

CHANGING IMAGES: REPRESENTATIONS OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN
BLACK WOMAN IN WORKS BY BESSIE HEAD, ELLEN KUZWAYO,
MANDLA LANGA AND MONGANE WALLY SEROTE

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SUMMARY

This study examines representations of Southern African black women in the works of two male and two female writers. A comparative approach is used to review the ways in which the writers characterise women who labour under intense restrictions in domestic situations, the workplace, and in political contexts. Some representations suggest that women have come to terms with social strictures and have learned to live fulfilled lives despite them. Other representations are contextualised in creative situations in which social roles are re-imagined. In the process, women are removed from conventional object-related gendered positions. These representations suggest that women have the capability to achieve personal transcendence rather than accept the immanence imposed by stereotyped gender relationships and repressive political structures. The suggestion is made that writers can change the image of women by centralising them as active subjects, challenging their exclusion and creating spaces for women to represent themselves.

KEYWORDS

African womanism, gender, representations, stereotypes, feminism, domestic roles, working roles, political roles, sexual relationships, Bessie Head, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mandla Langa, Mongane Serote

DEDICATION

*This volume is dedicated with love to my personal
"Collection of Treasures"...*

*patient parents,
a very special spouse, and
supportive sons.*

MY GRATITUDE

is also extended to

Dr Leon De Kock, for his invaluable insight;

and to

*The Education and Culture Service
ex Administration: House of Assembly,
for a bursary and study leave.*

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations have been used to facilitate reference to the primary works discussed in this dissertation. They are:

Works by Bessie Head

- QP *A Question of Power*
- CT *The Collector of Treasures, and Other Botswana Village Tales*
- SVRW *Serowe, Village of the Rainwind*
- M *Maru*
- WRCG *When Rain Clouds Gather*
- TTP *Tales of Tenderness and Power*

Works by Ellen Kuzwayo

- CMW *Call Me Woman*
- SDL *Sit Down and Listen*

Works by Mandlalenkosi Langa

- TB *Tenderness of Blood*
- RPS *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*

Works by Mongane Wally Serote

- TEBB *To Every Birth its Blood*

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation explores the representations of black women produced in fictional and non-fictional works by Bessie Head, Ellen Kuzwayo, Mandla Langa and Mongane Wally Serote. It aims to identify both the new images of women which these writers create and the stereotypes which they perpetuate. By examining the ways in which writers of both sexes characterise women labouring under intense restrictions, I hope to demonstrate how some writers reveal the strength of women against the weight of stereotype.

As an introduction to key concerns of the study, this chapter will highlight some of the issues in the debate about the criticism of writing by South African writers and discuss some issues involved when creating representations of black women. Chapter 2 will study images of the woman in her private life in both traditional and modern domestic environments. Chapter 3 will follow the woman into the workplace and study public images the writers reveal in the context of the world of work, whereas Chapter 4 will focus on the woman's part in political life and in the liberation struggle. In the final chapter, gender-specific issues will be discussed in the light of the study's findings.

The issue of acceptable terminology to distinguish between the racial groups of South African writers and characters is a vexed one. The terms "non-European", "non-white" or "non-black" have a negating and discriminatory effect, and will therefore not be used. South African society should ideally be uncompartimentalized "in terms of tribal, ethnic and racial distinctions" (Coetzee and Polley 1990:15), but established terms are still in common use as signifiers of race. During the liberation struggle the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) popularised the use of the term "black" in order to promote pride in all things African.¹ Many indigenous white South Africans also claim the right to be regarded as Africans, rather than as "white settlers", thus creating further tension and confusion of terminology. At this stage of South Africa's history there is little alternative to the use of the

terms "black" and "white", since social constructions of identity remain linked to self-apprehension in terms of colour. Despite this writer's strong reservations about their use, the terms "black" and "white" will therefore be used as markers of a received discourse in instances where ambiguity must be avoided.

The analysis of the roles and representations of women in this study addresses the creation of images which sustain unequal power relations between men and women. The term "representation" however, is not meant to suggest images of gender inferiority alone, because the aim of this dissertation is to show that multidimensional images of women are evident in the works of the four writers.

The subject of representations of southern African women cannot be viewed from the single dimension of the written text. It has to be contextualised against the broader backgrounds of South African and African literature and literary critical theory, which in turn have to be contextualised against the social, historic and political backgrounds which produced them. This complexity is an inevitable consequence of the facts that apartheid denied the black writer of South African origin a sense of South African identity, and that colonialism marginalised any writing which could not be evaluated by Eurocentric criticism (Ndebele 1991:45).

One result of such discriminatory practices was that the "tradition" which claimed to represent South African literature "ignored the culture and literary endeavours of the majority of people in this country" (Hofmeyr 1979:40). Another result was that many South African writers, including Serote, Langa and Head, felt obliged to write from an exiled position, often in other African states. Records show that South African writers attended international conferences on African writing, associated themselves with the ideals of the Black Consciousness Movement and participated in the drive for the recognition of African writing as a field of study with its own critical theory (Gunner in Granqvist 1990:105).²

The Black Consciousness Movement exhorted black writers not to show any sense of inferiority to their colonisers by abandoning their own cultures and adopting European cultures and standards. Identification by South African writers with the corpus of African literature and theory rather than with the body of overwhelmingly British literature in English which comprised the South African canon, coincided with confrontation within South African academic circles about the appropriacy of Eurocentric critical standards and a Eurocentric canon in South Africa. In 1979 Hofmeyr and Couzens identified a state of stagnation and ignorance in South African academic circles and challenged academics to revise both the canon and their critical theory to accommodate all of the varieties of South African literature written in English.³ More recently, Hofmeyr again criticised critics for "failing to realise that their interest in South African literature should be linked to a wider social frame of reference" (Hofmeyr 1991:41).

In the interim, feminism emerged as an important critical theory and as a political movement in South Africa. It identified the male viewpoint of the majority of writing in South Africa's dominantly patriarchal society, examined women's oppression, "exposed the dynamics of male domination and female subordination" (Bazilli 1991:4) and called for a new focus on women's issues in literature. Although feminism recognized the oppression of both black and white women in South Africa, white theorists initially did not recognize that there were significant differences between black and white women in this country. There was a general ignorance that black women were oppressed not just by men of both races, but also by customary law, the law of the country and by white women themselves.

Discussion on the subject of the experiential "authority" of both writer and critic brought into prominence the fact that the degree of gender marginalisation which Western women have experienced over the years and their personal circumstances differ from those of African women living clan life according to customary law (Hunter 1994:122). Whereas Western women have generally been kept in a state of dependency by male providers, black women have themselves customarily been providers and traders.⁴ This con-

trasts with the African perception of Western women as dependent on men, "nurturing, ornamental or in need of protection" (Cobham in Granqvist 1990:36).

Although many white feminists considered that they shared a bond of sisterhood with black women, black women's triple oppression by class, race and gender placed them at an even greater disadvantage than that experienced by white women. Women of both races also experienced differences in their personal circumstances, "issues, preoccupations and priorities" (Cooper 1992:77). Consequently, Western feminism did not match the perceived needs of the black community and it was difficult for different races "to associate in a single women's movement" (Lenta 1992:103).

Western feminism's much publicized anti-male stance attacked only the gender aspect of black women's oppression without contributing to black women's primary need for national liberation and their demand that they should be recognized as citizens with human rights (Ngcobo in Petersen 1988:184). Feminism was thus perceived by many black female writers to be applicable primarily to middle class white women (Wicomb interviewed in Hunter and Mackenzie 1993:90) and a threat to the national liberation struggle.

Although various black women acknowledged that Western feminism could contribute to an improvement of their lot, they felt "pressurised into saying... [their] sexual oppression was not important" as they stood "shoulder to shoulder" with black men in their commitment to the struggle for national liberation (Wicomb in Hunter and MacKenzie 1993:990).

When the Black Consciousness Movement raised the battle for national liberation to a cross-gender issue, this national priority contributed to a situation where it was mainly left to female writers and critics to reconstruct the literary character of black women within literary contexts and draw attention to women's issues.⁵ For a while white theorists did this on behalf of black women, but as black women gained sufficient confidence to write about themselves and air views they had not previously been allowed to initiate (Tlali in Petersen 1988:203), the issues of difference,

authority and black women's right to theorise about their own writing gained a contentious aspect. By 1990 matters had reached such a pitch in literary circles that an article by Sisi Maqagi in *Current Writing* challenged Western theorists, particularly feminists, on the issue of who should determine the theory applicable to writing by black women. White theorists were essentially sidelined and faced with the prospect that feminism might be classed as a racist, patriarchal and oppressive activity.

The predominantly white corps of feminist theorists in this country was compelled to confront the issue of socio-cultural difference between South African women and to concede that a common biology is insufficient basis for a common theory of literature, particularly in the absence of a common sense of history, priorities or nationhood. Hunter (1994:122) points out that despite the "self-evident urgency of promoting feminist goals in this country, problems [still] accrue around the term 'feminism'", which Lewis describes as "one among several 'Eurocentric, white-centred and middle-class paradigms' common among the 'left academic community' that 'silence the scrutinised black object'" (Lewis 1992b:15-21).

Feminist theory in South Africa is a constant state of critique and revision. Lockett's (1990:1-21) explanation of the different types of feminism practised here makes it clear that feminist ideologies are capable of adaptation to suit the cultural needs of different groups of women. This suggests that there could be an adaptation of feminism which could accommodate the distinction which South African black women have tended to make "between their own aspirations and those of European and white American feminist movements" (Lenta 1992:103). Bazilli (1991:7) identifies the need for women of all races to "decide for themselves who they are, where they are going, what obstacles face them and how to remove these." Only once such issues have been negotiated can women mass their collective voices against their several forms of oppression and exploitation.

Cooper (1992:77) explains that the "shared oppression and the resulting national struggle ... have added complications and ambiguities to the African woman's opposition to her exploitation

at the hands of African men".⁶ Lack of overt feminist anti-male sentiments among black women, and their involvement in political priorities perceived as more important, tended to restrain women from placing their female concerns in the foreground until national objectives had been attained. In consequence, the efforts of the writers in this study were not directed explicitly towards feminist issues unless such issues offered political solutions to national issues. Feminist ideology consequently had little overt role to play in the writing of the works under discussion, although Kuzwayo does object to the way in which men have traditionally oppressed women and tries to correct patriarchal attitudes which she finds unacceptable (Driver 1988:245).

According to Lenta (1992:103), Tlali has said that she "would not make an explicit decision to concentrate on women" in the "narrow, Western kind of way" because the liberation cause "is bound absolutely with the liberation of the whole nation" and the two issues thus have to be combined. Between them, Hunter, Clayton and Mackenzie have edited two volumes of NELM interviews with Lauretta Ngcobo, Zoë Wicomb, Miriam Tlali, Bessie Head and Ellen Kuzwayo. These interviews suggest that the writers concerned consider womanism an acceptable alternative to feminism. Lenta (1992:104) suggests that womanism "rejects the separatist strain of Anglo-American feminism and the self-contemplative strain of French feminism to focus strongly on the whole community of which women are members". She notes from the NELM interviews that Tlali prefers to identify herself as a "womanist" in the sense defined by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Alice Walker⁷:

The intelligent black woman writer, conscious of black impotence in the context of white patriarchal culture, empowers the black man. She believes in him; hence her books end in integrative images of the male and female worlds. Given this commitment, she can hardly become a strong ally of the white feminist until (perhaps) the political and economic fortunes of the black race improve.

In post-apartheid South Africa the political imperative for black women to support womanism and suppress the feminist aspects of their struggle for liberty has largely been removed, and it remains to be seen whether female writers will still adopt a womanist stance to their writing and to criticism. Even if they

adopt a more Western feminist stance, it seems advisable for their writings of the apartheid era still to be assessed according to (African) womanist, rather than (Western) feminist criteria.

At this stage, criticism of South African literature as a whole is in a state of reconstruction. Discussion is taking place on ideology and aesthetics, but in addition, the suggestion has repeatedly been made that it is important for the critic to understand the socio-historical contexts of black writing and to accept that these are a valid component of the texts (Gunner in Granqvist 1990:105). Ndebele (1991:148) appears to concur with this view and suggests that critics and writers should "workshop" to develop a suitable theory of criticism for various types of African writing. Western theorists are faced with reconceptualising their own role as "other" and re-evaluating their critical methodologies and ideologies when studying writing of the past and writing of the future so that the contexts of writing are taken into account as well as the techniques (Chapman 1991:6). Hunter (1994:122) is of the opinion that feminist researchers will also have to re-think their terms, studying carefully what emerges in the voices of South Africa's women in all their variety, to overcome problems such as Wicomb's complaint that "the so-called political discourse doesn't take into account what women are actually saying" (Hunter 1994:122).

Rather than apply either an inappropriate form of feminism or an unformulated "womanism" to this study of representations it was originally intended that this study should be a value free, ideology-free analysis of the texts which would enable the texts to "speak for themselves" (Harrow 1994:xiii) but, as Harrow found in his attempt to produce an ideology-free discussion of African literature, this is not possible, as the writer's own voice must necessarily intrude into any critical analysis. This voice is informed with the language of feminist literary analysis and theory, which are the keys to deciphering the essential clues to the meaning and significance of the texts about women's lives.

The dilemma exists that analysis without an ideological base is generally not acceptable or possible, yet the ideal ideology for

examining works such as those under discussion has not yet been formalised. Hofmeyr (1991:44) claims that "we need a theory of literature that includes the cultural products and practices of all classes" and explains "the complexities of a dynamic society and its culture". She adds that literature is "a social process and activity, the writer being part of a social context and the bearer of the weight of its beliefs, conformities and rebellions" and she condemns critics who set out to "deny the social texture of literature in South Africa". Hofmeyr's view has strongly influenced the approach to the texts in this study, where more attention is given to socio-historical factors revealed by the texts than to a specific critical ideology such as a form of Western feminism or "African" womanism.

This decision was taken for several reasons. Prime amongst these is that South African feminists or womanists generally resist the suggestion that Western concepts and standards should be used exclusively to assess representations of women in the works of African writers and insist that black African women should define their own form of feminism or womanism. Additionally, a Western feminist approach to the material being studied might be destructive when applied to the writing of black men, negating many of the affirmative effects of their writing.⁸ Another factor is the need for critics to take contexts into account when evaluating black writing and to adopt a critical ideology which is compatible with the intention of the writer. Although this study compares the writing of male and female African writers and a womanist approach might be compatible with the writing of both genders, this would limit the scope for attention to the type of reader response which an audience of liberal Western readers might make to the representations in works intended for their readership. This degree of complexity is probably the typical dilemma of the critic of South African literature in this time of transition and reconstruction.

A common feature in the writing studied is that it reflects the conditions and aspirations of the writers' societies. This lends weight to Chapman's call for "modified terms of value" and for lessons to be learnt from sociology, political science and history if an attempt is to be made to restructure identities in

this country (1991:11). Ogunjipe-Leslie (in Davies and Graves 1986:7) appears to support emphasis on the social contexts of writing when she locates the condition of women in Africa within the socio-economic realities of culture and development instead of prioritising literary issues. The six main burdens on African women which she identifies can be noted in the texts under scrutiny. They are:

- Oppression from foreign intrusions such as colonial domination;
- The heritage of communal tradition;
- Their own "lag in development", produced by colonization, neo-colonialism and poverty;
- Men "weaned on centuries of male domination who will not willingly relinquish their power and privilege";
- Their race, "because the international economic order is divided along race and class lines"; and
- Their own self-perception.

Although these are not literary issues, they affect writers' perceptions of African women and their representations of female characters. Davies and Graves (1986:7) consider the most important challenge to the African woman to be her own perception of self since it is she who will have to define her own freedom. This assumption appears to be based on the view that male writers are unlikely to change a trend in which women in "male texts" are "frequently moulded within tight cultural and social constraints" (Humm 1986:14). Hence the importance of the female writer's representations of women, to be read and interpreted by women and men of her own and other races.

Ngcobo (in Petersen 1988:151) speaks of writers' responsibility to women and has suggested that there is a need for changed portrayal and representations of women. She identifies a need for role models and representations which are accurate, just, liberating and self-defining. Instead of the negative, shallow and stereotyped representations of the past she calls for images of women which could make a contribution to the future of the black woman. This liberating literature should "not only forgive women

their mistakes but condemn men who take advantage of women and ... not condone men's fallibility" (Ngcobo in Petersen 1988:151). She concludes that African women should take advantage of world movements like feminism and human rights to help them to fight for their rights. Ndebele (1991:23) also calls for a wider range of representations of black people in roles which show them active in the whole gamut of human activity instead of confining them to "symbolic" roles which disempower them in stereotypical roles which perpetuate their oppression.

The works studied in this dissertation represent a small sample of material from the apartheid era. They cover a cross-section of short stories, autobiography and novels written by both male and female writers. Each genre has its own limitations and possibilities for representations of character.

Head adopts the traditions of the oral narrative in her short stories by focusing on a single character and her interaction with other people. Chetin (1989:114) suggests that Head uses

the mythic apparatus in her anthology of short stories, *The Collector of Treasures*, to interpret women's exiled status and to create a prospective vision of society where women no longer suffer 'from all the calamities that befall an inferior form of human life'.

Kuzwayo's short stories also highlight women, show them at the mercy of changes in society, and create new perspectives of them as people to be thought about and understood rather than to be treated as irrelevant or marginalised. Her greatest contribution to representations of women, however, is in her autobiography, *Call Me Woman*.

Driver (1991:237-238) suggests that the black female writer of autobiography claims a political voice and political visibility in the process of using her own life story as an example of a social truth about those intended to be mute as subjects. Kuzwayo attributes truth to her unconscious fictionalizing of the characters of herself and other women as she tries to "give a record of the lives of black women and the contribution they made to the development of this country, which people just close their eyes to"

(MacKenzie and Clayton 1989:59).

Call Me Woman reveals Kuzwayo's involvement in the Black Consciousness Movement. It yields not only a black woman's perspective on South African history during the first three-quarters of this century, but also the suffering, confusion, joys and achievements of a woman who determinedly rises above the low station in life which apartheid and patriarchy force upon her. The book goes beyond this to universalize Kuzwayo's plight and achievements as those of the African woman in general. The theme of the black woman battling against changes in society caused or created by an inhumane government, underlies and informs all of Kuzwayo's writing and operates as a form of bias in favour of black women. Kuzwayo is seldom critical of women, whether they live according to the principles of communality or adopt Western lifestyles but *Call Me Woman* is particularly redolent of political statements which blame apartheid and white oppression for the sexual inequality and oppression suffered by her gender.

The novel is not expected to report fact, as an autobiography should. It is a fictional construct which has the potential for imaginative recreations of character such as Ngcobo and Ndebele call for. Each of the writers in this study, however, has brought personal experience to bear in his or her writing, thus introducing the possibility of an autobiographical element and a dimension of fictionalised reality which could lead the reader to accept it as social truth.

Head acknowledges the autobiographical elements in her novels, particularly in *A Question of Power*. Her life as a marginalised coloured woman in South Africa and as an initially rejected exile in Botswana has provided rich source material for her themes of exile and power sharing. As a displaced woman herself, she has a personal mission to re-centre women in society by placing them on a level with men. She achieves this by using her creative fiction to articulate her views and to demonstrate how women can aspire to fulfilled lives. Her female characters are distributed over a wide spectrum of rural roles. She reveals the quality of many female personalities in the face of the oppression which they have been

forced to endure and portrays female characters in situations which reveal women's latent and actual potential to achieve the autonomy and high levels of achievement which Aidoo mentioned at the 1988 Stockholm Conference (Petersen 1988:181). Head has said that she deliberately uses ostensibly passive male and female characters like Maru and Margaret Cadmore to suggest creative solutions to problems which plague members of black society, such as social alienation, racism and the dearth of opportunities for the economic empowerment of rural women (Mackenzie and Clayton 1989:18-21).

Whereas Head frequently uses representations of women as the vehicle for the liberation of her gender and of humanity as a whole, Langa adopts the male perspective on the wider issues of political liberation and does not directly address feminist interests. Although he does not appear to set out to reveal female characters in a way which would liberate black women, certain cameo scenes in his work suggest how women react in new ways to the various contexts and roles in which they are placed. In Coetzee and Polley (1990:138), Langa professes to have researched "what it is to make love from the perspective, from the position of a woman" and considers this activity to have liberated his mind. He does not, however, reflect the same degree of interest in female activities which are non-biological in nature. He uses female characters as a vehicle to express views rather than develop their characters and is in danger of perpetuating or creating stereotypes in certain "flat" characters.

The writers considered here are not the only ones who experience difficulty in creating images of women. Davies (Davies and Graves 1986:92) says that Armah's characterisation of women in his novels reveals a tension between the notion, on the one hand, that they need to be liberated from being predominantly symbols of oppression, and become symbols of liberation; and, on the other, that female characters are for the most part symbols of womanhood, perverse or idealized. It is apparently extremely difficult for authors to create multi-dimensional images of women and yet not use female characters to promote political ideals. This tension might contribute to the difficulty which Langa experiences in representing convincing female characters.

From a feminist point of view, Serote is also guilty of this weakness. He generally reveals women through the eyes of a male protagonist rather than allow female characters to explore their own thoughts and express their own responses. The views of Tsi Molohe, the defeatist male protagonist in the first part of *To Every Birth its Blood*, as he watches or thinks about women, are significant demonstrations of the way in which male characters tend to reinforce what Western feminists regard as sexist stereotypes. This does not mean that the writer is a sexist male himself, simply that he writes from a male viewpoint. The majority of Serote's younger female characters are viewed from a sensual perspective and although there is some evidence that he understands issues which concern women, these issues are frequently introduced in relation to men or from a male perspective and thus contribute little to the rewriting of stereotypes. In Krog's view (reported in Coetzee and Polley 1990:128), "the oppressed man in an oppressed group would oppress his woman even further to feel superior somewhere". This attitude is evident in Serote's work.

For fictional writing to challenge oppressive ideology and stereotypes, it is faced with the need to re-centre the subject in a way which contributes to the creation of new images. Despite the differences in their circumstances, the four writers in this study have produced a body of contextually similar material with an Afro-centric focus which conveys African perspectives on the history and daily life of people in the Southern African region. Their work contributes towards breaking down the myth of primitive, uncivilised Africa. It also draws attention to the people who lived out that history.

Head is critical of historical factors which have had a negative effect on black people. In *Tales of Tenderness and Power* (1989:92), she criticises the laws of the ancestors for decreeing that women should be an "inferior form of human life"; British colonialism in Southern Africa for breaking up family life and turning African men into "boys" and "machine tools"; and the people of Botswana for allowing oppression to deprive them of the inner resources to cope with the freedom brought about by Independence. According to Head's analysis, the African man's revulsion at his

own "inner emptiness" resulted in a "dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation" which annihilated many of society's customary forms of protection for women.

All of the writers studied, with the exception of Head, write with a strong sense of the damage which might be done to their political cause by the division of the black community on gender lines. Kuzwayo was more constrained in her representation of women's self-assertion in pre-liberation South Africa than was Head in post-independence Botswana, where different social conditions and political imperatives prevailed.

Ngcobo (in Peterson and Rutherford 1986:82) is aware of the tensions in the lives of women who are involved in a liberation struggle and simultaneously

... caught up in a hybrid world of the old and new; the African and the alien locked in the struggle to integrate contradictions into a meaningful new whole. Women whose concerns have always had to do with customs and traditions have the task to salvage what they can of our life, while dissenting strongly from those customs that they feel we have outgrown or ought to outgrow.

This perspective suggests a need to demythologise much of what has been written about the black woman. During the process in which the African writer demythologises colonial and more modern myths, and creates liberating narratives, certain differences and similarities may occur in the ways in which black men and women write about black women. The differences often originate in the female writer's reactions against entrenched social attitudes towards women, including the attitudes of African men. Some similarities can be attributed to the established traditions of patriarchal culture and others to the fact that black women "support the men on issues of national liberation" (Head in Kuzwayo 1985:xiv). Accordingly, this study does not attempt to present any monolithic "African" or "typical" representation of women. Rather, a range of representations of roles is identified. Some of these representations suggest that women were poorly served by the liberation struggle.

It was a struggle in which the rights and roles of women were

overlooked, apparently with the full complicity of black women. Now, however South Africa has entered what will doubtless be a lengthy period of post-apartheid social correction. It is not sufficient for the Constitution to grant women rights - the ways in which women were the subject of past wrongs and misconceptions need to be addressed and redressed. It has been said that "the national question in South Africa needs to be reformulated to ensure that the struggle becomes a gender conscious struggle for a new transformed South Africa (Horn quoted in Bazilli 1991:8). The question is how this will be achieved.

Although it will be difficult for women emerging from a long period of political struggle to accept a new paradigm, they will be required to reorder their priorities without doing damage to an already fragile social infrastructure. Graves (1986:xi) is of the opinion that it is now important to correct "the faulty vision through which the African woman in literature has been seen", and that the presence of women in literature "must be fully recognized and appreciated as an integral part of what Africa is going to become". It is implicit in her view that greater understanding of representations of women in literature may contribute to improved cross-cultural understanding and the upliftment of women.

Records of congresses attended by black writers in independent countries⁹ reveal the expectation that writers should reconstruct black African characters in contexts which reflect their historical, current and potential roles in African society.¹⁰ Writers of both sexes have therefore been seen to have a mission to reinstate the image of black men and women as people to be reckoned with, and to claim their right to nationhood and to the legitimacy of their self-defined cultural norms and values. However, such a mission cannot be seen as gender-neutral. Graves (1986:ix) suggests that the perspectives from which male authors and male characters view women reveal the complexity of men's consciousness regarding women and "give support to the underlying truth that woman's consciousness of herself - in literature as in life - cannot be considered in a vacuum". Given the preponderance of male writers in Africa, it is clear that male views of women can perpetuate, break down or create stereotypes of women. It is for

this reason that the views which male writers and protagonists project about women have such significance and why two male writers have been included in this study.

In common with their African counterparts elsewhere on the continent, the writers in this study are committed to searching for less compromised, more "authentic" contexts in which to represent their own lives and those of their compatriots within the hybrid culture of formerly colonised regions. Black characters are the centre and focus of their stories, despite their political and social marginality in everyday white-dominated South African life of the period in which they wrote. The range of images they have created is under scrutiny because, as Davies (in Davies and Graves 1986:14-15) says, "the study of images is an important developmental step" which "represents the first realization that something is wrong" and poses "a challenge to established male writers to recognize distortions just as ... racist writers [have] to recognize and correct racial caricatures". In the case of South African writers, gender, as well as racial stereotypes have to be challenged, since they have operated as oppressive tropes both in terms of imposition from without, and as self-apprehension from within.

Racism invariably produces pejorative stereotypes. African women have often been cast in stereotypes which reflect partial subjection to either colonial or patriarchal ideology, or to both. African writers have frequently reacted against this by producing counter-representations aimed at reasserting autochthonous values. Inadequate representations of women of colour are repeatedly being replaced by more finely articulated ones. Ideally, these should be "in tune with African historical realities", create a vision of the future and not themselves "stereotype or limit women into postures of dependence and submergence" (Davies 1986:15).

Barrett (1985:70) quotes Perkins' view that "the chances of success in challenging a stereotype will depend upon the social location of the group in question". The works under study suggest that black women, as a "group" are breaking away from positions of subordination and may be relocating themselves in a position which is more socially favourable for stereotypes of their "group" to be

Race

challenged. Despite this transformation, there is considerable baggage from the past which might hinder the development of a changed image of black women.

To an extent, representations of women entail a "reflection of specific historical conditions" (Barrett 1985:69), as "stereotypes are tied to historical social relations" (Perkins' view discussed in Barrett (1985:70). According to Sole (1991:55), Serote considers the writer to be the mirror of society. If literary representations do not engender respect for women, this could be regarded as a reflection of a more general social lack which the writer is mirroring, or the writer may be reproducing, implicitly, a "too generalised conception" of the way that women function in society (Humm 1986:15). Such representation in terms of *lack*, constitutes a form of oppression in that consequent stereotyping places implicit limitations on the achievements which women are considered able to attain (Humm 1986:30).

Even a campaigner for women's rights such as Kuzwayo runs the risk of stereotyping by creating generalised and idealised images of women who affirm patriarchal interpretations of women's place in society. Lewis (1992a:39) points out how Kuzwayo compulsively feminizes her descriptions of other women in *Call Me Woman*, according them "praise when they are orderly, obedient, nurturant and domesticated [and] disapproval when they are not". Kuzwayo does this with her portrayal of the character of Puleng in "Ask the Ostriches" (SDL), where Puleng is represented as the stereotype of the fulfilled wife living in a traditional social setting.

Lewis (1992a:37) suggests that "critics have underestimated the way Kuzwayo validates culturally-specific patriarchal codes and the extent to which her treatment of gender experience is constrained by her vantage point". She also argues that "patterns of female socialization in *Call Me Woman* are based on a host of restrictive stereotypes" related to discipline, sexual conduct, communal integration, "feminine" activities and "female behaviour" (1992a:39). Although Lewis regards these stereotypes as restrictive, they promote norms which are widely approved by the BCM and in the remainder of Africa. They also form a composite

image of what Gordimer (1985:xi) refers to as Kuzwayo's "Africanized" ideals of womanhood and motherhood.

In African fiction, the woman is sometimes represented as the mythical, idealized image of the beautiful mother who is at one with her culture and her universe and asks nothing more from life than to live for her family. Although the "Mother Africa" prototype and its derivatives form part of a representational strategy aimed at achieving the upliftment of African culture, and attaching value to women, it generally limits both the prospects of individual women and the expectations of others with regard to women.¹¹ No matter how affirming the image, if it applies limitations in a racial or gender context, as Lewis has identified in Kuzwayo's works (Lewis 1992a:39), it can be regarded in a pejorative sense as an example of co-option, collusion or recuperation.

Davies and Graves (1986:14) argue that African woman writers often cast their female characters in the stereotype of the victim, and that African men lock women "into postures of dependence" defining them "only in terms of their association with men". The disaffirming characterisation of women as victims and dependents will be identified in the course of this study; however, the female victim will sometimes be shown to perform a political function intended to stimulate an empathetic response from black female readers, challenging them to change and cast off oppression which leaves them powerless.¹²

Bishop (1988:54) explains that early African writers and critics had a great desire to project an accurate image of Africa into the non-African world, but that Western publishers wanted them to produce a form of African literature that would reinforce, rather than combat, Western stereotypes of African people. This placed writers in the dilemma of having to write for a Western publisher and a Western audience but also being accountable to African critics who told them that they should write for an African audience and break down stereotypes as an act of liberation.

In his discussion of characterisation and stereotyping, Bishop (1988:54) applies Western critical standards when he says that

writers should not have to explain their characters, because these should be "universal" or "round" and understandable in the contexts of the stories. This is not always possible where female characters are peripheral to the plot, perform a supporting function to male protagonists, are used to convey a liberating message or are inaccessible to the reader because of a cultural void. Head's writing demonstrates how African writers writing for Western audiences tend to explain how Africans live, providing contexts which are essential for understanding the characters and bridging the cultural distance between reader and subject.¹³

The emphasis on African writers creating literature which is accessible to Westerners while at the same time creating liberating narratives for home audiences has produced a body of South African writing which contravenes some Western critical norms and constitutes a literature with a sense of specific difference from the European sense of the "universal". It is this sense of difference which constitutes what Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:18) call a national literature's mode of self-apprehension and its claim to be a self-constituting entity. It is also what makes it so difficult to evaluate African characterisation according to Western standards such as Forster's classic definitions of "round" and "flat" characters (Forster 1962:73).

For African writers, representing black characters realistically and in everyday situations is a means of reconstructing images of the self, making the marginal the "real" and relocating the centre. In this way the writers negate white control without presenting black culture as the only acceptable substitute for the European centre. Their stance aims at freeing the colonized from their disabled position through the construction of new and liberating narratives which expose the fictionality of all racist stereotypes and sometimes also glance at their historically determined nature.

The perspectives from which the woman writer presents her own self-perception are indicative of her view of womankind as a whole. Elements of the writer's own experience of womanhood surface in their fictional characters. This can be seen in Kuzwayo's repre-

sentation of the traditional African woman who knows fulfilment in her life, and in Head's Elizabeth, an individual who questions and challenges herself, other people and the forces that participate in the determination of her life. This trait contributes the potential for certain qualities of character and ways of thinking to become typical in writing by specific writers. Traces of this can be seen in Head's portrayal of Dikeledi (the collector in *The Collector of Treasures*), Mma-Mabele, Paulina and Thato, all of whom illustrate the same views on morality and display a strong sense of ownership of their bodies. The temptation is also present for writers to create characters in their own image, such as Kuzwayo's Neo, the social worker, and Head's Elizabeth, fraught by insanity until she establishes her own sense of identity as a human being.

Rushing (in Davies and Graves 1986:38) notes that it is in the "novels dealing with the final stages of colonialism in Africa, under siege by movements for independence", that images of women reflect a new, active response to inequality. As was the case in the rest of Africa, although South African writers of both sexes in the 1980s still depicted women in traditional supportive roles, these frequently had a new dimension of political significance and female characters with their own careers tended to become involved in roles with a new political significance (Rushing in Davies and Graves 1986:39-40). This development is reflected in various of the works under discussion.

Within this body of writing there is evidence of both the paucity of characterisation consequent upon stereotype and of the richness and diversity flowing from a refusal to countenance one-dimensional representation. Writers' disinclination to use stereotypes (particularly Western stereotypes) can be seen as a deliberate act of mental liberation from the oppressive conceptual structures of apartheid, and a step towards the reinstatement of women as a powerful force for change in society. This involves a search for "more accurate portrayals and ones which suggest the possibility of transcendence" (Davies 1986:15). The following chapters contribute to this search.

ENDNOTES:

1. The black consciousness movement in South Africa was spread by the student organisations, SASO and SASM, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They helped to set up a programme to make the black community aware of its own identity. On 19 October 1977 such organisations were banned. The history of the black consciousness movement is recorded by Lodge (1983). Barnett (1983:7) indicates that preference for the term "black" rather than "African" adds further nuances of meaning to attempts at definition of black or African writing. In South Africa, the white establishment has seen "black" negatively as non-white and denied it a culture. For the African, the term "black" signifies pride in African culture and history and commits him to a struggle to cast off the non-African yoke.
2. See Petersen (1988) for the proceedings of the 1988 Stockholm Conference at which Laretta Ngcobo, Miriam Tlali and Wally Serote presented papers and participated in discussion in ways which indicate their identification with the cause of African writers, as well as acute awareness of the dearth of acceptance of black South African writers works and the lack of a suitable critical theory to accommodate many of the characteristics of protest literature and black South African writing.
3. See Hofmeyr (1979) in which she discusses the "state of original ignorance" (p.39) and "outdated methodologies" (p.41) prevalent in South African literary criticism at that time. Her article discusses the need to recognise South African literature as an entity and to recreate South African literary criticism as "a rigorous and exacting discipline, placed on a respectable theoretical footing and grounded in a truly interdisciplinary approach" (p.48).
4. See chapter 3 for a description of traditional working roles.
5. Jones *et al.* (1987:3) suggest that African writers present an objective treatment of womanhood and the problems of womanhood, and that the African woman writer has a duty to correct misconceptions about women - just as the African writer in the 1950s had a duty to correct misconceptions and rewrite the stereotypes propagated by the European writer in Africa.
6. Ama Ata Aidoo goes so far as to say that African women writers would not voluntarily have used a "platform from which to prove that African women writers were different in any way from their male counterparts, or that they faced some fundamental problems which male African writers did not face" (Petersen 1988:158).
7. Footnote to Lenta's article: the idea of womanism is developed by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, 1985, 'Womanism: The Dynamics of the Contemporary Black Female Novel in English,' *Signs*, 11 (1), pp.68-69, and by Alice Walker, 1983, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* Women's Press: London pp.xi-xii.
8. For in-depth discussion of the criteria for the criticism of black woman writers and who should determine these, see articles by Lockett (1990), Maqagi (1990), de Reuck (1990) and Ryan (1990).
9. See Bishop (1988) for many examples during the period 1947 to 1966.
10. Barnett (1983:13) quotes Dhlomo's views on literature, expressed in an article entitled "Why Study Tribal Dramatic Forms?": "If our literature is to hold its own among the literatures of the world; if it is to offer something distinct and unique; if it is to reflect the soul of Africa, it must spring from indigenous, tribal culture; it must treat of our history, customs and our great tribal heroes We cannot build by forsaking our origins. We must go back to go forward." These are ideas generally attributed to a movement of black consciousness which reached South Africa some 30 years later.

11. Cloete (1993) discusses how frontierswomen were similarly represented as volksmoeders to uplift the image of the Afrikaner woman.
12. Nuttall (1994:98) casts doubt on whether black women read works by black South African women writers. She suggests that Ellen Kuzwayo has written for a foreign audience, and that Lewis Nkosi has classified white South Africans as such a foreign audience (1994:85). This suggests that the reconstruction of the image of African people is primarily a cross-cultural activity. Es'kia Mphahlele (in Welz 1987:30), disagrees with this standpoint. He is reported as having said: "We write not to address ourselves to the white public, we are addressing ourselves to ourselves; we are talking among ourselves as black people." The implication of this is that black writers wish to achieve a transformative effect amongst the target group of their own race.
13. Because of the differences in culture of the target audience and the writer, African idioms have to be literally translated and their significance explained to the reader (Nuttall 1994:85).

CHAPTER 2

DOMESTIC ROLES

Patriarchal dominance in many cultures has maintained the myth underlying much of gender stereotyping and oppression of women - that the woman should be confined to the private realm of the household while men occupy public, male spaces (Hofmeyr 1994:29). In South Africa and elsewhere, this gender-prescribed division of spheres results in the social expectation that women will be conventionally represented in men-related and family-related domestic contexts. Such contexts tend to stereotype women into submissive or subordinate roles of a type sanctioned by society, and show women in a pejorative light as lacking power as individuals (Coward quoted in Clayton 1988a:3).

Van Zyl (1989:12) sums up the black woman's lot when she argues that a

... woman's status in society is determined by her relationship to men: first her father, and in her adult life it implies marriage. Here she is valued for three major roles: her domestic productivity in maintaining a household; her reproductive capacity in producing and rearing children; and her sexual ... role. A woman who remains single is seen to have 'failed' to get married. Thus every woman is socially contextualised in relation to the ideology of marriage and the family.

The main concern of this chapter is to examine the way in which the writers under consideration operate within or against patriarchal ideologies of marriage and the family to perpetuate, change or subvert gender stereotypes of women in their domestic roles. To this end, domestic roles and gender relationships in a variety of customary and modern domestic settings will be examined.

The main groupings and domestic roles revealed in the writings of the four writers are: single parents and common law wives, wives in arranged and polygamous marriages, women who experience cultural difficulties when they adopt Christianity or marry into cultures other than their own, wives in situations

where there is tribal protection and custom to sustain them as opposed to women who have lost their tribal protection, idealized models of motherhood as against mothers who neglect their duty, mothers and wives who are involved in the political activities of their sons and husbands, women negated by their participation in tribal life as opposed to women who are a powerful force in their marriages, township and society wives, women who leave their customary domestic roles to support their families, those who try to accommodate the roles of provider and of mother, and grandmothers.

Not all of these subjects will be examined in detail here, as various roles can be more appropriately dealt with in later chapters. The most important aspects of domestic gender relationships revealed in the texts under scrutiny, such as sexuality and reproduction, the wife/property relationship, the implicit labour contractual basis of marriage, and the woman's submission to the male head of the family, will be discussed in the context of their relationship to roles identified in this chapter.

If the major emphasis lies on how female writers represent women in purely domestic roles, this is because the two male writers in this study tend to politicise wives and mothers, rather than show them in conventional domestic roles. This supports the view of Jones *et al.* (1987:2) that it is a

... recurrent refrain that women (both African and non-African) and the cause of womanhood have been very inadequately served by the African male writers in their works. There is the suggestion that African male writers are either unable or unwilling to present woman in her totality, and have therefore resorted to the use of stereotypes; and that their treatment of issues that most deeply concern women - issues such as polygamy, childbearing, motherhood, the subordination of the female to the male - has been jaundiced.

To the list of issues of female concern identified above, Head and Kuzwayo add the pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships which resulted when the number of men left behind in the rural areas of South Africa and Botswana could not supply

the demand for husbands at a time when Christianity was teaching women to reject polygamy and women were coming to terms with their own sexuality.¹

Sexuality can be seen as an ideological construct based on gender socialisation (Van Zyl 1989:15). The subject is dealt with in this chapter on domestic roles because of the effect which changes in women's attitude to their own sexuality have had on the domestic lives of black women as a group. Head's representations of female sexuality show how women have internalised their society's attitude to sexuality, accepted changed sexual mores as "normal" and "natural" and adapted their lifestyles and expectations accordingly. Head's stories lend credence to the claim by Van Zyl that ideas on sexual practice applicable to procreation and pleasure "apply differently to the two genders", and that "woman's sexuality, childbearing and rearing [are] seen as inextricably intertwined, while men's sexuality [have] none of these constraints" (1989:14-15).²

Men in Head's stories tend to use sex to dominate those women who wish to be married. Such women are emotionally manipulated into sexual relationships as an essential preliminary to hypothetical marriages which seldom come off. In *Maru*, Moleka, a totem or chief, uses his good looks and desirable status to enable him to sleep with a different woman every night. The many illegitimate children for whom his mother cares are presented as living proof that Moleka has no regard for any woman's affective needs, but uses their bodies as a convenience to gratify his own physical urges and ego.

Many of the women described as Moleka's "concubines" act contrary to the maternal stereotype by rejecting the children Moleka fathers, and leaving them with his mother. This suggests unified female rejection of an unacceptable morality which allows men to abuse women sexually instead of perpetuating traditions which promote chastity, such as those discussed in "The Lovers" (TTP).

Head's stories suggest that many women who in earlier times considered themselves secure under customary law and who had not regarded themselves as oppressed in terms of gender relationships, are ill-equipped to adapt to changing role demands and suffer great hardships as a result of their physical vulnerability. Relationships between women and men frequently become subsumed in a mere battle for survival in which ill-educated women are trapped in a social scheme where men value them only on a biological level for "their ability to have sex" (CT:49) and are not prepared to accept responsibility for their progeny.

The fact that women in Head's stories are so frequently left to bear and rear babies alone under conditions of great hardship, suggests that women's reproductive function has been debased by men's pursuit of fleeting sexual gratification.³ "Witchcraft" (CT) introduces Mma-Mabele, who is reviled and ostracised by men because she refuses to "show" herself and have sex with profligate males.

"Witchcraft" suggests the considerable reaction of Botswanan men against women who refuse to have sexual intercourse and who will not submit to sexual domination by any male. It also describes the physical and mental torment suffered by Mma-Mabele when she reacts against "the distorted and grotesque values in the outside world" (Chetin 1989:130). Taken in isolation, Mma-Mabele's opposition to the "tyranny of centuries" (Chetin 1989:130) is a matter of personal principle and affirmation of her rights as an individual. Considered in conjunction with stances taken by other "moral" women in Head's stories, such as Paulina (WRCG) and Thato ("Hunting", CT), Mma-Mabele's character reflects a revised social image of woman, presented in reaction to a gender relationship which devalues women to the level of sex object and locates them as the playthings of men.

Head's work intimates that lack of male responsibility and sexual restraint have become accepted aspects of the gender relationship in Botswana. In her descriptions of courtships,

Head appears to be promoting views about how a marriage partner should be selected. Like Makhaya in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Tholo in "Hunting" (CT) does not rush into marriage without taking the time to discover the qualities which he considers make Thato, his chosen woman, special. Tholo's family rejects Thato as being too old and worldly wise for Tholo, but he sees that she possesses fine personal qualities, has wisdom and can think. Head makes the rather scathing narrative comment that

[a]pparently when a man married, he had to marry a gay and frivolous plaything with an empty head and ten years his junior. Then they wondered about all the futile marriages that barely lasted six months or a year. (CT:108)

These words suggest Head's jaundiced view of the idealised "gay plaything" which men seem to want as the standard of a young woman in the society Head portrays. Head presents Thato as a contrast to that stereotype. Thato has character and is self-sufficient, yet she privately longs for a man who seems a cut above the average to satisfy her emotional and physical needs. Like Mma-Mabele, Thato has standards of her own and has not succumbed to moral looseness.

The model which Head and Kuzwayo promote, is that of the self-contained woman whose character and intellect, rather than her body, attract a life partner. The theme they repeatedly use is one in which a woman of fine character rises above the crowd and gains as her reward a husband who will treat her as a partner. Feminists might reject this as a male-centred stereotype, but the stories suggest that the reality of life in Africa makes it far easier for a woman to survive in a marriage than on her own or in a group of women, despite excellent female support networks.

In Head's "Tao" (TTP) the issue of promiscuity is discussed in greater depth. The narrator relates the story of Kate, a teacher friend who is unable to attract a suitable marriage partner in Botswana and is inclined to view sleeping with a man as "woman's primary occupation" (TTP:54). The narrator comments

on the dilemma experienced by even the educated women of her country, in that the majority of relationships are temporary, sexual and do not involve depths of human feeling and tenderness or a promise of permanent commitment.

Head removes initiative from men when the narrator of "Tao" (CT) claims that few women choose to marry, as they are repelled at the thought of having to treat their husbands as objects to be possessed and pressured into fidelity once they have cajoled or forced them into marriage, as Tao's wife feels she must (TTP:52). The beer-brewing women in "Life" (CT) likewise enter into common law marriage, instead of formal marriage, in conscious reaction against male manipulation and control, rather than as the result of promiscuity. These women feel free to expel common-law husbands from their homes if they no longer satisfy their needs or have fathered the children the women want.

This approach to life empowers the woman to take control of her own destiny and biological capacity to exercise sexuality. Head implies that many Botswanan women have evaluated their position, have come to terms with it and have set their own rules for living in their society. In this respect they are not victims of social change, but creators of a new order.

The old order, however, lingers on in representations of other women. In "Jacob, the Faith Healing Priest" (CT), Head describes how some married women regard single women. Head's representation of Johannah's sister-in-law creates the image of a class of married women who appear blind to the social reasons for their sisters' misfortunes and are content to lead an idle life, socialising and dressing smartly while poorer female relations act as their domestic servants. According to this story, custom decrees that Johannah should live in the yard of her elder brother, and enjoy his protection in return for doing all the domestic chores and leaving her sister-in-law in the superior position of the "Madam". Johannah is unable to win her sister-in-law's support when it comes to paying for her

children's school fees. This leads to confrontation between the two women.

Johannah is not ashamed of her status as a single mother of four and does her best to face down her sister-in-law when the latter abuses her by calling her a loose woman and a harlot. These value judgements reflect the married woman's lack of sympathy and respect for an unmarried mother and the conflicting standards within a single society. They also reinforce the stereotypical gender-based view that women who do not marry are inferior because of their failure to snare a husband to support them.

When Johannah is disillusioned by her sister-in-law's lack of compassion, she seeks advice from Jacob, the Prophet. She accepts and confesses that all the fault in her relationships has been on her side, because she has allowed herself to be deluded by promises of marriage, and her loving nature has made a fool of her. At the same time, she identifies what she considers to be her own strong point. She considers herself to be "a real woman" and says that the children of a "real woman" do not "get lean and die" or "fall into the fire" (CT:30). This shows an uneducated rural Botswanan woman's view that the meaning of womanhood is associated with protecting and nurturing children.

These duties are complicated by modern society's emphasis on education, and the concomitant need to pay school fees. This requires a cash income which Johannah cannot acquire from any source other than a man. Johannah changes her socially unacceptable "manless" status by moving, uninvited, into the prophet's yard and becoming his common-law wife. Her initiative places Jacob in the position of having to accept the social contract and role which Johannah expects of him as the male in their partnership. Her expectation is that Jacob will provide her children and herself with financial support in exchange for her work and presence in his home. Chetin (1989:126) considers that "[t]he 'family' only becomes complete when the 'real woman', Johannah,

comes to provide the practical and traditional awareness needed to balance and complement Jacob's spiritual consciousness".

This story illustrates the strength of spirit and character of a village mother. Despite Johannah's willingness to comply with her culture's expectations of her, she is quite capable of finding a novel solution to her problems, albeit male-centred, when custom fails her.

Throughout Head's short stories the reader can identify similar resourceful characteristics in different women responding to challenging situations and mastering adversity.⁴ This trend seeks to project an ideal of the village woman as a heroine determinedly fighting for survival in an environment which has become particularly hostile towards single women, yet accords married women limited status.

In the stories under scrutiny, women of all types of character and filling many roles, appear to be grateful for the protection and status afforded by marriage. Despite the male domination and the duties which the stories show marriage to entail, marriage apparently also brings wives some rights, privileges and security. Some of the stronger wives, like Puleng in Kuzwayo's "Ask the Ostriches" (SDL), actually use their protected status to their own advantage and earn extra respect for themselves by performing their household duties well enough to win the admiration of their husbands and neighbours. This contributes towards a strong image of women who are fulfilled in conventional gender roles.

Dikeledi, the "Collector of Treasures", is a Botswanan wife who rejects her husband's right to control her. She chooses "an extreme measure as a way of ending and redressing her terrible oppression" and is punished by society for doing so (Trump 1990:177). Prior to this event, Head builds up approval and sympathy for Dikeledi's character by representing her as a fine woman who perpetuates customary ways in modern society, has

character and ability but is unable to achieve distinction because of her own family's physical needs and her husband's moral degeneration.

Dikeledi's husband, Garesego Mokopi, is a sexual profligate who abandons his wife and their four children when he usurps a man from his own home and takes over that man's wife. Head describes how Dikeledi is left without support and builds up a picture of a woman who maintains her children in exemplary fashion by using traditional skills. In the process Dikeledi makes very good friends with her neighbours, the Thebolos. When Dikeledi asks Garesego for help with her eldest son's secondary school fees, he becomes obsessed with unfounded jealousy of Paul Thebolo. This drives him to return to Dikeledi's home with the intention of forcing himself upon her and claiming his conjugal rights in return for the needed cash. He does not realise that Dikeledi's new lifestyle, particularly her friendship with the Thebolo couple, has become a treasure to her which she is not willing to allow Garesego to destroy.

Dikeledi takes control of the situation when she plans to castrate her husband. Her lack of expertise, however, leads to the rupturing of an artery in Garesego's groin, and to his dramatic death. This scandalises the community. The men are particularly outraged. They regard Dikeledi's assault on her husband's genitals as a symbolic attempt at emasculation of men as a group, aimed at robbing a man of his power over women.

Dikeledi's crime is decreed to be manslaughter and she is imprisoned in the company of a group of other women who have taken similar violent revenge on men who have abused them. The fact that this is not an isolated incident, but "part of a pattern of female resistance" (Trump 1990:177) represents these women as a class of victims with enough strength of character to strike a physical blow in their defence against oppressive men. Garesego, like other village men Head describes, underestimates his wife's depth of feeling and strength of mind because he

thinks of her only from a sexual perspective as a body to be possessed and dominated.

Control does not only have a sexual dimension, but is also implicit in the male's position as the head of the household. Head's "The Lovers" (TTP), "Property" (TTP) and "Snapshots of a Wedding" (CT) all demonstrate that the convention of arranged marriage in traditional African communities is customarily the equivalent of a socially approved labour contract, which is arranged to link families and property and keep assets securely within the clan (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950:3).

Head suggests a break with this convention in "Property" (TTP). In this story she writes about a tribal man who breaks with custom in that he wants something more than a sterile relationship from his arranged marriage, but finds that society is not ready to accommodate his needs.

The man's concept of marriage cannot succeed because the whole life of the unnamed wife has prepared her for the conventional type of marriage arrangement. She is "well-trained in the duties of a wife and of an apparently docile and subservient temperament as women of her background are supposed to be" (TTP:65). These words apparently reinforce the stereotype of the woman as a passive servant in her husband's home, but the writer's tone and the context in which the words are used, indicate that Head wishes the reader to think critically about both the stereotype and the philosophy behind it.

The man does not regard his wife as the customary stereotype of a domestic servant and bedfellow, but "as the grass that sways in the wind" (TTP:65), an image which suggests grace, beauty and harmony with nature. This abstract, idealistic image contrasts with the wife's pragmatic expectations of the marriage contract. She considers that she has been purchased and is an object to be owned and disposed of as her husband sees fit.⁵ If he should abuse her, it would be to the benefit of her clan, to which she

owed an even greater allegiance. According to Head, the prevailing attitude was that

... if something was your property you expected it to keep the place spick and span and occasionally you roughed it up with a good beating to keep it in its place; to assert your male dominance ... the slave ran home and the condition of return was that its family be made richer by one beast. (TTP:66)

Head's seemingly flippant description carries a bitterly ironic undertone, the words "slave" and "it" instead of "she" suggesting that the woman is dehumanised and de-sexed by the clan's attitude. Head implies that the community's attitude to any woman is based on expectations of stereotypical behaviour which have patriarchal interests at heart rather than those of the woman.

The woman's acceptance of her role and duties thus contributes to her representation as a dutiful clanswoman and daughter rather than as a bad wife. Her attitude shows how some women reinforce their own subjugation to men by accepting the subordination and limitations imposed on them. Such acceptance reinforces the stereotype of the wife as a mindless, emotionless incubator who willingly performs menial tasks. It also perpetuates stereotypical gender relationships in support of an ideology which regards women as subservient to both men and the custom of clan rights, in terms of which women are regarded as disposable material assets. It is a mark of Head's success as a writer that the reader can view the way in which the young wife provokes her husband into assaulting her as a culturally acceptable act which the woman performs out of a sense of obligation to her family.

Head suggests an alternative to subjugation such as that endured by this woman. Mbuya, her son, renounces tradition and his huge herd rather than be restricted by an arranged marriage. He says:

I have a different view of my future wife ... I shall choose her for myself ... my wife shall never be my property. She will never be purchased to be the slave in my mother's home. She will

never carry a pot of water on her head and she will never collect firewood in the bush. (TTP:70)

In the context of this story, Mbuya's ideal of the woman's role within a marriage is attributable to the influence of city life, which values the individual above the group and demands different daily duties of the woman. The view that men should value women is implicit in the words and deeds of both father and son. The writer appears to be attempting to provoke men into viewing women in a more humane way, and at the same time encouraging women to desire love and respect from their marriage partners. Head consciously debunks old customs as she attempts to subvert stereotypes by substituting them with demonstrably workable alternatives.

Head's views are not altogether new. Kuzwayo tells that the arranged marriage has gradually given way to more private arrangements which offer both marriage partners the potential for satisfaction in their marriages. In "Life-riddle" (SDL), Kuzwayo relates the story of a South African wedding which is a blend of Christian ceremony, African social custom and Western sophistication. The story focuses on the stress which black women with a measure of freedom still suffer as a result of social and family pressure, despite the surface changes which Western culture has wrought on black lifestyles.

When the groom of the bride's choice does not arrive at her country homestead in time for the Westernized wedding ceremony, the country folk are distraught and can

... hardly bear to think of the embarrassment, humiliation and scandal that they would suffer if no bridegroom appeared. For them Bassie's failure to arrive could be interpreted as his rejection of them all. (SDL:27)

This is particularly significant in that such a humiliating situation would never have been allowed to develop under the old system of arranged marriages. The subsequent predictions by family members of a poor future husband-wife relationship distress Makie so severely that she has to be sedated. However,

when Bassie arrives on the scene the next day he charms his prospective in-laws out of their anger and the wedding continues.

After her moment of glory as the centre of attention at the wedding, Makie returns to a minor role. The wedding marks the bride's transition from a daughter's dependency on her family to a wife's dependency on her husband and in-laws. From the text, it can be deduced that Makie's new role as a daughter-in-law and wife requires her to produce babies at planned intervals and to bond her family and their immediate relatives together in love and harmony. This appears to represent the author's ideal of marriage.

Kuzwayo gives very little attention to Makie's character, other than to show her as a woman torn between her love for her fiancée and her duty to her family. Kuzwayo's slant on the story creates the impression that Makie suffers nervous stress and emotional collapse only because of her vulnerability, caused by the weakening of the customs and culture which should have protected her interests. Makie's confidence in her own choice of husband is vindicated, despite the stress which she has been made to endure.

The impression is created that Makie has a successful marriage because she is a person who loves her husband, respects her elders and has a sound basis of family values despite the blend of cultures within which she lives. Makie serves as a model for prospective wives. Her qualities can be noted in other "remarkable" women with successful marriages "whose lives impliedly reach a climax once they marry and who apparently thereafter continue to live only through others" (Lewis 1992a:39). This theme is repeated in the stories of Mpho in "One of Many" (SDL) and Puleng in "Ask the Ostriches" (SDL). All three women satisfy the requirements for Kuzwayo's representation of the good wife and mother, who gains status through her success in these roles (Davies and Graves 1986:2).

Kuzwayo is at pains to point out that many South African black women are disillusioned in their expectations of husbands because black men have been emasculated by apartheid laws, which introduced "new, brutal and systematic methods of controlling the lives of black people" (SDL:2).⁶ Her story, "Ask the Ostriches" (SDL), shows contempt for Mokete, a supposedly "emasculated" migrant farm worker whom she contrasts with Thulo, a fine and respected member of the Bakwena tribe. Kuzwayo also uses the story to contrast the wives of these men, and to depict the woman who has lived under tribal law on a reserve in a more favourable light than the woman who has lived in Westernized society.

The story describes the lot of Mokete's family when they are expelled from the farm where he works. It reflects Mokete's patriarchal disdain of the views of Mookho, his wife. Mokete treats Mookho as an insignificant person. During the account given of their search for employment, Kuzwayo places emphasis on the man's health and the hardships which threaten the baby, but no mention is made of the condition, feelings or opinions of the labourer's wife. When they are attacked by ostriches, Mokete runs away and abandons his wife and child to their fate. As it becomes clear to her that her husband has not fulfilled his role as her protector, Mookho becomes progressively more hysterical and frightened. Her strong mothering instinct is credited with giving her the strength to fight off the ostriches until an unknown man, Thulo, comes to her rescue.

Mookho feels a sense of disillusionment at her own conditioned inability to cope without a male protector. This awareness of dependence leaves her vulnerable and in despair. Her loyalty to her husband is threatened by the position in which she finds herself and by Thulo's criticism of Mokete. Mookho's uncertainty, nervousness and apparent lack of control over her emotions indicate that she feels bereft by the loss of her husband and of her marital security. The image of Mookho to this point is one of a rather pathetic, insecure and dependent person

who is used to being subservient to her husband and not thinking for herself.

Puleng, Thulo's wife, embodies Kuzwayo's image of the traditional black wife sustained by black culture and customs. She is calm, obedient and secure in her position as the wife of a successful farmer and respected tribal elder who is the epitome of the traditional black man. She offers Mookho hospitality, support and comfort as her husband has asked her to do and shows herself to be a loyal, faithful, discreet and supportive wife. Puleng is valued by her husband, who respects her opinion and discusses matters of importance with her. She is clearly a woman who approves of tradition and the security which it offers to the woman. Kuzwayo seems to approve of this woman's character, but places her approval within the broader context of approval of communal life based on custom.

Kuzwayo offers Puleng's character as a contrast to the distracted Mookho thus far. After some time spent on the reserve, Mookho is credited with the characteristics of honesty, reliability, industriousness and openness which are common to Kuzwayo's idealised wife. Her personality becomes her fortune and she is valued and accepted, first by other women and then by men. She becomes calm and fulfilled in the tribal situation, in contrast to her initial hysteria.

Kuzwayo then devotes several pages to the development of discussions between Thulo and Puleng on the subject of Thulo taking Mookho as his second wife because she has so many fine qualities. Ironically, Mookho is not granted a voice in her own destiny. Despite all the detail given of Puleng's opinions and Thulo's thoughts and feelings, Mookho's thoughts and feelings are again disregarded throughout. Mention is made of Mookho's concern that Thulo's warmth towards her might create a rift between herself and Puleng, but her acceptance of the role of second wife is taken as read. Once again she becomes a male's

appendage, but this time only as a passive junior wife, with the inferior status which this entails.

As is expected of her, Mookho dutifully becomes pregnant and brings great joy to the family, thus reinforcing the stereotype that the woman's primary role is to produce children. The image of contented wives in a happy polygamous marriage is one which Kuzwayo repeats in valorization of black culture, despite her own Christian background.

In "The Lovers" (TTP), Head also describes a polygamous marriage which works well for the women involved. Mma-Tselane is the first wife of an arranged marriage. Head represents her as accepting of the fact that her husband takes another wife to perpetuate his line. Head attributes this attitude to the fact that Mma-Tselane considers herself broad-minded and prides herself on the meticulous way in which she upholds communal traditions. Head does not directly criticize this attitude, yet the story implies criticism of tribal customs which disregard the feelings of individuals and do not allow women to think for themselves or question the patriarchal authority of the clan.

The following passage sums up the complementary communal lifestyle which Mma-Tselane and Mma-Monosi lead because each woman accepts her ordained domestic functions and roles:

Once Mma-Monosi became a part of the household, Mma-Tselane did no work but entertained and paid calls the day long. Mma-Monosi ran the entire household The two women complemented each other, for, if Mma-Tselane was a queen, then Mma-Monosi was a humble worker between them the two women achieved a very harmonious household. Both were unconcerned that they received scant attention from the man of the household and Rra-Tselane was entirely concerned with his own affairs at the chief's court and at the cattle post. (TTP:88)

As is the case in Kuzwayo's "Ask the Ostriches" (SDL), the first wife has the stronger personality and the senior position. Each woman in this loveless marriage has both complied with custom and accepted a role which suits her. Head distinguishes neatly between the queen who has a ceremonial role supervising

the welfare of her subjects and the worker who copes with the behind-the-scenes domestic tasks. The metaphor drawn from nature suggests that there is a natural order in this type of life, but the slighting reference to the male head of the family reduces him to the level of a drone needed for the reproduction of the species. This implies that men are only really necessary to enable women to produce children, rather than the obverse.

Kuzwayo's autobiography, *Call Me Woman*, repeatedly refers to black women as "mothers". Whether Kuzwayo is writing about prisoners in jail, or street vendors, women are valorized as mothers caring about, and fending for, their children. This creates the impression that "[m]othering and motherhood are central to women's lives" (Antonis 1981:72), and locates "a public and active space for mothering" (Lewis 1992a:36). Driver (1990:238) suggests that Kuzwayo "more or less ignores the figure of masculinity, and gives to motherhood not just the spiritual power of an immanent being, but an intelligent, active and angry political role". Kuzwayo does this by depicting mothering as "a pivotal and extensively supportive activity which coordinates acquisitions of selfhood" (Lewis 1992a:36).

Mothers in Kuzwayo's writing are depicted as exemplary figures who at all times deserve, but generally do not receive, the admiration of all those around them for their vital role.⁷ From the stories studied, it seems that the general statement that "women are idealised as individual mothers and the nurturers and caretakers of men and children" (Van Zyl and Shefer 1989:5) is highly applicable to black women. As a group, they are repeatedly represented as people who take pride in their ability to produce and raise children.

Van Zyl and Shefer (1989:13) argue that "[m]otherhood is seen as the pinnacle of any woman's life". The biological aspect of procreation is thus complemented by the social expectation that the mother will also nurture and educate the children in the ways of their culture.

An exception to this is evident in "The Lovers" (TTP). Mma-Keaja^B produces Keaja as an heir for her husband, but has such a poor relationship with the child's father, that both husband and son avoid her. Keaja's mother acts contrary to the idealised stereotype of the loving and nurturing mother. During his youth she hates Keaja "deeply and bitterly" and at times she physically assaults him in wild frustration (TTP:86). Head attributes this bitterness to Mma-Keaja's inability to control her husband and son. This image of the bitter and vindictive mother is an unusual one in African writing, as the mother is usually depicted as caring and nurturing, even though often strict and exacting. Mma-Keaja represents the classic stereotype of the bitter and vindictive wife of any race or nationality.

As has been mentioned, a woman's second most important function is her responsibility for educating her children in customary ways and law so that they can blend into society. When Tselane informs her mother, Mma-Tselane, that she is carrying Keaja's child, and that they wish to marry in contravention of the tradition of arranged marriages, the shock to both Mma-Tselane and Mma-Monososi is severe. Inevitably, Tselane's disgrace will cause Mma-Tselane to become a broken woman as her social prestige, her "kingdom", and her self-esteem crumble around her (TTP:98). She almost collapses with shock when she has to tell Tselane's father her news but she explains the situation with as much dignity as she can muster and then faces his wrath. Mma-Tselane fights for the assurance that her child will not come to harm, but she is too angry about the damage done to her own public image to lend her daughter the emotional support which she needs. This scene creates an evocative image of strength, dignity and fortitude under extreme stress, but falls short of the customary nurturing image of motherhood.

The shock which Mma-Tselane suffers when the lovers do not return following their temporary dismissal from the village compensates for her initial lack of maternal instinct. She is maddened and distraught by the loss of her daughter. After

viewing the spot where Mma-Monosi fancies that the hillside has devoured the young people, she returns to her home and dies. The effect of this collapse is particularly dramatic when Mma-Tselane's previous social stature and strong personality are taken into account. Her death fulfils stereotypical social expectations that a "queen" amongst woman will come to a memorable end. Social pressure on a woman to be an exemplary mother and the transmitter of culture apparently cannot be overestimated.

Head's Johannah ("Jacob, the Faith Healing Priest", CT) represents the idealised image of a model mother who teaches her children to adhere to the strict laws governing family life and relationships with adults, and teaches them the customs of her own childhood, so that they are extremely well disciplined. Under their mother's guidance and supervision, Johannah's children perform their duties in the home so diligently that Jacob is concerned that the children are not given enough time to play.⁹ Johannah answers his doubts on this subject with the calm statement that life is not play, and that children have to be taught about life so that they will be prepared to stand up to hardship as adults (CT:35).

Johannah's view of life is that the black woman's life is a hard one which demands a great deal of realism, hard work and pragmatism (CT:35). Her story reveals that if the black mother were not to inculcate customs and traditional practices in her children and teach them domestic, cultural and gender roles, the black father would be powerless to do so, as he has so little to do with the children. The successful mother, in Johannah's view, is one who teaches her daughters to be able to apply traditional values in the domestic situation and prepares her sons to fend for their families. The fact that this also entails perpetuating gender power roles, seems to pass unnoticed.

Kuzwayo also reinforces the conventional image of black motherhood. In a narrative which tells the story of an unsuc-

cessful modern mother, "Education: No Substitute for Culture" (SDL), she relates how Annie, a schoolteacher, rejects her husband's nephew when her sister-in-law dies. Although it is Piet's traditional duty to care for his orphaned nephew, Thulo, Annie is a modern career woman who lacks communal spirit and does not approve of sharing assets with the clan. As a result, she does not co-operate with her husband for the good of the child, thus earning Kuzwayo's disapproval.

This disapproval is shown in the development of a series of episodes which illustrate Annie's inadequacy as a mother responsible for educating her children to function within traditional culture. When the children are young, Annie encourages her own children to leave domestic chores to Thulo and neglects the duty of training her daughter for womanhood. Dikgopi grows up "untrained and unprepared for her responsibilities in the home". Piet becomes concerned when he realises that other mothers are

... grooming their daughters to be all-rounders when they reached maturity. But, at the age of ten, Dikgopi still depended on Thulo to wash her socks and panties - a shameful thing in the black community. (SDL:50)

Thulo is Annie's intended victim, but in the long run her own daughter pays the price because she is not equipped to fill her domestic role in an ordinary family, leaves school and has an illegitimate baby at the age of sixteen.

After Piet's death the children become unmanageable. Kuzwayo attributes this to poor parenting when they were young. It takes the death of her youngest son before Annie acknowledges the error of her ways, adopts a more "responsible" attitude towards her remaining children and becomes a different person. After this change of heart, she is no longer depicted as arrogant, cold-blooded, mean and unfair. Kuzwayo considers Annie's acceptance of traditional female roles to have restored her to social acceptability. It is clear that the personal characteristics which Kuzwayo admires and promotes are those

which show the mother to be warm, affectionate and just, but she uses negative characteristics to stereotype women who do not fulfil their mothering role in the customary ways (Lewis 1992a:39).

When Annie dies, Thulo has her buried in a way which symbolises forgiveness for all her shortcomings in the early part of her life, and approval of the latter part. Kuzwayo sums up the message of the story by saying that

... in her folly, Annie had abused Thulo, in the full belief that she loved her own children. But she never taught them the basics of self-respect, responsibility, duty, respect for others and common courtesy. Her children were never introduced to their own black culture or taught to value it. (SDL:62)

Kuzwayo regards the above qualities as essential to African culture. She implies that Annie introduced her children to the basis of another culture but was not actually capable of teaching them the norms and values of that culture because she did not understand them herself. As a result of the mother's inadequacy, the family lived in a cultural void and belonged to neither culture. This is a damning image of the modern African woman as an inadequate and destructive mother if she abandons her own culture and does not fulfil expectations of motherhood by teaching her children to live according to the traditions of autochthonous culture.

Compliance with culture and custom is not, apparently, always satisfactory for women. Custom can also produce situations which are destructive for women living in a society whose norms no longer support those customs. In "One of Many" (SDL), Kuzwayo tells of the conflict between custom and Mpho's needs as a single mother. Kuzwayo says "[a]ccording to today's standards, Mpho was a single parent" (SDL:63), thus indicating a change of standards and the black person's acceptance that the single parent is a common reality of life.¹⁰

Despite this change in social standards, and Mpho's determined efforts over a long period, her attempts to gain permission to take Mosa, her son, into her marriage with Jabu are doomed. Her own mother lays claim to Mosa as a prospective bread-winner for the family, and eventually the child is forced to comply with custom and live with his uncle's family.¹¹

The sister-in-law responsible for Mosa does not wish to have the child and makes life very difficult. Like Annie (in "Education, No Substitute for Culture", SDL), she is in a position to place pressure on Mpho because she has a say in her husband's house and feels the financial stress of providing for an additional child. She and Annie represent the stereotype of the uncaring sister-in-law who does not wish comply with tradition and raise a child who is not her own, and who is "cold and arrogant". This is comparable with the Western stereotype of the wicked stepmother.¹²

Mpho, by contrast with these women, is the stereotypical dutiful clanswoman, with great respect for custom and her family, and excellent parental skills. Kuzwayo's approval of Mpho's character is palpable and in stark contrast to her disapproval of Annie.

Social expectations based on traditions "which demand fertility and respect for the extended family" (Clayton 1988a:4) are shown to have a negative capacity in that they can have a devastating effect on barren wives. Frank (in Jones *et al.* 1987:20) indicates that "for a woman to lack reproductive power is to lack all power" because lack of fertility is always attributed to the woman. Kuzwayo points out that failure to conceive was seen as a "general indictment of a woman's behaviour and character" (SDL:81), and she illustrates this in "The Reward of Waiting" (SDL).

In this story, Kuzwayo tells how a married couple who have two daughters but are unable to conceive a son, decide to

introduce a second wife to the family for the purpose of producing an heir. Kuzwayo makes it clear that Mosidi, the first wife, has admirable qualities, such as a relaxed nature and respect for people, which have earned her many friends among the community's women. Unlike Puleng, ("Ask the Ostriches", SDL), Mosidi is a Christian and finds it difficult to accept polygamy in her home. She eventually bows to her husband's manipulative pressure and, after careful thought and research, chooses Fumane, an attractive, well-groomed young woman from a good background to be Khotso's second wife.

Fumane is known in the community as an industrious, diligent woman, (qualities which Kuzwayo promotes as highly prized in wives-to-be). She is very confident of her ability to produce a son for Khotso and harmony prevails until Mosidi becomes pregnant instead of Fumane. Fumane becomes depressed and withdrawn as she has not fulfilled the role expected of her or her own expectations of herself. She rudely returns to her parents without taking leave of Khotso and Mosidi.

Fumane has suffered self-pity, tension, anxiety and insecurity because of her barrenness. She tells her parents that she has suffered "emotional torture and humiliation" (SDL:81) in her marriage to Khotso. She then flees to the city to find a job and to forget the traumatic experience she has undergone. She regards this form of voluntary exile as preferable to facing the disapproval which other members of the clan will vent on her because she has not lived up to their expectations of a woman as a producer of children.

Despite her training in traditional ways, Fumane lacks the strength of character which Kuzwayo attributes to the Christian Mosidi and becomes nervously distressed about her barrenness. Her promising home background and fine qualities mean nothing when faced with the sense of personal failure about her inability to fulfil the community's expectations of a woman. Kuzwayo implies that even the finest of young women can be destroyed by

social failure. Fumane becomes the antithesis of what the noble black woman should be. She typifies the barren woman - a neurotic outcast from the community, exiled to a life of humiliating service in a white person's home - the ultimate denigration of womanhood and a mark of failure when regarded in the light of fiction in this study.

During the disintegration of his second marriage, Khotso learns to value Mosidi's calm nature, her confidence in herself and in others, and her respect for people. He attributes her character with "integrity, dependability, good judgement, unselfishness ... honesty and sincerity when making decisions" (SDL:81). The story creates a direct link between Mosidi's strength of character and her Christian faith. She assumes the character of a happy and fulfilled Christian woman who serves her God, her devoted monogamous husband and their family.

This story counters Kuzwayo's previous apparent approval of polygamy. Although Kuzwayo approves of traditional culture, and accepts that it can work well under certain conditions, in this story she promotes the Christian practice of monogamy. "The Reward of Waiting" eulogizes the Christian wife as the ideal female character on whom to base the future. Khotso acknowledges that Mosidi is "the pillar, strength, support and guide of the family" and says "[l]et it always be so" (SDL:82), thus renouncing his own traditional leadership of the family and patriarchy in deference to this remarkable woman. Once again, this is a case of the writer attempting to re-imagine society by creating a fictional example of a reconstructed family unit which gives prominence and respect to a strong woman fulfilling her roles as wife and mother.

Serote and Langa deal with women's domestic duties from a male perspective, giving them little prominence. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Serote contextualises wives and mothers in housekeeping situations, effectively binding them to the kitchen, with an occasional mention of the bedroom. Langa oversimplifies

the complexity of women's domestic roles when he uses house-keeping skills as a superficial evaluation of a wife's performance in her house-related roles. In Langa's *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, a policeman cruelly derides a black woman for having "nests for mice" under her beds (RPS:138) and implies that she is not worth listening to on political matters because she cannot even do her housekeeping properly. This sort of contempt for women as housekeepers is not typical of the representations already discussed, which generally accord women dignity and status according to their ability to fulfil community expectations of them in the domestic sphere.

The roles described to this point reflect the purely domestic realms of women's influence. These roles are repeated and extended as women venture into the worlds of work and politics or use their domestic skills in the community. They form the basis for more public roles, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

ENDNOTES:

1. Research by the United Nations on the situation of families in Eastern and Southern Africa (1993:24-27) in preparation for the UN Year of the Family, 1994, has produced statistics which show that the average age at first marriage is higher in South Africa and Botswana than elsewhere in Africa and that a lower percentage of the population marries. The research suggests that social change has been brought about by the migrant labour system.
2. According to Van Zyl and Shefer (1989:15), the prevalent norm associated with sexuality in Western, Christian oriented society is that its ultimate goal is "procreation within an approved familial set-up" and this view is generally used by the dominant group to "justify" and "naturalise the existing relations of domination". They explain that the terms "normal" and "healthy" apply to "what is regarded as "normal" and "healthy" for men. Men are encouraged to "sow their wild oats", while women are expected to be either chaste and monogamous mothers of children, or loose women who afford men pleasure but cannot expect to be regarded as suitable breeding stock. This view can also be supported by reference to the stories discussed in this dissertation.
3. The preponderance of single mothers in Head's stories suggests that Botswanan women do not exercise control over their reproductive potential, even though many of them are represented as sexually liberated and in control of their choice of sex partners. "Snapshots of a Wedding", "Life" and "Hunting" (all in *The Collector of Treasures*) show that the children of single women are frequently the product of casual liaisons or common law marriages with men of the woman's choice.
4. For example, Dikeledi in "Collector of Treasures"(CT), Mma-Mabele in "Witchcraft" (CT) and Paulina in *When Rain Clouds Gather*.

5. The wife's duties are affirmed during the process of the traditional Tswana wedding. See "Snapshots of a Wedding" (CT:79-80).
6. Driver (1990:236) quotes Vernon February as having said that men could be "dehumanized and degraded even by the smallest white child". Driver describes the African man as "symbolically castrated by white patriarchal government" and voices the male expectation that women will "restore them to their masculinity".
7. To Kuzwayo, herself a divorcee with divorced parents, motherhood appears to be a more important role than wifehood, but Head does not give the role the same emphasis. Kuzwayo's autobiography emphasises the importance of her relationship with her own mother and the strong bond between herself and her sons. To her, motherhood entails "deep-seated emotions of love and care, and the sheer satisfaction of living with and for one's offspring" (CMW:180). As a result of her divorce and the loss of custody of her first two sons, she was particularly protective of her youngest son.
8. Mothers are traditionally called by the name of a child, prefixed by Ma- or Mma-, e.g. Mma-Keaja, is Keaja's mother. Fathers are identified as the name prefixed by Rra-, e.g. Rra-Keaja. This custom suggests the social acknowledgement given to parenthood.
9. It is apparent that Botswanan children are not alone in performing household duties. Kuzwayo goes into detail about the type of work which South African children do. "Each child would be assigned particular tasks such as sweeping and cleaning certain rooms, fetching water from the fountain, or collecting and washing dishes after meals ... collecting fuel for the fire ... running errands for their elders ... transporting water to a work camp" (SDL:127). Kuzwayo's comment that "[t]he youngsters took a real pride in carrying out such duties well" (SDL:127), is indicative of her affirmation of a sense of the value of customary work divisions.
10. Mookodi (1972:358) explains that rural-urban migration has taken many women to towns, where they form short-lived unions with men, resulting in a high rate of illegitimacy. The exigencies of life make it difficult for these unmarried mothers to advance as rapidly as they should.
11. The custom and tradition for generations had been embedded almost as law that "a child born out of wedlock belongs to his or her maternal uncle's family ... and remains a member of that family when the mother decides to get married to another man" (SDL:64). This leaves Mpho with the dilemma caused by the conflict between her own needs and her mother's rights, rooted in traditional custom and entitled to override the single mother's own wishes.
12. In contrast to this, Kuzwayo tells about her own step-mother in *Call Me Woman*. Kuzwayo's father's second wife had no children of her own, but looked after her sister's children as if they were her own. She maintained her standards and values consistently. She ran her household efficiently. She was neutral towards Ellen Merafe, not a loving and warm person.

CHAPTER 3

WORKING ROLES

Over the years, social structures have changed and created opportunities for women to participate in the national economy. As a result, many women exercise influence through their participation in activities beyond their homes. These activities have brought women greater public exposure and created the potential for a fresh assessment to be made of their occupational roles, as reflected in literary images (Davies and Graves 1986:75). This chapter seeks to examine representations with regard to the working roles of female characters in the books under discussion.

Kuzwayo claims that the white state has historically viewed the black woman as unproductive in industry, completely dependent on her male counterpart, helpless, and unintelligent to the point of being useless and stupid (CMW:12). What Kuzwayo here regards as an "unrealistic" representation could be related to a lack of awareness among whites of the important roles black women have played, in conjunction with the patriarchalism of black authors. This issue will be briefly addressed before an analysis of roles is undertaken.

One of the key issues underpinning humanist feminism¹ is a critical view of the man's dominance as a provider, and the woman's objectification as a consumer. There appears to be little awareness that this feminist issue does not have quite the same validity and relevance in African society as it does in Western society. One aspect of general ignorance relating to the nature of black women's life-style and occupational sphere, is a poor awareness that women are not simply male-dependent consumers. They also have responsibilities as providers, cultivators and traders. These are occupational roles which are not traditional in white middle class homes, but are integral to the traditional African woman's self-image (Le Vine in Middleton 1970:175).

Le Vine argues that the considerable extent of black women's occupational involvement might lead one to expect changes in the national economy to make women more independent and cause them to challenge male domination in marital and social relationships. He also says that men in societies where women become economically independent "experience intense relative deprivation - which results in their hostility to women, feelings of sexual inadequacy and envy of women", all of which have cultural manifestations (Le Vine in Middleton 1970:180). Some of these manifestations are aimed at the devaluing of women's work.

Both the social change to which Le Vine refers, and the devaluation of women, can be seen in the literature under scrutiny. Representations such as Serote's images of women often link women to what Van Zyl calls "undervalued work of domestic origin" (1989:13). This is so in the case of Mary, Tsi's sister, who becomes a domestic servant in *To Every Birth its Blood*. Alternatively, representations often "exclude" women by not showing their active engagement with occupational roles which were previously dominated by men. The case of Grace Ramono (TEBB) may be cited as an example. Grace is said to be a headmistress, but is never shown in that professional role. This deprives her of the opportunity to demonstrate personal power in her working environment.

Advertising has established the perception in South Africa that personal power corresponds with income, and is class based.² Literary images of black women do not generally empower the woman by providing public exposure of the personal, social or cash value of their endeavours. This leaves the reader dependent on her own conceptualisation of the value of women's work. Friedman (1989:73) points out that social valuation of women's work is generally linked to the production of "surplus-value or profit". Eurocentric conceptualisation of surplus value or profit in terms of money has the potential to distort the reader's understanding of the important economic role which black women in a barter-based society actually play in their families.

The African women depicted in Head's social history, *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, and in her stories about Botswana, routinely plough to produce the crops required to feed their families. They also strive to produce a crop surplus which can be bartered for additional household supplies or money. (See "The Summer Sun" and "Looking for a Rain God" in *The Collector of Treasures*.³) The story of Dikeledi in "The Collector of Treasures" (CT) makes it apparent that women functioning in the money-based economy of post-colonial Africa, have also had to use their skills in paid employment in order to supply needs such as clothing and school fees for their children.

In *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, Head describes how women handed down ancient skills to their daughters. Girls and young women were trained in the domestic skills of building mud walls, plastering, decorating courtyard walls, thatching, cooking, cleaning, sewing, basket making, pot-making, herbal doctoring or beer brewing. In vocational terms, women were thus farmers, builders, construction labourers, cooks, domestic servants, seamstresses, tailors, craftswomen, doctors and brewers - not to mention teachers, nurses, historians and entertainers. Career or occupational opportunities for black women in modern society have often developed as women have put traditional "domestic" skills to use in formal employment. These working roles form the basis of the following discussion.

Head's stories indicate that women who remain in the rural districts generally have to rely on their wits, character and farming skill to sustain and support themselves. Head represents women's contributions to family upkeep as a major social responsibility, which should earn them community respect. It is evident from her stories that this is not a straightforward procedure. Head shows women in contexts which reveal that both human and natural forces contrive to make life very difficult for women to earn a living, let alone gain respect for their labours.

In "Looking for a Rain God" (CT), the position of women who farm according to tribal custom is threatened because weather conditions are unfavourable. The social expectation that women shall persevere regardless of the odds, combined with a drought, create such a stressful predicament for the farmers that Tiro and her sister are driven to the brink of insanity by their desperate longing for the rain essential to produce the food needed for their family's sustenance. Head represents the nightly keening of the women as a sign of mental degeneration within a situation which they are powerless to change.

The deaths of Tiro's little daughters, Neo and Boseyong, are the direct result of the family's desperation. Instead of submitting to the sun's fierce power and accepting their inevitable starvation, the family tries to combat the drought by applying a dimly remembered ancient tribal custom in which the little girls' body parts are scattered over the lands to propitiate the rain god. A new image of the mother emerges in this story. It is that of a woman who is so devastated by hardship that she sacrifices her own flesh and blood. Head does not represent this as a flaw in the woman's personality, but as a fault of inappropriate traditional approaches to the production of food under adverse conditions.

In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Head suggests a community-based alternative to the female suffering consequent upon the situation described above. Gilbert, the British volunteer worker, realises that the Botswanan climate creates unfavourable farming conditions and that customary practices need to be revised. He also realises that the key to revitalising traditional agriculture, and the economy, is to involve female farmers in learning new, more productive agricultural methods. Because he realises that the women will not listen to him, and that change must evolve from within the social context,⁴ Gilbert enlists Makhaya's help in training women to grow tobacco.

Unlike Makhaya, a traditional African man who clung to the ideology of patriarchy might have experienced difficulty in treating the women as his equals and enlisting their support, but Head describes Makhaya as highly proficient in the ability to relate to women. Head represents Makhaya as one of a new generation of men in that he acknowledges women as his equals and discourages any terms of address which he considers to be an artificial boost to a man's status (WRCG:15). Makhaya manages to maintain friendly yet firm control over the tobacco co-operative group. Dinorego regards Makhaya's way of treating the women he trained as typical of the old order:

It seemed to him that Makhaya was well versed in Ancient African customs where the man maintained his dignity and self-control in front of women, except that in former times this man had maintained it over a harem of concubines, while Makhaya had none. (WRCG:137-138)

Despite Dinorego's view, when Makhaya works side by side with the illiterate women and chats to them like a brother, Paulina thinks: "He makes us feel at ease ... because he has no feeling. He takes away the feeling in us that he is a man" (WRCG:112). The way in which Makhaya acknowledges and respects women appears to provide Head's ideal of male-female working relationships, since he replaces male dominance with a complementary asexual partnership in the working environment.

Despite Makhaya's ability to relate to women, he and Gilbert would not have been able to start the project at all if it had not been promoted to the rest of the women by Paulina. Head carefully establishes the importance of the relationship between Paulina and the other women. She suggests that the other women respect Paulina as a natural leader with a gay and adventurous spirit (WRCG:94), and that they cheerfully follow her lead in starting off a tobacco unit. (The profit motive cannot be underestimated. The women know the value of money and are willing to work for it.⁵) Paulina is represented as a tireless worker who leads by her example to the other women.

Head does not represent Paulina in idealistic terms, as a dedicated farmer or businesswoman. She also does not underplay the fact that Paulina's desire to impress Makhaya affects her enthusiasm for the success of the project and encourages her to exert the full force of her personality on the neighbourhood women. Paulina is sketched as a woman with an enormous capacity for devotion to an exceptional man. She converts her emotional burden into raw energy for her work, as an expression of her unrequited love for Makhaya.

In addition to revealing the extent of Paulina's emotional energy, Head's story also builds up her image as a fine organiser at home and in public. She accommodates parenting, domestic responsibilities and farming for profit in her busy life. Although the burdens of widowhood and motherhood are sometimes almost too much for Paulina to bear, she is shown to be an astute, respectable and admirable woman who uses her interpersonal skills to lead her gender into a revolutionary new type of farming which benefits the entire community. Her role is one which cannot be filled by a man, and shows the importance of social recognition for female leadership over other women.

Although Paulina is not conscious that she is in the process of changing her society, her activities are viewed with suspicion by Matenge, a chief who is presented as the epitome of evil. The villagers unite to help Paulina face him down in a display of silent and passive resistance. This opposition so unnerves Matenge that he commits suicide. His death shocks everyone into a state of mind which makes them receptive to rejecting oppression. This event transforms Paulina into a sign, in that the overthrow of Matenge and the old destructive ways of thinking about farming are directly attributable to this woman's courage and leadership on the tobacco project. Paulina's situation in this idealistic success story creates the potential for representations of a new type of dynamic female farmer not found in Head's other tales of farming.

According to Kuzwayo, women in rural areas became so overwhelmed by the problems of scratching out a living on diminishing pieces of tribal land, and coping without their menfolk, that an endless flow of them streamed to the cities (CMW:31). She writes that women were drawn to the cities by the hope of better opportunities, and shared whatever profit they made, in cash or kind, with those they left behind. She adds a touch of nobility to this action in the following words:

The emotional deprivation of those left behind was compensated for by material gain brought back from the cities by their dear mothers, grannies, aunts or sisters; a contribution which could never be clearly measured in any way but which made a positive impact, no matter how limited, on the lives of those who benefited from it. (CMW:31)

Kuzwayo's autobiography, *Call Me Woman*, is a vehicle through which the writer repeatedly emphasises and praises the public and private achievements of even the humblest and least noticed of women. Kuzwayo expresses particular appreciation for those who make a contribution to township life in the process of toiling for a living. Her approach can be contrasted with that of Langa.

Langa reflects the presence of women on a less sensitive level than Kuzwayo would appear to prefer. In a scene in which women vend take-away food in the streets near a railway station (TB:17), Mkhonto, a guerilla who has just been released from jail, notes the range of foods which vendors offer for sale. He accepts the scene as a common township sight, and does not give a thought to the women's lives or the conditions under which they work. The impression is created that Langa has little appreciation of the value of the work done by female vendors.

Kuzwayo, in contrast, is very concerned about the plight of these "mothers". Unlike Langa, she does not feature vendors purely as background material. She "re-writes motherhood" by showing that female vendors are mothers who have empowered themselves economically by using their domestic skills in trade (Lewis 1992a:38). She also discusses their lives, admires their mutual supportiveness and shows them to be a strong-willed group

of entrepreneurs who make a reasonable living to support their families (CMW:38).

The majority of women in the fiction studied, however, do not act as entrepreneurs, but seek paid employment. When the South African economy stopped importing goods and began to manufacture commodities geared to military demands during the second World War, a section of the white labour force was enlisted in the army, and their jobs in factories were filled by large numbers of African women (Lodge 1983:12). Of the female characters in the works studied, only Granny Basadi (in "Granny Basadi" SDL) is mentioned in an industrial context, and nothing is said about her working role other than that she was used to working hard and conscientiously.

The lack of literary contexts representing women in this field, and the relatively greater emphasis on domestic service, suggests that the majority of black women have traditionally been perceived as working in the informal sector or in domestic service, although an increasing number now work in professional and commercial fields (CMW:260).

Van Zyl (1989:13) indicates that "where it is performed for wages, the devalued status of women's work spills over into extremely exploitative working conditions and wages for domestic work". The devaluation of "women's work" into a low-status, low-paid job reinforces the idea of the black woman's inferiority to other women (Schalkwyk 1989:254; Daymond *et al.* 1984:iv). Friedman (1989:101) reports on research which proves that the dominant ideology further demeans the domestic worker by making her "invisible" in advertising. Domestic work is thus often presented in literature as an evil to be borne only because there is no alternative. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Tsi's father is horrified to hear that his daughter, Mary, is "working kitchens" and dreads the effect her lowly work will have on her son.⁶

In *Call Me Woman*, Kuzwayo expresses concern about the exploitation she perceives to be rife in the treatment of domestic workers. She propounds a new image of domestic workers and raises the status of their work when she refers to them as "gracious black mothers" who have

... brought up and nurtured children of all communities, sometimes at the sacrifice of their own children indeed, some of the leading white men and women in this country are the products of the ingenious hands and minds of the black 'nurse', 'nanny' or 'mother' who has been, and still is, underpaid for one of the outstanding responsible human services; that is bringing up children. This is a task she has undertaken with responsibility, love, loyalty and respect. (CMW:24)

In writing such as this, Kuzwayo makes a strong claim for respect to be accorded to the women who have performed underrated work without acknowledgement or suitable reward. The author further politicizes the issue when she claims that "new generations of black women have ... brought about unprecedented transformation in the old loathed stereotype of the domestic servant" (CMW:260). To enhance this new image, she relates that the Domestic Workers Employer Programme trains domestic workers in "fine sewing, cookery, literacy, money handling, car driving, first aid and other skills" (CMW:24), and that the women of this movement are also fighting for living wages, paid annual leave and pension schemes.⁷

The activities in which the women are trained are those which support the ideology of motherhood promoted by the Black Consciousness Movement which Kuzwayo supported during the 1970s (Driver 1990:235). Lewis (1992a:40), however, regards these activities, and those which Kuzwayo promoted via the National Council of African Women and the Young Women's Christian Association, as "based on extremely debilitating assumptions about women's status and capabilities".

Lewis claims that Kuzwayo rarely challenges such debilitating assumptions, but Kuzwayo does project a revalued image of domestic servants in "The Strongest Point in a Chain is its Weakest Point" (SDL). Pulane, the female protagonist in this

story, works as a labourer and then in a restaurant in a small town until she marries. She is described in the favourable terms Kuzwayo uses for women who are sought after as wives, as "never idle, always willing to work even if the job was far below her capabilities" (SDL:83).⁸

Kuzwayo builds up Pulane's image as an excellent house-keeper, mother and wife. Her marriage to Mmuso seems idyllically based on custom - "the father was proud of providing for his family ... the mother acknowledged and appreciated her husband's efforts and achievements" (SDL:86). The amicable relationship is threatened when Mmuso's "meagre wage" is no longer sufficient to support a wife and three children and Pulane starts "to toy with the idea of finding a job" (SDL:86) to supplement their income. At first she is hesitant about broaching the subject with her husband. This suggests that she is sensitive to the fact that it might be a blow to Mmuso's pride to be told that he is no longer capable of providing for his family, but that she is willing to succumb to necessity, sacrifice her female role as "mother" and adopt the male role of "provider", for the sake of her children.

Pulane's husband seems to be understanding when they negotiate about the best time for Pulane to start work and, at the agreed time, Pulane finds a temporary job in domestic service. This seemingly idyllic marriage is shattered shortly afterwards when Mmuso unexpectedly takes their eldest son back to his home in Boshothu for his Christmas holiday. Mmuso has not previously mentioned his proposed holiday to Pulane, and she reports her husband's absence to the police, believing Mmuso and her son to be dead or injured. Pulane is "dazed and numbed" when Pitso, her husband's colleague, informs her of Mmuso's holiday plans (SDL:90). Despite her shock and hurt at her husband's implied rejection of her, Pulane thanks Pitso for the information. Pitso is stunned and distressed by his friend's action and his cowardice in not informing his wife of his plans, but admires Pulane's strength of character at this time. In this scene,

Pulane shows that she can be focused, strong and cope with crisis.

Pulane retrieves her child with the help of the Boshothu authorities. Her fine qualities emerge strongly after this traumatic experience shatters her marriage. She "firmly pulled herself together and found a steady, rewarding job as a domestic worker", earning enough money to purchase a house and support her children and uncle.

Her courage, determination, resourcefulness and industriousness carried her through all the pain and difficulties she encountered. Wishing for her children greater opportunities than she had had, she encouraged them in every way to make the most of their education. From her ordeal, she emerged as a model and an inspiration to the younger generation - and, in particular, to young women. (SDL:91)

Despite the irony that Pulane finds fulfilment in the much despised field of domestic work, Kuzwayo appears to be setting an ideal for domestic workers to strive towards. She does this by creating the image of Pulane as such an excellent worker that she crosses the racial barriers between herself and her employers, making friends with some of them "from far-off countries over the seas" (SDL:91) and crossing the black/white, employer/employee gulf. Pulane is something of a martyr, but one whose idealised fine qualities of character raise her above pity and earn admiration. Her character adds dignity and merit to the position of the domestic worker because she strives to work to the best of her ability and wins respect from her white employers, thus elevating her job above the stereotype of a menial position.

An example of a more professional calling which also derives from earlier nurturing social roles, is that of social work. Social workers need a particular sensitivity to the needs and sufferings of the people they serve. Kuzwayo considers female social workers to be prepared for their roles by the incidental training they gain from daily village life (CMW:114). In "Village People" (TTP:41), Head relates how the community's

strength as a cohesive informal social support force works to the benefit of the individual. This is demonstrated in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, when Paulina's son dies of tuberculosis and malnutrition during a terrible drought. People crowd in about Paulina, "and sit, sit in heavy silence, absorbing the pain, till, to the mother it is only a dim, dull ache folded into the stream of life" (TTP:41).

"Lasting impressions" (SDL), Kuzwayo's story about Neo, who becomes a social worker, is both strongly autobiographical in its reflection of Kuzwayo's life and reminiscent of events in the inspirational life of Violet Subisisiwe.⁹ Like Kuzwayo, Neo learns African mythology from the tribal storytellers around the hearth. When she mixes with people from urban communities she feels that she will "make herself a laughing stock with her stories of ghosts and river snakes" and so she suppresses her own cultural background (SDL:115). Neo becomes a teacher and later a social worker. She then goes through a period where she learns to acknowledge and appreciate the stories and experiences of her past and is eventually "able to share with pride and confidence her deep knowledge of the folklore, music, dances, costumes, dishes and home medicines traditional to the community" (SDL:115).

Kuzwayo holds up Neo as an example to other women, in that she promotes traditional culture to colleagues from other racial groups, particularly whites, who "had given the strong impression that they knew all there was to know about black people - their culture, customs and overall way of life" (SDL:116). Neo's new role as a cultural expert is very positively represented because it brings her professional recognition and a fresh image at work. Like Violet Subisisiwe, Neo becomes a delegate for a programme to be run in the UK and later in the USA and is exposed to the international scene at many levels.¹⁰ This story creates the image of a professional social worker who has fine characteristics and is well equipped to help girls of her own culture

because her life is firmly based on an appreciation and understanding of the value of her own culture.

Culture is more traditionally transmitted by the teacher, who supplements the roles of the story-teller and mother. Kuzwayo provides evidence of this in her accounts of her own teaching days, where anecdotes about her achievements enhance her record of involvement in the profession. Kuzwayo's estimation of the quality of teachers is very high, in stark contrast with her low opinion of the erstwhile Bantu Education system (CMW:9).

Head also presents teachers as worthy of social esteem. She represents Dikeledi and Margaret Cadmore, in *Maru*, as teachers whose skills and education make them highly regarded members of the community. In a scene where Margaret's pupils carry out the racist principal's order to confront their teacher with the fact that she is a member of the despised race of Bushmen, Dikeledi storms into the classroom and demands respect for Margaret on the ground that Margaret is the children's teacher (M:46). The image of the female teacher is further enhanced by the fact that Dikeledi takes over Pete's post as the school principal and appears to acquit herself well.

The medical profession has traditionally been another respected outlet for the home-learned skills of the black woman. Home nursing is a conventional female occupation, with women being expected to care for the sick and the aged. Some respected women, like Mma-Tselane, in Head's "The Lovers" (TTP), occasionally heal other women and children through the therapeutic use of herbs and natural remedies, whereas others, like Mma-Baloi, do so for a living.

Mma-Baloi in "Chief Sekoto Holds Court" (TTP:61-64) is an old woman accused of witchcraft because she uses traditional herbal remedies to cure people, but is not a recognised Tswana doctor. She is terrified and horrified by the sudden death of a strange woman who visits her for help. Head depicts her at her

trial at Chief Sekoto's kgotla as the stereotype of an aged woman - a quaking, ashen, crumpled heap with a quavering voice. This image emphasises the weakness of the aged, rather than giving recognition to Mma-Baloi for her healing skills. However, Chief Sekoto's action in making a place for Mma-Baloi in his own home, as his personal healer, illustrates his respect for traditional methods of healing and his veneration for the aged woman's ancient skills. He effectively demonstrates that society should revere the aged for their achievements and adherence to culture, thus enhancing the image of aged women and traditional healers.

Kuzwayo claims that the majority of women become nurses, rather than doctors, because girls are not encouraged to take science subjects at school (CMW:87). In "Education, No Substitute for Culture" (CT), Manana is Thulo's wife, and a nurse in a clinic. When Thulo's close friend, Tshepo, dies in an accident, Manana,

... took over the running of the house, [and] displayed outstanding qualities of efficiency and sensitivity. The great emotional burden being carried by the members of the family seemed to bring out the best in her. She comforted the family, allocated duties, made arrangements, all the time working side by side with her husband. (SDL:54)

Although Manana is not shown in her working role at the clinic where she is employed, the approving tone of these words projects the image of a fine nurse utilising her desirable characteristics to the benefit of her community. Manana is contextualised as a woman who lives according to the supportive framework of the customs and values of her culture, feels secure in that context and is admirable as a result of her successful integration of tradition and modernity.

In *To Every Birth its Blood* Tsi's wife, Lily, is also an admirable woman with many fine characteristics. She is a physiotherapist who works with disabled and handicapped children. Tsi cannot understand how she can do this. He wants to make her "comfortable" (TEBB:73) and thinks that working with children disfigured by distorted faces and twisted bodies should be

driving Lily crazy. Tsi does not understand Lily's dedication to her work, or to the children and mothers whom she assists. His perspective on her work is based on the view that a woman should be sheltered by a man from the "uncomfortable" aspects of life.

Tsi may be genuinely insensitive to the needs and hopes of mothers of crippled children, be suffering from feelings of inferiority because his wife works, or simply be perpetuating the stereotyped ideology of domesticity, according to which the male is the provider and protector while the woman confines herself to the domestic spheres of work. The writer gives no concrete indication of which option applies, thus suggesting that he is unaware that there are deep psychological ramifications underlying this aspect of the marital relationship between an unemployed man and an educated career woman.

The emphasis thus far has been on conventional types of work. In broaching the subject of "illegal" forms of work, Kuzwayo is at pains to point out that circumstances forced unemployed township women into illegal or underground activities (CMW:38). Some of these, such as beer brewing, liquor selling and prostitution were relatively natural extensions of domestic activities.

In "The Deep River" (CT:2) Head tells how beer was traditionally made by women to celebrate the harvest. Head describes Life's friends among the modern beer-brewing women of Botswana (in "Life", CT) as

... a gay and lovable crowd who had emancipated themselves some time ago. They were drunk every day and could be seen staggering around the village, usually with a wide-eyed illegitimate baby hitched on to their hips. They also talked and laughed loudly and slapped each other on the back and had developed a language all their own. (CT:39)

This generalisation forms a stereotype from which one develops the immediate expectation that beer-brewers will be loud, promiscuous, and shallow hedonists. Such an expectation

is countered by Head's sympathetic treatment of these women in their role as the friends of Life, a misunderstood woman.

Kuzwayo also claims a respectable image for beer-brewing. She asserts that the only occupation possible for the women who could not be absorbed into domestic service was beer-brewing (CMW:24). The township version of the beer-brewer is the Skokian Queen.¹¹ Kuzwayo identifies the stock stereotype of the Skokian Queens as "generally seen as immoral and undesirable members of the community" (CMW:27), but counters this when she claims that they were often different when approached as individual women. Lewis (1992a:36) argues that Kuzwayo "openly betrays her own ethical model" when she renames a Skokian Queen named Motena as "Mama Motena" and describes her as a "lovely person, warm and very orderly in her life as a mother and housewife" (CMW:28). Kuzwayo does not stop at this. She tries to improve the image of shebeen queens even further by redeeming Mama (Mother) Motena's involvement in liquor-selling with the words "[s]he was a lovely respectable mother who sold liquor for survival" (CMW:28).

In *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, Langa creates the character of Aunt Margaret, a shopkeeper turned shebeen queen who also successfully maintains a respectable image. She is careful to protect her own name from scandal, and is very discreet about the fact that her helper, Eugene, lives with her. She is shown as a caring guardian during the years that Khethiwe lives with her (RPS:16).

Serote also shows approval of a shebeen queen. Tsi (TEBB:35) calls the owner of his favourite shebeen "Aunt Miriam". He regards her as an older person, to whom he owes respect. Miriam uses her domestic skills to prepare food for her customers and to run her business. She is not simply a businesswoman, although she is very hard-headed and strict about credit to people who might be arrested and leave her short of cash for stock. Miriam is shown to have a compassionate side, in that she

takes a personal interest in Tsi, his brothers and their relationship with their mother (TEBB:36). She reveals both sides of herself when she is scathing about Tsi using his last rand to buy beer (TEBB:39), and when she evicts Tsi, Moipone and their friends for brawling in her shebeen. Tsi describes the way Miriam tells him that Lucky has killed Moipone, as reflecting "the coldness of shebeen queens" who have seen many such scenes (TEBB:139). This supports the stereotype that shebeen queens are emotionally hardened to the violence and human tragedy they witness.

Tsi's experiences at Miriam's shebeen illustrate the way in which many young women become involved in prostitution. He observes Minki, the young girl with Moipone, and notes that she is young, shy and clearly not used to going to shebeens. When Tsi and Anka try to advise Minki not to go to the shebeens with Moipone, they evince a sense that a young girl should be protected from their lascivious friend. Tsi suspects that Minki's curiosity has already caught her up "in the ways of the devil" (TEBB:47). He considers her smile to show

... the wound of becoming a woman when you are still a girl, the wound of being a mother, sister and almost a whore, when you are still wondering about things, completely unaware of the danger around you. (TEBB:47)

Tsi suspects that Minki has already had experiences her parents know nothing about and it distresses him that he is allowing her young, beautiful face to smile "amid smoke, fumes of alcohol, everything that we had used to hurt and destroy ourselves" (TEBB:47). Serote allows the situation to gain nightmarish qualities in Tsi's mind, thus representing this young woman's situation as a social nightmare which devalues womanhood, but encourages men to develop a social conscience about this subject.

In "Education, No Substitute for Culture" (SDL), Kuzwayo reflects on the way in which girls and women become socially isolated, lose friends and suffer "degradation in the eyes of

those who once held them in high esteem" (CMW:38) because they turn to prostitution to make a living. By the time of Annie's death, it is too late for her surviving son and her only daughter to reverse the damage which has been caused by Annie's rejection of the norms of black culture. Her poor parental guidance to her children is reflected in their degenerate behaviour. Her much-loved son becomes a drunkard who squanders his inheritance on alcohol and prostitutes. The daughter, Dikgopi, suffers an even worse fate. Her marriage eventually collapses and she becomes a street woman. Kuzwayo describes Dikgopi as

... a wanderer, a prostitute, and someone who seemed beside herself lost to herself and to her family a true example of a child brought up with foreign, unfounded concepts of culture and tradition. (SDL:61)

This perspective removes blame from the prostitute and places it on her family and the broader society within which she lives. Dikgopi is portrayed less as a prostitute than as a victim of her mother's rejection of traditional ways. Kuzwayo calls for empathy for Dikgopi's plight because the woman ultimately pays the huge penalty of losing her dignity and sense of self-worth.

The insight which Kuzwayo gives the reader into the reasons for Dikgopi's decline creates the basis for better comprehension of many other female characters, including young township streetgirls. The story also gains a political perspective in that Western civilization is ultimately blamed for the corruption of entrenched African values which protected the woman's position and person, even if this involved restraint and control by men.

Langa also politicizes prostitution. Mkhonto, in *Tenderness of Blood*, listens to a woman singing a sad song about a slave girl who welcomes prostitution because it saves her "from a staring loneliness that is driving her out of her mind" (TB:24). The song reminds him of "little girls he has watched being claimed by the streets on which he grew up" (TB:24). The singer's sorrow becomes his own and his sense of impotence grows

as he listens to her voice, "laden with a plea for understanding a proud person is forced to make when everything is lost" (TB:24). Langa says that the girl's song "in a curious way, becomes [Mkhonto's] song, the story of the women of his life" (TB:24-25), thus indicating the pathos in the lives of many of the women of his nation and making the woman's plight personal to him.

Kuzwayo lacks sympathy for prostitutes who lose their humanity and become mercenary. She describes prostitutes as "an exclusive class of women - women without scruples", who drink expensive liquor with wealthy men (SDL:61). Serote also implies criticism of prostitutes when he describes the "wig, nail polish, false eye-lashes, painted face and all that shit" which comprise the glamorous image of hardened whores in Aunt Miriam's shebeen (TEBB:47). His emphasis on the natural beauty and wholesomeness of appearance and manner of other women in *To Every Birth its Blood* contrasts favourably with the artificial appearance of prostitutes. It seems likely that Serote is expressing a derogatory sexist view on women who have full control of their sexuality and charge for their sexual services.

Social ostracisation of prostitutes is also evident in Head's "Life" (CT). The Botswanan village women of Life's village are convinced that Life has too much money to have earned it by hard work in Johannesburg (CT:39). The "intensely conservative" women of the village do not pursue Life's company (CT:39). Her open-handed generosity with money, however, attracts the company and friendship of the beer-brewers. Even though the beer-brewers are fascinated by Life's prostitution, and the wealth which she accrues from it, they do not sell their own bodies because they regard it as below them to do so.¹² Their sex lives are "subject to the respectable order of village life", and they have "steady boyfriends" (CT:39).

It was apparently commonly known and accepted that selling one's body was a characteristic of bad women, who infected men

and underwent self-inflicted abortions. Head, however, does not depict Life as a "bad woman". Her prostitution is represented as a novel business venture. She is not shown as a hard and cold-blooded woman without morals, but as a warm, generous and loyal friend who is also an astute businesswoman capitalizing on her physical attributes.

The local men, despite their support for Life's business, consider her to be a "terrible fuck-about" and are horrified that Laresego would even consider marrying her (CT:42). It is impossible for them to accept that a "whore" can function as is expected of a wife.¹³ The sexual values of the village men are apparent in this. As Head explains in various of her stories, the men flit from woman to woman, despite the fact that they are married, but do not expect their wives to have the same sexual freedom. These double standards are often revealed in an ironic tone which indicates that the writer denounces them.

Life is attracted to Laresego's power without realising that marriage to him will entail a degree of control from her husband which will kill her mentally. She is unable to be the epitome of the "woman" that he and the rest of the villagers expect her to become once she has married and renounced her independent ways. As Katrak (1985:32) points out, although Life rejects her own self-definition and tries to conform to the village definition of womanhood, she does not have the mental resources to cope with the boredom of village life or the repression which Laresego inflicts on her. She cannot live without music, company, stimulation, the fine edge of chance or the use of her own money. Life provokes Laresego into killing her rather than live such a mentally and physically stultifying life.

Although prostitution lacks social acceptability, it is not shown to have criminal aspects. Kuzwayo suggests that unemployment and meagre wages lead women to become criminals when they resort to shop-lifting for their daily needs. Kuzwayo (CMW:137) says the original stigma of this crime has given way to a

condoning attitude as people consider shop-lifting a despairing reaction to social conditions and part of the quest for survival.

Kuzwayo politicizes the position of shop-lifters, as does Langa in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*. Kuzwayo (CMW:19) says, almost admiringly, that some girls have become real professionals. Langa provides a demonstration of this skill in the character of Dudu, who takes Khethiwe out shopping with the intention of lifting goods from a John Orr's store, one of a prestigious retail chain (RPS:81). For the first time, Dudu does not steal anything, but the two women cause chaos in the toy department of the store just to antagonise the suspicious white shop assistant who appears to be expecting them to steal. Dudu's character is bright, lively and defiant of the laws made to oppress her people. She has an income and her shop-lifting is not needs-driven but her symbolic reaction against the State and the social order. Langa appears to be evoking sympathy for Dudu's political stance via her attractive personality. In this way shoplifting becomes a political statement rather than a crime.¹⁴

An additional group of unconventional occupations is revealed in representations of women in careers based on aesthetic and cultural aspects of customary life. These include writers, historians, actresses and singers. The majority of these are based on the traditional role of the storyteller.

It is apparent from Kuzwayo's introduction to *Sit Down and Listen* that the storyteller was often a woman whose vital socio-cultural educational function was to convey communal values to children in the entertaining form of folk stories (corroborated by Hofmeyr 1994:25-37). The storyteller gained prestige, and Kuzwayo's admiration, by being at the centre of the social situation as both an educator and a consummate entertainer with a fine sense of the dramatic (SDL: Introduction).

In modern times, this sense of the dramatic has found its expression in formal and informal drama. Township theatre productions have frequently highlighted the suffering and aspirations of black people. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Onalenna acts in township theatre productions with Tsi in order to conscientize audiences on the need to liberate their people from oppression. She does this as an expression of her identity as an idealist and freedom fighter, despite the fact that doing so can render her vulnerable to investigation by the security police (TEBB:171). The impression is created of a very determined and dedicated person with a social conscience.

The social conscience of the writer of fiction is evident in the stories which Kuzwayo and Head recount. Trump (1990:107) quotes Herbert Dhlomo's view that the writer "can touch the mind, heart and spirit of the people" and spread the liberation message to more people than might be reached by politicians. Clayton (1990:26) explains that black writers have been renamed "cultural workers", and given the task of pointing "directly to past and present abuses of power". Some of the stories related by Head and Kuzwayo are modern, of their own invention and do expose abuses of power, whereas others resemble classic stories which would have been told by the storyteller of old. The purpose of their stories is often to preserve culture by showing practices in contexts which attach value to them, thus appealing to people to take pride in their past.

This is more conventionally done in social histories, such as *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*, or autobiographies such as *Call Me Woman*. Kuzwayo's Aunt Blanche set an example for Kuzwayo when she assumed the storyteller's role as a historian (Hofmeyr 1994:31) and wrote the story of her life in order to bring recognition to the rich heritage of the Barolong and her own family. The fact that she later entrusted this account to Kuzwayo for publication as her obituary, suggests Aunt Blanche's need to prove her roots and the importance of her strain of ancestors (CMW:109). Together, Aunt Blanche, Elizabeth Wolpert

and Kuzwayo decided to make the film *Tsiamelo: A Place of Goodness*, which tells the story of Kuzwayo's family, including the dispossession of their land and the history of the "great men and women who preceded" them (CMW:109). Kuzwayo praises her aunt for working on matter which was of tremendous significance in providing her people with a sense of history and identity. Kuzwayo's own autobiography serves the same purpose, but extends its scope so that recognition is accorded to the women who have shared Kuzwayo's life.

Serote and Langa recognise musicians for the important role they play in people's lives - expressing thoughts and feelings which the listeners do not dare to express themselves. Mkhonto (TB:27) remembers attending a requiem mass at which a young woman sang a very poignant cappella about a time when bondage would have ended. She was said to have known young men in the liberation movement and to have "seen the images of the terrible things that lay athwart the path to liberation". He describes her voice as "laden with hundreds of years of pain" and her smile as "a self-conscious smile that masked unutterable pain". This young singer becomes a symbol of liberation to Mkhonto, who vividly remembers the liberation message the song communicated and associates an image of suffering with the woman who sang it.

In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Tsi feels unable to express his own feelings and needs, and so he tries to communicate with his wife via the music he plays. As Nina Simone and Miriam Makeba sing or Dollar Brand plays, his moods change to suit the music. He changes from feeling desolate when listening to Nina Simone to being amorous and optimistic when he listens to "Ausi Miriam". Listening to Miriam Makeba he remembers that she is an exile (TEBB:4) and becomes conscious of his nation's suffering. Once again, the female singer becomes the symbolic voice of a nation's people in exile, and a signifier for a more general sense of suffering and struggle.

This discussion has progressed from representations of women's battle for survival on farmlands to images of women whose work has symbolic significance. This is indicative of a vast range of female potential. According to Kuzwayo, many women have explored the fields of medicine, law, economics, commerce, administration, human and social sciences, among others (CMW:260).¹⁵ Although this indicates that black women have entered virtually every profession, there is little mention of such professions in the fiction studied. This could be because Head wrote about women in rural areas, and Langa and Serote seldom recognise female characters in anything other than domestic or politically supportive roles. Kuzwayo herself mentions that many educated women have moved away to neighbouring provinces, other African countries or lands overseas, thus removing themselves as the basis for realistic fiction about life in South Africa. Kuzwayo considers these women to "have modelled a life style for future generations" (CMW:249-250), but this is not reflected in the fiction of the past.

Kuzwayo sums up what has been said about working women when she says:

Black women have broken into a whole range of new occupations ... they expect a great deal in their lives, such that young women of fifty years ago never dreamed of; and welcome their ambitions as a very exciting and overdue development. But this dynamic process among black women, revolutionary as it is, brings with it its own complications. New achievements in employment for women bring women a new kind of equality with their menfolk, at work, at home, and in the community. This situation has become a threat to some men. The changing role of the urban woman as she makes an increasing contribution towards the family income, even brings in more money than the husband, has added to the problems of family relationships. This factor hits at the root of the traditional acceptance of the man as the head of the family, and is made more complex by the cultural dimension in the black community where the man has always been accorded a special authority as father and master, with his word the last in family decisions. Women are now taking a very firm stand against such behaviour in their husbands (CMW:261)

Despite the damage which the occupational independence of women has wrought on the institution of marriage, Kuzwayo is extremely proud of women's achievements. She claims, rather indignantly, that

[t]hese are the achievements of black women today, who over several generations have been condemned as unproductive, unintelligent, incapable to the point of being male property, whether they were single or married, and finally being categorised as "Minors". Through their own efforts and achievements they have pulled themselves up by their own bootlaces and have proved beyond all shadow of doubt that, after all is said and done, "Minors are heroines". (CMW:243)

Kuzwayo considers the "heroine" image to be justified by the political and social repression which female black workers and professionals have overcome and the hardships which they have had to endure. Her tendency to romanticise women's achievements is, however, offset by Head's greater realism and the frequent down-playing of women by Serote and Langa.

The male authors do not have the benefit of female writers' "female perspective" on black women's working lives or the drive to liberate women from the more damaging aspects of paternalism, and might be said to portray women according to the norms of a male dominated society. This may be as a result of the suppression of feminism by the liberation struggle. A slight change in attitude can be noted in their treatment of women in political roles, as will be seen in the next chapter.

ENDNOTES:

1. For a discussion of humanist feminism, see Shefer (1989:40-43).
2. Friedman (1989:67-107) discusses the social construction of gender in advertising. She speculates on whether "sexualised" gender images are related to black people's lives, and links advertising's appeal to the middle classes, rather than to the working classes (1989:107). This suggests her implicit view that there is a difference in the level of empowerment experienced by middle and working class women.
3. The male (husband) is the protector, a participant in the administration of communal justice, and usually a cattle rancher, tending sheep, goats or cattle, bought from surplus income or obtained as lobola (bride-price) for his daughters.
4. Dinorego (WRCG:27) tells Makhaya how his daughter, Maria, first copied kitchen shelves from a picture in one of Gilbert's books, started to use curry powder to cook goat meat, and was copied by all the other women. In the context of their discussion, this demonstrates the Botswanan woman's willingness to adapt and improve her lifestyle when the example is set by one of her own group.
5. The co-operative training scheme run by Pat van Rensburg at Swaneng College (described in *Serowe: Village of the Rain Wind*) also received an enthusiastic enrolment of women keen to learn money-making skills, but ran into difficulties when there were inadequate work opportunities

for trainees. Bessie Head was herself involved in the vegetable farming venture and used this background in *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power*.

6. According to Tsi's father's stereotyped view of domestic work, Mary's child will stay in the kitchen with her instead of being educated, and learn to accept the exploitation and humiliation of his race in domestic service (TEBB:144). As it turns out, the employers create new aspirations in young Oupa, and he becomes a freedom fighter, but this is not attributed to Mary in any way.
7. June Goodwin gives more detail of the DWEF programmes in *Cry Amandla!*
8. Kuzwayo goes into the matter of the limitations on black women's career options in some depth in *Call Me Woman*. Unemployment soon became rife when women moved to the cities *en masse*, as there were not enough white homes to absorb the uneducated black women who were pouring into the cities in search of domestic work. The result was a further devaluing of labour which was oversupplied and unskilled in an unfamiliar cultural situation (CMW:14).
9. Ms Subisisiwe was a trained teacher and social worker who worked within her community on upliftment programmes for women and girls and was inspirational in her conviction about the value of her work (CMW:92).
10. Driver (1990:240) comments that Kuzwayo draws attention to the scope that community work gives women to move away from their parents and be independent of men.
11. *Skokian* was a home-brew which contained dangerous ingredients to give it a "kick". It gave its name to its producers - women called "Skokian Queens". Skokian Queens sold "illicit liquor", ranging from regular wines and beer to brandy, gin and dangerous and unwholesome home-made concoctions. The "queens" were frequently arrested and became experts at dodging the police. As the trade gained sophistication, their title changed to "Shebeen Queens" (CMW:27).
12. The beer-brewer's freedom of sexual choice and free sexual activity is linked to a "boyfriend", not to a client, and the children which result from their liaisons are accepted as a natural part of their lives. Head says that "people's attitude to sex was broad and generous - it was recognised as a necessary part of human life, that it ought to be available whenever possible like food and water, or else one's life would be extinguished or one would get dreadfully ill. To prevent these catastrophes from happening, men and women generally had quite a lot of sex but on a respectable and human level, with financial considerations coming as an afterthought" (CT:39).
13. Van Zyl and Shefer (1989:5) describe the virgin:whore dichotomy as the "well documented double standard for men and women, where men are supposed to gain sexual experience while finally marrying a virgin".
14. Kuzwayo says that legislation which separates communities, categorises huge numbers of people as underdogs and dispossesses citizens, has a terrible effect on the mores and values of disadvantaged communities. In her childhood she condemned thieves, burglars and shop-lifters, but she now often expresses the desire that criminals will not be caught (CMW:37).
15. Mookodi (1972:357) claims that Botswanan women now "serve as statisticians, doctors, education, immigration and police officers - posts which were previously filled by men". "About 75% of the qualified teachers are women" and "[c]areer women appear to be accepted by the public".

CHAPTER 4

POLITICAL ROLES

In her autobiography, Ellen Kuzwayo has suggested how the changing position of African women since the 1940s gradually enabled them to enter a previously male-dominated political environment (CMW:241). In the process, women ceased being passive background figures and became active agents for change. This chapter examines the ways in which women have been represented in politicised and politically active contexts. It also delineates a transformative process during which women become aware of socio-political issues, overcome traditional political passivity and adopt roles which involve them in active participation in political issues.

In the works under discussion, memory and reflection seem to play a key role in the development of political awareness. Sole (1991:61) notes that in *To Every Birth its Blood*

... while memory, and the act of remembering, initiate and sustain individual and collective pain, they at the same time open a way for the relevant characters to muse on the origins of this pain.

Sole (1991:61) deems this novel to reflect an "intense experience of disorder for black South Africans, a profound dislocation of black selfhood and nationhood". There is evidence of this in Yaonne's letters from America to the lover he left behind in Alexandra, Onalenna (TEBB:185, 195). Yaonne's confused and emotional words voice a concerned exile's view of the violence in Soweto. Onalenna's discussion of these letters with her friends provides the opportunity for the writer to present a political perspective on issues which complements the main storyline. In the process, Onalenna's inter-personal skills, socio-political knowledge, commitment and political sensitivity are favourably displayed.

In Part 1 of *To Every Birth its Blood*, Onalenna is represented as someone who realises that every person has a role to play in resolving the problems in her society. Her awareness develops to a level where she plays an active role in persuading men and other women to bring about political change. In Part 2, her role changes

from intellectual involvement with the problems to physical activity. (The nature of this activity will be discussed later in this chapter.)

Langa similarly draws on a feminine perspective in relation to political struggle in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*. He starts the novel by using a child's view to heighten the reader's awareness of social injustices which have become entrenched in daily life. Eight-year-old Khethiwe's reflections are used to elaborate on the political aspects of the authoritarian relationship between white women and the black children who are their servants (RPS:10). Khethiwe also observes the misery endured by Clara, a woman she meets on the train to Durban, because Clara's diabetic friend has died, untreated, in prison (RPS:12). Unprompted, Khethiwe forms the value judgement that such treatment is inhumane and undeserved. Langa uses Khethiwe's perceptions of oppression to develop his theme of political resistance.

As the story progresses, Langa continues to use Khethiwe's perspective to provide political background to the 1970s and early 1980s, when his novel is set. He exposes Khethiwe to situations which create sensitivity to the plight of oppressed people and shows how she responds to them. As a teenager, Khethiwe describes her teachers as "trapped" and the students as "bewildered", slashing and maiming anything that touches them (RPS:41). She leaves school and joins a study-group run by a non-government organisation which helps young people to complete their education. When it comes to politics, she is an interested observer who muses about the political talk, strikes, and trials she hears about in her aunt's shebeen. She follows the trials in newspapers but is forbidden to attend them.

By the time Khethiwe enters late adolescence and becomes a nursing student, she has started to feel personally threatened by state-employed "agents and vicious voyeurs ... provocateurs who struck controversial topics only to make lengthy reports in Fisher Street", the site of the security police (RPS:76). Langa invokes sympathy for the "sense of helplessness" Khethiwe feels about the risk that she might be tricked into making an incriminating comment

or disclosure which could lead to her imprisonment. At this point of the story, Khethiwe has not made a conscious commitment to a political organisation, and her confused feelings suggest the concern that might be felt by a young intellectual with a sense of national responsibility counterbalanced by self-interest. Langa's story exposes this young woman's vulnerability, fear of physical harm, and indecisiveness, in contrast to her intellectual capacity and sense of social responsibility.

Langa's novel prompts further respect for Khethiwe's mental competence by describing how she responds to the talk of black medical students at the University of Natal. She listens to the philosophy being espoused, knowing that it is "just a holding time for more organized action" (RPS:71). She is cynical about idealistic students who consider running alternative structures such as peoples' clinics as a prelude to seizing power. She is unimpressed by what she regards as grandiose theory and wonders whether students understand that they will have to make sacrifices and spill their own blood to achieve their ideals (RPS:71). Even more importantly, she is not swept up by ideology but is reserved, aware and mature beyond her years. Langa seems to mean the reader to respect Khethiwe's judgement because of her image of dignified restraint.

When Khethiwe is in a position to make her own political choices, she becomes involved with Mark Mgobhozi, a poet and member of what Langa and Serote both call "the Movement". Mark tells Khethiwe that professionals "have to stop thinking about their professions as professions" and be a little more committed to their nation (RPS:76). This appears to be an indictment of people who build personal careers to such an extent that they allow fear of betrayal, imprisonment and interrogation to deter them from participation in the struggle. Khethiwe avoids this stigma by joining the Movement. Her image as a hard-working professional medical practitioner in the service of the Movement develops naturally from passages which show her growth in political awareness while she is a student. Khethiwe's political commitment and work earn her respect, even from her father.

Sole (1991:66) identifies a similar tendency to invoke respect

for politically active characters in Serote's characterisation of Movement members in *To Every Birth its Blood*. He notes that

... it is noticeable that the Movement transmogrifies the characters who accept its inevitability into calm, dignified and disciplined individuals with a sense of purpose. This correct deportment ensures that the larger community will feel and exhibit 'respect' for the individuals who make the correct choice.

There is a corresponding lack of respect for characters who do not make "the correct choice". The socio-political dimensions of the generation gap between many parents and their children are frequently explored in the works under review. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, the narrator relates how Nomsisi rejects her mother and father because they have neither developed to her level of political awareness, nor joined the liberation struggle.¹ Nomsisi applies the demeaning description "the boy and girl" (TEBB:44) to her parents to suggest that she is disillusioned with them for not rebelling against apartheid. These words are indicative of what Nomsisi regards as a lack of political maturity in her parents.

Nomsisi's parents are not alone in their political stasis. Sole (1991:61) says that the dilemma of Tsi's family "is that they either cannot or will not change their circumstances". This is true of Tsi's mother in the first part of *To Every Birth its Blood*, but not in the second. In Part 1 of the novel, Tsi's mother is shown as a woman who lives according to customary law and who expects her children to do her credit in return for the attention and care she lavishes upon them. She fears that her image as a mother may be tarnished in the community by the actions of her children. She feels the shame of having one son who beats his wife, another in prison, and a third who makes such a mess of his life that his wife is destined to be miserable. In addition, her daughter has been expelled from the family home for having an illegitimate child. The mother's relationship with her children is soured by confrontation and poor comprehension of each other's values. The inadequate interaction between Tsi and his mother on political issues takes motherhood out of its nurturing context, into a political dimension.

When Tsi's father takes refuge from the novel's political context by isolating himself in his room, Tsi begins to pity his

mother (TEBB:61). His description of her creates the image of a woman who is terribly unsettled by a destructive domestic situation for which she is mentally and physically unprepared. She is caught between her politically aware sons, her politically impotent husband and a cultural background which has not prepared her to accept political responsibility or to take political initiatives. She begins to lapse into private moments of introspection during which she sings hymns. Tsi says:

If any of us talked to her, she would just look at us and continue to sing, or breathe to listen to her pause. That was the moment when everything in the house, we the children, our father, seemed to move, to climb, to go beyond, we seemed to be reaching out, in unison, searching for whatever it was that now and then snaps, to make a child a stranger to its mother, a wife a stranger to her husband, a husband a stranger to his wife. (TEBB:62)

Tsi's mother is represented as a woman who resists her own disintegration by becoming a mere spectator of life. She turns inwards and seeks her centre in "total Christian faith in a personal saviour" (TEBB:63). Tsi considers her typical of old people worn down by lost battles, who "had decided to take the path that leads to the hole" (TEBB:63). This image of hopelessness extends to both sexes, but is perhaps most pronounced in old women who do not know how to direct their energies in a way which will be acceptable to the children and compatible with their own upbringing.

After the trial of Fix, Tsi's brother, the attitudes of their parents change. Ma-Tsi talks a lot about her imprisoned son and his friends, and then starts to sing the songs she has heard in court and to attend "freedom funerals" (TEBB:140). She visits Fix in jail and reports that the prisoners are "in high spirits" but make her "feel ignorant being outside" (TEBB:162). By becoming involved in freedom activities, she is able to reinstate her faith in herself as a parent and form a closer bond with her children. At this stage of the story she has a new lease on life and displays the courage and tenacity which Tsi expects of his mother. She lacks a high political profile, but does what she is capable of at her age and in her situation. This liberates her from the mental depression she has endured.

Mental liberation from various forms of oppression is important

in Head's novels. Elizabeth, in *A Question of Power*, battles insanity while she fends for herself and her son against a background in which she feels excluded from local society. Her exclusion is based on the fact that she is a stateless person who has rejected apartheid South Africa by moving to Botswana. She is disorientated by her lack of a personal "centre". This derives from her lack of a sense of national identity and her inability to become assimilated into Botswanan society.

Elizabeth's "dreams" and the visions she experiences during spells of dementia, introduce power figures on sexual, political and spiritual levels of her existence. Over an extended period, Elizabeth's physical and emotional needs conflict until she eventually achieves a state of mental equilibrium. She discards the shreds of past misapprehensions, brings into balance all of the opposing forces which oppress her and seems to find peace within herself. In a final phase of spiritual transcendence, Elizabeth realises that she can liberate herself from power figures and use a power within herself to meet the challenges of "a new dawn and a new world" (QP:205). Having reached this stage of mental and spiritual grace, Elizabeth is able to make "the gesture of belonging" (QP:206) which establishes that she is mentally revitalised, spiritually strong and personally empowered to continue her life on a rational level.

The issues raised in this difficult book have a political dimension in that Elizabeth's visions raise many questions which challenge the reader to re-evaluate society. They also involve Elizabeth in conflicts which draw on all her mental and physical resources. Her character is created as a model for oppressed women in that she is shown to have the personal resources and resilience to overcome the most debilitating physical, verbal, emotional and mental abuse.

The level of mental and physical activity which Elizabeth achieves in *A Question of Power* is high in contrast with that of Margaret Cadmore in what Head wished to be a "magical" story with a message for humanity, *Maru* (back cover: *Maru*, Heinemann edition). Margaret is a Masarwa orphan who is given a liberal British edu-

cation by a white foster mother. Head places Margaret, an exceptionally gifted woman but a passive character, in a situation where she is compelled to participate in a liberating political activity of great symbolic significance to humanity and her race.

Throughout the story, Margaret's desires and needs are made totally secondary to those of Moleka, the totem with whom she falls in love; Maru, whom she is compelled to marry; and Dikeledi, her friend and Maru's sister. Margaret has admirable teaching ability, intelligence and artistic talent, but effaces herself as a person in the community. She subsumes herself in the creation of paintings, which Dikeledi then appropriates and gives to Maru. Despite her low-key social role, Margaret is central to the story, with Margaret Cadmore snr. claiming that she was born to do something great for her nation and Maru manipulating her into that destiny, like an unwitting and passive pawn.

Maru selects Margaret as the ideal subject for a political statement he intends to make against racism and the abuse of power. In effect, Head creates Margaret's character as the catalyst which enables a desirable political situation to develop. For the fairy-tale ending of the story to have the "magical" impact which Head desired, it is important for Margaret to be a unique and sensitive woman. Her actions and feelings, however, are manipulated by Maru and become part of a greater metaphysical scheme over which Margaret has no control. Even her artistic impressions are subject to Maru's ruthless telepathic control of her mind. The minutiae of her daily life are simply sensory impressions to be captured on a canvas and interpreted by Maru and Moleka.

Margaret complements Maru as a woman in traditional gender-related roles, but her main role is that of a spiritual force greater than his own. Without Margaret, a Masarwa (generally despised in Botswana), Maru cannot achieve his life's mission to demonstrate that people can live in an ideal state where there is no abuse of power or racism. Maru achieves this mission by reducing Margaret to total collapse, informing her of the role he has planned for her in his new scheme of life, renouncing his chieftaincy and moving with her to the place he has prepared for what amounts to

their "rebirth" as twin souls living in a state of political grace. By submitting to marriage to Maru, Margaret also achieves the liberating mission for which Margaret Cadmore snr. has prepared her. This marriage of a future paramount chief to a lowly Masarwa creates a breeze of social change as others of Margaret's nation in Botswana feel the stirring of self-respect and claim liberation from the oppression of ethnocentric racism.

Racism in the public sphere is a theme in all of the books studied. The representation of women in this regard is sometimes cast within the problematic subject of inter-racial sex. That such relations are fraught with problems, is shown by the way Langa politicises sex between a white man and a black woman in *Tenderness of Blood*. Mkhonto has a long discussion with Ntombi about her long-standing affair with Steve, a white Hungarian theologian (TB:178). Langa's narrator says that the "students couldn't accept Ntombi's crossing of the colour line" (TB:72). Ntombi's side of the story is that she met Steve in the context of American society and feels hurt that people have been unkind about their relationship. She is critical about the fact that it is beyond the realm of other people's possibilities to "think that people of different colours ... can have a meaningful relationship" (TB:178).

Ntombi's view provides a subjective female perspective on this subject. Mkhonto, however, provides an equally subjective political perspective on the relationship between Steve and Ntombi when he tells Ntombi that what seems to be the "exploitation of our women" is viewed with "anger and suspicion".² He makes Ntombi re-evaluate her priorities by suggesting to her that the country "has not come to the stage where one can say 'I'm doing my own thing'" and that her "thing" is inextricably bound with the political issues affecting black people (TB:178).

Mkhonto challenges Ntombi to decide whether her relationship with Steve is the "real thing". She resolves her problem by taking Mkhonto as her lover. Their marriage is later soured by Ntombi's ability to relate to white men. Mkhonto's suspicion appears to be vindicated when Ntombi is raped at a party attended only by whites (TB:358-359). He rescues his "defiled wife", but rejects her, even

when she writes him a letter which tells him that she was a victim, not a collaborator in her own rape (TB:361-362). Langa seems to base Mkhonto's motivation for participating in the liberation struggle on the sexist premise that Ntombi is responsible for her own rape, and that her husband is entitled to avenge the desecration of his property even though he rejects the woman.

When Mkhonto discovers that Ntombi had been expecting his child at the time of the rape, it does not make him more kindly disposed towards her, but sharpens his hatred of white males. He says there has been too much of "this unlimited capacity to forgive the murderers as this letter from an African sister recovering from her rape and the wanton defilement of her children shows" (TB:362). He is unhinged and totally dedicated to the overthrow of a system which has allowed such things to happen to black women in general and to his wife in particular.³ The energy created by his anger, however, is directed into his anti-apartheid activities, rather than into a bond with his wife.

The tension between Mkhonto and his wife on this issue permeates the introductory phases of each part of the book, and is not satisfactorily resolved at the end. It is doubtful whether Mkhonto will return to Ntombi until he has exacted his full revenge for what he regards as the defilement of African womanhood. Ntombi's predicament reflects the burden which male sexism places on women whom men contextualise as their "property". There is a sense of impotence in her situation, which contradicts the strength displayed by her character prior to marriage.

In her first role as a university research assistant, Ntombi is cast as an intelligent, capable, and politically literate woman who colours history with a perspective of oppression unsuspected by many other people.⁴ As a student of history, Ntombi is concerned whether what her group of politically active friends want is what the people want or "something we imagine is also wanted by the people" (TB:327). She reminds Mkhonto that there is nothing that can be done without the support of the people in whose name they are demanding change (TB:326). Everything she says and does, however, simply contributes to the development of political themes

in the book. In her later role as Mkhonto's wife, she loses status. She does not develop as a character and eventually becomes the passive, cowed victim of her own husband's racially based jealousy. Once again, a woman has been used as the catalyst for male political activity. This sidelining of a strong black woman is regrettable because isolated incidents in the story show that Ntombi has the ability to create political change, not just talk about the issues.⁵

Ntombi represents a hardened and realistic group of educated women who support men on issues of national liberation. She brutally tells Mkhonto that it is "idealized romanticism" to think of himself as a "Messiah" or "Liberator", because the government is too powerful (TB:327). This is an interesting perspective on Mkhonto. Ntombi suggests that he is trying to be superhuman. This suggests the possibility that an "emasculated" man who has a demonstrable inferiority complex about his physically and mentally strong wife's relationship with white men might react by attempting to adopt an idealized role intended to bring him acclaim in the public sphere. The fact that Mkhonto embarks on a personally liberating mission of vengeance reinforces this suggestion.

This scene of confrontation between husband and wife on a political issue is only slightly less unusual than one in which a black woman confronts a white man alone, or assaults a white man in a situation of racial conflict. In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Bella becomes involved in a fight with Koek, the abusive white lift operator and gets the better of him (TEBB:129). Bella is not a student or a known political activist, but an inconspicuous kitchen messenger whom Tsi only knows as Morongwa. Her scrap with Koek has political implications as she is a black person fighting a white person, regardless of their sex. Tsi and Tuki consider Morongwa to be brave and their discussion of this subject suggests that they probably would not have dared emulate her deed. Morongwa's presence in the story signifies racial protest by a character whom even people from her own race regard as insignificant until she acts publicly, surprising all and sundry.

The issue of naming gains a political slant in this incident.

Tuki says "Bella" is Morongwa's "slave name", but Tsi says the issue is not "about slave names, it's about proper, meaningful names" (130). In *To Every Birth its Blood*, using a traditional name, rather than a Western name, becomes a statement of African identity and of support for the liberation struggle.

When Rose Ramono travels extensively as a journalist, she meets "young men and women ... some literally building the future with their hands". She finds it difficult to "talk to such clear-minded people You were either on the side of the Black people or you were not" (TEBB:249). She changes her byline from Rose Ramono to Dikeledi Ramono, then she fights "with her career at stake ... for the right to talk about blacks, not 'non-whites', in her articles" (TEBB:250). This gains her greater respect from the black community. This incident occurs in the Black Consciousness days, when "a brand-new black woman and man" emerges and Dikeledi believes that something is going to happen (TEBB:235). Her commitment to Black Consciousness, which she displays in her workplace, represents a young woman's willingness to be counted as a worker for the national cause rather than risk isolation from her peers.

After Dikeledi's father, Michael Ramono, is sentenced to fifteen years' imprisonment for being a "revolutionary", she realises that she has never thought of her father as a revolutionary and is so conditioned to following his lifestyle that she is uncertain what a "revolutionary" is (TEBB:237). She is moved by the speech her father makes and pleased that she agrees with so much that he says. Dikeledi allows Oupa to enlist her in the Movement and then assists the Movement by highlighting contentious issues in her newspaper column. She keeps the story of Mpando's death in the news for three weeks, deftly manipulating views and reports to make a case for a revision of police attitudes to the public (TEBB:265).

This image of the intelligent and skilful daughter continuing her father's work despite police harassment may be meant to be inspirational to the daughters of detainees, and to show that educated women can use their skills to further the cause of freedom. The representation of Dikeledi is enhanced by scenes and passages

which describe her as physically attractive, intelligent, sensitive to the feelings of others, an affectionate daughter and sister, and a contributor to the financial upkeep of her family.

There are many instances of political activity by women which is subordinate to the political will of men in the stories under discussion. Women even help male activists they do not personally know. In *Tenderness of Blood* (TB:337), two nurses who were the relatives of Ndlovu, a deceased Movement agent, help Tuki to elude the police and find transport. They do this despite the fact that they know the police are very active in the township where they live. They represent brave and caring women who show political men their support in small, but important, ways. Such women do not display their united strength publicly, but secretly take advantage of opportunities to demonstrate their commitment. On a very inconspicuous level, they are guerillas. Their participation in the struggle, however, occurs within gendered conditions which cast them only as supporting agents, not as initiators of action.

Some women pay with their lives for giving support to political men. Hugh, a guerilla in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, thinks about Tsepo, a colleague whose aunt and guardian died when her house was firebombed by the security police while he was in detention. "This was the price he had to pay for refusing to testify" in the Harry Gwala trial (RPS:88). The mother of Mark Mgobhozi, Khethiwe's poet friend in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, collapses and dies of heart failure when the security police tell her to look at her mutilated "kaffertjie" in hospital after a session of interrogation (RPS:101). The security police consider these women's deaths as merely instrumental to weakening the resolve of male political prisoners. The women are not developed as characters but have a symbolic martyr-like quality because they have been made to suffer for the cause espoused by their sons.

Mothers with political sons, and the wives of political husbands, most frequently appear in supportive contexts. In *Tenderness of Blood*, Lungi's mother, Mrs Guma, shares his banning order with him. She is a lively, intelligent and active woman who is very bored in their house where "even washing dishes becomes a

welcome diversion" (TB:190). Mrs Guma once held high aspirations for her son. She would have liked Lungi to become "a doctor? a lawyer? something like that" before he was detained (TB:190). After the 18 months Lungi spent in solitary confinement she found it difficult "to reconcile the ghost who came to live with us here and the son I knew as Lungi" (TB:191).

Mrs Guma has a mother's concern for her son's welfare. Her strength of character is shown in the words: "... there is so much evil that can destroy you if you allow yourself to be destroyed. There is no cure for despair except to recognise its source, isolate it and deal with it" (TB:191). She becomes really distressed only if Lungi has problems with the police. Then she goes into a "flap" and "loses her mind completely" (TB:198). In Mkhonto's opinion "[m]others are like that Sometimes they can make you feel like a child" (TB:198). These flippant words from Mkhonto detract from the supportive role of Lungi's mother, in that he conflates her gender-based nurturing role with her involvement in her son's political life, and dismisses both as insignificant irritations to a man with a political mission.⁶

Mkhonto's own mother claims recognition as a mother when she reveals that she regards Mkhonto primarily as her child, not as a man. She talks of the tension she feels, "being on the edge all the time, wondering when they are going to bring your child a corpse to your door-step" (TB:293). She says that the mothers of politically active children join burial societies and attend wakes, vigils and funerals "like they are an elixir of life", because they are worried (TB:293). She compares some women's regret at ever having "felt the kick in the womb" with the envy of other childless women who "envy anyone who's ever borne a child" and "even envy women whose children are lying cold in the box" (TB:293). This association of motherhood with the production of children born to be freedom fighters has close parallels with Serote's ending of *To Every Birth its Blood*. It also modifies the conventional mother-son relationship by attaching a political significance to it.

The bond between mother and son is frequently shown to be even stronger than that between husband and wife. (This might be because

being a mother of sons confers status on a woman, whereas marriage frequently reduces her to the level of a man's vassal.) The quality of the marriage relationship appears to have a distinct effect on the degree of support which a wife lends to her husband's political activities.

Grace Ramono, in *To Every Birth its Blood*, is described as a physically attractive, strong, hard-working, respected member of the community, a dedicated social worker, and the director of the Alexandra Welfare Centre and Creche. She is the wife of a former school principal who becomes a political activist when "the trouble" comes (TEBB:204). Before their arranged marriage as very young people, Grace has a great deal of love and respect for Michael, but Michael has a sense of mission which cannot be confined by marriage. Throughout their married life he is seldom at home and Grace is represented as a grass widow putting her considerable energies into raising children and pursuing a career in which she nurtures children.

Grace supports Michael when he starts travelling in the service of the Movement, because he is an idealist "dreaming about being near the oasis" and Africa needs him (TEBB:221). Michael doesn't tell her about his work, but Grace becomes "clearer about the oasis" from what the newspapers say. In their relationship, she is "as the earth to a tree: this sometimes made him weep" (TEBB:221). This is an admirable image of a nurturing woman who provides her husband with security and succour, but Grace's emotional strength is severely tested when her elderly husband is sentenced to fifteen years on Robben Island. In private, she weeps; but in public she rises to the challenge and impresses everyone with her strength of character, showing a brave face and making others feel that she is giving them support (TEBB:240). She is what Kuzwayo calls a "heroine" in daily living (CMW:250).

Granny, a guerilla's wife in *To Every Birth its Blood*, presents an example of similar strength when she visits her husband, Georgy, in custody in a hospital. Georgy has to have his legs amputated after guerilla action, but Granny shows great fortitude when she calmly tells him that he is "not the only one" and that they will

get artificial legs for him (TEBB:363). She is mentally and emotionally strong, even though she is concerned about her husband's welfare. Despite Georgy's plight, Granny has no hesitation in committing her son, Fidel, to the Movement, in the company of Themba, his father. She is a "flat" character, the stereotype of the wife of a professional soldier. She is politically committed but lacks imagination or needs as a woman, wife or mother. Like Tsepo's aunt and Mark Mgobhozi's mother in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, Georgy contributes to the political theme of *To Every Birth its Blood* without the narrator giving attention to her as a complex female character.

Margaret, Khethiwe's aunt in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, shows that women can suffer tremendous loneliness as a result of their husbands' political activities. She says her husband "should have had sense enough to leave politics to the politicians" (RPS:21). She tries to sound flippant when she says "[t]he next I heard about him he was making small ones out of big ones on Robben Island" (RPS:21), but Khethiwe notes that "behind all that bluster, Margaret wanted to cry" and that she has trekked all around the country looking for ways to escape her loneliness (RPS:22). Margaret is representative of decent, hard-working women who lose their husbands because of politics. Her instincts as a businesswoman are sound, but her successful business does not compensate for her personal loneliness.

The ideal presented in Langa's works is that women should support their husbands in their activities, and that husbands should respect their wives' capabilities and protect them from harm. Max, Mkhonto's lawyer in *Tenderness of Blood*, speaks of his wife, Zodwa, in a voice "full of pride" (TB:13). He is concerned about the safety of Zodwa and his daughter, Thembi, because he works for the Movement (TB:19).

Although Mkhonto describes Zodwa as a woman who "must have seen a lot of trouble in her time" (TB:234), she is also represented as attractive, well-dressed and the perfect hostess. Her husband lavishes attention on her but also expects her to do many things for him. There is no indication of how Zodwa feels about Max's

demands on her time, other than that she "gives her husband a long impenetrable look" when she tells Mkhonto that she is not her own boss (TB:234). This act suggests that although Zodwa has her own views on this subject, she and Max have come to a mutually acceptable agreement. The mere inference that there has been discussion and agreement on the subject of the spouses' domestic limits enhances Zodwa's status as a woman and as a wife.

When Mkhonto looks at Max and Zodwa together, it seems to him that Zodwa has the strength to create order out of "the chaos boiling in her husband's head" (TB:238). Max calls her "a planner" and adds "perhaps that should scare me a little" (TB:263). This appears to indicate that Max is a little uncomfortable with Zodwa's feminism or capabilities, even though he is proud of her. The impression is created that Max probably does not feel secure enough of his superiority over Zodwa to take her for granted. Zodwa's marriage is an attractive role model for society wives and for wives of professional men with political commitment. Although Max voices his desire to protect his wife from harm, Zodwa appears to have established a measure of personal space which they both find acceptable.

Male protectiveness is also shown in the story of Sharon and Don Bengu. Mkhonto meets Sharon at the party thrown to celebrate Mkhonto's release from jail. Sharon is a photographer who used to trail behind her student leader husband on campaigns and rallies. She tells Mkhonto that she took photographs but did not get involved in planning because she accepted her husband's judgement that "knowing too much about some of these things can be hazardous" (TB:268). Ironically, Sharon's husband asked her for her professional advice on promoting the demonstration, but did not wish her to know about the strategy actually to be used on the Freedom Rally. Sharon filmed a police assault on female students at the illegal rally and escaped with the film. While she tried to ensure that her husband was safe after the rally - "the safety of her man being paramount in her mind" - her photographs of police violence at the rally were printed and published in the national dailies and weeklies, and the police began to harass her (TB:270). Sharon does not say how she felt about this, but it appears that she is not

greatly disturbed by the experience. She is shown as an attractive, intelligent but rather emotionless woman. Her function in the story is to remind Mkhonto of a similar university sit-in and provide the backdrop for the way in which Ntombi escapes with Mkhonto's photos of police violence at that sit-in. Ntombi's action results in the release of photographs which establish Mkhonto's reputation as a press photographer.

Langa illustrates that not all wives are content to be kept in the background of their husbands' activities. In *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, Mbongwa's wife, MaCele, is an educated ex-nurse and a gossip who cannot be told anything sensitive. She becomes a threat to the Movement when she becomes too inquisitive about why Mbongwa's "very important business" (RPS:132) has to be undertaken during the night. MaCele feels superior to the "know-nothing useless women of Ndaweni" (RPS:133) and, unlike the uneducated women of the village, she wants "to know what other people preferred to turn a blind eye to" (RPS:132). When the couple argue about MaCele's right to be privy to her husband's business, Mbongwa insults MaCele instead of acknowledging that their marriage has not lived up to her expectations and those of her parents.

Mbongwa underestimates the extent to which he has antagonised his wife, even though he knows her as "a hater" who would take action rather than brood about it (RPS:134). MaCele betrays Mbongwa to the police but he manages to evade capture by concealing the evidence. MaCele is distressed by the indignity she suffers at the hands of the young police officer when no proof can be found for her story (RPS:138). Instead of invoking sympathy for MaCele because her husband has duped her, Langa's narrator evokes antipathy for this woman. He does this by representing MaCele as an obstacle to what "a whole nation feels is imperative" and a threat to many lives (RPS:136). When, however, Mbongwa mercilessly beats his wife because of a sexual slight (RPS:178), his brutality alienates Khethiwe, Dr Shelley Vilakazi and, probably, many readers, because it is inappropriate in the context of Mbongwa's political idealism. MaCele takes revenge by betraying Mbongwa again (RPS:185-186). This time he is interrogated into betraying the guerillas in the forest and dies in a shootout when the police make him lead them to the

guerilla camp.

MaCele is never given an opportunity to identify with her husband's activities because she is treated in the customary way and not given credit for a modern outlook on marriage. Her love of gossip is regarded as weakness of character and counts against her where secrecy is paramount. This causes her to be rejected by her husband and the community leaders. In the process, she is alienated from the activities of the people's movement and remains unaware of the consequences of putting her own needs first. She becomes bitter and vindictive in her unhappy marriage and the perfect traitor. Langa could be sounding a word of warning to husbands who do not enlist their wives' support for their political aspirations. He might also be propounding an ideal for the politically correct wife as a supportive, discreet background figure who does not endanger any lives by word or deed because she accepts that her ignorance of political activities will protect her from police abuse.

Women's reactions to children's involvement in political violence are revealed in *Call Me Woman*. Kuzwayo tells of being shocked, terrified and under great nervous pressure as she entered Soweto in June 1976, only to see the fires and "battlefield, full of police foot patrols, and military riding in 'hippos', each armed with a gun" (CMW:42). Kuzwayo tells how hundreds of bitter and furious black mothers express their emotional torture as a result of the loss of their children. Some feel helpless, but many others become dynamically involved in the freedom struggle. They learn to champion "the course of the national struggle for liberation of their people - even if this means the sacrifice of their own well-being and freedom, and that of their children and families too" (CMW:44). This image of dedication and determination enhances the representation of women in politics by making them seem resolute, noble and self-sacrificing.

Nevertheless, women tend to be portrayed as reacting against laws which affect their families rather than fighting for freedom on the "frontline" of guerilla warfare. Kuzwayo relates the speech which she personally made to her son, Justice Bakone Moloto, when

he was arrested and banned to Mafikeng. The essence is that her son has proved by his actions that he is doing something worthwhile which is a threat to the oppressive government. She exhorts him to feel inspired to do even better when he gets his next chance and to remember the values and standards that their family "has stood for in the past and will stand for in future" (CMW:188). Kuzwayo's own politicised approach to life is evident in this passage. She appears to identify with Justice's participation in politics through the similarity of their work, but accepts that because he is a man, Justice is more vulnerable and also more likely to achieve change on a grand scale. This view might be realistic, modest, or simply reflect some women's inculcated belief that men, even their own offspring, are superior to themselves.

The male writers' stories, however, show a move away from exclusive emphasis on men's role in the struggle. Several young female characters become actively involved in Movement activities. Ndungane, Khethiwe's father, says that the people he leads expect his children "to be part of the resistance" (RPS:52). He has a heart-to-heart talk with Khethiwe and tells her that he originally sent her to Durban to learn things "that would somehow ease our load" (RPS:41). As Khethiwe listens to her father, she realises that she has never before felt so determined to change the nature of the troubles experienced by her people. This idealistic response is entirely predictable in the light of previous scenes in which she features.

When Khethiwe returns to her village as an adult, the Movement has given her the option of joining the guerillas or starting a clinic (RPS:131). She decides that she can make the greatest contribution by trying to uplift the lives of women battling to rear babies with inadequate medical services and poor levels of nutrition (RPS:120). Despite this decision, she does not hesitate to nurse a sick guerilla in the forest, and dies because of her involvement with the freedom fighters.

Khethiwe's character is idealised. From her early youth, through her teenage and student years, she is a remote character who operates on a cerebral level and is scarcely touched by emotion.

After she has become involved with the freedom fighters she finds fulfilment, and love, in the arms of a guerilla leader. She dies after killing Duma, the policeman hunting down the guerillas, with the weapon her lover taught her to use. Khethiwe's lover is warned of danger by the sound of her shots and she becomes a heroine in the romantic sense by saving his life. She also receives martyr status when her body is dangled from the police helicopter as a display of the results consequent upon resistance to the state (RPS:191).

Khethiwe's family is represented as having been involved in a long history of resistance to the state, and it is thus a natural development that she should follow her father's lead and become involved in the resistance movement. This is not the case with Nomakhwezi in *Tenderness of Blood*. Nomakhwezi is the daughter of the Minister of Agriculture in Matanzima's government. She rejects her father on various levels. She regards him as a bad husband and father, and a sexist man because he neglects his educated wife and her children in favour of a mistress who is willing to "pump out" babies "like a baby factory" (TB:55). She has also come to regard her father as a person who sold out the interests of his people in favour of self-enrichment.

Nomakhwezi feels she has grown up knowing privilege at the expense of others, and this knowledge makes her feel sensitive. As a result, she is very intense and slightly apart from the community of women at Fort Hare. Langa's representation of her character suggests the author's sensitivity to the complexity of emotions which might be suffered by a young woman from a wealthy family if she has a highly developed social conscience which makes her reject her own upbringing.

Nomakhwezi's disillusionment in her past is evident in the crassness of her language as she addresses issues directly and cynically. She talks to Mkhonto as an equal and tells him that he is so full of self-disgust because he does not really know the truth about the situation, and that he lies to himself. She informs him that he "is still in darkness when it comes to the truths of the revolution" and exhorts him to "become committed to an ideal"

(TB:57). This is an interesting reversal of gender roles, in that the woman takes the lead in being politically committed.

Mkhonto's sexism is evident in his silent wondering about what happens to Nomakhwezi when she is "moved by the imperious demands of her loins", ceases to be "a smart-talking student" (TB:49) and becomes a woman, but Nomakhwezi refuses to admit sex to their relationship. At this stage of their relationship, she treats him as a comrade, not as a man. Langa does not allow this state of affairs to last for long, as he next describes Mkhonto and Nomakhwezi as acting with the foolishness of a couple in love (TB:62). This adds a hitherto unsuspected dimension to Nomakhwezi's character. Her parting letter to Mkhonto shows her to be in touch with her emotions and sexual needs, yet capable of subordinating them to what she perceives to be the greater needs of her nation (TB:101-102).

When Nomakhwezi suddenly leaves university to join the People's Army, the newspapers accuse her of shooting her father in the head, using "the same pistol that Kaiser Matanzima had given him" (TB:102). The media have a field-day deploring the killing and saying that South Africa is indeed "a sick country" where daughters turn on their fathers. Grace, her room-mate, asks Mkhonto not to believe that Nomakhwezi is capable of killing her father (TB:153). There is an interesting conflict in this situation. Nomakhwezi is shown as an angry young woman who detests everything her father stands for, while the reader is asked to believe that she would not sink to patricide. Langa leaves it to the reader to decide, but such interpretation is coloured by the fact that Mkhonto, who knew Nomakhwezi so well, always thinks of her with respect and affection. This implies that the reader should follow Mkhonto's lead and think well of Nomakhwezi, regardless of whether or not she killed her father. There are grounds for suspicion that the writer might wish to maintain the high moral image of Nomakhwezi which he has built up. By casting doubt on the media's reporting of the killing, the narrator is able to imply moral rectitude in this act of vengeance without detracting from the image of a committed female activist.

Infringement of laws or reaction against the state were

frequently rewarded by detention, often without trial. In *Call Me Woman* Kuzwayo speaks admiringly of the

... strength, calibre and outstanding personality of many black women - women who have been detained under extremely brutal and frightening conditions but who have emerged like tested steel, their character and courage somehow untouched by bitterness and deep-seated frustration. (CMW:5)

Kuzwayo eulogises Thenjiwe Mthintso, who was one of these hardened detainees (CMW:211). She was the age of Kuzwayo's own children and had already been detained at different times. Detentions had not left Thenjiwe emotionally and physically unscarred, but she still had a great deal to offer other prisoners. She gave other detainees peace of mind, and told them about hideous incidents she had survived. She bore no malice or bitterness. Her insight helped others to see their "own plight with the minimum of resentment" and to use their energy to complete the period of detention, staying up to date with the outside world. She led by example and was cool, calm, composed and quite "unruffled by the presence of the most officious wardress ... her actions spoke much louder than words, and their message was loud and clear" (CMW:211). Kuzwayo describes Thenjiwe as "a woman of small stature but strong moral fibre" and presents her as an inspiration to other women.

Serote's descriptions of women who work for the Movement in *To Every Birth its Blood* also convey the impression that women have "strong moral fibre" when it comes to the political issues to which they commit themselves. Nomsisi, Fix's lover, is initially depicted as a soft, friendly, gushy, sexually attractive woman. Tsi considers trying to proposition Nomsisi when his brother is in jail and is snubbed when he realises that she does not think of him in a sexual way, or as a man. It is only when she says that she is "sick and tired" of her job but needs the car "to do our work" (TEBB:42), that Tsi suspects for the first time that Nomsisi works for the Movement.

Tsi suddenly thinks of Nomsisi differently. He "began to know ... began to fear ... Nomsisi now stuck out, vulnerable, an easy picking for the beaks of plummeting hawks" (TEBB:43). He tries to visualise her in jail and under interrogation "under lights,

sweating, crying, screaming, lost" (TEBB:43). He is unable to conceive of any woman in a situation feared by men and cannot imagine her surviving the situation. Nomsisi has intelligence and physical strength, but Tsi does not have personal knowledge of women who have experienced torture and interrogation, and cannot visualise Nomsisi's reactions in anything other than physical terms.

In *To Every Birth its Blood*, Serote also places women in several other new political roles. Onalenna is a bomber on one occasion and the driver of a getaway car after four policemen have been executed by her group. Her reactions to these roles are rather bland. On the day of the first bombing, Onalenna and Dikeledi return to Alexandra together after Onalenna has placed her bomb (TEBB:269). Onalenna has no regrets about the bomb explosion. Instead, she puts it out of her mind and feels "joyful and pleasant" because Dikeledi has been recruited and they can start "a study group" of girls, and "a women's group too" (TEBB:270). This sounds no more iniquitous than a conventional study group, but Onalenna intends to provide women with "forbidden" reading material and train them to become guerillas.

Dikeledi, on the other hand, is overwhelmed at the sudden change in her world. There is suddenly a sense of urgency and direction.

She felt strange, knowing that now she belonged to a force which was slowly, very slowly, but systematically, like water flowing from a dam, approaching every corner of the country It was strange to know that she was one with this wind She wondered whether she really could, whichever way it had to be done, gain the calmness, the discipline she had observed in Oni and Oupa. For her it was a miracle how they managed to be who they were. She wondered a lot about herself; would she be able to cope, could they teach her how to be like them. How was it done, she wished that she could know, that she could be sure it would be all right, that she would be all right, that she would qualify to be a member. (TEBB:270)

The way to qualify to become a member of the Movement appears to be to accept even abnormal activity as natural and justified. The day after the bombing, however, Onalenna's routine is disturbed and her thoughts wander between her sexual needs, her wish to be a wife and mother and her need to function in the Movement (TEBB:276-277). She is mildly disturbed that the man she loves is in exile, does not know about her activities and cannot be told.

She reveals natural curiosity when she buys the newspaper to find out what damage her bomb has caused.

Ma-Maria, the old woman to whom Onalenna speaks when she goes to buy the newspaper, shows her readiness for revolution when she says if "God isn't bringing any fire, we are going to make the fire" (TEBB:281). Onalenna marvels that although the old lady had been "abused, pulled and pushed, beaten by this her time, yet here she was, still a fighter". She comments that "women seemed to be waiting, waiting, all the time waiting, for the men to come back, and then waiting after the men had died, to follow them" (TEBB:283). She adds a new interpretive dimension to this image of passivity when she looks at the earth and decides that although "men have paid their price for that women have paid their price too" (TEBB:284). Onalenna concludes that women like Ma-Maria "have kept the faith ... have made certain that the struggle is forever assured of its victory, when those who carry it forward follow the correct line" and describes her as an "old but forever fighting lady" (TEBB:284).

Discussion in this chapter has touched on representations of women's political attitudes and activity as they are reflected in the roles and experiences of women in age groups ranging from girlhood and adolescence through maturity to old age. Political awareness seems to know no age threshold, as women and children alike have been precipitated into awareness by changes happening in their lives and around them. The writers create the impression that it is very difficult for women to break away from being spectators and to acknowledge that they have a political role to play. Literary representations of women in works by these writers show that once the first hurdle to participation is overcome, women are be willing to take part in the liberation struggle according to their own capabilities and limitations.

The works in this study have attached nobility to women placed in contexts in which they have experienced personal growth through their political commitment or have lost loved ones, personal freedom and even their lives for the sake of national liberation. The following chapter will seek to place their gendered status in a more

general context.

ENDNOTES:

1. Schalkwyk (1989:268) identifies a similar occurrence in Elsa Joubert's *Poppie Nongena*. "Parents are no longer accepted as wiser, authoritative figures: they are instead rejected for passively contributing to continued oppression."
2. In the 1930s an all-white "People's Front" was established. In a pamphlet addressed to white workers entitled *Communism and the Native Question*, it was stated that "[w]here racial intercourse does take place, it is largely due to the poverty and backwardness of the native woman which leaves them without self-respect" (Lodge 1983:10). Although Langa's novel is set in the 1970s and early 1980s, some of this attitude seems to have survived.
3. When Ntombi visits Mkhonto in jail, she is sick and very restrained. He later remembers that he became so overwrought that he jumped up and assaulted the warder "all the time screaming that I'd kill Welman and all the other white mother-fuckers who made our lives a misery" (TB:425). His anger is clearly directed against the population group which he feels has denigrated his status as a person and desecrated his marriage to Ntombi.
4. Ntombi tells her friends that "[n]othing that breathes the spirit of resistance of our people, the plunder of the colonizers, can ever be written, not while these fuckers are still in power." Dave has to admit this is correct (TB:84).
5. On one occasion she confronts David, a university lecturer, with the accusation that he has chosen a restaurant which is so exclusive and expensive that there is "[n]o chance of hassling with the natives" there. David finally accepts this truth, which has "eluded him for a long time" (TB:80).
6. Kuzwayo's extreme emphasis on "motherhood" and motherly faith and courage provide a much needed female perspective on life to counterbalance the desensitized male view voiced by Mkhonto. Kuzwayo's own tale in *Call Me Woman* of how she supports her son, Justice, during his banning in Mafikeng shows an almost fanatical devotion and a very high level of supportive activity (see CMW:188).

CHAPTER 5

GENDER ISSUES

This chapter attempts to establish the ways in which the four writers contribute to the oppression or empowerment of women through their representation of female characters.

Friedman (1989:72) claims that gender power relationships are maintained in society by the creation of "distinctions between male and female spheres - and it is the reproduction of these distinctions which accounts for the persistence of the so-called 'naturalness' of it all". Five main spheres of gender representation in relation to this study will be discussed:

- The nature of household labour, and production versus consumption;
- The relationship between sexuality, procreation and the value of the woman's body;
- The objectification of women and violence against them;
- The legal, political and economic position of women in society; and
- Gender power relationships in general.

These five spheres are areas of feminist concern. Although no specific form of Western feminism is entirely applicable to the study of writing by black writers, consideration will be given to ways in which certain forms of feminist theory seek to challenge the oppression of women, and to what extent the writers studied here themselves challenge such oppression in their representations of women.

From the representations of women discussed in chapter two, it appears that single women are frequently depicted as breaking away from conventional male-dependent stereotypes, but that many married women are represented as content to be housewives. Being a housewife in the Western mould often constitutes a reduction in the power of black women because colonialism appears to have reduced their ability to provide for their families, and reduced them to

being participants in power relationships where consumers (females) continue to be regarded as subordinate to providers (males).

There is a limited extent to which women are represented in relationships where they provide for men, or in which they live in complementary relationships where both men and women contribute to domestic income. That this can be destructive is shown in Kuzwayo's "The Strongest Point in a Chain is its Weakest Point" (SDL). In this story Kuzwayo shows how a seemingly idyllic marriage can be destroyed by tension when a wife has to work to supplement the husband's income. This happens despite the extreme sensitivity which Pulane, the wife, exercises in broaching the subject of finding a job. The blame for the failure of the marriage is eventually apportioned to the difference in the marriage partners' cultures, rather than to the man's inability to provide for his increasing number of children.

Serote also does little to further the cause of female economic liberation in *To Every Birth its Blood* when he shows that it is a tense and uncomfortable situation for both partners when Lily has to take the responsibility for finances and give her husband pocket money to buy drinks for his friends. Lily's resolve on the amount she can spare is weakened by the irony of her husband's plea that she should be proud of her man and give generously, but even so, the scene reveals Lily's power to control her husband's expenditure (TEBB:5). In this case, the usual roles are reversed. The woman is represented as the provider, whereas the man is dependent on her largesse. There appears to be a link between economic empowerment of the woman and the revision of domestic power relationships, because when Tsi no longer has control of the distribution of their capital, he resents being dependent on Lily for support, feels insecure and looks for ways of asserting himself as a power figure.

Serote perpetuates stereotypical domestic power relationships by showing Lily to be perfectly at home and content as Tsi watches her working in the kitchen (TEBB:1-2). Tsi also expresses the belief that Ausi-Pule, his sister-in-law, delights in ministering to her menfolk's needs and that she feels physically and emotionally fulfilled when she is in a position to do so (TEBB:23). Head's

female characters also contribute to this impression, as they are often shown in contexts in which house cleaning and cooking are undertaken with a sense of order, purposefulness and dignity. Such images, which represent women as content to be dominant in the sphere of domestic work, counter the Western feminist notion that household labour is devalued and demeaning.

Kuzwayo is also at pains to show women such as Granny Basadi ("How Much Does a Roof Cost?", SDL) and Puleng ("Ask the Ostriches", SDL) as being fulfilled in their domestic roles. They are content to respect the men who provide for them and offer them reciprocal respect. Power relations between man and wife in these stories appear to be natural, complementary relationships. Puleng is represented as a power to be reckoned with in her marriage, yet there are no elements of Western feminism or signs of overt power play between her and her husband, and their marriage is amicable.

In *A Rainbow in the Paper Sky*, Langa points to the plight of feminist aspirations in Africa in a scene which shows Aunt Margaret and Khethiwe preparing food for the men because it is expected of them, while also discussing the futility of the younger woman's "feminist nonsense" (RPS:49). These words indicate the low status which men allocated to feminist aspirations during the freedom struggle. They are also indicative of the "fear" of Western feminism which Tlali (in Petersen 1988:185) claims the African man has.

Serote also brings the conventional division of domestic labour into prominence in *To Every Birth its Blood* when he describes how Tsi attempts to clear up messed coffee after Ndo, his brother, breaks a cup (TEBB:25). This brief excursion into domesticity develops into a disturbing experience for Tsi, who feels like a stranger in his own home when he does not know where to find or put kitchen utensils. His exhaustion and claustrophobia in reaction to this discovery indicate that although he realises he should be willing to assist his working wife, it is an unnatural and stressful situation for him. His upbringing has made him lack familiarity with domestic work, and he consequently feels alienated from his own home and seeks refuge elsewhere.

The texts discussed in this dissertation reveal that casual sexual recreation is possible in modern society, but in custom-based society the bodies of women are frequently regarded as the site of domestic production of future workers. The relationship between sexuality and procreation was touched upon in chapter 2, but will now be brought into the context of the value of the female body and the objectification of women.

Social settings in the primary works of these writers generally establish the motivation for characters' actions on a socio-political level, rather than provide opportunities for reflection on their relationships with their bodies or "femininity" on an intrapersonal level. No single definitive ideological position on the "femininity" of black women appears to be achievable through an analysis of the constructions of language and visual imagery in these works, as there are so many differing representations of women in varying contexts at different phases of history.

In the works in this study, women's physical desires are occasionally displayed within a social context, as is the case with the women of Paulina's village in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, or Life's beer-brewing friends in "Life" (CT). However, women are seldom shown to be sexually empowered and incidents even arise where women are made to feel sexually disempowered. This is the case when Makhaya coldly snubs Paulina's initial advances, made via her daughter (WRCG). This causes Paulina to feel demeaned and removes the initiative from her in their future relationship.

Conflicting representations of sexuality also tend to create different impressions of women's empowerment. An example of this is the way Head's narrators discuss Paulina's desire for attention from Makhaya (WRCG) and Thato's desire to marry Thalo (CT). Various scenes support the assumption that the only desire which these women are allowed is "the desire for desire of the man" (Shefer 1989:38), yet this view can be refuted by reference to representations of politically dedicated women such as Nomakhwezi (TB), Dikeledi Ramono and Nomsisi (both in *To Every Birth its Blood*). Langa and Serote show these young women to place their desire to participate in the national liberation movement above their sexual needs.

This does not mean that female activists lose interest in sex. Serote describes how Onalenna becomes very aware of her sexual needs the day after placing her first bomb. She sits in an abandoned way and exercises considerable curiosity about her own sexual organs within the context of conception and giving birth, but does not engage with the subject of sexual gratification for pleasure (TEBB:276). Onalenna's discussion of morality with old Ma-Maria provides her with a tiny source of ironic amusement, but essentially reinforces the patriarchal view that women should restrict their sexual activities to their proposed life partner, unless they wish to invoke social censure (TEBB:280).

Van Zyl (1989:14) airs the Western view that "sex and sexuality have always been political issues" because of the history of ideas pertaining to sexual practices. She states that sexuality is "an ideological construction which rests squarely on gender socialisation, and sees the sexual interaction between male and female as the hunted and the hunter" (1989:15). Head's stories, however, contribute to the overthrow of this ideology in cases where she shows that many modern South African women have ignored the restrictions which society has placed on women's sexual activities. In "Tao" (TTP) she characterises Botswanan women as claiming the right to pursue sexual practices for the sake of sexual pleasure, not just for procreation. Langa's description of love-making between Mkhonto and Ntombi (TB:226-231), and Dudu's seduction of Thokozani in *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky* (RPS:54), also represent women in the context of making the choice to have intercourse for pleasure and to affirm that they are alive, with no thought of procreation or permanent commitment.

Southern African women's inability to alter the male attitude that men are entitled to turn sex into a form of recreation by sleeping around and having multiple sexual relationships, has the potential to render their social position untenable unless they accept casual relationships as "normal" and "natural". An authorial stance against the oppression of women caused by double standards on sexual activity has to show how women have internalised their position and the results on gender power struggles of women's resistance to objectification and oppression.

Langa's narrator reveals how Khethiwe has internalised one aspect of women's position in a scene where Mark, the poet, explains how male medical students at a party will manipulate the situation so that they can keep all the women for themselves. Khethiwe suggests, somewhat critically, that women are to blame for their own sexual exploitation at parties if they allow themselves to be "treated like commodities" (RPS:75). Langa then counters this criticism and suggests a less condemnatory male view of the subject when Mark points out that women consciously enter into sexual liaisons because they simply "want fun", like everyone else (RPS:75). This exchange of opinions illustrates opposing genders' views on female sexuality. Both views suggest that women have some choice, but Khethiwe's comment shows awareness of sexuality as a feminist issue, whereas Mark's words are dismissive and seek to undermine the seriousness of feminine resistance to the commodification of sex. This scene suggests that some aspects of feminism are common to all women and may be expected to emerge more strongly in post-apartheid South Africa, possibly forming a new basis for consultation and agreement between different races.

With the exception of Dikeledi, who becomes a prostitute (in "Education - No Substitute for Culture", SDL), Kuzwayo prefers to represent women as having strict standards for their sexual liaisons. Even when characters such as Dineo and Mpho (in "One of Many", SDL) demonstrate women's new freedom from sexual mores, Kuzwayo places this "freedom" in contexts where women enter into common-law marriages. When Kuzwayo refers to sexual freedom in general, she represents it as compensation to women for the frustration, hardship and lack of married companionship which social structures have caused (CMW:14). Although Kuzwayo does not express approval for this trend, she does show her understanding of the situation and attempts to cast sexually liberated women in what are conventionally acceptable contexts, even though they are in conflict with traditional or Christian norms.

Langa accords acceptability to sexual liberation in the character of Ntombi, who claims that she is sexually liberated in a way which suggests that she regards this as a normal condition (TB:329). However, Langa plays down the issue of Ntombi's sexual

freedom to an extent by linking it to the political aspects of responsibility for contraception and family planning.¹

Ntombi and Mkhonto engage in a serious dispute because Ntombi chooses to apply birth control measures rather than have a child when it would be inopportune for her career (TB:335). This is shown to be a decision she takes without consulting her husband or considering his need to procreate in order to prove his manhood. Mkhonto rejects his wife's claim to sole control over this issue and considers her stance to be a refusal to bear his child. He regards this as a personal affront to his masculinity and, in an immature reaction, regresses to being a bed-wetting alcoholic.

Ntombi relents without telling Mkhonto that she has decided to have a child, thus complicating developments and facilitating Mkhonto's later rejection of her and her daughter. In this matter, Ntombi is represented as a wife who has acted insensitively, albeit logically in her own view, and who deserves to be reprimanded by her husband because birth control and family planning are shown to be the concern of both partners in a marriage. Although this is a male's representation of the subject, it reveals that empowerment/disempowerment are inherent in decisions related to procreation.

In general terms, control over reproduction appears to be regarded as a male prerogative, as men feel obliged to produce heirs. It is unclear from the works of writers other than Langa, to what extent women generally exercise control over their reproductive functions. This suggests that this is not an important or particularly political issue in African culture, whether traditional or modern. Kuzwayo mentions a female prisoner's wistful joke about migrant workers going home in alternate years on "conception leave" (CMW:5). She later tells how migrant workers on "conception leave" leave women with extra babies to care for.

In "The Summer Sun" (TTP), Head makes the suggestion that modern women equate education with birth control. The young girl who narrates this story considers that "it is not so easy for a woman to have too many babies when she has improved her mind. She

has to think how she will feed the baby, clothe and wash it" (TTP:45). This girl's simplistic belief that education makes a woman more responsible and a less prolific breeder appears to be a sign of a change of attitude to child-bearing.

Such revision is unlikely to take place as long as women regard marriage as a measure of their success in life and use their bodies to procure husbands. Neo, in Head's "Snapshots of a Wedding" (CT), is shown to be an educated woman with good marriage prospects but she takes the conscious decision to become pregnant in order to ensure that Kegoletile will marry her. Her decision not only negates the view that educated women are less likely to become pregnant, but it attaches value to the concept that marriage is the state by which a woman's success is measured. This relegates education and career interest to subordinate positions and elevates the importance of male dominated social conventions, such as marriage has tended to be.

Male dominance can also be maintained by the objectification of the female body. This form of objectification is particularly evident in *To Every Birth its Blood*. No matter what the importance of women's roles in the story, Serote initially contextualises them in terms of a male's view of their bodies. Through the agency of Tsi, a philandering male, Serote describes virtually every woman in terms of her physical attributes. When he does this, he links sensual and sexual connotations to his descriptions of body parts, such as Grace Ramono's "bust shooting out" or "her hands caught between her thighs" as she speaks (TEBB:204). To a lesser extent, Langa does the same thing in *Tenderness of Blood*, where Mkhonto sporadically fulfils the role of a sexually speculative male observer.

In the first part of *To Every Birth Its Blood*, much commentary is given by Tsi, as an observer of a politically quiescent lifestyle which he detests but which he has not committed himself to change (Sole 1991:61). Tsi's views of women place them in male-related contexts as wife, sister, lover or mother (TEBB:25). His attitude to his wife, a physiotherapist, reveals his insecurity as an unemployed educated man and as a black person. Gender power

relationships are apparently just as much a male problem as a female one, for Tsi does not appear to have any understanding of how Lily's mind works, and as a result he experiences frustration and conflict in his marital relationship with her.

In a scene which reveals the underlying conflict between the couple's personalities and which also shows how oppression has humiliated and emasculated Tsi, Lily stimulates Tsi sexually and then leaves him throbbing in frustration while she confronts him with his lack of power outside the bedroom (TEBB:50-51). Lily is dominant at this stage, but even though she has the power to frustrate Tsi, she does not have the power to get him to do anything to improve his degenerate behaviour. Her momentary triumph turns to despair; she fears he will be picked up by the police because he "drank" the permit money. She screams at him, refuses to accept his excuses and says that she is tired of his "strange stupid life" and the fact that he thinks he is "still a small boy", thus suggesting that she cannot respect him as a man (TEBB:50). Her verbalised frustrations appear primarily to be the vehicle for emphasising Tsi's condition and only secondarily an attempt to voice the dilemma of an educated woman with a reprobate husband.

Serote describes the scene in graphic detail as an illustration of the covert power play between Lily and Tsi. Lily's views on their marriage show maturity, spirit, a great capacity for self-sacrifice and an educated black woman's need for a fulfilling relationship based on mutual respect and love (TEBB:53). Tsi does not appear to realise the depth of Lily's mental and emotional processes but is appreciative of her superficially attractive physical appearance and sensuality. This scene is particularly important in that it is atypical. Serote generally shows Lily's reactions to situations, rather than verbalise her personal feelings and opinions.

Various scenes in the first part of the book depict Lily as a woman who is mature despite her youth. She has heroic qualities in that she is willing and able to confront major issues in a responsible manner despite the potential for harming her own feelings. She is strong enough to provide the backbone in a

marriage where the man has been morally and spiritually weakened by his lifestyle. Although her character has little scope for development within the constraints of a minor role, the mention of Lily's name in connection with Tsi in the latter part of the book performs a metonymic function in that it suggests her strength of character and reminds the reader that she provides her husband and their marriage with vital support.

Tsi appears to choose drinking and womanising as a bolster for his masculine ego and sense of superiority over his wife. The issue of sexual performance in relation to manhood or womanhood arises in the narrator's account of Tsi's visit to Tshidi, his sweetheart since childhood. After his humiliation during interrogation and physical assault by the police, Tsi needs to be recognised as powerful and elects to visit Tshidi rather than return to his wife (Barboure 1984:173). When Serote's narrator describes the way in which Tshidi rather reluctantly lets Tsi, a married man, into her home, he conveys the sense of a passively sexual woman waiting for a man to initiate active sexuality (TEBB:106).

During Tsi's visit he is unable to perform sexually or tell Tshidi what the problem is. He regards Tshidi's eyes as "demanding and bewildered" and thinks that she must have doubted "if she was a woman at all when we both knew what was happening, because I could have lain there with her, having no penis, having no balls" (TEBB:113). Tsi feels that he deserves to be told that he is not a man, but is aware that he has also put Tshidi into the position of doubting her femininity. This representation centres both characters' beings on their sexual prowess, and denies them other significant dimensions.

Tshidi is represented solely in relation to her sexual relationship with Tsi. She is shown to be uneducated, accept male physical dominance, have no "feminist" tendencies and be unable to withstand Tsi's advances.² Tsi is shown to be ruthless enough to take unscrupulous advantage of Tshidi despite the fact that he is aware of her feelings and considers her to be doomed by her own weakness. This aspect of Tsi's relationship with Tshidi reinforces the gender stereotyped view that

[v]ulnerability is regarded as one of women's more endearing feminine characteristics, and indeed often quoted as sexually arousing to men. Together with passivity and softness, it epitomises a person who is under threat of violence, someone who cannot defend themselves. The ideology of women as weak reinforces the myth of masculine protectiveness, alias men's control of women when a woman is not with a man, she exposes her vulnerability to any man who might want to possess her. (Van Zyl 1989:16)

Tsi also regards Nomsisi as an attractive and available sex object. As mentioned in chapter four, Tsi seems to view Nomsisi in a sexually speculative way because his brother is in jail and she no longer has a male protector. When he realises that she is a member of the Movement, Tsi gains respect for Nomsisi but also expresses a sense of his inadequacy, since he cannot protect her from the kind of police interrogation he himself has suffered. Although Nomsisi has been represented as a character who has transcended conventional female spheres of action, Serote still contextualises her in terms of her object-relatedness to men who can choose to protect or physically abuse her.

This situation develops as a "natural" extension of established patriarchal behaviour. Masculine behaviour of this type is endorsed by the male writers, and to a lesser extent by the female writers, because, consciously or otherwise, they create representations of women which emphasise the importance of women's physical appearance, rather than their actions. This has the potential to contribute to women's objectification as ornamental, passive people. The way in which Tsi and other male characters study the appearance of women thus devalues the female body and reinforces the image of these women in object-related relationships with men, no matter what social or political roles they play.

Head raises the issue of how the female body is devalued in *When Rain Clouds Gather*. When Makhaya illegally crosses the border from South Africa into Botswana, he encounters a predatory old woman who hires him a room for the night (WRCG:13). Head creates a cameo in which the old woman tells her ten-year-old granddaughter to prostitute herself to Makhaya for money to live on. Makhaya is revolted at the loathsomeness of the situation and gives the girl money to get rid of her. He politicises the situation by rationalising the woman's depravity in prostituting the child as an evil "created by poverty and oppression". He thinks:

It was the mentality of the old hag that ruined a whole continent - some sort of clinging, ancestral belief that a man was nothing more than a grovelling sex organ, that there was no such thing as privacy of souls and body, and that no ordinary man would hesitate to jump on a mere child. (WRCG:14)

Head is not sympathetic in her representation of the old woman who seeks to exploit the child's body. She does, however, imply that the standards of some women have been reduced by poverty and the lack of customary clan support, and that child prostitution is a reprehensible result of social degeneration.

This scene evokes images of the utmost degradation. It stands in sharp contrast to the image Head creates of other fine, noble old women who maintain their culture and rear others to adhere to it, such as Mma-Millipede, an exemplary Christian woman in *When Rain Clouds Gather*, and Sejosenye, a proud grandmother in "The Wind and a Boy" (CT). At the same time the scene raises the issue of how women have allowed the bodies of other black women to become devalued and held in contempt by men. Makhaya's male resistance to this concept contributes towards a revalued representation of the black woman.

Two important dimensions of male-female relationships which require a great deal of social re-evaluation and correction are the issues of violence against women and rape. Violence against women is seen as a consequence partly of the social objectification of women's bodies under a patriarchal system in which femininity, female sexuality and the female body are considered to be controlled and possessed by men. Scenes of assault and abuse within marriage show abused married women as demeaned, disempowered and socially debilitated. Kuzwayo elects not to give any detail in *Call Me Woman* of the way in which her first husband abused her, although she does elaborate upon the suffering which she underwent as a result. By not airing her marital problems in public she may have saved herself some of the humiliation which her society attaches to a failed marriage.

Kuzwayo is proud of the way in which she challenges her husband's divorce lawyer, and the way that she stands up for her

own rights in court, but this is apparently not typical of African women. Head says that battered women often have no legal power such as recourse to a chief's court or the law to lodge a complaint against their husbands, but customarily have to ask male relatives to intervene on their behalf (MacKenzie and Clayton 1989:16).

Serote represents Tsi's brother, Ndo, as a man who compensates for his self-perceived lack of manhood and power by assaulting his wife, Ausi-Pule. Ndo does this in the knowledge that he is acting according to the norms of a society which condones male domination and abuse of women (TEBB:21). Tsi observes that when Ndo is not drunk he is a solicitous husband who, while listening to music with guests, talks quietly and calmly about the futility of being a man. This does not mean that Ausi-Pule is spoken to as Ndo's equal. He appears to treat her as a sounding-board, a receptacle for his ideas, to be abused later in rejection of his frustrated manhood.

Ausi-Pule is typical of abused women described in these works and may be regarded as a role model of the abused woman who expects her husband to assault her after a drinking spree. Ausi-Pule does not appear to fear Ndo, despite the way in which he assaults her, but she seems frustrated about her inability to change his ways and wishes that Tsi could influence his brother to behave differently. Although Tsi does not appear to attempt to intervene in the way that custom and Ausi-Pule would appear entitled to expect, he admires Ausi-Pule for the way in which she has managed to come to terms with her misery. It is interesting that he is far more sensitive to Ausi-Pule's needs than he is to those of his own wife. Tsi sympathises with this woman and admires her strength, thus raising her from victim status to a heroine of sorts.

In *Tenderness of Blood*, Langa's character, Mkhonto, discusses the issue of female fear of men. When Mkhonto watches Grace leaving a shop he realises that women's fear of men is based on "the experience of women from the cradle to the grave" (TB:148). He expresses his amazement that black people who have endured so much suffering should even contemplate "causing pain to the young and defenceless ones" (TB:148).³ He decides that his people are "human only when it comes to talking about the bigger questions of

the world. When things are scaled down to specifics, then we lash out and maim the littlest among us" (TB:148). Mkhonto thinks about how even young boys inflict pain and suffering on their female peers. He raises the point that if the female does not entreat the male to cease his abuse, "the young man feels somehow threatened by something unnameable" (TB:149). Although male relatives exact retribution for serious harm to females, the fact remains that Serote and Langa represent township girls and women as powerless, defenceless and weak against the superior physical strength of men and boys who roam the streets looking for victims to dominate.

Tsi's thoughts about Minki, who goes to the shebeen with Moipone, and about Mary, his sister, represent young women as sexually curious but ill-equipped to protect themselves in the violent context of township life. Tsi's narration represents physically and sexually abused young black women as victims of the generation gap, of cultural alienation and of extreme emphasis on male control. Instead of representing them as street girls or prostitutes, he discusses their vulnerability to physical assault from men who have a need to experience feelings of power. This approach is reminiscent of Kuzwayo's sensitivity to the dilemma of women whose lives are moulded by social pressures rather than directed by the women themselves, because they lack control over their lives.

It would appear from the texts that many black men expect to exert control over women. Van Zyl (1989:10) claims that a married woman in a patriarchal system

... becomes the sexual and reproductive property of the man. It is therefore not unexpected that rape is not regarded as a crime against a woman but becomes part of ideological issues significant to patriarchy.

In this context, Van Zyl also says that to "proceed from the point of view of women's experiences of rape is ... fundamentally to challenge historical constructions of rape" (1989:10). Ntombi's rape at Wellman's party (discussed in chapter four) illustrates this male-centred approach to the act of rape, as the assault on Ntombi is described from her husband's point of view.

Langa represents Ntombi as an independent type of woman who attends a party on her own and who can, by patriarchal standards, be held responsible for her own rape.⁴ Ntombi's feelings, as the victim of a demeaning assault, are put aside, with the exception of a brief letter to Mkhonto in which she tries to explain the circumstances surrounding the rape and her lack of guilt. Mkhonto's resentment of the defilement of his wife, however, permeates the entire book.

Mkhonto internalises Ntombi's rape as a personal affront from white men who have emasculated him even further by their attack on his sexual domain. This inter-racial rape thus gains political as well as inter-personal dimensions - it is not simply an abuse of power by white men over a black woman, but the symbolic abuse of African manhood. Ntombi's reduction in status from this point of the story can be regarded as the representation of a woman whose bodily value is drastically reduced by the damage caused to her social image as a man's property.

Kuzwayo suggests that the image of women as men's property was reinforced by women's minor status before the law. She describes how her eldest minor son had to give his written permission for her to receive a passport (CMW:240), and how women were not allowed to own houses or enter into hire-purchase contracts (SDL:93). Kuzwayo considers the upliftment of women's legal status to have been a significant contribution to the improvement of the status and image of women at national level (SDL:85). Kuzwayo identifies with, and has empathy for, the masses of women previously labelled as "minors" by the state and their own menfolk. Her repeated emphasis on this point is indicative of the keenness with which she has experienced her object-situatedness in both gender and political terms.

Kuzwayo uses the contentious and vital issue of women's inability to own a home so that she can illustrate women's paradoxical minor status. In "How Much Does a Roof Cost?" (SDL), Kuzwayo emphasises the enforced passivity of a nameless widow who is faced with losing her home unless her son can find a source of income to pay the rent and take over the lease. The widow's son, John, trades his late father's car in on a more suitable vehicle and saves their

home by starting a taxi business (SDL:103). The son is shown as assertive, rational, logical and capable throughout the story, whereas the mother trails along in her widow's weeds, silently accompanying him, but with no active part. Although the widow is no more than a presence and a prop to the son's persuasive arguments, a car salesman says: "I give this car to your son, for your sake. I rely on you for the promise he makes" (SDL:102). Despite the mother's passive, hopeless and subservient image, she is respected by the salesman for the expectations which he has of her implicit role as the young man's mother.

When, as above, Kuzwayo invokes the image of respected motherhood in conjunction with what she considers to be the unacceptable stereotype of the powerless black woman, the result is a paradoxical balance between the woman's lack of legal status and her respected role as a producer and educator of children. Kuzwayo appears to create this effect as a typical example of the double frame of reference within which black women have lived. She shows women to be simultaneously respected as mothers within their communities, and vulnerable and subservient to power figures in virtually every other social sphere. Stories such as this lend greater emphasis to the need for black women to participate in a gender struggle and to free themselves from oppression suffered at the hands of men, the state and social structures such as the advertising media.

All of the writers in this study have placed female characters against the background of their material living conditions and the historical contexts of the period. In various ways, they have represented women as oppressed on personal and social levels. The way in which issues are politicised creates some understanding of the limitations on many women, particularly the aged, and of the effort it requires for women to break out of the moulds created for them. Representations of women such as Tsi's mother constitute a sympathetic attempt to place women in the socio-political contexts of their times. They contribute towards improved understanding of the dilemma of what Perkins would consider to be a socially debilitated group striving to challenge its stereotyped roles (discussed by Barrett 1985:70).

Head, living in a country which has been "free" for many years, generally utilises integrative themes to suggest a future vision in which men and women cooperate in the upliftment of women from oppressive roles. In a Nelm interview (MacKenzie and Clayton 1989:14) Head suggests that the storyteller can "shape the future" and she explains how "majestic" male characters such as Paul Thebolo can be utilised to suggest solutions for abandoned women of superb character, like Dikeledi. In the same interview (1989:16), Head suggests that Botswanan women have started to exercise their independence and now bypass the control exercised by male relatives by appealing to the chief's court for justice against their husbands.

Gynocritical theory conflicts with Head's womanist approach in that theorists believe that representing women in contexts where they achieve equality with men is not sufficient. They hold that the entire social structure must be challenged by writers who reject the values of male society. This has clearly not been the case in the works studied, where three of the writers are participants in the freedom struggle who focus their energies against apartheid. These writers generally attempt to consolidate the position of African culture in an attempt to gain status for their national identity, rather than attack patriarchal society.

Head and Kuzwayo both imply that the upliftment of women has been a desirable corollary of the political struggle for independence. That upliftment has been achieved in many cases, is reflected in cases where women have been characterised in roles which denote improvement and changes in women's domestic, working and political roles. These representations mirror the upliftment of the status of women on a personal level.

The key to this upliftment of status, however, appears to be the woman's change from acceptance of oppression to liberating activity. Maqagi (1990:24) identifies the need for women to compile their own programme for "transformation from ... dependent, unskilled, weak-bodied and weak-minded creatures", but Bazin (1985:34) suggests that there is a prior requirement of "personal growth on the part of the individual" before she can "extract her-

self from an oppressive environment".

The narrator of Head's "Tao" is typical of several other female characters in that she is willing to accept traditional roles and lend wifely support to a powerful man, but does not wish to subvert the male role and be a pillar of support for a weak husband, even though she is capable of doing so. This trend may reflect some women's desire for recognition and security rather than a drive towards Western-style feminism.

Emmanuel Ngara (in Petersen 1988:184) distinguishes between what he knows as feminism and what African women are fighting for - "a more human society, where the question of equity is addressed". In the same discussion (1988:183), Ama Ata Aidoo is on record as having complained that African women are charged with having adopted socially destructive foreign feminism whenever African women "try to remind ourselves and our brothers and lovers and husbands and colleagues that we also exist". She claims that the militancy of African women is not the result of Western feminism but part of a "concrete tradition of strong women fighters ...[who] are refusing to be overlooked".

It is also Aidoo's opinion that it is "rubbish" to say that the "fact that a woman writes about women characters makes her a feminist". She considers that it should rather be said that women write about other women as "a very legitimate way of seeing the world". Cooper (1992:78) rejects the possibility that there is a "single, genuine and monolithic African woman's point of view at all" (1992:79) and thus no single form of feminism or womanism applicable to all African women.

Cooper's view appears to be supported by the findings of this study, where a very diverse range of conditions, roles and images has been identified. There are, however, many points of similarity between the lives and circumstances of many of the women created in this small range of texts. When looking for a suitable direction for South African literature and criticism of the future, Ndebele (1991:21) points to the need for the South African experience to be "conscious of itself and define itself". He says that for the

writer the "immediate aim is a radically contemplative state of mind in which the objects of contemplation are that range of social conditions which are the major ingredients of social consciousness". This includes removing the conditions which facilitate the oppression of women.

If Head is correct in her view that the storyteller can shape the future (MacKenzie and Clayton 1989:14) and representations of women, on the lines of Head's Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* or Margaret in *Maru*, can exercise influence, then female writers can contribute towards the struggle against oppression by representing women in new and different ways. This should be done in preference to allowing "symbolic" characters to continue to contribute towards the maintenance of patriarchal power relationships (Ndebele 1991:23). Head's seemingly radical representation of Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* could thus be considered a way of facilitating "non-prescriptive inclusion of women in ways which centralise woman as an active subject, challenge the exclusion of woman and actively create spaces for women to represent themselves" (Van Zyl and Shefer 1989:9).

Accurate and sensitive representations need to be forged out of collective women's struggles if new identities are to be created which are liberating, constructive role models such as Ngcobo asked for in Stockholm (Petersen 1988:13). This will be tantamount to the liberation struggle being continued on a different front by women acting democratically and creatively to transform social relations in a way which is acceptable to all participants.

The works in this study suggest the womanist view prevalent in the liberation struggle, that a re-invention of subjectivity does not imply women *replacing* males in importance, but *assisting* them because of their joint political commitment. The writers, whose works were written between 1974 and 1990, seem to feel that the point in history had not yet been reached where women could be seen to put their own interests above those of the nation. The point has, however, now been reached when a greater degree of feminist consciousness can be raised and inequalities re-examined. Whether a feminist writer or not, each author has the option whether or not

to show female characters in terms of established dualisms, dichotomies or stereotypical differences.

Head certainly did not consider herself to be a feminist, but she very pointedly uses a scene involving Paulina, Makhaya and a fire to illustrate some differences between men and women and to suggest a modification of attitudes which could revise the gender power base (WRCG:139). Paulina notes that men and women are unlike mentally, and decides that the mental difference between men and women is revealed in the way they lay fires. By raising the issue of gender-related mental difference, Head is acknowledging difference without suggesting that one sex is superior to the other. Makhaya's fire-laying suggests neatness, order, caution, respect, meticulous planning and measured action. This contrasts with the "rag-bag" approach which Paulina prefers when laying a fire. Head represents the woman's approach as indicative of a woman too burdened with work to take a pride in meticulous detail where this is immaterial to the effectiveness of her work. She takes care to provide a broad view, rather than value the woman's approach at the expense of that of the man, thus valuing difference.

During their debate about whether a man should do a job such as lighting the fire at all, Makhaya ridicules Paulina's view that it is a woman's work to make the fire. He informs her that men also live on earth, and are not gods who cannot make tea if they want it, or even sweep the floor if they are of a mind to (WRCG:139). This is contrary to the more usual African view. To a Western reader this may appear to be a small matter, but to an African reader from a patriarchal community, such a view may be heresy of earth-shaking proportions.

It is difficult to tell whether Paulina, Head's mouthpiece, approves of the way in which Makhaya is turning her traditional ideas upside down. She appears to be reluctant to accept change to her traditional female role initiated by a man, yet at the same time is loath to break a lifetime habit and confront his authority. Her dilemma is that the situation has the potential for beneficial change, yet she feels secure in the old ways.

Overall, Head's short stories show women as competent within the confines of their own worlds, and capable of adopting roles previously considered to be the preserve of men. That portion of Head's fiction which is based on fact can be regarded as a reflection of actual women's attempts to cope with new roles. Her novels are very creative and indicate ways in which women can attempt to achieve transcendence from oppression.

Clayton (1988b:65), points out that, as a historian, Head is able to "overturn a dominant settler mythology" and achieve what she herself calls "a compromise of tenderness" (CT:10) between African tradition and Western influence. By showing Africa as it is, rather than as a dark continent, and writing about a "real site where cultures met, conflicted, gave way or peaceably meshed", Head reveals the women of Botswana as "moral agents within their own landscape" (Clayton 1988b:64).

Kuzwayo's fictional work also has a factual base, but she does not use this base in as transformative a manner as Head. She tends to adopt an anecdotal style to tell those stories which reinforce her views on socio-political issues affecting black women. In her non-fiction, Kuzwayo takes every available opportunity to represent the steadfastness and courage of women who have emerged from the protective cocoon of clan rule and who have filled roles previously dominated by men. Driver (1990:231) comments on Kuzwayo's particular pride in the way that women "somehow seem to cope with the pressures more successfully than men" (CMW:51). Kuzwayo enhances the image of all black women when she proudly notes that the descendants of women who originally suffered the negative effects of the migrant labour system have now "defied the cultural myth that black women are inferior to men and to women of other racial groups" (CMW:241).

Representations of female characters created by Head and Kuzwayo show that these writers have particular insight into women and how they are "both a product of and reaction to a community ... shaped by other, external forces" (Schalkwyk 1989:271). This study has produced grounds for agreement with Clayton's view that Head's representations of women are of those of "believable and varied

human beings" with "a delicate nervous balance acted upon by credible historical events, and who seek, in turn, to encounter and shape history" (Clayton 1988b:64). The same can be said of many of Kuzwayo's representations of women.

Even from the works of the men, with their male view of society and potential for inadequate representations of women, one seldom gains the sense that women are the victims of their own personal deficiencies. Instead, they appear to be the products of conflicting social systems which have as a common basis the oppression of women. Langa and Serote provide valuable insights into the ways in which men perceive women. Although Langa makes a greater attempt than Serote to show how women can become active participants in social life and gain status, he is limited by the historical context of his writing and cannot reflect female transcendence in ways in which it has not yet occurred at the time of writing. Overall, Langa's works also appear more sexually enlightened than *To Every Birth its Blood*, and his representations of women have the potential to make a contribution towards the revision of the image of black women.

It can be claimed that the four writers have, to some extent, fulfilled the expectation of Nkosi and Mphahlele, that African writers should use a personal basis of experience and understanding to create accurate and perceptive characterisations (Nkosi 1983:129). They have also affirmed Mphahlele's view that there is no single definitive image of the African character, whether male or female (Nkosi 1983:129). Women vary from being passive victims to the creators and controllers of a new order and combatants in the struggle against social injustice.

Kuzwayo says of black women: "Don't judge them by what they don't have - but rather by the values which they express in their culture" (SDL:122). The culture reflected in the multiplicity of images in these works frames women in representations which, in Kuzwayo's words (SDL:123), are "something truly to wonder at" when the circumstances of their lives are taken into account.

In the Preface to *Call Me Woman*, Gordimer acclaims Kuzwayo for

defining herself as an African woman who has "Africanized the Western concept of woman" (CMW:xi). Driver (1990:233) also praises Kuzwayo for "making a significant adjustment and contribution to the Western concept of woman". The praise of these two critics suggests that literary representations are capable of influencing the image formation of black women, and that the desired revision of the image of the Southern African black woman can take place in this country if writers are sensitive to this issue.

It is the contention of this dissertation that representations of women's lives have the potential to change attitudes towards black women. The foundation laid in recent writing now needs to be built upon in newer literature in such a way that a further loosening of gender constraints may be assisted. After that has been achieved, writers can aim even higher and pursue an ideal of which the late Bessie Head would certainly have approved. Amiri Baraka (1980:12) verbalises this as knitting the "world's black family together, not just achieving female transcendence".

ENDNOTES:

1. Amos and Parmar (1984:13) regard birth control as an aspect of sexuality which is relevant to black women.
2. See "Snapshots of a Wedding" in *The Collector of Treasures* for a similar male attitude to women. In this story the male protagonist elects to marry the educated woman because she will be able to command a better income from employment, but he continues his sexual liaison with an uneducated woman of a more compliant temperament.
3. In a letter to Randolph Vigne (1991:30), Bessie Head said that "[b]lack people are terribly insecure and this insecurity is shockingly destructive, perhaps without meaning to be".
4. Friedman (1989:20-23) explains that women are judged according to the available stereotypes of women who "can" or "can't" be raped. The more independent a woman is, the less likely it is that it will be believed that she has been raped. In South Africa the intersection of racism with the Christian ideology of sexuality make black women the most vulnerable to rape myths. According to Friedman, the majority of rapes in South Africa are inflicted on black women by white men because there is an idea that black women are more actively sexual, due to the ideologies of sexuality and racism. The position of powerlessness that black women experience relative to white men means that they are the women who will be believed least of all if they choose to report a rape to the police.

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