or he can grow to a point where she or he make her or his own moral decisions. This chapter will look at the possibility of transforming the patriarchal culture.

Chapter seven on "Conclusions" will bring the dissertation to a close by providing a brief summary and conclusions of the preceding discussion. It will also attempt to conclude the entire work by bringing to the fore the way African women see their moral agency which is part and parcel of their moral responsibility.

1.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to describe the problem to be examined in this study. It has also explained the significance of the study and provided an outline of the entire dissertation. In addition, it has attempted to define the concepts that will be used regularly throughout this study. The entire work, as outlined in this chapter, will attempt to bring to the fore the moral agency of African women by articulating their involvement in various aspects of their societies. The chapter also explains the method to be followed in the study, as well as limitations to be expected and the general procedure to be adopted in the various chapters.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF MORALITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

When we make a claim that African women are moral agents, we make an affirmative statement which seems to be obvious. But against the backdrop of some African traditional and cultural practices that demean the role of women in both home and society, this affirmation is critical. Using the term 'affirmation' is not simply to applaud the role that women have in African society. This affirmation seeks to go beyond this narrow definition to mean also that it is an unquestionable fact that African women are indeed moral agents. By this we mean that they are at the heart of the formation of the moral character in children and in this way do, in fact, have a positive influence in society.

It is not enough, nevertheless, to make simply this affirmation. If there is agreement that women are moral agents, which they are, and if we realize their critical moral agency, then there is another challenge for both women and men. In the light of the apparent deterioration of the moral fabric of our society the challenge is for us to reinforce our moral agency in our society. This requires two things. First, it means that women must come to realize their role in maintaining and enhancing the moral values of society. But this cannot come without self-critical evaluation. Women should engage in self-introspection. They have to deal with how they treat one another and assess how this impacts on their status in society. This examination must

be carried on in the light of the three worlds to be defined in chapter three.

The second challenge is to earnestly critique those elements of African culture and religious traditions (African and Christianity) which demean African women or which marginalize their role as moral agents, thus consciously and unconsciously contributing to the collapse of the moral fabric of African society. If African communities are to move from strength to strength, the moral agency of African women has to be taken seriously. An earnest self-criticism of African culture and tradition should come as a "matter of must" and as a necessary process. We should not do it because we are pressured by developments in other parts of the world. At the same time, having said this, we cannot ignore the influence of the outside world. The moral collapse of our society can to a certain extent be attributed to those outside influences, such as western culture and its economic developments. So we cannot claim absolute immunity from outside influences. However, we should also not quickly see new innovations as intrusions of western influence.

It needs to be clarified also that when we claim that African women are moral agents we do not intend to imply that African men are not. What this claim means however, is that, contrary to traditional perceptions, which have tended to see women as weak moral agents or none at all, women are agents of morality on the same pedestal as men. Women are equally transmitters of moral values that are intrinsic and critical to the fibre of human society, and in this case to African communities and the society

at large.

Before we demonstrate how and in what ways African women are moral agents, we need to define how morality is transmitted in society.

2.2 TRANSMITTING MORALITY

Morality, as defined in chapter 1, has to do with values and standards we have set for ourselves, families, and the society at large. In all these institutions there are "do's" and "don'ts" which serve as a guide to a good moral life.

The "do's" serve as rules that govern the conduct in a given community. All members constituting that particular community are expected to abide by the rules. Violations of the rules lead to disapproval of one's conduct by other members of the community.

Generally, human communities transmit norms of good conduct orally from generation to generation. The transmission is to a large extent done by the parents.¹ In communal societies extended family members and the community as a whole play a significant role in transmitting moral conduct to younger members of the community and in maintaining the same standard for all other members. This process of socialization primarily serves to maintain the fabric of social relations and thus ensuring the survival of that society.

¹ Here the word parents is used in a broader sense to include members of the extended family. For example, grandparents, uncles, aunts and so forth.

The process of transmitting moral norms to younger members of the community by adults does not only take place through instruction. It also happens through the interaction of parents or adults with their children. On this point Karl Menger (1974:4) correctly concludes that morality begins at an early age. He maintains that when children listen to adults speaking about good or evil actions, behaviour, language and so on, they are actually engaged in a learning process of differentiating between good and bad moral behaviour. He further asserts that this process' "principal objective is to guide the child's actual decisions toward that which they call good and away from that which they call evil" (Menger 1974:4). For Karl Menger punishments and rewards, promises and suggestions are all processes of instilling moral values in children. If a child misbehaves she or he knows that she or he will be punished. Equally, the child knows that if she or he does good, she or he is sure of being rewarded.

William H. Shaw (1996:6-7) agrees with Karl Menger (1974:4) that people learn moral conduct in their early upbringing. He also points out that the behaviour of those around children, the standards of culture, our experiences and our critical reflection further the moral education of children. Shaw continues to say that there are two ways of looking at morality. He calls the first one, a narrow definition of morality and the second one he calls a broader definition of morality. Morality in a narrow sense refers to "principles that do or should regulate people's conduct and relations with others" and morality in a broader sense goes beyond the "principles of conduct that we embrace but also [includes] the values, ideals,

and aspirations that shape our lives (Shaw 1996:13). The second definition reflects what kind of a person one is or wants to be, and what one's involvement in both the physical and the spiritual² worlds should be.

2.3 DEONTOLOGICAL, TELEOLOGICAL AND METAPHYSICAL MORAL APPROACHES

The first definition of morality that William Shaw (1996:7) proposes here, that is, morality in a narrow sense, has to do with norms and rules. This is the deontological approach to morality. Baier (1994:276) describes deontology as "a string of commands" that one has to obey. Deontological approach to morality has to do with laws, norms and rules that are to be followed in order for the members of the community to co-exist peacefully. The second definition that looks at morality from a broader perspective is two dimensional. The first dimension has to do with outcomes or consequences of an act. This is referred to as the teleological approach. Donagan (1977:228) describes this approach "as a means to specific ends; . . . in which various specific ends are related, through a rational plan of life, to the comprehensive end of a happy human life".

The second dimension has to do with reason and is referred to as the metaphysical approach. The metaphysical or philosophical approach goes beyond the teleological/consequential approach. The metaphysical approach is more concerned about reasoning and

² In Africa the physical and the spiritual worlds are not totally separate though not exactly the same. What one does in the physical world impacts on what that person will be in the spiritual world. If a person is a good moral agent in the physical world he or she will undoubtedly continue to be so in the spiritual world in a more effective and superior level to those still in the physical world.

analysing the action one wants to take and making an informed choice than depending on a rule or outcomes. The metaphysical approach to morality asserts that it is not enough to have principles, norms and rules. It is not enough to know the consequences of an action. This approach maintains that principles, norms and rules should also be weighed and analyzed so that it can be determined whether they are worthwhile and will produce the intended results. The rules and principles that are worth our while are those that are sensitive, fair and just to human nature (Shaw 1996:13). For example, there is a Judeo-Christian norm that demands obedience from children to their parents. Is this a good norm? What is its shortcomings? To mention but one shortcoming that is obvious here, it is: what if the parent is abusive? This rule has loopholes and therefore needs to be qualified so that the child is expected to obey the parent if the parent acts in the best interest of both of them. The metaphysical approach to ethics recommends this scrutiny of all rules and principles before they are applied.

2.4 MORALITY VERSUS MORALIZING

Berry I. Chazan and Jonas F. Soltis make an interesting distinction between morality and moralizing. For them moralizing "refers to the offering of judgements about specific principles, values, and behaviors deemed as 'immoral' or 'moral' in a particular society" (Chazan & Soltis 1973:2). Moralizing, according to Chazan and Soltis, means educating and enforcing the rules that keep the community intact. Moralizing, therefore, has as its inherent role to "preserve" the tradition and to pass it on from generation to generation without necessarily reflecting on its strengths and weaknesses in a given culture.

In more general terms, and as a rule more than an exception, women see themselves as teachers whose role is primarily to make sure that their children abide or adhere to the rules and norms of society. Beyond this point it is uncommon for African women, more especially the grass roots African women to question the assumptions of the socialization process and its expectations. In this way African women can simply become the guardians of the social and cultural status quos.

From the perspective of this study, therefore, moralizing is not always a positive thing. There are contexts where it might frustrate the dynamic nature of human cultures confining them to a static mode of existence. It is clear that Chazan and Soltis do not necessarily condemn moralizing but what they emphasize is that if moralizing is the only form of moral education in a given society, then that particular community might not develop as it should.

Morality, then, would involve going beyond the preservation of what is traditionally regarded as "good" and beyond the internalization of these societal "values". Morality should go on to a stage where we think for ourselves in critical and general terms and achieve a kind of autonomy as moral agents (Chazan & Soltis 1973:22). This should be done within the categories of moral goodness defined by the boundaries of what is defined as moral.

Inspite of what we can term a negative side of moralizing, it is only fair to agree with Chazan and Soltis' conclusions that moralizing is important to social life. Through it society is

able to ensure and "evaluate adherence to accepted principles, of preventing too dangerous deviation from accepted principles, and of enabling periodic modifications of accepted principles" (Chazan & Soltis 1973:3). As the two authors indicate, moralizing aids in providing guidelines that protect a society from "moral anarchy or moral totalitarianism" (Chazan & Soltis 1973:3).

This basic necessity for moralizing however, becomes inadequate and dangerous when it precludes possibilities for new innovations. As a natural process of dynamic movement and self-critique of cultures, the moralizing ethic must be willing to heed the voice of those who are negatively affected by what is regarded as "good" by society. This is not to say that all new innovations are good and just as not all cultural or traditional mores are good. What it means however, is that communities must allow individuals within them to bring in new and helpful insights that will help enhance the fabric and growth of the society.

Morality, understood in the framework of moral philosophy, then, posits a challenge that requires us not simply to dismiss moralizing but rather to engage moralizing and morality in a dialogical relationship. The "basic assumption, terminology, and conceptual apparatus" (Chazan & Soltis 1973:5) of what is termed "moral" must be challenged and/or clarified. This is what involves morality. In other words morality involves critical thinking concerning what society regards as the norms and values of a moral life. The challenge here is that the moral life which is intrinsic and critical to societal cohesion should also be

accompanied by the critical thinking of individual members of society (cf Chazan & Soltis 1973:5). This is a necessary balance.

The balance between morality, which involves the individual, and the society insures that morality is not just a matter of social engagement, where persons are simply required to accept, live and transmit social codes (Chazan & Soltis 1973:8). Morality should entail the individual's critical reflection on the social codes and bring in constructive innovations that allow the growth of the individual and society. Frankena clarifies the importance of the interaction between society and the individual further. He argues that morality is

a social enterprise, not just a discovery or invention of the individual for his own guidance. Like one's language, state, or church, it exists before the individual, who is inducted into it and becomes more or less of a participant in it, and it goes on existing after him [sic]. Moreover, it is not social merely in the sense of being a system governing the relations of one individual to others; such a system might still be entirely the individual's own construction, as some parts of one's code of action with respect to others. . . . It is an instrument of society as a whole for the guidance of individuals and smaller groups (Frankena 1973:24).

Having articulated the social aspect of morality, Frankena does not stress the social aspect at the expense of its relation to

the individual. It has to be borne in mind that society is made up of individuals. These individuals who influence social moral codes are not mere tools that will in turn be subordinated by the same moral codes they have helped create. They are not totally subjected to a point where they cease to be rational beings. It might be that at other occasions, through socialization and the internalization of social codes, individuals cease to be rational, that is, they stop to reflect on the meaning and consequences of the codes for themselves and society.

However, morality, at least as it has developed in the western world, also has a more individualistic or protestant aspect. . . . morality fosters or even calls for the use of reason and for a kind of autonomy on the part of the individual, asking him [sic], when mature and normal, to make his [sic] own decisions, though possibly with someone's advice, and even stimulating him [sic] to think out principles or goals in the light of which he [sic] is to make his [sic] decisions. Morality is a social institution of life, but it is one which promotes rational self-guidance or self-determination in its members (Frankena 1973:25-26).

According to Chazan and Soltis, what this means is that one of the basic assumptions of moral philosophy is that morality is not a one-sided phenomenon which only has to do with the compulsory and fixed behaviour within a given society. Whilst moral values or behaviour are integral to the axis of morality,

morality does not only consist of them. To see morality in such a narrow sense refuses to acknowledge the voluntary role of the individual in carrying out those norms and behaviours. More explicitly Chazan and Soltis state that

It is clear that societies do develop moral codes, and that such codes are often dominant in the determination of an individual's behavior. However, these historical and sociological conclusions should not hide the fact that the ultimate sense of the moral sphere is of an aspect of human life in which the mature individual, whatever society and social tradition he may be rooted in, freely chooses a code of norms and behaviors. That is "morality" and "moral", philosophically speaking, are not simply rooted in adherence to imposed social norms (Chazan & Soltis 1973:8).

Having heard from Shaw, Menger, Chazan and Soltis, who actually agree in their approaches to morality, the big question that needs to be addressed is: how will one know that one's moral thinking and actions are correct? How will one know that one's principles are right? According to these four authors, one will know that one's principles are good if they are in accord with the will of nature, which Shaw sees as sensitivity to human nature. Menger and Shaw assert that sensitivity and wishes that one has for one's needs in life in general should be the same sensitivity that one applies when thinking about other people's lives and nature as a whole. In this regard one should at least be confident that one's moral principles are properly focused.

In Christian circles this takes the form of the rule about treating others the way one would like to be treated (Luke 6:31).

Indeed, some situations that nature presents to us are the opposite of what we term good.

Everywhere in nature we see that the strong are victorious, nature wants the supremacy and the thriving of the powerful and the annihilation and disappearance of the weak. Up to a certain point, it is clear what code for human behaviour corresponds to this view. But one might as well say just as well: sympathy with the weak is a feeling that nature has implanted in man [sic] (Menger 1974:8).

The second point is that satisfactory moral theory is one that acts on reason and advocates for what is just. The reasoning should be consistent. The example that Shaw (1996:62) brings forth here is that of supremacy of race and gender. He maintains that if one believes his or her race or gender to be superior, one should use the same reasoning to arrive at the conclusion that all races and sexes are superior, even those that one regards as the "other".³ This is because there is no way that one can experience the "other", but one can understand the "other"

³In this case the word "other" is used to describe that which is different from others. In patriarchal societies what is different from the norm is the "other" and therefore inferior. Feminists use this terminology to illustrate how the patriarchal society regards women. The belief is that the "other" cannot think, direct and shape its destiny. It therefore needs those regarded as superior to do that for it. The argument above is that the "other" can only be understood by letting it describe itself otherwise it will remain a mystery.

by letting the "other" define itself. This, for Shaw, will consist of what he terms consistency in reasoning, and according to Menger, justice and fairness. "We ought to act so as to promote impartially the interests of everyone alike, except when individuals deserve particular responses as a result of their own past behavior" (Shaw 1996:62).

A good theory will also encourage all people to strive for perfection and fulfillment. This is what the authors, Shaw, Menger, Chazan and Soltis, maintain as going beyond normative or moralizing theories to a point where one is able to analyze for oneself what is good, perfect and fulfilling action. This is what many religions of the world encourage their adherents to do, "strive for perfection".

2.5 FEMALE MORAL THEORIES

Women seem to adopt the existing ethical patterns of thinking, that is deontological, teleological and the metaphysical approaches to morality, but they also point out these theories' limitations especially in the way they have been applied. The agenda of feminist⁴ theory in general is to focus on women's experiences as a primary source. Margaret A. Farley, Virginia Held, Rita Manning, among many other scholars, agree, however, that feminist scholarship in all disciplines, including moral inquiry, is in its infancy.

⁴ Unfortunately, "feminism" or "feminist" is a very much contested term because of different individual perspectives. I am not going to avoid this terminology. I am going to use it here to represent a "position, a belief, a perspective, a movement, that is opposed to discrimination on the basis of gender" (Curran, Farley and McCormick, S. J. 1996:5)

For Virginia Held (1995:153) feminists see morality "as a matter of practice and art as well as knowledge". Practice in her opinion entails the knowledge of what we ought to do and how to carry the agenda through. She believes that morality involves action, feeling, thinking and observation. The reason why women have involved themselves in moral inquiry is their endeavor to try to integrate knowledge or theory with the real life that will be admired by both men and women.

For Rita Manning (1995:4) women's involvement in philosophy, and in other disciplines, is to bring forth the fact that "women are the moral equals of men, that oppression of women is wrong", and that the departmentalization and hierarchical orders of life are not given but are socially constructed.

Margaret A. Farley asserts that

. . . feminist theory traces its origins to women's growing awareness of the disparity between received traditional interpretations of their identity and function and their own experience of themselves and their lives. Hence, major tasks undertaken by feminist scholars include the critique of sources of sexism (religious, social, political, economic); retrieval of women's history and pro-women myths; reconstruction of theories of human persona and the human community (Curran, Farley, McCormick, S. J. 1996:6).

Feminists are also aware of the diversity of women's "moral

experience".⁵ There is need to give attention to the diverse history and culture of women. Theories that acknowledge this reality will withstand philosophical scrutiny. There is need for balance in our ethical theories. The balance will emerge if theorists take all moral experiences into consideration.

Virginia Held (1995:155) describes "moral experience" as the process that

. . . includes the sort of judgment we arrive at independently of moral theory. It includes the sort of choices we make about how to act, arrived at independently of general moral judgments to which we think we are committed. Sometimes we already have moral theories or general judgments recommending how we ought to act, and we act in accordance with them and judge that we acted rightly. Or, if we fail to act in accordance with them, we judge that we acted wrongly, out of weakness of will perhaps, but we maintain our belief in the theory or judgment. At other times, we choose the act because that particular act seems right to us regardless of any moral theory or abstract generality.

The components of moral experience are listening, feeling,

⁵ Experience is cited by feminists as the entry point to all their disciplines or scholarship. This term is used in a narrow sense by many women, meaning *my experience*, in *my context* and with those people who are *like me or my community*. But here I use experience in a broader sense. Moral experience is the kind of experience that does not advocate for self-interests or selfish gains. Moral experience involves feelings, listening, thinking, action and being connected to self and to others. This type of experience avoids parochial thinking and action.

thinking, being connected with self and others. All these components of moral experience give information or form a basis for moral judgment or action. For instance, listening as part of moral experience is as important a part of experience as feeling and thinking, and being true to one's feelings is as important as being true to the feelings of others. All these, that is feelings, listening and thinking, as part of experience are very important components of action to be taken. Experience in a narrow sense lacks deeper thinking. It tends to support people's moral judgments because they happen to belong to the same race, ethnicity, gender, profession, organization and so on.

From three starting points in ethical decision making that Carol Robb (1994:14) articulates - which are (a) problem posing, (b) working towards the ideal life, (c) reflecting on concrete historical experiences - women have been consistent in making the concrete situations their entry point in doing ethics or making ethical decisions. For example, when they discuss "violence against women", women will always state the realities, that is, the what, how and why of the realities. Based on these, then, the solution will be thought of. It is when one knows the sources of her problem and how it affects her that one will know what it is that ought to be done. This is in itself an empowerment because it allows one to analyze one's problem and make informed choices. Robb (1994:15) asserts that

In this procedure, there is a commonality or at least a basis for commonality with those who articulate ethical reflection from other oppressed groups. For until the dominant ideology of a social structure can

be exposed as manufactured instead of natural, the terms of an ethical problem will tend to reflect assumptions which support a dominant ideology. For this reason an act of defining a problem is a political act; it is an exercise of power to have accepted one's terms of a "problem".

For our moral experience to be able to put moral theories to the test there should be coherence between reason and the norms that we are familiar with or the norms that we are required to use. This means that the norms we decide to use must pass the philosophical test. Virginia Held (1995:156) asserts that ethicists should not have cut and dry moral theories but that moral theories should be adjusted in the light of moral experience "as well as of particular judgments and actions in the light of theory".

Moral scholars, both male and female, do agree that moral norms are very important for moral decisions. Female scholars take this point a little bit further by arguing that moral theories must be flexible enough to accommodate people's moral experience and that moral experience can also test the authenticity of moral theories. I agree with Virginia Held when she says that theories should be developed within a given situation and context. This does not negate the existence of universal moral experience, norms and theories.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has considered teleological and deontological moral theories as well as the distinction between morality and

moralizing. In dealing with these theories, we have tried to show how they often have either positive or negative influences on the way people think and live their lives.

By contrasting the processes of moralizing with morality we demonstrated how the former is restrictive to the growth of individuals, particularly African women and their constructive contribution to the growth of their communities. We have argued that inherently moralizing theories perpetuate the acceptance of cultural norms that keep women as victims of their cultural systems and thereby inhibit their growth as autonomous individuals. We have also argued that these theories limit women's potential and ability to live their lives in full in their communities. They retard women's growth while they encourage and support men in their quest to excell. We concluded that these theories need to be critically looked at for the good of society.

In viewing theories of morality, we have shown that unlike moralizing, morality allows for a critique of cultural norms. In this way individuals have the opportunity to reflect on and proactively criticize the norms and codes of their society. In the context of the dialectic between the individual's experience and autonomous reasoning, women are able to participate fully in their own growth and to help in the life of society.

We have also articulated women's moral theories and their attempt to free women from the bondage of some classical theories. These theories encourage women to name themselves and their experiences and to express their feelings. They help women

to honour their inward experiences and encourage dialogue between the social and the personal worlds.

This chapter has tried to make a case for women, particularly African women, to question the assumptions of moralizing and its expectations and socializing processes. As a result of this new hermeneutic of dealing with their cultural reality, women would be choosing a morality through which they would begin to think and participate as autonomous moral agents within society. The primary goal of this hermeneutic is for women to grow and seek to create a liberative society.

Women must urge that when morality is transmitted or taught to young generations of girls and boys, an effort must be made to empower them to be able to make informed moral decisions that do not degrade them or others. They should not just repeat the "do's" and "don'ts" of morality without evaluating them.

CHAPTER 3

WESTERN AND AFRICAN TRADITIONAL VIEWS ON WOMEN

This chapter will examine some aspects of classical moral philosophy and how it has influenced the lives of women and subsequently their place in society. It will also articulate the voices of women moral philosophers themselves. Further it will look at the types of culture from which classical and African traditional philosophies have their origins. In this exercise the voices of women moral philosophers themselves will be articulated.

3.1 WESTERN PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT AND WOMEN

The origins of Western thought, which was the domain of men, relegated women to a subordinate position relative to that of men. To illustrate this argument we cite two Western classical thinkers - Aristotle and Rousseau. These classical Western thinkers associated women with darkness. They described them as "that which lacked form; with vagueness, indeterminacy, [and] irregularity" (Coole 1993:13). In his Politics Aristotle asserted that men should rule over their households. He went on to say that man's "rule over his wife is like that of a magistrate in a free state, over his children it is like that of a king" (Mahowald 1978:67). For Aristotle, men (and not women) were naturally qualified to lead. He was of the opinion that women could only be allowed to lead under unnatural circumstances; even then, older women were preferred to lead under these unnatural circumstances (Mahowald 1978:67).

Like other Western philosophers, Aristotle believed that a

woman's primary task is to be a mother. He referred to a woman's uterus as an incubator "for concocting and nourishing the embryo" (Balme 1972:133). In the act of reproduction a man was seen as a mover or an agent, while a woman became a patient (Balme 1972:52-3). The man's semen was therefore regarded as a giver of life and the soul, which was regarded as the source of the human intellect (ibid p.89). As for the woman's egg, Aristotle saw it as a source for the matter (body).

Here we see the place that women occupy in Aristotle's thought. Men are movers, life giving, and therefore co-creating with the Creator. They have the ability to think. They have the intellect. In contrast to this positive view about men, Aristotle saw women simply as objects (matter) with no capacity to think. Their role, as represented in his thinking, is simply to give a structure which will home the intellect, that is, the man.

For Rousseau women were created to please men. To avoid men's anger women were to be submissive and use their charms to constrain men (Mahowald 1978:103). Rousseau advised a woman to cultivate "her own powers, which lie in cunning, beauty, wit and wiles", and that she should "rule by gentleness, kindness and tact, by caresses and tears; by modesty, distance and chastity" (Coole 1993:84). Like Plato, Rousseau believed that women should be educated. However Rousseau maintained that women should not strive to be "sturdy like men but for them, so that they can be mothers of sturdy males" (Mahowald 1978:106). Rousseau concluded that naturally "women's right is not to be free and equal but to win love and respect through obedience and fidelity" (Coole

1993:84).

In Rousseau's thinking we see another dimension concerning the role of women in Western philosophical thought. For Rousseau, women's role was to be passive. While he recognized the fact that women could serve, however, such service was only for the sake of men and limited to that only. They were to be objects of service with no capacity to be critical thinkers. The role of critical thinking was the domain of men.

From our brief consideration of Aristotle and Rousseau's thinking, it is evident that women were deliberately marginalized. Clearly only men were regarded as moral agents while women were seen as passive objects whose role was to give birth to matter and to satisfy the desires of men. Out of their writings and teaching, these thinkers contributed to a culture that perpetuates the idea that women cannot be moral agents since their role is that of giving service to men. They were beings who were incapable of thinking. Therefore, it would be unrealistic to think that Aristotle and Rousseau's philosophies about women did not influence their contemporaries and subsequently the generations that followed. The culture which these philosophies influenced and created was the same one in which Christianity took root.

3.2 CHRISTIAN PATRISTIC THOUGHT AND WOMEN

The early Christian fathers were born and bred in those cultures where the thinking of the philosophers we have considered above had made an impact. Thus those who formulated early Christian thought took the same direction as these thinkers. Although the

early fathers believed that men and women were both created by God, they too marginalized women. They saw the fall (of Adam and Eve) 'as a turning point that changed women's status. A woman became the evil one. She is the one who was tempted first and the one who persuaded the man to sin. Eve's sin became the sin of all women. Women came to be regarded as inferior beings who were destructive and dangerous if not controlled. For this reason, the Christian fathers were instructed to rule over their households to bring about the required order.

In their discussions on the status of women the early fathers drew their arguments from Genesis 2, "in which Eve is created second, from Adam's rib rather than Genesis 1, in which male and female are created at the same time, both 'in the image and likeness' of God" (Clark 1983:15). Also, the woman's role was seen as that of a helper (Gen. 2:18). When theologizing about women's status, the early fathers' usage of the bible was selective. It seems that they formulated their opinions about women and then researched for sources from the bible to validate their points of view.

Tertullian, an important Christian writer from Carthage in North Africa, asserted that women should carry themselves around like Eve and wear cheap clothes as a sign of penitence for their sin. He had this to say to women:

You are the Devil's gateway; you are the unsealer of that tree; you are the first foresaker of the divine law; you are the one who persuaded him whom the Devil was not brave enough to approach; you so lightly

crushed the image of God, the man Adam; because of your punishment, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die. And you think to adorn yourself beyond your 'tunics of skins' (Quoted by Clark 1983:39).

Tertullian saw women's appearance as evil, a temptation to men. The modest clothing was for Tertullian a sign that women are aware of their sinful nature and the damage they have caused to the world. Being simple without any adornment was, for him, a sign of repentance from sin.

John Chrysostom, the bishop of Constantinople, had two conflicting opinions about the status of women. At the beginning of his writings he believed that before the fall there was equality between Adam and Eve, but after the fall Adam was instructed to rule over her. The second opinion he formulated later was that Eve's status as a "helper" was definitely inferior to that of Adam from the beginning (Clark 1983:33-35). Chrysostom believed that

To woman is assigned the presidency of the household; to man, all the business of state, the marketplace, the administration of justice, government, the military, and all other such enterprises. A woman is not able to hurl the spear or shoot an arrow, but she can grasp the distaff, weave at the loom; she correctly disposes of all such tasks that pertain to the household. She cannot express her opinion in a legislative assembly, but she can express it at home, . . . (quoted by Clark 1983:36).

For Chrysostom the public sphere was out of reach for women. The early fathers' trend of thought on women seems to be the same. They believed that the female sex was inferior, and like Aristotle, they believed that the important tasks for women were to raise children and take care of the households. This opinion goes for Jerome, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas as well (Clark & Richardson 1996:39,58,60,69 and 70).

If we are of the opinion that cultures shape and influence people, we will see how the Church fathers theologized within and for their context. From their theologizing we see a partnership between their beliefs and the thinking of classical Western thought. They seem to have searched for clues from the Bible which would legitimize the propositions of Aristotle, Rousseau and others about the place and role of women. The theology that they espoused entrenched the idea that women cannot be moral agents in all spheres of life.

It is worth mentioning, however, that both classical Western and early Christian thoughts at times espoused some positive ideas on who women are and what they can do. For example, Aristotle and Rousseau adopted Plato's stance of exposing women to education. But this was only to a limited extent. The education they advocated for women was of lesser value to that of men. They proposed that women should not be educated for the public sphere basically because that was not where they belonged. They were educated to be good wives and mothers but not leaders. Rousseau maintained that the special functions of women, their inclinations and their duties combined, suggest the kind of education they require (Mahowald 1978: 105). He continues to say

that

Men and women are made for each other but they differ in the measure of their dependence on each other. We could get on better without women than women could get on without us. To play their part in life they must earn our esteem. By the very law of nature women are at the mercy of men's judgments both for themselves and for their children. . . . It is not enough that they should be beautiful: they must be pleasing. . . . Their honour does not rest on their conduct but on their reputation. Hence the kind of education they get should be the very opposite of men's in this respect (quoted by Mahowald 1978:105).

Coole makes a very interesting observation about Rousseau. She says that his views on women violate the principles of his ethics and social theory. She maintains that Rousseau

demands equality and autonomy among male citizens but authority and heteronomy in the family. He sees that men cannot be free while they depend on the economic or arbitrary power of other men yet he deliberately fosters women's dependence on husbands, from provision of their daily bread to choice of their religion and judgement of their virtue (Coole 1993:85).

These are the ambiguities that are found in some philosophers' writings. They were praising and blaming, honoring and disparaging the female sex at the same time (Clark 1983:15). It

is important, though, to realize that life is full of ambiguities.

3.3 AFRICAN TRADITIONAL THOUGHT AND WOMEN

Africans, both male and female, have argued that before colonialism African women were as free as men were. There are examples that can be given to illustrate this freedom (see ch.4). But the main question is, were they really as free as men were?

It might be safe to say that before colonialism African women were not totally subdued nor totally free. As chapter 4 will illustrate, there are ambiguities in women's world (space). There were those women who were free because of their husbands' positions. Some were respected by men and women alike because of the charisma and the spiritual gifts they had of foretelling the future and healing the sick while many today are respected because of their formal education. There has never been a blanket freedom for all women in Africa. I concur with Edet and Ekeya (1989:5) when they say that

Africa's traditional society was by and large not as fair to women as we would like to think. Sometimes women were regarded as secondhand citizens; often they were used and handled like the personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. Under colonial rule women fared no better, for all the disabilities of Western Christian culture were added to the already burden-some African situation.

The point that Edet and Ekeya are making here is important. Christian teaching especially during the missionary era, confined women to the home. In particular, the role of the missionary's wife was to teach African women to be good wives. Much of what they taught reflected the hierarchical and patriarchal structure of the missionaries' culture which was already influenced by classical Western thought. What emerged out of this scenario was that what was taught was often given Christian religious legitimization. Given the strong religious character of African culture, the degradation of women took hold.

Among the Basotho there is a saying that "*mosadi ke ngwana*" which means that a woman or a wife is a child. She never matures. There are no important decisions she can make in the absence of her husband or any other male figure. This is the reason why she has to be under male authority all the time. Someone who is male has to make sure that she does what she is supposed to do and that she behaves appropriately.

While African men marry women because of their beauty, they also have preference for women who will perform wifely duties for the husband and his family. This is why there is the saying that "*mosadi-tshwene o jewa matsoho*", which literally means that she can be as ugly as a baboon (*tshwene*), as long as she serves she is fine. What matters is how well she works, not only for her husband but for the entire family. In traditional Africa the wife is not the husband's but the family's.

One important wifely duty is to bear children, more importantly,

boys. A woman who does not have children is considered an insult to her family, her husband's family and to the whole community. She is forced to go through rituals which are intended to remedy her barrenness. Barrenness has never been thought to be a man's problem in traditional Africa.

It is obvious that the impediments found in Western and Patristic Christian thoughts are also found in African thought. All these thoughts share similar patriarchal cultures. They all treat women as subordinates, except those few who manage to escape this treatment in some ways.

3.4 GENERAL

For some philosophers and scientists, women were beyond male understanding and explanation. They fell under the category of those things that were beyond or could not yield to science or reason. A woman was therefore regarded as the 'Other'. Such thinking, says Williams (1974:7), allows man

to remain alone as the One who works, judges, and defines reality. She is the Other, and since he cannot understand her, he is exempt[ed] from the effort of building an authentic relationship with her. If he cannot understand her, she cannot be understood, and authenticity cannot occur in the absence of understanding. Thus even if he is with her he stands alone, in charge, an alternative to the admission and sharing of their common humanity.

Thus her reality is that of being the "other". It is the reality

of exclusion, subordination, non intelligence and a lesser human. This is an attitude adopted by those who see themselves as standing on a higher moral ground. They see themselves as fit to speak on behalf of the "other", because the "other" is regarded as mentally inferior and cannot speak for self. This is the position that women find themselves in. Because somebody has decided that they cannot be understood, then somebody has to speak for them.

The "other"

is described in terms of, and encouraged to develop, personal psychological characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group. These characteristics form a certain familiar cluster: submissiveness, passivity, docility, dependency, lack of initiative, inability to act, to decide, to think, and the like (Miller 1976:7).

This is often true for a large number of women and black people in general in situations of oppression.

Although Miller is correct in her statement, it is also a reality that often in the midst of those who are submissive to oppression there are also a few subversive ones. It was not long ago in South Africa when the oppressive regime during the apartheid era believed that Black people were not as intelligent as White people, and therefore, not capable to rule the country. But the actual life of Black people, their longing and strategies for emancipation, their refusal to be silenced,

proved beyond reasonable doubt that they are equally intelligent. This is true for women too. Their strong will does not allow them to give up the essence of who they are, intelligent people who know what is right and wrong.

Although philosophers depict women negatively, life as we know it proves that women are as good as men. They are good in their own way and as fallible beings have their own shortcomings, like men. Some of their shortcomings and incapacibilities might be more than others because they are planted in the psyche of people through formal and informal education.

3.5 CONTRADICTIONS AND LIMITATIONS

As argued in chapter two, theories must be grounded or anchored in reality and go beyond what is known to what we think to be the ideal situation to work towards and to be achieved. Ethics and daily life should not operate in contradiction but rather in correcting and helping each other to develop. If a theory says that women are weak and cannot be soldiers but in daily life we see women in combat, then there is something wrong with the theoretical aspect of this issue.

Therefore, on the basis of what we know and experience in actual life, there are legitimate reasons to question the validity of the theories that we have reviewed above. These theories do not reflect reality and should not be upheld. Their motives stand to be questioned.

In these theories we see limitations and contradictions which require to be unlocked and purged if we are to see women as

moral agents. Trying to unlock the mystery of contradictions, Kittay and Meyers (1987:10) assert that

A morality of right and abstract reason begins with a moral agent who is separated from others, and who independently elects moral principles to obey. In contrast morality of responsibility and care begins with a self who is enmeshed in a network of relations to others, and whose moral deliberation aims to maintain these relations.

What Kittay and Meyers are saying is basically that philosophy and realities are two sides of the same coin. They both have to reflect the same coin they represent. Philosophy and reality have to relate and know the truth about each other. Relative to our subject matter, this means that philosophy should be based on actual experiences of women in their societies and the contributions which they bring to bear. In that process philosophy should see the kind of persons that women are - moral agents who hold within themselves a quality of being that is unique and complementary to that of men.

Philosophy is good only if it helps people to move beyond their experiences, that is, moving from the known to the unknown. This means that philosophy should help people who are stuck or a culture that is stagnant to move forward by painting the ideal situation for growth. This ideal situation should be realistic and simple enough to be put into practice. I agree with Kittay and Meyers (1987:10-1) when they say that theories that are not grounded in reality are constructed by the self which is removed

from others.

Kittay and Meyers maintain that people who develop theories, especially where people of other races, cultures and gender are involved, have to be extremely cautious. Time has to be taken for those people to be understood. This is what the term 'self extending to others' entails. When this happens, people realize that there is a lot that people share in common, they get to know others and the line of demarcation or the boundaries between themselves and others gets blurred. If Aristotle, Hegel, Rousseau, Augustine, Chrysostom and others had taken time to know women and had not regarded them as the "other", they would have realized the fact that there is very little difference between the two sexes; that is "them" and "us". They would have realized that the differences are not to be seen as opposites but as complementary.

One of the beliefs held by some moral theorists is that theories should be free from emotional ties (Baier 1994:33-4). Evidently, their emotions is one human quality that is associated with women and is seen as an impediment. In early socialization boys are encouraged not to show emotions but to be active and rational while girls are encouraged to be in tune with emotions. "This is, in part, a result of their training as subordinates; for anyone in a subordinate position must learn to be attuned to the vicissitudes of mood, pleasure, and displeasure of the dominant group" (Miller 1976:38). This aspect has worked in favor of women, for it promotes their sensitivity towards others. For women activities are normally conducted in such a way that they lead to emotional connectedness. If people are

emotionally connected the danger of viewing others as outsiders gets minimized.

Without the neglect of other theories, women embrace with ease the theories of love and caring because it is only through genuine emotions, which are the deepest level of connectedness, that one can be able to love and care fully. Emotions as well as rationality are given: every human being is born with them. Unfortunately in the process of socialization some aspects are neutralized while others are promoted. What is also interesting is to realize the renaming of feelings by dominant groups so that they do not appear to be the same as the ones shared by the subordinate groups. It is my observation that when men are emotional, they are said to be passionate, while the same behaviour by women is labeled emotional. To be passionate is considered to be a virtue while to be emotional is considered a vice. In reality emotions and passion are one and the same thing. Emotions or passion for wrong reasons can impede just and sound judgment.

The point we are making here is that the emotional character of women must be seen as a channel of moral agency. The extent to which women can show affinity to their children illustrates this. It is not uncommon in Africa, for example, to see a woman taking care of and living with children other than her own. The fact that "adoption" was not known in African societies says much about the affinity which African women had for children in general. They could live with and bring up children of others, even orphans, as their own because of their emotional nature. Socialization should encourage this process of emotional

connectedness for all human beings of all ages in order to make sure that our communities are constituted by people with a sense of connectedness to others.

Kittay and Meyers (1987:12) are therefore correct when they say that

The principles of impartial reason fail to capture the emotionally imbued morality of friendship and family. . . . emotion is pertinent to forming moral principles . . . emotion ties are integral to morality, . . . our duties are shaped by institutional as well as emotional ties.

Equally, Carol McMillan (1982:28) warns of a danger of building a wedge between reason and emotion. She maintains that

In forcing a wedge between reason and emotion, rationalist writers like Hegel fail to see that what makes bodily states and sensations emotional is the presence of evaluations or cognition. Although feelings involve bodily processes, they are nevertheless distinguished from them. Emotions are appraised as reasonable or unreasonable, justified or unjustified. We distinguish between emotions like shame and embarrassment, sentimentality and love, by reference to the way in which the subject perceives the object of the emotion and to the surroundings in which the emotion is felt and expressed. Thus to contrast thought and emotion by assuming that the

latter is devoid of all cognition is to miss one of its crucial features.

According to McMillan emotions are an integral part of moral judgment. To accept this fact is not to deny objectivity and rationality. Healthy emotions promote healthy and balanced thinking and connections. They (healthy emotions) reduce the danger of objectifying people. "Indeed most oppressed groups are thought by dominant groups to be inappropriately emotional" (Kay 1996:15).

African traditional ethics of interdependence, namely, '*motho ke motho ka batho*', illustrates the very fact of emotional ties. In African society children care for their parents out of love, not because they are forced to. In cases where children are irresponsible, extended family members and the community help with the caring of the needy as far as they can. This signifies emotional ties that people develop in relationships and this cannot be discarded when people make ethical decisions.

The Bible tells us that when Jesus Christ heard and saw how Lazarus' death had affected his sisters and his community, he (Jesus) was also moved to tears (John 11:28-37). John (11:33b) says "he [Jesus Christ] was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved", and verse 35 says "Jesus began to weep". Jesus Christ showed his emotions and in the middle of those emotions he went on to do the right thing - he gave life. He raised Lazarus from the dead.

In his ministry Jesus Christ also related to the Jews and the

Gentiles alike. He understood them as he communicated with them (John 4: 1-42), as he healed them physically (Mark 7:24-30) and in feeding them (Mark 8:1-9). It was because of his deep understanding of people that Jesus Christ was able to change their lives. He understood their humanity in its totality because he was connected to them on a deepest level, which is both emotional and rational.

It is only when we allow ourselves to be vulnerable that we can understand others' vulnerability. It is when we accept our emotional side that our rational side becomes real and strong. It is dangerous, therefore, to suppress emotions or pretend as if one is an emotionless being in decision-making.

3.6 CONCLUSION

From the arguments above it is obvious that sexual bias in some theories arises from the assumptions that the dominant group makes about the capabilities of women to reason, which are not at all concrete.

Carol McMillan (1982:2) articulates an opinion given by Simmel Georg in 1919, when he maintained that

women are judged according to male rather than female norms because we [men] fail to see that there is an asymmetry both in the empirical and in the metaphysical nature of the two sexes. As a result, all sorts of misunderstanding about women arise because judgments are made about them which are appropriate only to that other being, man.

In this case women are expected to fit in the criteria already established for them. Instead of being regarded as subjects they are reduced to means. They are forced to operate in the world of others. The fact that women and men might have a different way of assimilating and processing information does not justify the inferior status that women are always relegated to.

Theories that liberate should aim at representing the opinions and situations of all with the aim of giving to all people the human dignity they deserve as God's creatures. For example, when Aristotle articulated his stance on political justice it became obvious that it endorsed the hierarchical social order of Greece, namely, the ruler, the free and the slave. Political justice was to be distributed according to these social categories. "As a result, standards of justice, as Aristotle conceives of them, inevitably reflect a choice that some individuals make and impose on others" (Yack 1993:41). Slaves had no say or influence in shaping political justice in their society.

Liberating theories should aim at opening the debate to those at the bottom of the social ladder. This will eliminate the arrogance of dominant groups from making rules for others. If there is a need for dominant groups to exist, it will no longer be for speaking about or speaking for subordinate groups, but it will be to speak with subordinate groups with the aim of liberating all people.

CHAPTER 4

REALITIES OF AFRICAN WOMEN: THREE WORLDS UNDER REVIEW

This chapter will try to bring to the fore the ambiguities of African women's world. There are three major layers of experience that I intend to discuss. Each of these layers represents a world of its own. Instead of using the word "layer", therefore, I prefer to use the word "world". Sometimes these worlds of women overlap, forcing women to go through them all at once. In order to survive, women have developed a survival mechanism and a personality for each world.

4.1 THE FIRST WORLD

The first world is the world of men, the patriarchal world where a woman is regarded as a minor and expected to be under male supervision for the rest of her life. From the moment she is born she becomes men's property. As a girl, an unmarried woman, a married woman and a widow she is constantly under the authority of males.

A woman is socialized to be a good mother and a wife, a giver of life and a homemaker. She is expected to be gentle, meek and mild. If she is the opposite of these expectations she is accused of being uncultured or behaving "unlike a woman" or "unlike a lady" and, therefore, is ostracized by the community. Because of the consequences that go with being different or rebellious,

Girls learn to fear success and to underachieve, concealing intelligence and initiative in order to be

accepted as 'feminine'. Men are expected to be 'aggressive' and unemotional, women to be sensitive, intuitive etc. From a very early age they learn what is expected of them in terms of the 'feminine' or 'masculine' personality, and this is heavily reinforced at puberty (Rogers 1979:18).

The birth of a girl child in Africa is associated with wealth¹ for her father. This, I believe, is the reason why there is such an enormous pressure for women to get married at an early age - so that they can bring cattle or wealth into the family, hence names like *Dibuseng* (bring them back); *Madikgomo* (mother of cows); *Bogadi* (bride price or lobola); *Letlotlo* (riches) and so on. All these names given to a girl mean that "she will bring money to the family when she marries" (Njoku: 1980:17). Some Africans will argue that

In its true sense *lobola* (bride price) . . . gives value to a girl. It is a sign of affection to her, strengthening her position and at the same time honoring the older generation. It also affirms the new relationship between two families. It makes clear to everybody that the young man is really serious in his love and does all to win her for marriage (Haselbarth 1976:71).

¹ In African society when a woman is married there is a bride price that has to be paid. This is called "*bohadi*" or "*lobola*". In its origin this was regarded as a gift to the bride's father for agreeing to give away her daughter for marriage. The number of cattle which is normally requested by the father as *lobola*, differs from one ethnic group to the other.

It is seldom, though, that the two families - that of the bride and that of the groom - ever agree on the price. Among the Southern Basotho in South Africa, unlike among the Bangwaketse in Botswana, the bride price is not standardized. Every bride's family sets its own price. The groom's family always begs for the price to be lowered. Those proud enough to beg, pay whatever price is asked for even if it means going for loans. At the end it is the woman who suffers because of it. The sins or the arrogance of her father will be carried by her for the rest of her life. Whenever she makes mistakes, like any other human being, or fails to carry out the chores expected of her, she is told directly or indirectly how expensive she was to marry. In this case

what could increase the girl's honor and value actually lessens it where a dowry appears to some like pay. What can be "bought", even if it was expensive, can ultimately be thrown away once it has served its purpose (Haselbarth 1976:81-2).

In these situations young women find themselves being torn between their father's demands and the anger of their husband's family for having paid excessive money that has left their son and her husband penniless. It is worth mentioning here that although a woman is blamed for the excessive price set by her father, she is not even allowed to be present when *lobola* is discussed, she is not allowed to comment or to disagree with the decisions made.

Among some ethnic groups different members of the family (like

malome (uncle), *rakgadi* (aunt), *ntate* (father), and so on) contribute towards their son's or nephew's *lobola*. This therefore, makes African marriage not just a matter between two people but between families; not only nuclear families but also extended families; hence the expression "*ke mosadi wa rona*", which means, "she is our wife". Traditionally marriage does not become a union of friendship or pleasure between two people but one of procreation and undeclared servitude of the woman to all members of the husband's family, often including the extended families.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995:136) comes with an interesting observation and argument on the question of *lobola*. She says,

We Africans often protest vehemently against Western misinterpretations that we sell our daughters and buy wives. We say that whatever changes hands is a testimony to the marriage and that is why it must be returned when the marriage ends. If that is so, then all means of exchange - cows, gold, money - should be dissociated from the transaction and a piece of paper with signatures should suffice. Gifts should be treated as gifts, and loans as loans; no refund should be demanded of used articles.

I agree with Oduyoye and Haselbarth that if *lobola* gives value to a girl, if it honors the older generation, if it affirms fellowship between two extended families, then it should not be treated as a transaction. What is a gift should not be rubbed on the face of the daughter-in-law when she makes mistakes. Also,

lobola should not be expected back when the marriage is dissolved. In some instances among the Basotho, when separation or divorce is caused by a woman's infidelity, *lobola* has to be returned. This does not seem right. If *lobola* is a gift then, it should be treated as such. A gift cannot be expected back when the relationship ends.

In African society marriage means prestige and respect. A woman is considered whole or complete when she has a husband, who is also supposed to make sure that his wife is under control. A married woman is respected only if she toes the line and plays by the rules. A single and independent woman by choice, by divorce or by not finding the right partner raises suspicions because her abilities, her body, her mind and her movements are free from male authority and control but her own. This is basically the reason why an unmarried woman is despised and ridiculed by the society. John Mbiti (1991:64) affirms the above point when he says that "the woman who is not married has practically no role in society, as far as traditional African world-view goes. It is expected that all women get married". Oduyoye (1995:68-9) takes the point further by saying that a woman's "whole education has been in preparation for marriage, so a failure here is a total failure. If a woman never marries at all, it must be due to something she has done".

Although marriage is said to give a woman dignity and self worth, there are aspects of culture which discriminate against married women as well. If a woman has no children she is treated like an outcast. A husband whose wife is barren would be expected to marry her sister or any other woman of his choice if

polygyny is still practiced in that community. Another option will be for him to divorce her on the basis that she cannot bear children. The third option, which is an accepted practice, is that the man enters into extra marital affairs, have children and take care of them and their mother(s). These children will be customarily regarded as his heirs.

In the case of the death of the husband a woman is often expected to mourn for six to twelve months, depending on the traditions and customs of the individual ethnic group. During this period she is literally cut off from the active life of the society. She wears clothes that separate her from the rest. A widow is perceived as a symbol of bad luck to the society. If she is allowed to attend traditional feasts or church gatherings, she is expected to sit at the back of the room behind everyone. If she was active in the church or community organizations, she is expected to cut off all her activities until the period of mourning is over. Daisy N. Nwachuku (1992:61) sums up the experiences of how a widow is treated in African society when she says,

The widow is perceived as a taboo to living husbands and other males. She is subject to hopelessness, punishment, neglect, contempt, suspicion about her treachery, or lack of good care. She is perceived as threatening to other couples' relationships and suspected of adulterous living. The result is that a widow is usually a neglected and deserted lonely woman. These perceptions of widowhood become strategies of emotional and spiritual violence.

Suspicious and ill-treatment especially by her "in-laws" become more intense if she is still young. She is often accused for her husband's death. Rebelliousness of any kind on the part of the young woman at this stage is highly dangerous and risky because the accusations mount. The more rebellious she becomes against the way she is treated the more she is accused and labeled a murderer. The death of her husband takes her back to incompleteness. The in-laws determine her future. This illustrates the fact that a married woman is married forever and that African marriage is an ownership of a woman by her husband's family. Oduyoye (1995:149) agrees with the above point when she maintains that

the ritual of traditional marriage knows no death, this is true for both husbands and wives, although, again, this applies more to the woman than the man.

Women who are independent and assertive, either married or single, are given names like: *poho* (bull), *mokoko* (cock), *monna* (manlike woman). If an assertive woman is married she will be said to be controlling her husband (*o mohula ka nko*) and if not married she will be said to be attracting men (*o batla banna*) to herself. If a woman is

passive, she is noble, saintly and pure, and inspires man. If assertive, then she is evil, distracting man from his religious and worldly pursuits, she is a witch, a temptress, or a prostitute; and some myths even present her as a demon and symbol of sensual

lust, a being whom men must fear (Fanusie 1992:138).

When African women liberationists raise issues that are critical to the well being of women, they are interpreted by conservative custodians of culture as threatening the welfare of the community. The women who speak out are stigmatized as

"angry feminists" or "frustrated women". Needless to say, a woman who concerns herself with negative conditions of African women and social justice for them reveals herself as "being angry about nothing" and secretly sexually frustrated. . . . "The good African woman" is faithful to her "culture and heritage" and as a wife, acts submissive and accepts servitude and emotional abuse (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:12).

Oduyoye agrees with Fanusie and Ogundipe-Leslie, when examining the Akan and Yoruba myths. She asserts that

the rule is that a good woman does not put her own needs first, for her selflessness is the *sine qua non* of a healthy community. A woman's silence is upheld, while the prophetic disruptiveness that points to the possible new ways of being is deplored. Myths are structured to make sure that all female rebels are duly contained. These myths are society's way of pleading with women to put community welfare above their personal desires. Through these myths, the society demonstrates the futility of a woman's effort

to change her destiny. The society thus preempts any outcry of rebellion on the part of women (Oduyoye 1995:34).

Although myths do not openly play a significant role in the South African society today, the experiences that Oduyoye, Fanusie and Ogundipe-Leslie articulate are known to the majority of women in South Africa.

4.2 THE SECOND WORLD

The second world is the world of powerful women who operate within patriarchal norms and rules. We need to understand that to have power is not a bad thing at all. It is a symbol of life and importance. However, power becomes negative if it is used against others. But if it is used with and for others it becomes a positive tool of empowerment. Power is something that should not be used selfishly with the aim of achieving one's goals no matter what, because in the process many lives will be destroyed. Women's power, for women know better how power-over (domination) feels like and how destructive it can be, must not be used "egotistically and it must never undertake life-denying pursuits" (Oduyoye 1995:26).

As women we have been socialized not to support or to trust one another. We have tended to be worst enemies of ourselves and our world portrays this vividly. We need to take stock of ourselves and analyze our situation in order to find the reason why we behave the way we do when associating with other women, yet when we associate with men we become the nicest people that the world has ever known. This might not be of our own making but we are

obliged to look at it critically and to try by all means to resolve it. If it is not dealt with it will push us further apart and put us at loggerheads. We need to exorcise the demon that pulls women asunder.

The divisions among African women are clearly drawn. For instance in our Churches women groups are divided according to age and marital status. This is not the case with men's groups. To be a member of the Women's Service Union in the Methodist Church of Southern Africa, for instance, one has to be married first. There is, however, a rule on paper now which allows women who are in their mid-adult years and are culturally regarded as having passed years of marriage to be members of what has been regarded for a long time as married women's "territory". Observing and listening to the "co-opted", the question is, are they treated like members or are they treated like second class members because they do not meet the first criterion of membership, which is marriage? I do not want to generalize too much here. I believe there are good married women out there who are willing to accept all women as sisters regardless of their marital status. These women need to work hard to change the system from the way it operates at the moment.

In traditional African society there is a pyramid of power which puts men at the top of the pyramid and women at the bottom. In the traditional women's world there is also a pyramid of power which looks like this:

elderly women (mothers)
(custodians of culture)

wives and mothers-in-law

(mothers of sons)

wives and mothers
(without sons)
daughters-in-law

single women
(ready for marriage)

single women
(aged, divorcees, widows)

Traditionally, single women are not supposed to mingle with married women, even if they are of the same age. Equally, single women with children are not supposed to socialize with single women who have no children or married women of their age. The reason here is that single women with children are stigmatized for life and are regarded as morally weak. They are, therefore, not supposed to socialize with "well behaved" girls because they might be a bad influence to them. This is how African society takes over control of women's over-all existence, by strictly regulating their association and introducing taboos to go with it. These controls, demarcations and stigmatization of people do not exist in the men's world.

In real life the pyramid is not as simple as it looks. For example single women who are daughters of mothers-in-law can wield power over their brothers' wives and their children. This means that in their mothers' houses they have more power, and they occupy position-two in the pyramid. In their parents-in-law's homes women occupy position-four. When they give birth they graduate to position three in the pyramid while still occupying position two when they are in their mothers territory.

With the death of one's husband one becomes demoted from

position two or three to position five in the pyramid. This example shows how one's position changes temporarily and sometimes permanently. This use of power is sometimes subtle but damaging. It is more psychological than anything.

Men in the family and in the community dismiss these stages of oppression and disputes taking place in women's world as petty issues that women like to get themselves into. Because of the lack of support from their husbands, married women do not normally share their pain with anyone. When they seek their mothers' advice they are told that 'marriage is not easy and they have to hang in there until things sort themselves out'. These responses lead to bitterness and depression for daughters-in-law and the victims are likely to repeat the same treatment on their own daughters-in-law later. In this way the cycle continues forever.

In her article, "Silenced by Culture, Sustained by Faith", Musimbi Kanyoro writes about this oppression of women by women. She articulates her mother's experience of pain in the hands of her mother-in-law and her daughters. The problem began when Musimbi's mother gave birth to four girls and no boy. This was a reason enough for her to be tormented, ill-treated and alienated by other female members in the family. No one, either male or female, came to her rescue (Kanyoro 1994:4).

This attitude is more intensified if a woman has no children. Barrenness is seen as a sign of evil for the woman concerned. Oduyoye agrees with this point when she asserts that

If a woman has many children when those around her - especially sisters or sisters-in-law - have none, she is a witch, calling attention to herself alone. If a woman is childless, she is a witch or a victim of witchcraft; others close to her may have sold her ovaries for money or tied up her womb out of vindictiveness (Oduyoye 1995:122).

These women's greatest tormenters are other women, especially in their husbands' households. The husband is advised to either divorce or take a second wife who will bear him children, boys in particular. Most of the time these arrangements are carried out by the female members of the family with the full knowledge of men, including the man involved.

Motherhood is also a prestigious position for a woman especially if she is a mother of sons. Oduyoye (1995:141-2) asserts that

The fertility of a woman is the biological foundation of marriage and it governs male-female relations within the institution. Motherhood is a highly valued role open only to women but desired by both men and women as well as society as a whole; it is the channel by which men reproduce themselves and continue the family name and it is the channel by which women actualize their psycho-religious need to be the source of life. Often, procreation is described as if women are simply "objects of genetic and social transmission".

Why do women stay in these situations? As I mentioned in the first section, marriage is what every human being in African society is expected to go through. Those who do not are regarded as abnormal and are not taken seriously by the community. In this culture, marriage signifies completeness and wholeness. A divorced woman is also a disgrace to her family and a threat to married women of her age. This is one of the reasons why women choose to stay in marriage even if they are miserable. Since marriage is said to be 'for better and for worse', a woman is expected to lie low and persevere against all odds. Some are physically abused but they dare not leave because their cultures and religions expect them to stay in these relationships and make them work. Many die in silence because they have been barred from talking back to their abusers and to tell the world the truth of what is happening in their homes.

Among some of the Basotho, Batswana and Amazulu ethnic groupings, when a woman becomes married, "*wa lauwa*", which literally means to be "instructed". She is given instructions of how to be a good woman, a good wife, a good daughter-in-law. She is advised in an instructive manner to be sweet, soft, timid, meek and mild and to endure all. African Christian marriage is never complete without African traditional rites such as, '*lobola*' [dowry], '*ho hlabisa*' [sealing of an agreement symbolized by slaughtering of a sheep or a goat], '*ho apesa*' or '*ho behelletsa*' [dressing the bride-to-be as a symbol of engagement] and so on. In these circumstances Christianity does not and cannot bail one out from the frustration and the rigid rules set by one's community.

It is also important to note that what happens in the two worlds discussed, that is the first and the second worlds, affects all women whether educated or not, although at various levels. By virtue of being educated, some women will not experience the intensity of ill-treatments especially if they talk back to their tormentors. One most valuable contribution that Western education gives women is the power to break the "culture of silence" and to tell when it hurts. I also imagine that the awe with which traditional African society regards Western civilization is the reason why it respects, to a certain extent, educated women.

To make an illustration of the above point, I use here a case study of a single young woman minister² who worked in one of South Africa's homelands called Kwazulu-Natal. Towards the end of 1985 the tribal court in the area decided to take a piece of the Church's land where this woman minister resided. As women are not allowed in traditional courts, she was just informed about the decision and not expected to do or to say anything but to agree with it. She contested the procedure that the traditional court followed to confiscate the land without negotiating with the Church. Her vehement protest to the messenger of the king and the person given the land won her a day in a male dominated traditional court of law, and in this way, that day, history was made in that village. I believe that if she had not been in a relative position of power and more educated than all the other members of the traditional court,

² The case study is about the then single woman minister by the name of Libuseng Lebaka. She worked around Babanango and Nkandla areas for two years, that is 1985 to 1986. Her manse was in a tiny and scattered village called Ohlelo.

she would never have been allowed to defend her Church's land. Needless to say she won the case because the traditional court did not want to face the power above the power which was in front of them then.

The other reason that makes educated women's ill-treatment less severe is the fact that most of them are financially viable and therefore can "make it" on their own. Besides, most of them do not live with their "in-laws" any longer. But those who are not educated and still have to live with their "in-laws" go through painful experiences, sometimes for the rest of their lives. I must point out, however, that not all mothers-in-law are cruel toward their sons' wives and they need to be given the credit they deserve for being on the other side of tradition and culture.

4.3 THE THIRD WORLD

The third world is the world of acknowledgement, respect and recognition of those women who are in leadership positions. Here we have a few categories. The first category is that of women who become leaders because they are married into a family of leaders. For example, if a woman is married to a king, she automatically assumes a leadership role and she is respected by all in her husband's territory. Also if the husband dies and does not have a son who is old enough to assume responsibility, the queen will ascend the throne to rule the country or a particular ethnic group until her son is mature enough to take over.

We can argue that in the above case a woman does not become a

ruler on her own right but she becomes a transitional ruler between her husband and her son's eras. This is true, but we also have to look at the respect, command and moral responsibility that she assumes and willingly carries out during this period. She does not lead behind closed doors or behind male figures. She fundamentally becomes a visible ruler who is as much respected as her husband was, and sometimes even better than her husband, given her abilities.

An example here is that of Manthatisi (c. 1781-1835), queen of the Batlokwa ethnic group in Lesotho. Her husband died leaving her behind with a son, Sekonyela, who was a minor. Manthatisi was officially given the throne to rule the Batlokwa people until her son was mature enough to assume leadership.

During Manthatisi's reign there were several communities in the Southern African region that "were warring against one another over territorial claims" (Qunta 1987:53). She became entangled in these wars as the leader of her people. It is said that "the Batlokwa under the leadership of Manthatisi, blazed a trail of conquest and subjugation, . . . Manthatisi had a reputation for being ruthless with her enemies and she became one of the most respected and feared leaders of the region." (Qunta 1987:53).

There were times when she conquered her enemies by instilling fear in them. "She [would] deliberately spread the rumors to the effect that captives were eaten alive." (Qunta 1987:53). She was a woman of intelligence who never ceased to think. In one instance she rescued her son, Sekonyela, from danger during his time as a king. This is what is said to have happened.

While they were stationed at Tlapaneng, the Hlubi sent out a retaliatory expedition to the Batlokwa base, which was virtually undefended as Sekonyela had led men on an expedition in the vicinity. Faced with an almost hopeless situation, Manthatisi quickly formed all available men into single rank, made all the women line up behind them waving the handles of hoes instead of spears and holding up sleeping-mats to look like shields (Qunta 1987:54).

The Hlubi retreated believing that they saw a full army. As they retreated they came upon Sekonyela and his warriors, who fought and defeated them. Even when the son was the ruler, Manthatisi continued to work hard to protect the Batlokwa people and she continued to be highly respected.

The second category is that of women who become leaders because they have the gifts of prophecy and healing, or they have religious responsibilities in their communities. An example here is that of an Angolan native by the name of Kimpa Vita, who was renamed Donna Beatrice after her Christian baptism. At the age of twenty she claimed to be possessed by the spirit. She gave up her "worldly goods" (Daneel 1987:46) for the sake of prophecy. She preached against the Roman Catholic Church's formal way of worship and its emphasis on external symbols.

According to Inus Daneel, Donna Beatrice was the first person to preach about the Black Messiah in the 1700's. She believed that Christ was born in her home town of the then Sao Salvador and that he had black disciples as well. From this Daneel (1987:46)

concludes that

Here for the first time we encounter the idea of a Black Christ; in other words the first inklings of Black Theology. Her proclamation gave expression to a deep yearning: the yearning for a Christ who would identify with the despised African. How could the White Christ of the Portuguese images, the Christ of the exploiters - how could he ever help the suffering African, pining for liberty.

Donna also proclaimed the kingdom of God which was to be realized in her own country by her own people after "Congo" (i.e., Angola) had been restored back to its legitimate people and leaders. She soon became a national hero and "was venerated as a saint" (Daneel 1987:46-7) during the time of her leadership. In 1706 she was condemned to death by Portuguese authorities for her utterances. She was then burnt alive because she was considered a heretic. "She died with the name of Jesus on her lips" (Daneel 1987:47).

In South Africa we have another well known prophet with very little written about her. She was Mantsopa Makhetha. She was born in 1793 in Lesotho. There is a cave named after her in Ficksburg, a small town in the Free State Province. The cave is called '*lehaha la Mantsopa*', which means 'Mantsopa's cave'. Legend has it that *Nkgono* (grandmother) Mantsopa, as she came to be called until this day, used to pray for people in this little cave and they were healed. She also predicted the battle between the Black and the White people then. It is said that she also

predicted the coming battle to be '*ntwa ya mahlo a mafubedu*', which means a 'fierce battle'. She was well respected by the Basotho people in the Free State and this is the reason why she is today referred to as Grandmother Mantsopa.

It is also worth mentioning a woman who was not necessarily respected because of her prophetic capabilities as she was an ordinary religious leader. She was a native of Zimbabwe. It was Nehanda Nyakasikana, who was also referred to by her people as *mbuya*, which means grandmother. Nehanda was born around 1862 into a religious family. As she grew up she proved herself to be a good leader. She was made one of the religious leaders of the Mashona nation.

When the British invaded Zimbabwe in the late eighteenth hundreds (in 1888 -- Davison 1997:111), Nehanda was among those leaders who were highly influential (Qunta 1987:55). The British invaders took the natives' fertile land and cattle and native women were subjected to sexual abuse. Observing the invaders' cruelty and the injustice that her people had to endure, she concluded that white people were "evil, inhuman and destructive, and she saw their presence as the greatest threat to the survival of African social, political, religious and economic institutions" (Qunta 1987:56).

In 1896, when the first liberation struggle was waged against the British, Nehanda was one of the leaders and a good strategist. The invaders acknowledged that Nehanda had good tactical ability. However, the white settlers defeated Nehanda by entering into alliance with the Ndebele-speaking people. This

move weakened the strength of the total native force. She was captured together with a man called Kagubi, another influential leader at the time. Nehanda was taken to Salisbury where she was accused of "causing and instigating rebellion and murdering the Native Commissioner, Pollard, notorious for his cruelty" (Qunta 1987:58). On 2 March 1898 Nehanda was sentenced to death and was executed on 27 April 1898. Kagubi was also found guilty and sentenced to death. The Africans mourned the death of Nehanda. For the settlers, her death was a victory. To that effect a Roman Catholic priest wrote,

Everyone felt relieved after the execution, as the very existence of the main actors in the horrors of the rebellion, though they were secured in prison, made one feel uncomfortable. With their deaths, it was universally felt the rebellion was finished, their bodies were buried in a secret place so that no natives could take away their bodies and claim that their spirit had descended to any other prophetess or witchdoctor. The younger generation, it was hoped, now knew that the white Queen meant to reign (quoted by Qunta 1987:58).

The third category is that of women who have received Western education in institutions of higher learning. Before political liberation in South Africa, we saw very few women assuming positions of leadership and responsibility. After liberation many African women assumed responsibilities that had been denied them for a very long time. These women are leaders by virtue of their education. They are teachers, nurses, lawyers, judges,

economists, politicians, medical doctors, professors, journalists, pastors. The list goes on and on. With their skills and conduct they motivate and educate others for a better life. They do their work like any other person. Their failures are not unique. When they fail it is not because they are women. They fail because they are human, just like men.

As mentioned above (pg. 76), the third world of women includes prophets and traditional spiritual healers like *izangoma*.³ These women are more respected than women in the other two categories, that is, women who become leaders because of their husbands' positions in the society and those who have received Western education. The reason for the respect given to prophets and traditional spiritual healers is that they are believed to be connected with the spiritual world and that they communicate with ancestors. They are seen to be able to convey the message from the living dead to the living. This aspect of life is highly respected in the traditional and contemporary African society.

All the three worlds of women are real and are experienced by women on a daily basis. The disturbing questions arising from them are: Why do women allow what is going on in each of these worlds? Why do they allow themselves to be divided and set against one another? The answer to these questions is found in the fact that there are three levels of consciousness among

³ *Izangoma* are people who have a gift of foretelling the future. They rebuke the community about its transgressions. They communicate with the ancestors and they mediate between the ancestors and the living. They sometimes perform or give instructions on how to perform different rituals of purification or cleansing of a person, a home or a community.

women.

The first level is that of women who have accepted the unfair norms and practices of the patriarchal culture as given. To them it is God-given and they do not see anything wrong in the way in which they are treated. Most of these women are comfortable in the first world mainly because this is the only world they know.

The second level is that of women who are aware of the unfair norms and practices aimed at them but they feel powerless to do anything about them. Actually, they are afraid of the status quo. They do not want to be labeled rebels or renegades. They want to be seen and accepted as "ladies" - that is, polite and refined women. The thought of challenging the status quo paralyses them. They have given up the struggle even before they started it. The majority of these women are found in the second world of women.

The third and the last level of consciousness is that of women who are aware of the injustices against women in general. These are women who are willing to highlight issues of domination and challenge the powers that be. Because of this, they are ridiculed. These women are found in the third world. Unfortunately women in this category, that is, women who are aware and who are willing to put their lives and their professions on the line for the sake of other women and other oppressed groups in their communities, are very few. As a result their impact takes long to be felt by the entire society.

4.4 CONCLUSION

The importance of highlighting African women's worlds in this chapter has been in order to bring to the fore the place and experiences of women within their society. However, as we have seen, these experiences are not the same for all women. There are divisions that exist among women. These divisions are created, encouraged and enforced by African patriarchal culture.

What is at stake specifically in women's second world is that women who are involved here are unconsciously participating in a process that perpetuates the inferiorization of other women. Women in the second world are not involved in a continuous critical analysis of the way in which African culture is socializing women and the extent to which that process inhibits the growth of women as subjects and thus their contribution to a healthy society. As we will argue in chapter 6, it will take conscientization to break this circle of uncritical socializing. We have to understand that, in the eyes of those women who are active participants in the second world, which is the world of women-to-women domination, their interpretation of their roles is that of moral agency. Notwithstanding the way they perceive their roles, we have argued that this should not be the case where true moral agency is involved. True moral agency advocates for autonomy, caring, loving and an ongoing critical reflection.

From our discussion of the third world of women, that is, the world where women claim their voice and participate in the betterment of themselves and their communities, we begin to see the moral agency of women. Here women discover, articulate, respect and celebrate who they are. That these women are where

they are cannot be interpreted as an accident of history. Rather, they should be seen as an example of what critical thinking that arises out of experience is all about.

Given the place that African culture generally allots to women, these women have risen above the constraints of their culture and have rejected those elements of African culture that see them as objects rather than subjects. The third world of women is the world where women reclaim their voice and strive to break the culture of silence they have been socialized into. It is the world that encourages and nourishes the spiritual, mental and physical qualities and abilities of women. This is the world that takes women from the moralized stage to the stage where they become moral teachers and agents of change. These women become vehicles of change in their lives and in the lives of other oppressed groups. They become advocates of what ought to be and not necessarily preservers of what has been. They become role models for others. These women's moral agency is to unlock the mysteries of life and show the way to attain a better life. They reveal the importance of being who one is created to be.

Women's third world is a world of rebelliousness as well as proactiveness. Here women refuse to be sidelined and repressed. Once they have reclaimed their voice they contribute to the growth and social wellness of their society. However, this third world of women is not a perfect world. There are weaknesses that are inherent in it as in all humans and human institutions. Nevertheless, here we have women who are good role models of what it means to be a subject and not an object.

Highlighting the three worlds of women is not to set them against each other. Rather, the aim is to expose the ambiguities that constitute the total world of women. By analysing the worlds of women from which good or bad moral agency can be inferred, we seek to conscientize women and those who join their struggle to understand the complexities of women's lives. We do not profess to have dealt with all the experiences of women and their ambiguities, but we have mainly tried to highlight some important issues to be noted and addressed in the future by all people of good will.

CHAPTER 5

AFRICAN WOMEN, CULTURE, POLITICS AND THE ECONOMY

After reading chapter four, where examples of women who have been involved in leadership positions in traditional African society are discussed, a question might be asked: If women have been involved in leadership positions in the past, why are there so few of them today in the public sphere? If they make more than half of the country's population in South Africa and have had good role models, why are they not out there - in the public sphere - in high numbers to help bring about desired change to their womenfolk and to the world.

This chapter attempts to answer these questions in two parts. First, it will try to point at what has hindered women from progressing the way they should, namely, at culture as the development and refinement of the mind. It will look at both the positive and negative aspects of culture. Practical examples will be given to demonstrate these two aspects. Secondly, the chapter will look briefly at two areas in which African women have been involved both in the past and in the present, namely, politics and the economy. These two examples are used to illustrate that although there were and there are still some hindrances, women are trying their best to overcome them and to do their best in trying to bring about desired positive change in their lives and in the lives of those around them. The chapter will, therefore, illustrate how women, in spite of the obstacles of patriarchal culture, have been involved in shaping politics and the economies of their communities. The role which women have played in the shaping and building of politics and

the economy will be traced from Africa's pre-colonial to colonial and post-colonial periods. However, these three areas should not be seen as the only areas where women have been involved.

Little has been written about African women in the pre-colonial period. However, it is not convincing to say that "we know almost nothing about pre-colonial women's world", as Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997:45) states. What can be argued at least is that African women, especially in South Africa, know very little about their past because the colonial system tried all it could to uproot African people in general from their heritage. In spite of this, however, African descendants do know part of their history about life before colonialism, which has been handed down orally from generation to generation. This history, although minimal, is important.

In writing African history, especially African women's history and experiences, African women themselves will have to relate the stories of their grandmothers and mothers. They will have to knit these stories together in order to present them and educate the world about their history, which is rooted in their ancestors. No one can give a clearer and credible picture of African women's experiences except African women themselves. I am not trying to debar others who are not women or black from writing about African women's experiences - after serious empirical research, of course - but I am saying that *motsibi wa tsela ke motsamai wa yona*, which literally means that you know the road by travelling it frequently.

I therefore believe that African women's ways of knowing, which are not very much different from those of their great-grandmothers and their mothers, are easily accessible to them today both emotionally and physically. This is the reason why I put African women's writings about themselves as far more important than writings by others, and because they would be writing about what they know to have happened, which is in one way or another still connected to their experiences. There is a way in which they can be said to have inherited their mothers gardens.¹

5.1 WHAT IS CULTURE?

In order to understand what culture has done to African women we need to find out what its meaning is and how it is used to keep order in society, sometimes at the expense of others. Culture refers to a people's way of life. According to N.S.S. Iwe (nd:54-5) culture may be defined as

the fabric of ideas, beliefs, skill, tools, esthetic objects, methods of thinking, of eating and of talking as well as customs and institutions into which each member of the society is born. In short it includes the way each individual makes a living, the music he [sic] plays, celebrations and festivals, modes of communication and transportation, the house we live in and the food we eat.

From this definition culture is indeed broad and deep. In a sense, culture encompasses all that a human being is. It does not only focus on the individual, but also on those things and

¹ Title of a book edited by Letty M. Russell et al.

activities that link the individual with others and the surroundings in which one exists. Culture is socially transmitted from generation to generation. In this way, therefore, we can argue that culture is learnt. It is also human-made, that is, it is created by human beings with the intention of keeping society or the community together.

In its functional role culture regulates the behaviour of individuals so that there is orderliness and coherence in a community. The regulation itself might have been unintentional in the beginning of human society but during the course of time it becomes intentional. This explains why people would say 'it is not my culture' or 'that is against African cultural norms'. These expressions indicate what one is not familiar with and the unwillingness to venture into what is not known or practiced. Quoting Malinowski, H. Richard Niebuhr (1951:33) maintains that culture "is the organization of human beings into permanent groups". This makes culture in its various aspects an intentional human invention. We cannot deny the fact that it can also be sporadic, and that which is sporadic but creative has to be assimilated into the community and made part of that community, if it is to be meaningful for all.

A. Irving Hallowell (1955:39) asserts that

. . . in terms of personality and culture theory, it is assumed that a human being always thinks, feels, perceives, and acts as a socialized person who must inevitably share psychological characteristics with his [sic] fellows in order to be capable of

interacting predictably in interpersonal relations with them in an ongoing socio-cultural system. The perceptions of the individual, then, must be anchored in the same meaningful world as theirs or else perception could not function effectively in relation to action.

According to what Iwe, Niebuhr and Hallowell say, culture affords members of a group to have a point of reference when they deal with others. Also it is through it that individuals have a sense of belonging and a need to contribute to the life of a given society.

Iwe (nd:56-7) further clarifies the issue of a sense of belonging, regulating the behaviour of individuals for orderliness and coherence when he says that culture

simplifies and guides behaviour, provides roles, defines relations and exerts social control, [it] serves as a "stamp" or "trademark" that distinguishes one society of people from another. [It] integrates, systematizes and interprets the values, institutions and norms of a society as it charges them with meaning and purpose. [It] furnishes society with the basic and social unity and solidarity. [It] functions as the matrix and guiding spirit of the social structure and life of the society. It relates and co-ordinates, integrates and stores the social heritage and values of the people. Finally, culture is the architect and moulder of social personality. There is a cultural

stamp on the personality of each of us that no one can escape.

The definition and the usage of culture in this work is broad. It includes both customs (usual practice) and traditions (stories and beliefs). In other words culture is used here inclusively. From the definitions given we can conclude that there are no customs or traditions outside culture.

Culture is a dynamic phenomenon. New challenges and discoveries compel a society to find and develop new ways of living and relating in accordance with new circumstances. For example, when deforestation makes it impossible for people to use fire wood for cooking, new ways of cooking have to be found. When more African women receive education and occupy leadership positions in society, the way society operates is altered. This is more so in terms of gender roles. When women get educated or introduced to new ways of life they leave the private sphere that they have been assigned to and join the public one. This means that this challenge compels other aspects of culture to die and at the same time gives birth to a new way of life which will accommodate the changes.

Because of the dynamic nature of culture, we can not say that a particular culture has reached maturity. To say a culture has reached maturity would be equal to saying that culture has ceased to be dynamic and has become static and stagnant. In reality this is not possible. It becomes important that from time to time culture be assessed, evaluated and altered if need be in order for it to develop further and be respected by all

its subjects. Culture is internalized by the community. But this does not mean that once culture has been internalized it cannot be critiqued. This is the reason why girls and boys do not become duplicates of their parents, because they always have new things to bring to life and old things to get rid of. The changes are the results of intentional assessments and evaluation.

Culture does not only pertain to social coherence. It also enables people to resist domination and extinction. Since people identify themselves as belonging to each other through culture, they resist being stripped of this identity. Spelling out the protest nature of culture implied here, S. S. Maimela (1996:82) argues that culture is

that internal force and resilience which has helped Africans both in the African continent and the diaspora to survive despite the atrocities of slavery, colonialism and post-colonial brutality, dictatorships and oppression which still characterize most African countries. It is that force which enabled Africans to retain their humanity and, above all, enabled their forefathers and foremothers as well as the present generation of people of African descent to articulate their rejection of attempted white destruction and denial of black humanity.

Here Maimela is articulating the African "culture of survival"; the inner strength that refuses to give up even when a person is ridiculed, beaten up, robbed and left naked; the inner strength

that defies humiliation and dehumanization; the inner strength that allows one to affirm who she or he is regardless of bad and evil experiences that she or he has gone through. This inner strength is always discovered and revived when one examines the ideas and beliefs, the thinking and teaching, the customs, the strength, the vision, the survival and the institutions of our ancestors near and far.²

This is the inner strength that sustained mothers of South Africa, like Lillian Ngoyi, Winnie Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Johanna Masilela to mention but a few. There were many other mothers whose names were never mentioned in history but who were always in the background to advise and support those who were in the fore-front. It is the same inner strength that prompted daughters of Africa to carry up arms to the borders of South Africa to fight for freedom. It is this inner strength that kept mothers on their knees praying for their sons and daughters in prisons and exile.

5.1.1 The Negative Impact of Culture on Women

While culture has many good aspects, it also has some negative ones as well. Maimela articulates one such aspect, which is not as fulfilling, strengthening and supporting as the one we have just articulated. He asserts that although culture is such an important tool for survival and for life in general it can also

² By ancestors near and far I am referring to all 'the leaving dead' (that is those who have lived a good life on earth and did not die. They just disappeared from the physical world to the world of spirits, and they become known as the living dead.) of African descent inside and outside the continent of Africa who have experienced the same struggles that Africans are facing everywhere. We draw and learn from their experiences. They give us determination and aspirations not to give up.

be used to destroy life and shutter determination. Maimela (1996:82-3) mentions a conversation he once had with a female student who told him that

she finds it most revealing that her male fellow theological students agree with her in almost everything in theological discourses provided that no reference is made to African culture. But when theological discussions begin to touch on the relationships between men and women in Africa, the problem of culture suddenly crops up. This is because it is convenient for males to use aspects of culture in order to perpetuate their privileged status.

African culture, as one of the patriarchal cultures in the world, is male dominated. In most cases it is unfriendly to women and children. It categorizes them as inferior beings who are to be under the constant supervision of males. The subjection of African women by some aspects of African culture and practices does not seem to change when other aspects of culture do. The idea that African women are inferior has become static. Those who hold this belief do not foresee changes or improvements and in fact they would prevent them. Theirs is a very limited worldview where this aspect of life remains the same with no possibilities of improvement or transformation. Here the question is: who is primitive and limited, men or culture? We will try to respond to this question as we go on.

Maimela (1996:83) asserts further that "too often culture has been used and is used by African males in the family context, as husbands, fathers, sons, brothers, etc., to try to safeguard and

perpetuate their dominant positions at the expense of females". This point can be taken further. Male superiority does not only manifest itself in the family setting. It is broader than that. In most instances or as a general rule males of all ages, especially from puberty age and older, believe themselves to be superior to all women. Two examples of what I am trying to illustrate here will suffice.

In 1992 a friend of mine, who had just completed her Masters degree in New Testament studies at Harvard University in the United States of America, went to teach at the Federal Theological Seminary in Pietermaritzburg. She became the first black woman (of African descent) to teach there. Her male colleague, who had the same qualifications and who had previously accepted a white woman at that same Seminary as a colleague, told my friend that theological students were not yet ready to be taught by a black woman. He went on to say that what he was saying was a "cultural fact".

This Western educated African man accepted a white woman as a colleague but would not do the same to a black woman. He found it easy and acceptable for his "boys" to be taught by a white woman but not by a black woman. For me this illustrates two issues, the first one is how white power has psychologically brainwashed the minds of the majority of black men, to an extent of accepting everything and everybody white as legitimate and acceptable because of her or his colour. Secondly, this illustrates how black men cling to the last weak thread of false power that they think they have over black women.

I have also observed the reaction of some African males towards black and white women's opinions and scholarships, especially in the ministry. When a white woman addresses an audience of black and white men on women's issues, she receives praise from black men as someone who knows her matter. They herald her as dignified and articulate. Black women receive something contrary. When a black woman with the same qualifications stands up to talk about the same issues from her perspective, she is said to be emulating white women, to be aggressive and disrespectful to her culture. These discriminatory attitudes and responses are a clear indication of the colonization of African men's minds, emanating also from the fear of losing the last vestige of power they think they have over other people, that is, African women.

The second illustration is that of one of my theological students in 1996. He was in his early twenties when he first came to receive his theological training. Although he was not objecting to the ministry of women *per se*, he believed that there are things that women are not supposed to do even if they are fully trained and even ordained. He said that he would not want a woman to bury him when he died. He argued that in his African culture burial is such a sacred ritual that it can only be properly administered by men for both men and women. At this early stage in his life, his mind was already structured towards what he thought to be a realistic image of manhood.

5.1.2 Culture of Domination

The second aspect of culture that Maimela sees as a negative force in society is when "dominant groups use the cultural

expressions of the powerless and dominated masses for the sole purpose of making victims of society accept their position of domination as well as the entrenched positions of dominant groups" (Maimela 1996:83). Jean Baker Miller agrees with Maimela on this line of argument, although with a certain variation. Her definition of a dominant group is broader than that of Maimela. She sees dominant groups as being both within and outside a given community. She sees dominant groups within a family setting, within a community, within a larger society, among ethnic groups and nations. Dominant groups usually define acceptable roles for others. These acceptable roles involve mostly doing what the dominant group does not like doing for itself. For her

a dominant group, inevitably, has the greatest influence in determining a culture's overall outlook - its philosophy, morality, social theory, and even science. . . . Inevitably the dominant group is the model for "normal human relationships" (Miller 1976:8).

Miller's description of what a dominant group is and how it operates, paints a picture of a dominant group as a group of people who strive at all costs to be in control. The group uses its power to dominate others and to enforce its model of what it thinks to be normal on others. Anybody who does not or who refuses to fit into its model is regarded as the "other" and, therefore, as "abnormal".

Those different from a dominant group are treated as

subordinates.

Subordinates are usually said to be unable to perform the preferred roles. Their incapacities are ascribed to innate defects or deficiencies of mind or body, therefore immutable and impossible to change or develop.... It follows that subordinates are described in terms of, and encouraged to develop, personal psychological characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group. These characteristics form a certain familiar cluster: submissiveness, passivity, docility, dependency, lack of initiative, inability to act, to decide, to think, and to like. . . . However, when subordinates show the potential for, or even more dangerously have developed other characteristics - let us say intelligence, initiative, assertiveness - there is usually no room available within the dominant framework for acknowledgement of these characteristics. Such people will be defined as at least unusual, if not definitely abnormal" (Miller 1976:7).

The philosophy of the power of the dominant group has given birth to racism, patriarchy, sexism, classism, professionalism and many more other kinds of abuses. It is common to hear a member of a dominant group talking about why blacks cannot do certain jobs, why a woman's best and natural place is in the kitchen, and the fact that a particular ethnic group is more intelligent than others.

I have defined culture above as the fabric of ideas that knits society together. Culture is undoubtedly a piece of strong thread that connects all of life together. We therefore need to be aware that when we deal with aspects of life such as the economy, politics, religion, morality, marriage, or even sports, all these will be given meaning and order by our language, which is part of a culture that has been constructed by the dominant group. In other words, the meaning we attach to things is the one we were taught as children or as men and women in the community.

Things are taught to subordinates in the manner in which the dominant group would attain its satisfaction and achieve its goal. The Apartheid regime in the past, some kings, some men, some educators, some parents, some businesses, control others by force to promote their own beliefs and they also build their own success in order to attain gratification. This chain of oppression which has become part of the dominant group's culture can only be broken down by naming its evils and rebelling against what it aims to promote. By so doing, subordinates should be willing "to suffer the consequences of their actions towards emancipation. Where there is struggle for emancipation there are [bound to be] casualties" (Lebaka-Ketshabile: 1997:14).

Politics and the economy, as discussed in the following two sections, will illustrate for us how women often defied the culture that restricted them to a particular way of doing things. The defiance, in a way, was the disturbance of the status quo and women suffered intensely for their liberation

undertakings. They were at times not understood and even ridiculed by their own men. The cowardly reaction of men towards women's protest is recorded by Julia Wells (1991:30-2). She notes, in reference to women protests against passes in some towns in the Orange Free State, that

some Jagersfontein men were not supportive. 'Women are silly,' they said and urged them to obey the law. Bloemfontein's male community leaders were cautious. They condemned the system of passes for women . . . But they did not whole-heartedly support breaking the law. Male leaders of the Orange Free State Native Congress, . . . told the mayor they disliked passive resistance as a strategy, but added, 'We have now given up the matter in the hands of the Almighty to work it up in His (sic) own way'.

5.2 WOMEN AND POLITICS

Although many African societies have been and are still patriarchal, women have never been passive objects in the practice of their traditions and politics. They voiced their grievances and took action if their voice was not heard or justice not served. There were times when they paid a very high price for this.

Before colonialism most African societies had dual-sex political systems or parallel chieftaincies: one made up of males and one of females (Okonjo 1976:45-58; Sudarkasa 1996:80; Steady 1996:7). The women's political system, although independent and led by the queen or the king's mother, had no power to implement

its decisions before they were sanctioned by the male political system. This was especially the case if the issue or decision to be implemented involved people other than women. Terborg-Penn (1987:37) asserts that African women were independent as far as their internal politics were concerned, that is, matters pertaining to their

trade and craft guilds. . . . and the maintenance of the public facilities (such as markets, roads, wells, and streams). They also testified on their own behalf in court or hearing. External affairs were largely in the hands of men, but in any crises, such as war, women were always involved.

Under normal circumstances some women who had reached menopausal stage were incorporated into the male political and religious systems (Bam 1986:40). In rare instances women who were still in the child bearing stage were incorporated. Mostly these were women who took over positions of power after the death of their husbands. One example of this is that of Queen Manthatisi, whom we referred to in some detail in chapter 4. Some were those with religious gifts of foretelling the future. Given the two political systems in African societies it is clear that the women's system was controlled and monitored by men. Although this was the case, women were in no way "confined to a 'private' sphere and [or totally] excluded from a 'public' sphere" (O'Barr and Firmin-Sellers 1995:192).

During the colonial period African women and men lost their political structures and power. However, African men were in one

way or another incorporated into the system because "colonial administrative systems allowed European officials to govern through indigenous male authorities, formalizing male institutions while ignoring their female equivalents" (O'Barr & Firmin-Sellers 1995:194).

O'Barr and Firmin-Sellers (1995:195) record a Nigerian Asante man's remark when asked about why African men did not describe the active role played by their women in politics to European anthropologists? The man said,

The white men never asked us this; you have dealings with and recognized only the men; we supposed the European considered women of no account, and we know you do not recognize them as we have always done.

The refusal to accept African women's leadership in their communities by colonialists, although limited, "imposed a legal and cultural apparatus that undermined women's traditional bases of power; women became politically and economically subordinated and marginalized" (O'Barr & Firmin-Sellers 1995:189).

The African woman's ways of living were challenged and where possible replaced by the European women's ways of life. The colonial officials, traders and missionaries tried hard to make African women into European women through religion, education and western culture.

Colonial officials (who were almost exclusively male), traders and missionaries all set out to make African

women more like their European counterparts. Through schooling and special projects, African women were taught to use modern medicine, prepare European meals, bear and raise children according to European experts' standards, engage in clubs and organization that complemented those of men, ... (O'Barr and Firmin-Sellers 1995:194).

O'Barr and Firmin-Sellers mention the account given by Nancy Hunt of the *foyer social* of the 1950s in Belgian Congo, which was founded by the missionaries and was later run by the government. The aim of the foyer was to give

'immoral Africans' a 'normal social life'. To this end, women were taught to be 'prudent ladies of the house, model wives and mothers of the family'. Building on women's 'natural feminine psychological propensity for motherhood and domesticity', the foyer worked to instill in a wife 'devotion, unselfishness, and discreet and intelligent collaboration in the profession of the husband (O'Barr and Firmin-Seller 1995:194).

The *foyer social* was not only taught in Belgian Congo but throughout Africa, mostly by missionaries.

Colonizers and missionaries partly succeeded in colonizing the minds of African men and women because there were men and women who felt powerless and lived according to the new social order. But if colonizers and missionaries had given African women and men equality and not inferiority, freedom and not slavery,

protection and not punishment, food and not poverty, land and not landlessness, dignity and not humiliation, they would have enjoyed overall success in Africa. Basically, Africans then were a trusting people and they easily accepted and welcomed strangers and shared with them what they had - that is, land, livestock and food. The problem with colonizers is that they were not happy with what they were given and not content with what they had. In the process of acquiring more they stripped others of their dignity.

O'Barr and Firmin-Sellers (1995:197) assert that

In spite of the burdens imposed by colonial policy, African women have been active agents, responding to their changing circumstances. African women actively participated in many early anti-colonial protests, as well as in the nationalist and liberation movements that swept the continent after the Second World War.

The colonizers' attitudes and behaviour towards African women and African societies in general did not shatter the spirit of African womanhood. That spirit is the one that compelled women not to stand passively watching their daughters and sons trodden upon and humiliated. African women rose to the forefront of political struggles, especially towards the end of the nineteenth century and the whole of the twentieth century to the present. In South Africa these struggles range from fighting against pass laws to fighting for the minimum wage. An African political organization newspaper in South Africa had this to say on 16 June 1913 in reference to women's struggle against passes:

On that day the native women declared their womanhood. Six hundred daughters of Africa taught the arrogant whites a lesson that will never be forgotten. ... The police endeavoured to keep them off the step ... the gathering got out of control. Sticks could be seen flourishing overhead and some came down with no gentle thwacks across the skulls of the police, who were bold enough to stem the onrush. 'We have done with pleading, we now demand!' declared the women (Wells 1991:1).

This march was only a part of women's political resistance which lasted for a year. The resistance of 1913 to 1914 took place mainly in the Free State, which was then the stronghold of the Afrikaners (Wells 1991:1-35). A number of women were imprisoned because of their involvement in these resistance marches. After they visited Kroonstad prison, the editor of *Tsala Ya Batho Newspaper*, Solomon Plaatje, and a member of *The African Political Organization (APO)*, Dr Abdullah Abdurahman, had this to say, as they praised women for their heroic stance and chastised men for not doing the same:

Let no woman pay a fine. They should all go and fill the gaol as a reciprocation of the contemptuous manner in which 'Free' State municipalities receive ministerial representations if they are on behalf of natives. Let them build new gaols. It is no disgrace to occupy them for your liberty (Wells 1991:30).

The APO newspaper had this to say about the men:

We the men, who are supposed to be made of sterner stuff than the weaker sex, might well hide our faces in shame, and ponder in some secluded spot over the heroic stand made by Africa's daughters on the 6 June, 1913. Our manhood has almost been extinguished. We docilely accept almost every abject position, and submit to every brutality of the white man, with little more than a murmur. Not so our women. They have accepted the white man's challenge, and have openly defied him to do his worst (ibid 30).

In 1923, after a long review of pass laws for women, it was decided that women should not carry passes but men should. However this victory was short-lived because in 1952 the Nationalist government's policy of apartheid reintroduced pass laws for women again. The re-introduction was not accepted without a fight. Women's anti-pass law campaigns started again. The national campaign took place in Pretoria at the Union Buildings on the 9 August 1956. Twenty thousand women participated. The slogan for this demonstration was "*You have tampered with the women, you have struck a rock*" (Walker 1982:189). Anti-pass campaigns in South Africa, which were first sparked by women, were later embraced by all the African people and they ended in the Sharpeville massacre on 21 March 1960. Immediately after the massacre black political organizations in the country were banned.

Women campaigned, fought and died in the political struggle in South Africa. Some died in the line of duty, some in exile, some

were bombed and others executed by the apartheid regime. They fought against tax and apartheid laws. Today women are fighting for equality and representation of women in decision-making structures. The battle is not totally won yet, as the glass ceiling thickens every day. I am saying the glass ceiling thickens everyday because even as African women are advancing educationally and otherwise, they do not easily get the recognition they deserve. They are not, as many of them deserve, promoted to important positions of power in their establishments. They are always expected to perform thrice as hard to prove their abilities. Nevertheless there are some changes which are seen and experienced.

There is, therefore, no doubt that although African women were ignored, at times suppressed and oppressed, they nevertheless rose to the occasion of their emancipation and that of their communities in the way they understood it then and now. According to Wells' information women in South Africa were the first to stand collectively against oppressive pass laws in the country, which means that they set an example for the rest of the country to follow.

If this is true, it goes without saying that women set good examples for their daughters and sons to follow. It is, therefore, not claiming too much credit for women to say that our leading women and men today in South Africa learned from the history and experiences of their great-grand mothers, grand mothers and mothers. In other words, men as well as women have been shaped politically by their ancestors, not only male but also female ancestors. They were inspired by them not to accept

oppression but to fight it. This is the 'culture of resistance' that has been passed on to us: the culture in which women's role has not been insignificant.

5.3 WOMEN AND THE ECONOMY

African women have been involved in the economy and the survival of their communities during the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. By economy here I mean that which is produced to sustain the lives of the people, especially crops and livestock. During the pre-colonial period women worked both at home and outside in the fields. The saying that a woman's place is at home or in the kitchen was never known in African societies. During the pre-colonial period women grew, harvested, processed, marketed, and cooked the food that fed the nation (Lindsay 1980:32). The harvest from the fields that women worked on was able to feed their children and the surplus was sold at the market. This is what Lindsay means by 'feeding the nation'.

According to Lindsay (1980:13) the involvement of women in agriculture before colonialism

was based to large extent upon equality with men, although there were some distinctions. In societies where men and women have engaged in similar activities, women's participation has given them equal access and control over their labor. When hunting and gathering were the primary means of subsistence, the distribution of resources was based on communal life and goods were distributed fairly equally. As women engaged in agriculture or related activities, they

were still active participants in the distribution of such goods (Lindsay 1980:13).

The above statement reflects the free participation of women in the traditional economy for the survival of the whole community. Africans believe that the work becomes a lot easier when many people become involved. This is called *letsema*³ in Sesotho. Women as well as men were seen as equal contributors to the well-being of the society and its interdependence. It is the idea of interdependence of people that gave birth to the philosophy of "*I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am*" (Mbiti 1970:141). A society that is founded on interdependence becomes healthy and viable because it realizes the fact that it cannot exist without its members' contribution and, therefore, it is bound to respect all its members. Unfortunately

the uncritical acceptance of the Western definition of work and development has led to the omission of women from development programs and a lack of recognition by planners of their work activity. As a result, the agricultural and home-related responsibilities undertaken by rural African women have been defined as noneconomic activity (Lindsay 1980:32).

In the book *If women were counted: A new feminist economics*,

³ Letsema is a practice of work ethic that encourages people to help each other as much as they can. For instance, if one has a corn field that needs to be harvested one can call on all members of one's community to help to harvest. Then the owner of the field will be expected to supply workers with food. This work will hardly take a day because the whole community is involved. Letsema will go on until all fields that belong to the members of the community are harvested.

Marilyn Waring provides very interesting examples of four people who do different types of work. According to Western economic standards, she states, two of these people are not considered workers. For the interest of this study only two examples will be cited.

Waring mentions Tendai, a woman from Zimbabwe, who starts her day at four in the morning. She fetches water eleven kilometers away from home and returns home at nine o'clock. She eats a little and goes out to fetch wood until twelve o'clock. When she comes back she washes dishes and prepares lunch for her family. She then goes out to search for wild vegetables for supper and then makes another evening trip for water. She prepares supper and her day ends at nine o'clock at night.

The second example is that of Ben, a highly trained member of the US military. "His regular duty is to descend to an underground facility where he waits for his colleague, for hours at a time, for an order to fire a nuclear missile" (Waring 1988:15-6).

Waring concludes that Tendai is the true worker and her work is of value. Although Ben works, she says, his work is destructive and a threat to the planet. We should take it further to say that it is not only a threat to the environment but also to human beings and all living creatures. These two examples are a good reminder that women, who are home makers, although labeled non-workers, are always at work. What marginalizes what they do as an important dimension of economic growth is how the term "work" is defined. For the Western world work is only the

production of goods for market consumption and for earning a living. Work is when money and more money is made for the comfort of the powerful few, while in African society work is that which benefits all members of the community. It is not only what people are paid for but what makes life what it should be for all. Like Tendai, women's work starts very early in the morning when they prepare daily necessities for their families.

In rural areas women have to walk long distances to fetch water and gather firewood. These two requirements take half of the day's time. On top of this a woman still has to cook, do the laundry, keep the house clean, take care of the elderly and children. All these responsibilities involve hard labour. Taking all these responsibilities into account we conclude that African women, whether earning a salary or not, are full-time workers.

After the land was taken from Africans by whites, men were forced to work as migrant labourers in mines and on white men's farms. This was the only way open to many to sustain their children with food and clothing. Women stayed behind to care for their homes, the elderly and children. They continued to plough the fields and take care of livestock. In other words, they continued to sustain the traditional economy in the absence of their husbands and sons. When the traditional economy was not able to sustain families as it used to, because men were not there to help and in some cases because of the inadequacy of the land, women were forced to become employed workers. We must point out at this stage that when women became employed workers they became sources of cheap labour, yet a critical force for the country's economic growth.

Women worked as domestic and farm labourers and factory workers (Walker 1982:15). These new conditions of work for both men and women brought a lot of dysfunction within the traditional family system. They separated husbands from wives and children from fathers for long periods of time. They also separated mothers and children for hours. These new work conditions destroyed the moral fibre and the bonding within traditional African families. Given all the hardships women had to face, they should be praised for not giving up. They dealt with problems to the best of their abilities, taking care of the well-being of their families and their communities.

5.4 SUMMARY

I have tried to articulate women's involvement in politics and the economy of their communities. I have considered their contribution collectively, regardless of their individual status. Their participation in the economy and politics in Africa shows that they are strong and determined human beings. They are people with vision and moral responsibility to themselves, their families and their communities.

Through illustrating the involvement of women in politics and the economy we can correctly conclude that moral agency involves a struggle against oppression and dehumanization. It is a quest for liberation, dignity and equality. The moral agency of African women is demonstrated in the things they did in the spheres of politics and economy to ensure the total well being of their communities. Things that are taken for granted, like

the production of food and preparing them to feed children and men, should not be taken for granted. Women demonstrated their contribution to society through acts of caring and compassion for their families and others. This is an aspect of morality.

In their struggles against forces that were determined to destroy their personhood and that of their children and communities, women demonstrated their moral agency. The Sesotho expression that says *"mmangwana o tshwara thipa ka bohaleng"*, which means a true mother is the one who holds the knife by the blade to stop it from hurting her child, applies here. In taking a stand for the survival and the continuance of their society women, together with men, were engaged in a moral course not only for themselves but also for their children and later generations. Thus our claim that African women are moral agents is unquestionable.

The fact that they were able to "till the soil" and feed their children when their men were forced into the migrant labour system (Davison 1997:134), stood up against their colonizers (Steady 1996:11), organized massive demonstrations and carried out their plans without being intimidated (Wells 1991:40) illustrates that African women are people with vision, who take into account the interests and welfare of their families, communities and fellow citizens.

Although African culture, like most cultures, was and is still to a large extent manipulated by men, women have maneuvered around this barrier. At times they have done this with ease and at other times with difficulty. Despite these barriers they have

shown tremendous strength in doing what they are convinced is right. They have not simply accepted the marginalization that could have had serious repercussions for themselves, their children and communities. "In times of crisis, they selected their own leaders, often older women known for their strength Afterward, the oral traditions of women in the community carried the memory of these heroines on for future generations to revere." (Terborg-Penn 1996:34).

Needless to say, while women made independent moral decisions for the survival of their culture, part of those decisions could have been under the influence of a male dominated culture. That is, one could argue that they did what they did because their culture demanded it from them. However, in the midst of possible cultural pressure we cannot question the deep seated commitment of motherhood to the emerging of an African society that would continue to exist to this day. For example, when South African women marched to the Union Building in August 9, 1956 they were not under cultural pressure, rather, they acted collectively out of their instincts with a strong commitment to justice and liberation.

As women become involved politically, economically, educationally and otherwise in the affairs of their countries, the patriarchal culture that dominates African societies is bound to change for the better. Increasingly it is coming to accommodate new roles and contributions that women are making towards society. It is indeed an illusion to think that women's role in society is of marginal importance. They are transformers of culture, politics and sustainers of economies.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

This chapter intends to argue for an alternative society that values all its members, as opposed to a patriarchal society that marginalizes women. Such an alternative society is an inclusive society where everyone is socialized in such a way that she or he reaches her or his full potential. It is a society in which its members, regardless of their sex, colour, creed, economic status and professions, are valued and respected equally because they all share a common identity, that is, that of humanity.

Also, the chapter will describe briefly the importance of socialization and how socialization can be carried out in a way that empowers all members of the community, especially women. It will also suggest and elaborate on three strategies for change, namely, conscientization, self-sufficiency and a "culture of respect".

6.1 SOCIALIZATION THAT EMPOWERS

According to Frederick Elkin (1960:4) socialization is "the process by which someone learns the ways of a given society or social group so that he [sic] can function within it". Peter L. Berger (1967:15) takes Elkin's point further by claiming that in socialization an "individual not only learns the objectivated meanings but identifies with and is shaped by them. He [sic] draws them into himself [sic] and makes them his [sic] meanings".

Elkin (1960:7-17) claims that there are three preconditions to

socialization. The first is an ongoing society. A child is to be born in a society in order for it to be socialized according to the norms and values of that particular society. If there is no society there cannot be socialization. The second precondition is the biological inheritance, which means that a child has to be biologically normal in order for it to understand and apprehend the social training. The normality that Elkin is talking about has to do with the presence and "the development of the brain, physical organs, and nervous system" which make a child capable "of complex and profound activities" (Elkin 1960:11). The third precondition is the human nature. This category has to do with the development of human feelings, such as "love, shame, vanity, ambition, envy, hero-worship, and cruelty" (Elkin 1960:13). Being apart from the society, having abnormal biological make-up and feelings, make it impossible for a child to learn or to become a fully socialized being.

Elkin (1960:10) and Berger (1967:15) argue that each society socializes its members according to its norms and standards. The society enables its members to communicate effectively by teaching them a common language, "common symbols - concepts, gestures, and objects that have closely similar meanings for all. . . . They must also know the statuses and roles of others and of themselves" (Elkin 1960:19). Berger (1967:15) further maintains that "The success of socialization depends upon the establishment of symmetry between the objective world of society and the subjective world of the individual."

Berger's point is key to healthy socialization. In the socialization of children a balance between the outward

(society) and the inward (personal) worlds should be established and respected so that the learner is not robbed of her or his individual identity. In African society, unfortunately, a girl-child is socialized in such a way that she respects and honours that which is outside her and distrusts that which is within her. The balance between the society's opinions and hers is totally discouraged. Her opinion is not as important as that of a boy-child. He is socialized to lead, to command and to achieve, while she is socialized only to care for others. This quality of caring for others that she is expected to have makes her a good and unselfish woman in the eyes of the society.

This work is not condemning the concept of socialization *per se* but only the way it is transmitted to members of the society, which seems to be biased, especially towards women. If girls are not encouraged to achieve and to honour themselves, their self-esteem and confidence is destroyed. Instead of being allowed to actively appropriate the social codes of society a girl is expected to absorb them passively. This expectation does not encourage symmetry between the teachings of society and the girl's personal perception of "being". Socialization that does not allow dialogue between what is taught and the individual's thoughts and feelings fails to produce a healthy, confident and productive individual member of society.

Socialization, be it moral, political, cultural or religious, should encourage individuals to be themselves. In the process of socialization the individual should be encouraged to dialogue with the teachings of society, affirming and critiquing its social codes. Where this is not encouraged, socialization

contributes towards the creation of human deficiencies. It destroys self-esteem and assertiveness in women and develop in them a false sense of being human.

An example of this is that of an eleven year-old girl who once told me that she hates being a girl because girls are not as strong and as intelligent as boys are. Her statement illustrates how girls are socialized differently from boys. In African society, when girls grow up they are constantly reminded of what they should and should not do. Reminders go like this, 'girls do not climb trees, girls do not argue too much, girls do not laugh too loud, girls do not wake up late, girls must cook, wash dishes, clean the house' -- the list is endless. Out-going and spontaneous little girls are taught at the very early stage to restrain themselves and their thoughts lest their friendliness be misunderstood by the opposite sex as invitation for sexual relationships. They are warned not to talk too much because it is considered inappropriate for girls to behave that way. To the contrary, it is normal and highly approved for boys to talk as much as they want to. Shy boys are considered 'not man enough'. They are said to be 'like girls'.

African culture, and its socialization, values a boy-child more than it values a girl-child. The reason is that a boy will continue the name of the family while women are not regarded as permanent members of their paternal households since they are expected to marry. The second reason that makes a boy-child to be more valued than a girl-child is that he is seen as the one who will be capable to take care of his parents in their old age. It is worth mentioning that the supposed caring that a man

offers to his family is also through his wife. In effect this means that it is, indeed a woman who does most of the caring on behalf of her husband, not a man, as it is always assumed. Should not the care that a woman gives to those around her be regarded as an invaluable contribution? The answer is a categorical "yes". Therefore girls and boys should be encouraged to possess similar qualities.

Another negative aspect of African socialization is that married women are expected to cut ties with their families of birth. More often than not they are discouraged to pay frequent visits and to communicate with their families, unless it is highly necessary. A woman is encouraged to bond and to spend more time with her husband's family, her new family. Unfortunately, however, in many instances, her new family is not as open and as welcoming to her as it is sometimes believed (see chapter 4).

These forms of stereotypes and the placing of boys and girls into "boxed roles", with boys as superiors, have meant that even those women who have "made it" against all odds work twice as hard to be accepted as good leaders in their communities. This results in the innate and acquired ability of women as moral agents being ignored, if not utterly rejected or squashed. Such attitudes and beliefs are carried out in the name of culture with the result that most women accept them as a given and with no hope or effort to change them. Those who try to change them are regarded as '*diganana*', renegades.

The kind of socialization described here disempowers girls, and in the long run, disempowers society as well. A married woman is

forced into a situation where she neither fully belongs to her blood family or her husband's. Her place in society becomes ambiguous, she seems to be always in transit, with no permanent place to make her voice heard and to make a solid contribution. Notwithstanding these barriers, however, women have continued to make their contributions in society, albeit rated as inferior compared to male contributors.

It is a weakness for our society to condition children into gender stereotypes where the female is trained to show signs of weakness and less intelligence. This kind of socialization conditions girls to accept failures as part of who they are, while boys are taught to "fear weakness, to try to get rid of it immediately and sometimes frantically" (Miller 1976:31). These gender-stereotyped approaches to socialization distort human experience. Boys grow up with the fear of making mistakes while girls dare not initiate anything new because of the fear to intrude in a territory that does not belong to them. They are seen and accepted as non-initiators, as beings who do not embody intellect, theirs is to wait upon men for direction.

Given the weaknesses of how boys and girls are socialized and the stereotypes that are attached to their roles, we should strive for a society that treats all its members with equal dignity and endeavours to enhance their abilities to enrich one another's lives. When both boys and girls are socialized in a way that will enhance their free and maximum participation in society, we are sure to see vibrant societies of free individuals whose contributions are unrestrained and not underrated. This requires that our socialization should be one

that empowers inclusively. All children should be given the same value and status they deserve as God's creatures. Boys and girls should be exposed to the kind of teaching and moulding that will expand their horizons and make their lives enjoyable and worth living.

An inclusive and empowering socialization is one that recognizes and accepts the fact that we are all human. Miller (1976:31) reminds us that no human being is born perfect or fully-grown. When we say that African women are moral agents we do not imply that they do not make mistakes. But their mistakes should be seen as part of human nature, a phenomenon that men are also victims of. It is the community that has to bring the individuals to a responsible and mature stage. Within this process, society should acknowledge our human weaknesses and limitations, which exceed biological, racial, or ethnic make-up or otherwise. The temptation to see mistakes committed by women as deplorable and to see those committed by men as normal or accidental and, therefore, easily pardonable and forgotten, makes a mockery of the theological understanding of human sinfulness. Women are not more sinful than men. Paul's injunction that "all have sinned and fallen short of the Grace of God"(Romans 3:23) applies to both men and women.

6.2 SEEKING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF SOCIALIZATION

In order to achieve maximum participation of women - which is independent but at the same time interdependent - in both the public and the private spheres, new ways of socializing both boys and girls need to be discovered and put into practice. In Africa at the moment, as already shown, the majority of girls

are still exposed to socialization that channels them to a certain way of life and thinking, primarily along the lines of fear - the fear of adventure and independence, which emanates from self-degradation -while boys are socialized to explore, succeed and be independent.

Socialization, be it learning about morality, cultural norms, religion and politics, should encourage interaction between that which one learns and personal convictions. As we noted from Chazan and Soltis¹, girls are moralized differently from boys. That is, their socialization in morality does not encourage dialogue, appropriation and the critique of moral codes. They remain students from the beginning to the end of their lives. They are not given the chance to own the process of moralizing, which means that the student lives according to the teachings of the family and the community, and then she graduates to be a teacher of moral standards in both the home and the community which in itself is a step towards moral responsibility. Although moralizing, that is, the teaching of or the learning about morality, is an important part of socialization, there is a stage in life when all members of the community should be given the latitude to think for themselves and make moral decisions that are appropriate for their situations and communities. This is what Peter Berger (1967:15) calls the symmetry between the objective world and the personal world. Morality requires the individual's capability to reflect critically on the social codes and to be able to bring new ideas for the growth of individuals and the community.

¹ See chapter 2, page 24.

Socialization be it moral, social, cultural or religious, should take seriously its negative impact when it is prolonged. Prolonged teaching without attempts of developing the individual to be her true self should be abandoned particularly as far as women are concerned. Socialization, especially in morality, should willingly heed the voice of those who are negatively affected. A negative kind of socialization is a process through which a woman is mostly

coerced to subsume within herself, as it were, the prescriptions of society and to make them the basis of her behaviour, thus creating the illusion of a female nature. Socialization is seen simply as the systematic denial of our supposed absolute individuality and liberty by the constraints imposed by social roles (McMillan 1982:63).

Girls are negatively affected by the socialization process, as it continues into their adulthood. An example of this is the number of authorities that the girl-child has to have from the moment she is born until she dies. As a child she is her father's asset. In the case where a father is not present any male figure in the household becomes her authority figure. When she becomes married the authority is transferred from the father to the husband. If her husband dies then any male figure in her husband's household or her son becomes her authority figure. She cannot do anything without the approval of her male authority figure (Rosaldo 1974:36-7). This is a practical example of a moralizing process that is continuous and negatively impacts on the psyche of women.

Breaking away from this kind of socialization that disadvantages women invites discontent from the community and insults to the one who takes this initiative (see Ch.4, p.59-60). Seeking new ways of socializing is an imperative for our African society. This will ensure that our young women will continue to value themselves and their contributions towards the building of the future of the African society. This is only possible if they (women) are treated as subjects and not as objects.

There is a concern in African society that outside influences with their emancipatory and egalitarian attitudes attract and corrupt young African women. It is imagined that they will become like renegades and revolvers, when in fact they will be aspiring and searching for a better personhood and existence elsewhere. If this trend continues, Africa will lose its most treasured citizens -- women. Adapting new ways of socialization will, I believe, bring a different attitude and motivation among the majority of girls. They will serve their families and communities voluntarily and out of love for humanity. The mandate of a moral agent is to teach, care and liberate. Liberation, caring and teaching are, among others, qualities that must be upheld by all moral agents. If these qualities in women and men were not retarded by prejudices and self-negation that people are socialized into, the world would be a better place to live in. There would be equality and respect between the sexes, races and ethnic groups.

6.3 DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

When people are aware of the situation in which they are and feel the need for change, it is important for them to think

about how to make others aware of the problem they see and together, think about what kind of change they want to implement and how they will implement it. This process of inquiry helps to conscientize people to develop strategies for change.

According to Louis M. Colonnese (1971:xvii), conscientization

posits that every man [sic] can know reality and perceive his [sic] situation therein. By becoming aware (*toma de consciencia*) man [sic] achieves a new self-understanding and social sensitivity whereby he [sic] becomes active on his [sic] own behalf in history.

Conscientization is a process in which people are made aware of their reality, and they own that reality and proceed to become active in changing what they think needs to be changed. The changes that are to be implemented and the way they should be implemented are carefully thought of.

6.3.1 Conscientization

As described above, conscientization has to do with awareness-raising for self and other members of society. It is a way in which people are encouraged to think and act on their problems for their own emancipation and well being. Therefore, conscientization is critical for empowerment. It includes, among other things,

gender awareness and sensitivity to the needs and interests of women . . . It means educating people to

recognize women's issues through an examination of various forms of gender discrimination; for instance, in the use of certain equipment and in marriage and divorce laws, inheritance practices, child custody, and employment (Davison 1997:199).

Conscientization makes people aware of the theories and practices that enslave them and the cultures that support them. Paulo Freire (1971:113) maintains that in consciousness-raising people find themselves in communication with one another while in oppression or domestication there is no communication, "there are only actors and spectators". For Ernani Fiori (1971:123) "to educate is to conscientize, and to conscientize is to seek the fullness of the human condition".

When people are conscientized they will come to realize the enslaving theories and perceptions which exist in their minds about others and themselves, and when they are conscientized and liberated the culture and socialization of enslavement will as well change for the good of society. African culture as well as cultures in other parts of the world should come to realize the fact that all humanity deserves respect. "No rational being should ever be used merely as a means; always, even when [man] [sic] is used as a means, he [sic] must at the same time be treated as an end" (Donagan 1977:229). In this way culture will produce productive members of society who will be able to care and to love themselves as well as those around them.

But a culture that uses socializing mechanisms that constrain women has created in the minds of many women a fear of becoming

the authentic self. Women end up trying to please those in authority by fitting into the created space no matter how big or small it is. If women try to go against what is regarded as the norm for them, they are ridiculed, resisted or sanctioned. In this way they lose touch with the inner self and embrace the *philosophical*² self.

The philosophical or the learnt self has created creatures like "ladies", that is, women who fit into the culturally constructed norms of what a woman should be. The idea of the philosophical self creates *men-like* women or women who are *like men*. Usually this refers to a woman who does what she is expected to do to the best of her ability and who happens to maintain what is believed to be the required standard of performance. She is usually accepted by men as an extraordinary woman. She will be said to be doing things like men and she will be called a man-like woman. This is supposed to make her feel proud, since she is not like all of them (women). This type of a woman is neither a man nor a woman but an-in-between creature, which for me is an insult: something that no woman should be proud of. But the incorporation of the process of conscientization and communication with one another will help us to know and to embrace the truth about ourselves and others.

This learnt self, which comes through the labels described, creates super-mothers, super-wives and super daughters-in-law.

² My emphasis. I coined this concept simply to mean the self or the personality that is learnt, not the one that is in the inside. There is nothing wrong with the learnt personality as long as it is balanced by who the real person is from the inside. I do not want to use "social" or "cultural self" because I believe these two can be concrete, but the philosophical is mostly theoretical and this is the emphasis I am trying to bring forth.

The "supers" are women who want to prove to the status quo that they can reach the requirements and even manage to go beyond them, but within the boundaries set by the status quo itself. This is at times done unconsciously. The "supers" do this mostly in negligence of their feelings and convictions. Women should be made aware that this is not right. Women should not compete to be alive but to live their God given life the way they want to live it, which is the way they ought to live it.

What can be done in situations where women are absorbing the untruths about themselves and do not see anything wrong in them (untruths)? What can be done in cases where the untruths or the wrongs are seen but those who see them do not see any way out, or in situations where the majority of women realize and experience oppression but are paralyzed to act because they are afraid of being ridiculed? Unfortunately, there is nothing magical that can remedy this situation. Conscientization, which is a process of articulating what is real and analysing it for a better future, is the only answer and it does not happen overnight. Women need to be made aware about their situation, their oppression and the alternatives. The usefulness of conscientization lies in its effectiveness to restore the individual's "responsibility for remaking himself [sic], i.e., for educating himself [sic] rather than 'being educated'" (Fiori 1960:124).

The process of conscientization will help women to be aware of the facts, and therefore, to reject anything that is detrimental to their well being. It will help them to refuse to adhere to social codes that are put in place to divide them into groups or

categories.³ These groups and categories are not only found in secular society but in the Church as well. If women are given necessary skills to analyse situations like these, they will be aware of what is happening in both Church and society and work towards changing it as well as preventing it from happening again.

Conscientization will empower women to break the culture of silence they are socialized into, which allows them to take abuse from men and women who are as oppressive to other women as some men are (see ch.4, section 2, The Second World). A process of conscientization which also includes learning to be assertive and to be confident in oneself will help women to say their minds and own their opinions regardless of the opposition they face. This form of conscientization can be done in steps through workshops, seminars, institutions of learning and individual mentoring. Audre Lorde (1984:40-44) asserts that women should detest silence when it is not time for it. They should avoid voicelessness when their inner souls want to attest to something. She gives witness through what she has seen and felt when she says,

I have come to believe over and over again that what is more important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having bruised or misunderstood. . . . For we have been socialized to respect fear more than our own needs for language and definition, and while we wait in silence for that final luxury of fearlessness, the weight of that

³ See chapter 4, pages 61 and 62 for the listing of these categories.

silence will choke us.

Audre Lorde challenges women to own their opinions and to make them known. She also makes it clear that by so doing one will be bruised and misunderstood but this should not discourage women from saying and doing what they believe to be right.

It is also important that educators in institutions of learning, both formal and informal, should expose their students to diverse knowledge. They should prescribe materials and books written by different people from different backgrounds; this will include books written by women as well. Students, both male and female, Black and White should be challenged to broaden their perspectives. This can only happen if students are exposed to syllabuses that promote growth, not the ones that settle for sameness year in and year out in the name of standards and national and international recognition.

It is also true that even if all the interventions to liberate women are put in place, women will never be free if they are afraid to write their own stories and seize their own existence. In the process of conscientization a continuous reflection is essential. It should be stated that

Conscientization is not prior requirement for the struggle of liberation - it is this very struggle. Regaining consciousness is identical with reconquering the world: it is liberating praxis. Conscientization is this people's struggle to retake their historical destiny, their culture, into their own hands (Fiori

1960: 143).

6.3.2 Self-Sufficiency

Coupled with challenging the status quo is the question of self-sufficiency⁴. Women are working hard in upgrading their educational standards and life skills because they want a better life for themselves and their children. Their aim is to be able to be independent economically so that they can be able to take care of themselves and others who need their care. In South Africa today women are visible in all spheres of life. They are in business, in politics, in education and religious leadership and they are doing well. This proves that if people are given necessary skills and opportunities to use those skills they can be what they want to be, which is what they are created to be - the best of who they are.

The number one temptation which faces these women is, because of their abilities to question, debate issues with clarity, seek and offer solutions, at times they are in danger of being quietened through high positions by the same status quo they are questioning. High positions are at times used to silence activists and visionaries. The problem here is that because of the rules set to pacify activists and visionaries, women end up abiding by their masters' rules, which means settling at the center and cutting ties with the margin. But others, though with difficulty, remain faithful to the struggles of the margin and

⁴ The word self-sufficiency is used here to describe the capacity of a potential member of a society who is economically well off and socially aware. She is able to take care of herself financially and psychologically not in isolation but in interdependence with other members of her society. This can also be termed 'self-sufficiency-in-community'.

continue to try to connect the center with the margin. This is in itself the conscientization of women and the transformation of the society.

In order to minimize the cutting of ties with the margin - which is a home base for the majority of women, women in leadership positions need moral support from all women. They need assurance that as they speak up and become sidelined by the system, others will be there to support, encourage and pray for them.

The undeniable fact is that the majority of African women in South Africa are illiterate or semi-illiterate. Illiteracy makes it difficult for women to get jobs that pay well and this is the reason why the majority of African women are the poorest in the country. They are the last to be employed and the first to be retrenched or fired. There is still much to be done in order for them to become economically viable which will make them self-sufficient. Economic viability will help women not to look up to a man to give them economic security. This will help stop early marriages that sometimes become abusive.

Knowledge builds women's confidence and esteem. It enables them to express themselves without being easily destroyed by sleazy, degrading and annoying comments and attitudes. They become much more confident to challenge inequalities and question their existence. These women "bear the burden and take the risks that go with being defined as 'troublemakers'. Since this role flies in the face of their conditioning, subordinates, especially women, do not come to it with ease" (Miller 1976:12).

6.3.3 Creating A Culture of Respect

The third strategy for change is creating a "culture of respect, acceptance and tolerance" among all creation. This is what the *Nguni* people in South Africa call the culture of '*ubuntu*'⁵ and the *Basotho* call it '*botho*'. *Ubuntu* or *Botho* culture aims at encouraging respect, love and care for all humanity and other creatures as well because all of creation is regarded as sacred.

When it is not misused, culture is a powerful tool and an important aspect of our being. No society can function without culture because culture makes possible the integration of life itself. But when misused, culture creates arrogant hierarchical structures, racism, sexism, ethnicism, tribalism and schisms of many kinds. It degrades and humiliates people. It frustrates and inhibits growth.

If all creation is regarded as sacred, it is obvious that women as part of God's creation are sacred beings too and they deserve to be treated likewise. For *ubuntu* philosophy to be a reality in African society it needs to be lived or actualized. If it is true

1. that each person is valuable in the sight of God and, therefore, has intrinsic worth and dignity;
2. that human beings share a common identity. Humanity

⁵ "Ubuntu is a traditional African philosophy and a way of life which presupposes that life, human beings and all of creation are sacred. It also presupposes that common life is the goal of all life including human life. As a philosophy, ubuntu inculcates a sense of belonging to one another in such a way that love, care and respect for one another become indispensable ingredients" (Pato, L.L. in *Spirituality in Religions: Profiles & Perspectives* by C.W. du Toit, (ed). 1995. pg.117-8.

that is created in the likeness of the Godhead shares that quality of unity, which is a unity in diversity;

3. that human beings have been given a task to be God's stewards on earth. As such, they have a responsibility to care for God's creation, and that entails accountability (Ndungane 1996:74);

it goes without saying that denial to women of any of the above mentioned human qualities and tasks is wrong. It is not only wrong but arrogant and sinful on the part of those who advocate and perpetuate the idea of inferiority of women because this denies women a dignity they deserve.

If women are regarded as inferior, what happens to the great saying that 'individuals are because of the community and that the community is because of individuals'? In Christological language we say that all beings are parts of the same body. If one member of the community or one part of the body is sick or does not function as it should, the whole community or body cannot be free from the disease (1 Corinthians 12:12-26). This means that if women are not functioning as a healthy part of the community the whole community is sick. In sociological terms this means that men cannot be free to take their rightful and proper place in the community as long as women are not free and not occupying their rightful positions as well.

If men as well as women have a fragile dignity to defend by pushing others down, the reality of the *ubuntu* concept will never be realized. *Ubuntu* does not mean spoon-feeding forever,

it does not mean raising a child forever but it means helping each other to reach and to maintain their potentials.

If women are regarded as mentally, physically and emotionally weak, where and what are the healthy members of the community doing to bring wholeness to its weak members? Are they supposed to be ridiculed, degraded, insulted or are they to be helped and made to recover? If women as members of society, are regarded as sick, the logical conclusion is that this is a reflection of the state of the society including men. Archbishop Tutu once said that White people in South Africa will never be free until all Black people are free.⁶ This applies to men in our societies. They cannot be free from the fear of women's power and capabilities until they free themselves from the bondage of control and manipulation.

"Ubuntu culture" in practice is the culture that engenders love and care, respect and dignity. It is jealous of its own and its own is all of creation. Simon Maimela asserts, as already seen in chapter 5, that there is often a misuse of African culture, religion and ethnic diversity (1996:82-4), in the sense that these aspects are at times used to oppress, exclude and to legitimize superiority over others. I also believe that there are misunderstandings and misinterpretations of gender differences. Until these 'mis-es' are corrected, we cannot fully realize the culture of 'ubuntu'. We cannot fully do what we ought to do or treat people the way they ought to be treated.

⁶ Archbishop Tutu said this in one of many speeches he delivered during the apartheid era.

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has attempted to argue for the creation of an ideal world that will respect all its inhabitants. It is a world that will value all its people and make them responsible members of society and good agents of transformation. For this to happen, this chapter recommends a different way of socializing children. It recommends the type of socialization that will empower women and men alike and value their contribution in society equally.

For such socialization to be realized, we have argued that there must be a creation of a new culture, namely, a culture of respect. Taking charge of their destiny, in and with their communities, women will be able to empower themselves in any responsible way they perceive necessary to become self-sufficient to take care of themselves and their families. They will join in partnership with all other members of society in creating a society that loves and cares for all its members.

An important aspect of socialization is conscientizing people. This will motivate them to build an inclusive community that regards its subjects with equality. It will be a community that embraces a kind of socialization that empowers people to be self-sufficient, not in isolation, but in communion with others. This inclusive community will also endeavour to promote a culture that will make necessary changes to society possible, leading to a realization of the culture of 'ubuntu'. An inclusive community is, therefore, a community that supports, builds, encourages, educates and values all its members. It is a community where members can rely on one another for support. It is a community that encourages moral agency and also builds

moral responsibility by respecting and valuing all its members. It is a community that encourages everyone to do her or his best and to be compensated accordingly.

There is an increasing number of women who are involved in the kind of conscientization we have described in the preceding pages. This in itself is an aspect of moral agency. They make other women aware of their oppression especially those women who are psychologically and mentally blinded by the principles of the first and the second worlds of women (chapter 4). They make other women aware of psychological and physical violence against them. They help them recover their self-esteem and confidence. Women organize workshops that help other women to be assertive in dealing with issues that affect them in their everyday experiences. These workshops help women who have been socialized into the culture of silence to break free. Women who are engaged in this kind of moral agency see these tasks not as burdens but as their moral responsibilities for they see themselves as vehicles of change.

I am more convinced than ever before that moral agents are those people who are aware of what is happening around them. Moral agents are those men and women who are able to voice their opinions about what they see as wrong in their society and act on these convictions. True moral agents abhor oppression and work towards the liberation of their people. They do not rejoice in the suffering of others. By socializing children in such a way that they become independent human beings and respected members of their communities, and conscientizing women and men to the realities of their society, moral agents are actually

creating a new culture of awareness which will in turn give birth to individual respect.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

This study has attempted to challenge the unfounded hypothesis of patriarchal societies that women are inferior in their thinking and incapable of engaging in sound moral judgments. Western, Christian and African philosophical thoughts have over the years developed theories and practices that restrict women and refuse them full participation in society. They have developed theories that support claims of women's inferiority when compared to men. According to these theories a woman's primary and most important task is that of being a mother.

All these traditions (Western, Christian and African) have treated women as subordinates. Their main problem is that they saw men alone as being able to define who they are as well as who women are. They did not allow women to name themselves and articulate their thoughts and capabilities. Men gave themselves the best parts in the history of humankind. They became the only ones to judge the nature of reality and that reality became reality for all.

Amidst the negative image given to women by male traditional theories in general, this work attempts to unearth women's strength and moral agency. Their strength partly lies in the fact that they have managed to use what the Church Fathers regarded as weak, namely, their minds, to empower themselves and their communities. Women's moral agency is found in their actions of compassion and enhancement of the moral values of society.

We are, therefore, arguing that African women are philosophers in their own right, within their cultural and experiential boundaries. The fact that they can act rightly is solid proof that they can think rightly. African women's abilities are, therefore, not limited to actions, for good actions cannot happen without concrete and realistic thinking. Their philosophies are translated into concrete realizable goals. And their moral agency is to be found in who and what they are and in their ability to care for others.

It goes to say that women's approach to dealing with reality might be different from that of men, as much as White people's approach may differ from that of Black people. However, this does not and should not be interpreted in terms of inferiority and superiority. Rather it should be seen as different and complementary.

South African women today are reaping the fruits of their foremothers and mothers' determination 'to be' and 'to belong'. They are occupying their rightful place in the national and regional governing bodies of the country. They are ascending the corporate ladder of success and education as well as other social structures. It is also important to realize that they have "not yet arrived". The holistic liberation struggle is still to be attained.

Rejecting the fallacies of patriarchal theories about women the study has argued that politically, economically, religiously and ethically women are strong pillars of their communities both in the past and in the present, just like men. It has shown that if

there are women who live without ethical bias or moral standards, it is not because of their biological make up. Rather, their weakness should be seen in terms of other deficiencies that all other human beings may also have regardless of their gender.

It has also been argued that the way women are socialized retards their growth in the sense that it does not allow them to operate from their axioms as women. Instead they are expected to operate from those (axioms) set for them by the male dominated society. According to the patriarchal values of society women never graduate from dependency to independence. They remain minors who need male guidance all the time. They are not encouraged to bring symmetry between what they learn and their inner convictions. Women are, therefore, taught, to operate outside themselves. The impression women are given is that to base one's operation outside oneself and on masculine standards (tough, boisterous, uncompromising) is good while to operate from inner drive and convictions, and in a feminine (power-with, interdependence, emotional-connectedness, graceful) way, is a sign of weakness.

Female and some contemporary male theorists assert that teachings of all kinds - be they on morality, culture, politics, religion and so forth - should not only aim at making people accept what they are taught but at developing their critical reflection and encouraging them to bring forth constructive innovations. Women's challenge, therefore, is to critique elements in their culture, religion, moral and social codes which belittle them. They should develop theories which reflect

their reality and the realities of the society they are part of. The theories developed should be in step with real life. They should also go a step further by creating an ideal society that everyone will be motivated to work toward. Theories should be developed with and among the people, not from high towers by individuals who are not part of the community or who have little to do with the community.

We have further given evidence of women who have been in the forefront of societal changes and profound leadership. The study mentions women like 'Manthatisi, Donna Beatrice and Nehanda (chap. 4) and Tendai (chap. 5), who went an extra mile to protect their children and communities from hunger (in the case of Tendai) and domination (in the case of 'Manthatisi, Donna and Nehanda). That is, implicitly, what moral agency is all about - being able to act purposefully and rightfully for the well-being of others. Although caring about themselves, moral agents are also able to act rightly for the sake of others in order to bring about life-giving changes.

African women in South Africa have participated in the development of the economy in their communities. They tilled the soil, nurtured their livestock and developed markets. In the absence and presence of their fathers, husbands, brothers and sons they took care of their families and those who needed their help. They fought political battles and, side by side with men, they finally obtained their freedom.

Some of these African women did not allow themselves to be pinned down by the patriarchal culture of suppression. They

manoeuvred through it in order to take care of what needed to be attended to. In communities where they were discouraged to study science, to be ministers, pilots, doctors, and leaders in other public spheres they have plunged themselves in these fields and proved that any person can be able to do what she or he sets herself or himself to do. Women have performed as well as men in public spheres. Traditional Western and Patristic theories as well as those of Africa, which for a long time aimed at putting women down, have been proven wrong given the distinctive evidence of what women are capable of doing.

This study, in effect, suggests a new way of life in the African cultural context. A new way of relating to one another as members of the community. It argues that women and men are created equal and should be treated as equals. It suggests a new way of socializing children. A type of socialization that will aim at empowering all learners, be they girls or boys, and encouraging them to be the best they can be.

In conclusion we must ask whether Africa can hope to grow and flourish while it ignores and suppresses the moral agency of its women? The answer is no. In the past Africa did not recognise that without its women it would be doomed to non-existence. The tides of colonialism, imperialism and other destructive forces would have destroyed it. Now that we can show and articulate some of the sources of its strength in the past - African women - we must now allow for a culture that embraces them and their abilities and join them in their quest for complete humanness. If African culture can begin to see the moral agency of women in all its dimensions, African society will not only have free

individuals but free individuals whose goal is to see a stronger Africa.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackermann, D. et al. 1991. *Women Hold up Half the Sky*.

Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.

Amadiume, I. 1987. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*. London: Zed Books Ltd.

Baier, A.C. 1994. *Moral Prejudices: Essays on Ethics*.

Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Balm, D.M. (tran). 1972. *Aristotle's De Partibus Animalium I and De Generatione Animalium I (with passages from II. 1-3)*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bam, B. 1986. Priorities for Women in South Africa, in *Speaking of Faith: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change*. D. Eck and D. Jain (eds). New Delhi: Indraprastha Press.

Belenky, M.F. et al. 1986. *Women's Ways of Knowing: Development of Self, Voice and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Berger, P.L. 1967. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory Of Religion*. New York: Doubbleday Dell.

Card, C. (ed). 1991. *Feminist Ethics*. Kansas: University Press.

Chazan, B and J.F. Soltis (eds). 1973. *Moral Education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Clark, E.A. 1983. *Women in the Early Church: Message of the Fathers of the Church 13*. Minnesota: The Liturgical Press.

Clark, E.A. and H. Richardson (eds). 1996. *Women and Religion: The original Sourcebook of Women in Christian Thought*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.

Colonnese, L.M. (ed). 1971. *Concientization For Liberation*. Washington D.C.: Division for Latin America-U.S.C.c.

Coquery-Vidrovitch, C. 1997. *African Women: A Modern History*. Colorado: Westview Press. (Translated by Beth G. Raps).

Coward, R. 1992. *Our Treacherous Hearts: Why Women Let Men Get Their Way*. London: Faber and Faber.

Curran, C. et al. 1996. *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*. New York: Paulist Press.

Daly, L.K. (ed). 1994. *Feminist Theological Ethics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Daneel, I. 1987. *Quest For Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches*. Gweru: Mambo Press.

Davison, J. 1997. *Gender, Lineage, and Ethnicity in Southern Africa*. Colorado: Westview Press.

Donagan, A. 1977. *The Theory of Morality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Edet, R. and B. Ekeya. 1988. Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community, in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*. Fabella Virginia and Mercy Oduyoye (eds). New York: Orbis Books.

Elkin, F. 1960. *Child And Society: The Process of Socialization*. New York: Random House.

Fanusie, L. 1992. Sexuality and Women in African Culture, in *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. M.A. Oduyoye and M.R.A. Kanyoro (eds). New York: Orbis Books.

Farley, M.A. 1996. Feminist Ethic, in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*. C. Curran, M. Farley and R. McCormick, S. J. (eds). New York: Paulist Press.

Fiori, E. 1971. Education and Conscientization, in *Conscientization for Liberation*. L. M. Colonnese (ed). Washington D.C.: Division for Latin America, U.S.C.C.

Frankena, W.K. 1973. Morality and Moral Philosophy, in *Moral Education*. B. Chazan and J. Soltis (eds). New York: Teachers College Press.

Freire, P. 1971. Education and Cultural Action, in *Conscientization for Liberation*. L. M. Colonnese (ed). Washington D.C.: Division for Latin America, U.S.C.C.

Gyekye, K. 1987. *An Essay On African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hallowell, A.I. 1955. *Culture and Experience*. New York: Schocken Books.

Haselbarth, H. 1976. *Christian Ethics in the African Context*. Ibadan: Daystar Press.

Hay, M.J. and S.Stichter (eds). 1995. *African Women South of the Sahara*. New York: Longman Group Limited.

Held, V. 1995. Feminist Moral Inquiry and the Feminist Future in *Justice And Care: Essential Readings in Feminist Ethics*. V. Held (ed). Westview Press: Cumnor Hill, Oxford.

Iwe, N.S.S. nd. *Christianity, Culture and Colonialism in Africa: Organized Religion And Factors in Developing Culture - An Analysis*. Port Harcourt: R.S.N.C.

Jaggar, A.M. 1991. Feminist Ethics: Projects, Problems, Prospects in *Feminist Ethics*. C. Card (ed). Kansas: University Press.

Joekes, S.P. 1987. *Women in the World Economy: An INSTRAW Study*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Johnstone, R.L. 1997. *Religion in Society: A Sociology of Religion*. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Kanyoro, M. 1994. Silenced by Culture, Sustained by Faith in *Claiming the Promise: African Churches Speak*. Margaret Larom (ed). New York: Friendship Press.

Kay, J.W. 1996. Getting Egypt out of the People: Aquinas's Contributions to Liberation in *Aquinas and Empowerment: Classical Ethics for Ordinary Lives*. G. Simon Harak, S.J.(ed). Washington: Georgetown University Press.

Kittay, E.F. and D.T. Meyers (eds). 1987. *Women and Moral Theory*. New Jersey: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lebaka-Ketshabile, L.S. 1997. *Liberating Action: A Perspective On Contextual Spirituality*. Pretoria: CB Powell Bible Centre, Unisa.

Lehmann, Paul. 1963. *Ethics in a Christian Context*. New York: Harper & Row.

Lindsay, B. (ed) 1980. *Comparative Perspectives of Third World Women: The Impact of Race, Sex, and Class*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Lorde, A. 1984. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. California: The Crossing Press.

Mahowald, M.B. (ed) 1978. *Philosophy of Women: Classical Current Concepts*. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company.

Maimela, S.S. 1996. Culture and Ethnic Diversity as Sources of Curse and Blessing in the Promotion of Democratic Change, in *Archbishop Tutu: Prophetic Witness in South Africa*. Hulley, L., L. Kretzschmar. and L. Pato (eds). Cape Town: Human & Rousseau.

- Manning, R.C. 1992. *Speaking From The Heart: A Feminist Perspective on Ethics*. Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1970. *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Mbiti, J.S. 1991. Flowers in the Garden: The Role of Women in African Religion, in *African Traditional Religions: In Contemporary Society*. Olupuna, Jacob. K.(ed). New York: Paragon House.
- McMillan, C. 1982. *Women, Reason and Nature: Some Philosophical Problems with Feminism*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Menger, K. 1974. *Morality, Decision and Social Organization*. Boston: D. Reidel Publishing Company.
- Miller, J.B. 1976. *Toward a New Philosophy of Women*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Ndungane, N.J. 1996. UTutu: Ngumuntu lowo, in *Archbishop Tutu: Prophetic Witness in South Africa*. Hulley, L. et al (eds). Cape Town: Human and Rousseau.
- Nelson, P. 1987. *Narrative and Morality: A Theological Inquiry*. Pennsylvania: State University Press.
- New Revised Standard Version. 1990. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers.

Niebuhr, H.R. 1951. *Christ and Culture*. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers.

Njoku, J.E.E. 1980. *The World Of The African Woman*. New Jersey: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Nwachuku, D.N. 1992. The Christian Widow in African Culture, in *The Will To Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. Oduyoye M.A. and Musimbi Kanyoro (eds). New York: Orbis Books.

O'Barr, J. and K. Firmin-Sellers. 1995. African Women in Politics, in *African Women South of the Sahara*. Hay M.J. and S. Stichter (eds). New York: Longman.

Oduyoye, M.A. 1995. *Daughters Of Anowa: African Women And Patriarchy*. New York: Orbis Books.

Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1994. *Re-creating Ourselves: African Women & Critical Transformations*. New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc.

Okonjo, K. 1976. The Dual Political Sex System in Operation: Igbo Women and Community Politics in Midwestern Nigeria, in *Women in Africa*. N. Hafkin and E. Bay (eds). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Pato, L.L. 1996. Being Fully Human: A Traditional African Culture and Spiritual Perspective, in *Spirituality in Religions Profiles & Perspectives*. C.W. du Toit (ed). Pretoria: University of South Africa.

- Qunta, C.N. 1987. *Outstanding African Women, 1500 BC-1900 AD in Women in Southern Africa*. C.N. Qunta (ed). London: Allison & Busby Limited.
- Robb, C.S. 1994. A Framework for Feminist Ethics, in *Feminist Theological Ethics: A Reader*. L.K. Daly (ed). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Rogers, B. 1979. *The Domestication Of Women: Discrimination in Developing Societies*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rosaldo, M.Z. and L. Lamphere (eds). 1974. *Woman, Culture, and Society*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Rosaldo, M.Z. 1974. Woman, Culture, and Society: A Theoretical Overview, in *Woman, Culture, and Society*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Shaw, W. 1993. *Social and Personal Ethics*. California: Wadsworth Publishing Company.
- Simons, H.J. 1968. *African Women: Their Legal Status in South Africa*. London: C. Hurst And Company.
- Stamp, P. 1989. *Technology, Gender, and Power in Africa*. Canada: IDRC.
- Steady, F. C. 1996. African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective, in *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*. R. Terborg-Penn and A. B. Rushing (eds). Washington: Howard

University Press.

Sudarkasa, N. 1996. The "Status of Women" in Indigenous African Societies, in *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*. R. Terborg-Penn and A. B. Rushing (eds). Washington: Howard University Press.

Terborg-Penn, R. et al. (eds). 1987. *Women in Africa and African Diaspora*. Washington: Howard University Press.

Terborg-Penn, R. and Andrea Benton Rushing. (eds). 1996. *Women in Africa and the African Diaspora: A Reader*. Washington: Howard University Press.

Sweetman, D. 1984. *Women Leaders in African History*. New Hampshire: Heinemann.

Villa-Vicencio, C. 1992. *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-Building and Human Rights*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Walker, C. 1982. *Women and Resistance in South Africa*. London: Onyx Press Ltd.

Walker, C. (ed) 1990. *Women and Gender in Southern Africa to 1945*. Cape Town: David Philip.

Waring, M. 1988. *If Women Were Counted: A New Feminist Economics*. San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Wells, J. 1991. *We Have Done With Pleading: The Women's 1913*

Anti-pass Campaign. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.

Williams, J.H. 1974. *Psychology of Women: Behavior in a Biosocial Context*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Yack, B. 1993. *The Problems of Political Animal: Community, Justice, and Conflict in Aristotelian Political Thought*. California: University of California Press.