

**A FEMINIST PASTORAL CARE APPROACH IN DECONSTRUCTING THE EFFECTS OF  
PATRIARCHY ON BASOTHO WOMEN'S IDENTITIES EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC  
VIOLENCE IN MARITAL RELATIONS.**

**by**

**ELIZA 'MATSELA MATSUMUNYANE**

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**SUPERVISOR: DR SB HESS**

**CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF M. NAIDOO**

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This work is dedicated to my late parents,  
Kokika and Maletta Matsumunyane

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## **SUMMARY**

The study is concerned with deconstructing the effects of patriarchal discourses on the identities of women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. It is explored within a feminist pastoral care framework within the Basotho culture. This is seen through the lens of Basotho culture and the Christian church as understood in an emerging postmodern culture.

The study explores and deconstructs patriarchal beliefs around the identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships through discursive conversations.

This study has sought to benefit any Mosotho woman who suffers under the control and abuse of her husband. The study does this by giving her a voice to deconstruct the silencing and disempowering patriarchal stories/identities. In turn it hopefully allows her to construct her own empowering preferred multiple identities without blaming anybody.

However, by the very nature of this study, ' the effects of patriarchy on identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relations' there was partiality and subjectivity throughout my discussions and reflections, as I found it hard to stand back from my resentment.

## **KEY WORDS**

Patriarchy, domestic violence, identity, postmodernism, social construction, deconstruction, feminist theology, feminist pastoral care.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

*Mosali o nyalla mots'eo:* a woman sulks around the pot area.

Literal meaning is that a woman, when has been beaten and/or quarreled with her husband should show her resentment by sitting next to her utensils.

Underlying meaning is that even if a woman is upset with her husband who has beaten and/or quarreled with her, she should not inform her maiden people and her community about her abuse, instead she should stay in her house, care and cook for her husband.

*M'a ngoana o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng:* a mother handles the knife by the sharp edge

Underlying meaning is that a woman should be brave to face, intervene and, protect children from their father's anger and also tolerate and protect her family and society from many problems.

## CHAPTER 1: THE PATRIARCHAL ‘SNAKES’ HAUNTING BASOTHO WOMEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

This chapter familiarises the reader with the way this topic builds up. In the background I write my motivation for undertaking the study, as well as the purpose of the study. The research question, together with the research aim, is then formulated. The pilot study is briefly discussed. I elaborate on the research design I used in the study. I then discussed how I collected data as well as the ethical research procedure and sampling. Lastly I wrote the synopsis of the theories used in this study project

### 1.1 MY MOTIVATION FOR DOING THIS RESEARCH

While I was working towards completing a pastoral therapy course with the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD), I had a therapeutic conversation with a Mosotho woman called ‘Mamosimotsana (pseudonym). From that therapeutic conversation I learnt that ‘Mamosimotsana was faced with many life threatening challenges. She was the sole breadwinner in the family because her husband was unemployed. She had four children to look after. She experienced domestic violence in her own home and she lived with HIV. According to [Lesotho-Wikigender.org](http://Lesotho-Wikigender.org) 2008 Basotho women have ‘a relatively high rate of HIV/AIDS’, which is often attributed to their unequal position in society.

From the initial therapeutic conversation, ‘Mamosimotsana used particularly disempowering language to talk about her identity in ways that made it difficult for her to deal with challenges in her life. I wondered how ‘Mamosimotsana could be assisted in exiting some of these disempowering identities.

She was searching for ways of coping with a situation of abuse. This became particularly challenging because of the way she thought about herself in those circumstances and the limited language she had to find a solution. She was trapped within a Basotho patriarchal discourse of being a ‘good’ obedient woman. Keane (1998:122 says ‘patriarchy literally means rule by the father’. However ‘patriarchy’ will be explained in much more detail in chapter two. I thought if she could free herself from the patriarchal discourses of being a ‘good’ woman, perhaps she would find more effective ways of coping. Strong patriarchal beliefs plunged her into feelings of confusion and desperation. I also realised how trapped she was within the dominant patriarchal belief system in Lesotho, which promotes men as leaders and heads of households, while treating women as passive followers. Because of the depth of internalisation of this belief, ‘Mamosimotsana often sought the approval of her abusive husband to find ways of surviving.

During our conversations, ‘Mamosimotsana described those challenges as ‘snakes’ which came to haunt her. These ‘snakes’ came to represent the effects of a powerful patriarchal system imposed upon her life. The system has been embodied in gender stereotypes, gender roles, cultural beliefs and Christian discourses. These beliefs, hidden in the fabric of society, have historically become accepted as part of being men and women in marital relationships. Talking about problems in this way is what White and Epston (1999:47) call an “externalising” conversation. Externalising conversations treat the problem as something separate from the person (Morgan 2000:17). In this way these hidden belief systems can be examined.

Together we (‘Mamosimotsana and I) worked at facing those ‘snakes’; exposing some of the patriarchal beliefs and discourses that were sustaining the problems in her life. Gradually

‘Mamosimotsana came to realise these discourses for what they are, doing what Morgan describes as deconstructing the problem within the practice of narrative therapy. ‘Narrative therapists are interested in discovering, acknowledging and ‘taking apart’ (deconstructing) the beliefs, ideas and practices of the broader culture in which a person lives that are serving to assist the problem and the problem story’ (Morgan 2000:45). It was on this journey with ‘Mamosimotsana and in my reading that I reflected on the effects of patriarchal discourses on Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. In the process of my reflection I realised that those patriarchal discourses have influenced me and contributed to who I have become as a woman. From this emerged the purpose of this research.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY

### 1.2.1 The purpose of this study

This dissertation explores and deconstructs some of the patriarchal beliefs which leave women like ‘Mamosimotsana crucified on the cross of male control and abuse in Lesotho. The story of ‘Mamosimotsana just highlights many challenges many Basotho women are faced with in institutionalised marital relationships. This research was about exploring some of those challenges, and sought to empower Basotho women who experience domestic violence under the institution of marriage within the context of cultural and Christian practices in Lesotho. It provides a space for women in marital relationships to articulate their experiences of being women in those relationships. The research encourages them to voice their un-storied experiences in order to ‘re-author’ life-giving identities or stories (Morgan 2000:5) which could empower them to challenge women’s subjugation within the dominant marital institution as understood within the traditions of the church and the wider discourse of society. The purpose of the study was therefore to reflect on the patriarchal system and the gender roles in Lesotho, as well as Basotho cultural and Christian practices that subjugate women.

Unless diligent attention is paid to the dominant patriarchal discourses of marital life among the Basotho, Basotho women will continue to be the underdogs in these relationships. In the light of this, this study makes a contribution by assisting Basotho women to question and challenge these discourses of married life which leave them under the male power operating in those relationships.

### 1.2.2 The research question

Against this background, this study asks the following question:-

How can Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships be empowered through the process of feminist pastoral care and in the light of the effects of patriarchal discourses?

### 1.2.3 The aim of the study

The research question above underscored the aim of the study, which was:

- To explore and deconstruct the effects of patriarchal discourses on the identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships

## 1.3 THE PILOT STUDY

Before conducting this study, I undertook a pilot study in order to find out how the wider Christian church in Lesotho views the effects of domestic violence on women in marital relations. This was done against a background of women finding their voices in a Western context.

## Background

In the West and USA women began as early middle of eighteenth century to fight for equal rights in the church was reflected for example in the work of Ann Lee who advocated for equal rights and responsibility of both sexes (Clark and Richardson 1977). In the Nineteenth century women reformers who were living within religious discourse, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton were involved in women's rights movement advocated for equal rights (Clark & Richardson 1977). In the last twenty five years or more feminist movements, women and pro feminist men disputed patriarchal theology and its negative effects in the church and the male dominated society (Neuger & Poling 1999:24).

In the context of Lesotho, and in the light of the Women's rights movement, I felt it important to seek out the opinions of those in power in the church, to find out how they have been influenced by this larger world shift of consciousness around women and their rights. I wanted to find out about their concerns, or lack of concern, for equal rights, and the negative effects of patriarchal theology on the women who attend their churches. I found no female pastors to interview.

Lesotho is predominantly a Christian country and therefore it is influenced by the Christian church and its beliefs. I sought the opinions of three male pastors/priests working at the National University of Lesotho (NUL). The church leaders were from the Anglican Church of Lesotho (ACL), the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the Deeper Life Bible Church (DLBC).

This pilot study was useful in ascertaining the level of awareness among male clergymen on this topic. This would further help in the research process to:

- help the researcher to refine the wording of concepts in domestic violence in order to take into consideration the sensitivity of the subject.

- determine the frequency and regularity of sermons related to domestic violence and use this as an indicator as to the priority it awards to domestic violence against Basotho married women.
- determine the context within which it is preached

The following questions were asked:

- Do you ever preach about the effects domestic violence on Basotho women?
- How often do you preach about domestic violence against women in marital relationships?
- In what context do you preach about it?

The Following were their responses:

- Anglican priest: *I had preached about the effects of domestic violence in heterosexual marriage once in my thirteen years of priesthood. I preached about the effects of domestic violence because one woman in my parish told me that her husband was beating her. Besides I have not preached about the effects of domestic violence on women in marital relationships because many women think that it is culturally normal for a husband to discipline his wife when she has been naughty.*
- Roman Catholic priest: *I have preached about domestic violence on women, men, and children in advent when talking about the story of Isaiah. I have never preached about the negative effects of patriarchy on women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships although I know that domestic violence against women is common in Lesotho.*

- Deeper Life Bible Church pastor: *I often preach about domestic violence in marital relationships. The Bible says, 'love yourself as you love your neighbour'. I speak about the effects of patriarchy on women, men and children, who experience domestic violence when I preach about the Golden Rule, 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself'. And I preach about the Golden Rule almost every Sunday. The duty for women is to manage her house, while the duties for men are how to manage his wife. He goes on to say 'I often preach that a woman is a glory of her husband, while a man is a glory of Jesus'.*

The outcome of this pilot study confirmed the initial idea for this study, that domestic violence was not often preached about and when it was, such as in the Deeper Life Church, the status quo of power and patriarchy was not challenged.

Another indicator from my interview with the pilot group of male priests helped to clarify and refine the main study by taking this information as a general assumption. This influenced my questions and helped to my wording in the main study by asking about the effects of patriarchy on married women participants. This knowledge assisted me to construct the research question.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to respond to the research question above and to achieve the aim of this study, I used a qualitative design. I have adopted this method because it is naturalistic and can be applied to the settings of life as it happens to people (Denzin and Lincoln 1994:2). I found it suitable in that it refrained from treating people, in this case women, as objects of research, which could have reproduced the dominant patriarchal text. The design was therefore designed to be empowering to

them as people with their own voices. This fits with the emphasis and the ethics of the research and the researcher. In the words of Denzin and Lincoln (1994:4) “qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.” A qualitative research approach also emphasizes the value of the nature of inquiry. It seeks answers to questions that express how social experience is created and given meaning. This study used this tool to achieve socially constructed meanings with both the female and the male participants in terms of the research questions and the aims articulated above. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2 &8) observe that a qualitative methodology includes many disciplines; it uses a multiple-method approach. For this reason, in this research, I allowed its flexibility to work alongside a contextual feminist approach to theological, historical, anthropological and sociological studies; in as far as they have a bearing on gender relations and identities in a Basotho patriarchal society. It was these gender relations and identities that I suspected were part of a ruse that constituted acts of domestic violence in their different forms and effects on women. In this way a qualitative method allows me to interrogate the knowledge of these relations and identities themselves through focusing on ways that these knowledges disempower women in marital relations.

For the purposes of this study, qualitative methodology also assisted me to help the participants in this study deconstruct those patriarchal structures and practices of gender which regulate men’s and women’s relations, especially structures which oppress women and have allowed men to exercise facile and controlling authority over women in those relationships. For this reason, a qualitative method accepts the many truths of life as they happen to people. It does not accept singular taken-for-granted truths. This ability to seek out multiple truths helped to challenge my own assumptions around patriarchal discourses as well as challenge the male participants to explore alternate identities. Within

a postmodern perspective of social realities, the qualitative method empowered the participants and me to challenge these singular and taken-for-granted patriarchal truths, particularly the belief that men are heads of the households and leaders in social relations with women; truths which leave women tied to the identities which make their lives difficult.

This qualitative methodology allows for a participatory approach in which women are given a voice to speak about their experiences of life, especially as women in social relations and marital relations. Reid (2004) says that a participatory method is by nature qualitative. For this reason, the approach of this study was both qualitative and participatory. It was in that conversation with ‘Mamosimotsana that I realised that we were who we were because of the social construction of femininity and womanhood within a patriarchal Basotho culture which has a tendency to silence women. I also became aware of the constitutive effects of patriarchal discourses of femininity and womanhood on us and our relationships and behaviours. ‘Mamosimotsana was also silenced by the gendered discourses of HIV/ AIDS circulating in Lesotho.

When starting the study I did not anticipate that she would die of AIDS. A great advantage of a participatory methodology is that it allows for flexibility in its workings in that the focus is relational and subjective rather than objective. After her death, I decided to continue the study, using her story as my point of insertion. I invited female and male participants working at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) campus to explore the research question. They had in common an interest in women’s issues, particularly the effects of patriarchy on the identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. For the development of this study, in order to get sufficient data from the participants, my interview questions were discursive, giving participants a space to say more. This

means that I used qualitative research that relied mainly on discursive questions as a tool for collecting data.

#### 1.4.1 Data collection

I engaged two groups of participants. The first group consisted of eight (8) people; four (4) women and four (4) men in the institution of marriage. They were interviewed individually for one and a half hours each. I asked the participants to identify with me what they believed and thought to be the causes and effects of patriarchy on identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. I was guided by semi-structured interviews, that is, open ended interviews (Reinharz 1992:18).

From the transcripts of these interviews I selected common themes. These themes were further explored in a focus group. The focus group consisted of two (2) women and two (2) men. This group allowed for new and different voices in a topic that is both biased through my own assumptions, and emotive.

I used the selected themes that emerged from the individual interviews and invited the focus group to further elaborate on these themes. The members of this group were new participants and I deliberately selected both male and female participants. Putting them together was aimed at allowing them to ‘interact’ and further deepen the topic under review. I particularly wanted the men to be part of a process, which would empower women in marital relationships to challenge and interrogate those dominant patriarchal discourses of married life which deprive them of living their own preferred life in marital relationships.

#### 1.4.2 Sampling

For my main sample I invited women and men working at the NUL where I work as they were easily contactable. I invited them through purposive sampling. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999: 44) explain that “purposive sampling means a strategy of selecting a small group that will be representative of a larger group on which the researcher aims to draw conclusions”. It is important to note that the participants came from different academic and work backgrounds. They were lecturers, secretaries, a driver and a cleaner at the NUL. In this way the research is limited as it did not include the unemployed, or those living in rural areas.

#### 1.4.3 Ethical research procedure

I sent a letter of consent to each of the participants to sign if they accepted my invitation (Appendix A) and I asked them to return the form. I explained the research study to the participants upon the return of the letters. The respondents who accepted the invitation signed the invitation form of consent (Appendix A). The names of people who participated in the research project were changed. I used pseudonyms. All information discussed was treated as strictly confidential. An ethical concern was that the researcher and the researched might be attacked by society because in Lesotho women are expected to be silent about their abuse. This is supported by the article “Rural Women and Violence” which says that community based researchers may face a backlash as a result of research (Dempster 1995) & (Geauvreau 1996). The participants were made aware that if they wanted to leave or not to attend the sessions they could do so because of their voluntary consent to the part of the study project.

## 1.5 A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THEORIES USED

### 1.5.1 Social construction

In the process of analysis of this study social construction epistemology was used. Social construction suggests that the world is not out there ‘as given’, but rather gives us a chance to continually invent suitable identities for a woman and man in the context of Lesotho. In this study social construction proposes that the real truth and traditional knowledge that were working in the past is under construction and changing in the new Lesotho. The colonisers and Christian missionaries came to Lesotho and brought a Western culture which brought with it Western education, economy and laws that are ever changing the traditional identities of women and men-their identities are not stagnant.

Looking at the research through the lens of social constructionists (Burr 1995 and Gergen 1985) gender categories are also socially constructed. Social construction suggests that the distinction between male roles and female roles are contextually, culturally and historically constructed and context-dependent. Social construction, used in this study, is suspicious of the dominant assumption that there is a distinct division of identities. It makes the assumption that gender roles of women and men are continually changing and that our identities are products of the society we live in.

### 1.5.2 Postmodern theory

Postmodern theory in this research challenges and questions the ‘foundationalism and absolutism of modern world, a culture of ‘real truth’. The Postmodern world, in which we are currently living, is a period of many truths. In the context of this research this postmodern world gives women many identities and many opportunities to re-invent their identities. This New Age recognises that we are invented by our culture and history. The current environment, for instance, of Global companies, Modern education and international Laws on human rights give a Mosotho woman a context to voice

and deconstruct disempowering identities in order to invent her own empowering multiple identities. It is also within a postmodern understanding in this study that even though we believe in many identities, we are still influenced by our past identities/experiences that are embedded in our culture. This makes sense when Rossouw (1993:895) observes that postmodernism does not destroy premodernism and modernism, but questions their beliefs.

### 1.5.3 Foucauldian understanding of power

For Foucault, the French poststructuralist, power is relational. This means, within this particular research, that wherever power is used within a patriarchal discourse, there will always be a form of resistance. Power also works with knowledge. Within the Basotho culture this patriarchal power and knowledge relationship has a powerful effect on categorising what is normal around a woman and her husband. This normalises their lives, making assumptions about what is right and wrong. At the same time it marginalises and subjugates the woman/wife. In the context of Lesotho these patriarchal power relationships privilege men over women. A Foucauldian understanding of power and resistance to this power offer Basotho women a voice to ‘insurrect’ their life-giving identities and deconstruct silencing identities of dominant patriarchal discourses.

### 1.5.4 Discourses

Discourses are found in our narratives. Discourses are statements, practices, institutions, structures in the Basotho patriarchal society. They bring certain knowledges to sight and hide others. In the context of this research, suffering women will challenge the negative patriarchal discourses/stories and re-author their life giving multiple identities.

### 1.5.5 Feminist theology

Feminist theology is used as a guide in this study. The notion of gender consciousness is the work of feminist theologians such as Ruether, Weedon, Graham, Bons-Storm, Neuger and Poling & Ackermann. In the context of this research feminist theology assists women experiencing domestic violence in marital relations to dismantle disempowering words and their taken-for-granted patriarchal discourses. As feminist theology is localised theology, it liberates Basotho women within and outside the church by not only academically liberating themselves but by also taking a practical action in their liberation.

### 1.5.6 Feminist pastoral care

Feminist theology and feminist pastoral care are relevant for this study because they give a woman seeking help a space to tell her stories and write her healing and liberating identities, as she is an expert of her stories. Furthermore through conversation feminist pastoral care assists a suffering woman by giving her a voice to deconstruct the silencing effects of patriarchal discourses in Lesotho.

## 1.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER ONE

This chapter familiarises the reader about the methodology of the study project. It also gives the synopsis of the theories used in the study. Chapter two discusses in-depth the theories and the beliefs of Basotho that uphold the study.

## CHAPTER 2: THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THIS RESEARCH

### Introduction

This chapter defines and discusses the key concepts, which form the backbone of this research: social construction, postmodernism, deconstruction, patriarchy, domestic violence, identity and the beliefs of Basotho that are relevant to the study. Furthermore, the chapter delves into feminist theology and feminist pastoral care which guide the study as there is a dominant assumption in the study that Lesotho, as a country, primarily embraces Christianity.

### 2.1 UNDERSTANDING POSTMODERN CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF LESOTHO

‘Culture is the interpretive and coping mechanism of society. It is the way in which people understand themselves, their world, and the appropriate interaction with one another and with the world they live in’ (Rossouw 1995:894).

Lesotho as a nation faces significant cultural changes as it shifts from a predominantly patriarchal society, towards one that is more egalitarian. Lesotho is struggling with coming to terms with vast changes that have been going on for the last one hundred years. The country has moved from a pre-modern belief system in which the ‘chiefs’ ruled without question, towards a modern belief system where individuals appear to have a certain amount of autonomy and free choice. ‘Modernity is the cultural form dominant in the Western World for the past century and a half which encourages us to represent the world as if it were organized by meta-narratives of humanized science, progress and individual meanings’ (Lowe 1991:43).

Modern culture developed as a result of Western growth models of wealth and the individual. Within a modern culture realities were understood as something fixed within truth. This would then mean that certain Western realities became privileged over others. Assimilating these changes has not been easy, and this study focuses on one of these changes, that of gender identity and power relations to Basotho women experiencing domestic violence within marital relationships.

Modern culture was introduced in Lesotho partly by the British colonial government and Christian missionaries who brought the idea of progress through education in Lesotho. However, as Bons-Storm (1996: 10) puts it, ‘modernity is being undermined by one of its tools: education. The one accepted rationality of Western androcentric modernity became disturbed by voices of women...’ Modern culture in some ways liberates Basotho women in marital relationships from the restrictive identities that kept them as inferior to their husbands. This was largely due to the role of education and new opportunities. However, concerning education and work, some Basotho women remain trapped largely in both bringing income as well as playing a subservient role. This is verified by Burstow (1992:10) when she observes that, “most married women, correspondingly, find themselves with two full time jobs- one at the workplace and one at home”. Women within this context found a certain amount of personal freedom largely through professions such as nursing and teaching that were available to them. But they were also trapped paradoxically in a subservient relationship to their husbands.

Postmodernism questions and challenges foundationalism and absolutism of modernity saying that there is no one real truth (Lowe 1991:43). Postmodern culture presents a scenario of multiple identities that view a Mosotho woman in marital relationships in a parable of many identities. For instance the

saying that ‘a woman must sulk around the pot area’ when beaten by her husband could be seen as a parable of identity. This could literally mean that when her husband has beaten her she should not show her discontentment; instead she should sit next to her utensils. This saying in Basotho culture could mean many things. This saying will be described in much greater details in the body of the research. ‘Postmodernism proposes that we live in a world of multiple realities. ‘Accordingly “reality”, as such, is context-dependent, socially constructed, and mediated or constituted primarily through language’ (Kogan & Gale 1997:102). This then offers a Mosotho woman in a marital relationship, a parable of many identities. This research utilizes some of these ideas in finding alternative life-giving identities for women living in Lesotho today. However drawing from Dockery (1995:17) when discussing postmodern culture, women and men have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voice and have that voice accepted as authentic. This however does not necessarily allow for the unspoken discourses around what can and cannot be said.

In the perspective of this study, this paradigm shift does not destroy modern culture (Rossouw 1993:895), but questions and challenges some of the scientific knowledge, which in modern cultures claimed as the taken-for-granted identities of women in marital relationships.

Bons-Storm (1996:78) writes ‘in this new era, the subject is constructed by the meaning given to it in discourse, and a manner of speaking about things, of a group in society, marked by its interest and its amount of power.’ This new era can assist Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships to critique the often hidden and not spoken about patriarchal discourses that disempower them and give them tools to construct their own preferred story identities. In the postmodern world, there is no individual essence to which the individual remains true or committed. ‘One’s identity is

continually emergent, re-formed, and re-directed as one move through the sea of ever changing relationships' (Gergen 1991:139)

According to the research question and the aim of this study, within this framework, deconstructing modern ideas around language helps Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in Basotho culture to find language for their experiences. Although beyond the scope of this research, finding the appropriate language will hopefully lead women to being able to move from the position of marginalization and domestic violence in patriarchal society towards an ability to integrate new cultural identities and meanings for their roles in the postmodern culture.

## 2.2 POSTMODERNISM AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN THE BASOTHO PATRIARCHAL CULTURE

Patriarchy is as old as the Basotho culture. In the context of my Basotho patriarchal culture and my church ACL, men have decision-making powers and are heads in the households. Women are seen as ‘perpetual minors’ to their husbands (Makoa 1997, Motebang 1997, & Maqutu 2005). Letuka et al (1998:84) defines patriarchy as follows:

Patriarchy is an ideology which supports and justifies the subordination of women by men and regulates relations between them. It also influences the definition of what constitutes a family because of its assumption that there being a family, there will be a male head. Patriarchy is particularly apparent in Sesotho marriage which is patrilineal and patrilocal.

According to Kotzé and Kotzé patriarchy is defined as:

[t]he power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological political system in which men force with direct pressure, or through ritual tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education and division of labor determine what part women shall or shall not play , and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male (Kotzé and Kotzé 2001:102).

Likewise SuEllen et al (2003:6) point out that:

In the patriarchal society a man is more privileged than a woman. They say that patriarchy is the system of knowledge and power that privilege men relative to women. The patriarchy is neither a single institution nor members of one gender. Rather, it is a version of reality that has powerfully influenced the way we think, the way we create our culture, and the way we live our lives. The patriarchy is supported by a wide range of sexist discourses and practices.

These definitions assist us in seeing that patriarchy in Basotho culture and Christianity has divided men and women in marital relationships into unequal categories. For instance men are rulers while women are subordinates. These unequal categories in Basotho patriarchal culture can be destructive in that a man can emotionally and physically abuse his wife and get away with it because of this culture. Neuger & Poling (1997:24) observe a similar reality in America. They write that ‘throughout the past twenty-five years of this wave of the feminist movement, women (and some men) have become increasingly aware of the destructive impact of patriarchy, especially on women’s lives.

A feminist theologian, Rebecca Chopp defines patriarchy as follows:

Patriarchy is revealed not simply as a social arrangement, nor as individual acts of cruelty toward women on the part of men but rather as a deep spiritual ordering that invades and spreads across the social order-through individual identity, to social practices, to lines of authority in institutions, to cultural images and representations .(Quoted in Neuger & Poling1997: 25).

These definitions underscore the role of people’s lives, on the everyday life. Morgan (2000:45) asserts that ‘acts of man’s violence and abuse against women, for example, can only exist when they are supported by acts of patriarchy and male dominance that serve to justify and excuse this violence.’ ‘Domestic violence is a problem which is often hidden, which occurs in the home’ Davies (1994:2). In domestic violence women are often victims while some men are perpetrators. Domestic violence against women in marital relationships is a very sensitive issue and is seen as a family affair. Graham (1999:191) observes that ‘... often the oppression of women takes place ‘in private’; in areas of life that are considered ‘personal.’ Domestic violence against women in marital relationships is also rife in Lesotho because it may be covered by among other factors, patriarchal institutions and practices

that people trust, such as the Basotho culture and Christian churches. Boonzaier & de la Rey (2004:443) say domestic violence is world problem that affects millions of women in the whole world. Graham and Halsey (1993:80) state that ‘violence against women is as old as patriarchal society itself, but establishing the extent of it is almost impossible...’ The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights Practice -2006 (2007:7) informs us that domestic violence against women in Lesotho is common and widespread, although it is under-reported and poorly documented. A Mosotho woman within the dominant patriarchal and cultural discourse is told to hide it, and keep it secret. This is verified by Kabeer (1994:246) who adds that ‘when a woman openly and publicly acknowledges that she is being beaten by her husband and that she wants to do something about it, she is laying herself open to the risk of her husband’s wrath as well as an alienation from her family and community.’

Women and Law-Southern Africa (WLSA Lesotho (poster) spells out forms of domestic violence as follows: emotional, physical, sexual and economical abuse. In the framework of this research study domestic violence refers to physical and emotional violence. The poster indicates that physical abuse is when a husband beats his wife, while emotional abuse is when a husband abuses his wife verbally. A Resource Manual (1993:6) which spells out strategies for confronting domestic violence also mentions ‘physical and mental assault.’ These are the most common forms experienced by women in Lesotho. The question is how Basotho patriarchal culture generates, sustains and supports them.

The following experiences demonstrate that this culture sometimes supports these forms of violence against women. At the school where I was teaching before I came to the NUL, there was a woman who had no biological children. Because of this she was emotionally abused both by her husband and the community. Within this Sesotho culture, a married woman who does not conceive child/children is often blamed by her husband and the community. In her struggle with culture this woman was able to

write her own preferred identity by penetrating the thick blanket of patriarchal discourses by running away from her home and coming to live on the school grounds alone.

Drawing from Madigan (1996:53) ‘if a man beats his partner, he would not think that this man is not acting alone as he did not individually construct this violence, it is because of his cultural and community training in “power over” tactics and violence.’ Davies (1994:7) reiterates that, ‘violence against women in marital relationships is an outcome of the belief, fostered in most cultures, that men are superior and that the women with whom they live are their possessions to be treated as men consider appropriate.’

In premodern culture Basotho men were socialised through two institutions, the *pitsos* and the *khotla* (Makoa 1997:7 & Motebang 1997:57). The pitso means an open-air meetings convened by chiefs) (Makoa 1997 & Motebang 1997). Motebang 1997:57), (the khotla, meaning the indigenous court). The pitsos were attended by male adults where village matters were discussed and ratification of the chief’s decisions was endorsed (Makoa 1997 & Motebang 1997). According to Makoa 1997:7) another important; institution was the *khotla*’ Makoa 1997:7. Makoa (1997:8) highlights that in the Basotho traditional culture ‘men were trained for power at the khotla.’ He says that the function of the khotla was to decide the power between a man and a woman and how the power is exercised again upholding gender inequality. On the other hand, it was at the khotla where boys were also taught that at manhood they should respect, protect, and provide food for their family. Makoa (1997:7) highlights ‘more importantly, the khotla was used to mould boys into responsible men by teaching them that they were the future husbands and heads of families.’ ‘While women are minors with limited independence as they

are perpetually subordinated to their husbands, parents, relatives depending on their marital status' (Makoa 1997:5).

According to Makoa (1997:9), when Lesotho became a British protectorate the Roman Dutch Law which was imposed on Lesotho by the colonial regime, was equally gender insensitive and corroborated Lesotho's customary laws which maintained that a woman in marital relationship was a perpetual minor (as it did in Britain at that time). The insensitiveness of these laws, as a result, elevated the husband to the status of head and ruler of the household. And this has made the subordination of women in marital relationships doubly reinforced. It must also be noted, as said earlier, that the modern western culture antagonised itself through education (Bons-Storm 1998:10), and created instability within the traditional structure. With education women became financially empowered (a masculine position that was man's domain) by providing for families. This instability in itself can sometimes result in domestic violence within the families. In addition Graham (1999:200) highlights that 'modernity introduced a discourse of human rights, of reason, empiricism and science; and it allowed women and their male allies to exploit the discourse of Enlightenment and emancipation to advance the course of women.'

Building on the opportunities of human rights and education, both with modernism and the shifts of the postmodern culture, however, Basotho women over the last four and half decades since independence have been given a voice to challenge traditional patriarchal practices, structures and concepts in marital relationships. The UN Conventions signed by the Lesotho government, gave a woman in a marital relationship a voice to challenge and question patriarchal discourses. An example of this is the Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (National Vision 2020 for Lesotho 2004:12 & Makoa 2007:5). Graham (1996:1) says that in postmodern times women

are given a voice to challenge the effects of patriarchal discourses through language. Consequently a Mosotho woman in a marital relationship is given a voice to report and speak about the violence she encounters in her home to The Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU) of the Lesotho Mounted Police Service (LMPS) and to their village chiefs. However, this does not allow for the cost involved to the woman of such a disclosure.

The contradictions above underscore a cultural shift to another frame of thinking with multiple identities for women facing domestic violence in their homes. Dockery (1995:14) refers to ‘the postmodern time as a dislocating time.’ This period disturbs the fixed identities of Basotho women, creating instability until a new generally accepted belief system emerges. This shifting culture is a culture, which according to Rossouw (1993:895), ‘is still in the making.’ Graham (1996:1) describes it as ‘an age of uncertainty,’ with the identities of both men and women ‘fluid’ unlike the definite identities of modern times.

Within the poststructuralist culture language has become a significant vehicle for change and this vehicle is used in this study. The issue of poststructural understanding discussed above brings us to the matter of how language can assist women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationship to move beyond the disempowering patriarchal stories/identities in marital relationships.

### 2.3 SESOTHO LANGUAGE AND THERAPY IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

It is in language that discourses, both life-giving and oppressive, can be exposed and talked about. A poststructural reading of the times argues that 'it is in language that we construct reality and the world we live in' (Freedman & Combs 1996:28). Freedman and Combs (1996:28) continue to say, that 'to postmodernists, the only worlds that people can know are the worlds we share in language, and language is an interactive process, not a passive receiving of preexisting truths.'

Weedon notes:

Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social organization and their likely social political consequences are defined and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. The assumption that the subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined but socially produced (Weedon 1987:21)

Women are not perceived as victims-innocent and not responsible in domestic violence situation. Drawing from Elliott (1997:55), 'language does not only construct or mediate our identities but continually reinforces the status quo.' In the context of this study it is through language that we construct patriarchal identities that silence a woman experiencing domestic violence in a marital relationship. She is silenced for example by the Basotho saying: 'a woman must sulk around the pot area (Machobane 1996: 39). Machobane continues 'a woman sulks around the pot area' means that a woman does not run back to her family when she has quarreled with her husband or has been beaten by her husband, but sulks around the pot area' (Machobane 1996:39). This saying means that even if a woman who has been beaten by her husband should, give her husband food, love, be obedient, and she should not run back to her maiden home. It is interesting to note that many women I know have broken with this tradition, often leading to divorce.

The saying 'm'a ngoana o tsoara thipa ka bohaleng meaning that 'a mother handles the knife by the sharp edge' is another common saying that can mean that a mother is a mediator and a protector when there are problems in the family. It could also mean that it is the same knife that turns and cuts the mother to death. Through language we can construct many story stories or truths and taken-for-granted truths that no longer help women. It is in how language is used that we can detect the causes and effects of patriarchal discourses on the identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. In this context that language gives a Mosotho woman 'a voice' to construct her own preferred stories without blaming anybody (Elliott 1997:65).

Narrative therapeutic practice has informed this research, initially through my narrative work with 'Mamosimotsana in chapter one, and then within the research through the position the researcher takes in that the researcher and the participants are co-researchers. I am mindful of the power relationship between the researcher and those participating and I have attempted to clarify their own voices. This allows the division between them and the researcher to blur. Taking what Anderson says, when participants are experts of their stories they are able to experience their own voices, power and authority in their conversations (Anderson 1997:95). Morgan (200:45) highlights that 'narrative therapists are interested in discovering; acknowledging and 'taking apart' (deconstructing) beliefs, ideas, and practices of women's life that are serving to assist the problem and the problem story.'

## 2.4 THEOLOGICAL LANGUAGE IN THE CHURCH

In this research my theological point of insertion is the very dominance of patriarchy and its effects on women who are experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships in the church and the Basotho society, and the way this has become defined within a faith culture. There are traditional church teachings (for example in my church, ACL) which support the superiority of a husband and the inferiority of a wife in the Basotho household. For instance Graham and Hasley (1993:85) note the often cited scripture, ‘for Adam was first formed, then Eve...’ There are many passages in scripture that appear, when taken literally, to support the status quo; for example ‘neither was the man created for the woman, but the woman for the man.’ (1Tim 2:11: New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha: 1989:224). When these Biblical texts are interpreted without the understanding of a cultural and historical context, it is not difficult to see how Basotho women are made to submit to their husbands. These selected scriptures also feed into the large cultural belief system that supports a husbands' power over his wife. This belief system was to be found within traditional culture and the discourse of the church at the time. Makoia (2007:6) for example says that missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS), now Lesotho Evangelical Church (LEC) wrote that women were/are destined to be their husbands’ subordinates through sayings like “in the beginning the woman was created for a man as his help mate and companion...the first woman was a free gift to the first man, given with Divine munificence unconditionally”.

Exposing this power imbalance and inequality in this context challenges the church today to find ways of empowering women and society to make a stand against such practices and thus re-interpret faith. In order to accomplish this, this research has employed a Foucauldian assumption that power is always held within a relationship that is never equal (White & Epston 1990, Flaskas & Humphreys 1993). Working with this assumption power is not an object to be grasped but held in relationship with

resistance. In other words there is no power without resistance and it is this resistance that women in this instance can use to change the status quo within the church theology. The many alternate stories and exceptions to rules already cited in this study show this resistance. Nevertheless Paul for example states, ‘as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female, for all you are one in Christ’ (The Holy Bible. New Standard Version with Apocrypha 1909:200).

The threads of these beliefs are sought out in this study in order to find new social constructions that can negotiate or renegotiate in its way into the future of the church in Lesotho.

## 2.5 FOUCAULDIAN UNDERSTANDING OF POWER IN THE CONTEXT OF LESOTHO

According to Foucault power/knowledge is constituted by us through stories, narratives, and discourses. This then builds on the ideas discussed in this study of language, culture and belief systems which are integral to the power of the established churches and the Basotho society in Lesotho.

According to Foucault power is always present and it is found everywhere in human relations (Townley 1994:8). White and Epston expound on Foucault’s ideas (White & Epston 1990:22) by arguing that, ‘we are all caught up in a net or web of power/knowledge; it is not possible to act apart from this domain and are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others.’ In a Foucaudian understanding, a husband and his wife in the family and the church have power and they are at the same time undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation with each other (White & Epston 1990:22).

In this Foucauldian understanding power/knowledge that a husband and a wife exercise in relation to each other, divides them into what White and Epston (1990:20) refer to as ‘normalising’ and ‘abnormalising’ categories. Quoting Foucault (in White and Epston, 1990:19) “these truths” are “normalising” in the sense that they constitute norms around which persons are incited to shape or constitute their lives and ideas.’ In a patriarchal society normalising power in Lesotho shapes and divides a man and a woman into unequal categories, for example, a husband can be seen as the powerful, ideal, head and the one who can dictate what is to happen in the household while a wife can be seen as the powerless and therefore subordinate in the household. However within a poststructural understanding there are many stories about ourselves, some of which speak of women within the Basotho patriarchal culture, being strong, ‘handling a knife by the sharp edge’, meaning a woman is able to protect the children and the family from her husband’s anger. These stories then can become the alternate stories that can create a different power relationship.

Drawing from Freedman and Combs (1996:39) there are many beliefs that have acquired truth status and have thus become ‘internalised’ as the dominant truths’. These truths tend to blind men and women so that they do not see the possibilities that other narratives might offer them other alternatives. Foucauldian language, “people tend to become “docile bodies” under’the [internalized] gaze” of those who control the discourses of power in our culture’ Freedman & Combs 1990:39). Foucault (1980:80) refers to these other narratives which are hidden to us, as subjugated knowledges. In the Foucauldian view, husbands and their women might stand up to the “gaze” of the dominant patriarchal culture (Freedman & Combs 1996:14) to resurrect their own preferred subjugated or empowering story identities.

## 2.6 PATRIARCHAL BELIEFS AND IDENTITIES THAT SUSTAIN POWER OVER WOMEN IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

The story of the woman of the school where I once taught highlights issues of identity of women within patriarchal culture and their struggle for alternative identities (see 2.2). White demonstrates this point when he writes that ‘poststructuralist understandings account for identity as a social and public achievement - identity is something that is negotiated within social institutions and within communities of people - and is shaped by historical and cultural forces’ (White 1999:58).

My personal story corroborates White’s observation. When I reached puberty, on the first time of my menstruation, I underwent a rite of passage from girlhood to womanhood. This rite of passage was a moment in my life which deepened my identity as a woman. It proclaimed my identity as a woman and prescribed a code of conduct I had to adhere to hence forth. Epston and White(1992:12) capture this reality when they note that ‘the rite of passage is a universal phenomenon for facilitating transitions, in social life, from one status and/or identity to another.’ In the context of Sesotho culture the discourse around this rite of passage is that when a girl reaches puberty, (at her first time of menstruation) she must be taken to a well to draw some water. On that day, early in the morning my mother put a clay pot on my head. Two young married women accompanied me to a well. I was half dressed. When I got to the well one woman filled the clay pot to the brim with water, they put it on my head. I was given a new identity; I was told that I was a woman, and I should not play with boys. Among other things this new identity cautioned me to be aware of their presence around my life. I was told to keep my body pure, whereas boys appeared free of this burden. This concurs with the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Sports (2003) where it says that ‘in Sesotho culture a woman’s identity is founded on patriarchal beliefs, in which men are the primary beneficiaries’.

That social identity was replaced by a new one when I was sent to a teacher training college. I became a teacher, breadwinner and a household keeper. This is a social construction that benefits the survival of a larger group. According to Gergen (1991:157) ‘...one has an identity because it is permitted by the social rituals of which one is part; one is allowed to be a certain type of person because this sort of person is essential to the broader games of society. Thabane (The New Land Law. Federation of Women Law Lawyers. unpublished paper) indicates that ‘the Land Bill protects the rights of women specifically by putting them on equal positions with men.’

Dominant patriarchal beliefs are supported by the stories/identities and the practices that are sustained within a community. Letuka et al (1998:38) observe, ‘patriarchy positions men in relation to power that is taken-for-granted to such an extent that abuse is entertained under the guise of leadership, care and protection.’ When writing this research, I listened to a traditional dance of a group of women Basali ba Litotla (these are women in marital relationships who have conceived children) on (Radio MoAfrica FM 22/7/2012). These mothers were singing a traditional song saying, ‘I cannot reveal my problems to other women because they are liars’. While listening to them singing it was as if the powerless reproduce the belief that one woman cannot trust another. It is also very common that in abuse the abused begin to abuse those beneath them.

In the context of Lesotho there is both contradiction and conflict of identities in that some man can be both a protector and a perpetrator of violence in the family. This is verified by Burstow (1992:6) when she says, ‘the wife is maimed, violated, beaten and protected by her man. For example in the Basotho culture to some men the custom of bohali entitles a man to protect and own a woman. The custom of paying bohali is as old as the patriarchal culture. Bohali is a rite of passage that continues constructing

and changing identity of a woman into ‘a wife’s service to her husband and family or into a mother’s service to her children’ (Makoa 1997:8). Bohali is a ritual in which a head of cattle is given by the parents of the bridegroom to the brides’ family (Maqutu 2005:8).

Payment of bohali is one of the sources of gender-based violence. Increasingly many people wrongly take the payment of bohali as buying women, and as a result treat them as bought property. This wrong perception needs to be corrected if Sesotho marriage is to have the respect it had originally (Ministry of Gender, Youth and Sports 2003:6)

Schuler (1994:161) likewise says ‘because of ‘lobola’, ‘bohali’ in Sesotho, the general male beliefs, that having paid for a wife, to beat her is well within a husband’s rights”. In addition Schuler (1994:10) highlights that “because of a woman’s relationship to a man, a woman is vulnerable to domestic violence.’ According to Casalis (1861:182), an early Christian missionary, ‘this custom reduces a Mosotho woman to the state of bordering slavery”. However Maqutu (2005:8) argues that ‘the customary marriage without an exchange of cattle for the bride is unthinkable. Yet to say women are bought and sold would be a misconception and a distortion.’ It is alleged that through this practice some men take ‘ownership’ and regard women as objects and their ‘possessions’. On the other hand bohali was/is a custom or social construction that helped/helps the society and the families of the bride and bridegroom to create stability and friendship. As with many practice however, the custom of bohali is open to abuse. Bohali is therefore commonly used as a tool of oppression as well as value creating great contradiction.

In spite of this oppression and labels given to those who break the gender rules, such as *monna o jele phehla*’, (meaning that a man is docile) for a man who helps his wife in the kitchen, and prostitute for a woman who is a breadwinner, change happens. Society is constantly changing and facing new challenges that de-stabilise the status quo, as has already been discussed with modernism brought in by

the West and education. New challenges face Lesotho such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In addition Basotho women are becoming empowered through outside employment, thus reducing their dependence upon their husbands.

The changing face of employment however has in many instances disempowered men as can be commonly seen with men who have lost their jobs. This is understood as a contributing factor to violence. Single men for example who were interviewed by Dyer (2001:10) said that in Sesotho traditional culture men had the final word in the family, but now because women are also employed, a man's word is no longer final. Boonzaier (2005: 10) puts it this way 'the change of gender roles that have been constructed by culture that masculinity is equal with economic provision and powers have resulted into a conflict in the family.' Makoa (1997:5) says that 'freedom of women is either denied or constrained by a battery of national laws, societal norms, taboos, traditions, customs, institutions, and the ideology of patriarchy.' Additionally Makoa (1997) and Maqutu (2005) states that in customary law marriage a woman is a perpetual minor.

However, in Lesotho today the laws and conventions that challenge the traditional culture to empower Basotho women are incorporated into the constitution. For instance Lesotho has ratified laws and conventions which give women and men equal rights. For instance the Beijing Declaration of 1995 states that men and women have equal rights (Chaka-Makhooane 2000:2, National Vision 2020 for Lesotho 2004:12 & Makoa 2007:5). Again the Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act of 2006 gives husbands and wives equal rights (Lesotho: Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 9 of 2006). The Act declares that 'subject to the provisions of this Act with regard to the administration of a joint estate, the common law, customary law and any other marriage rules in terms of which a husband acquires the

marital power over the persons and property of his wife are repealed...’ (Legal Capacity of Married Persons Act 9 of 2006). This Act repealed customary laws of marital power that say that the husband is ‘the head of the family and posses the decisive voice in all matters affecting the common life of the spouses...’

The issue of identity discussed above brings us to the theoretical frameworks within which this research is positioned. These frameworks are grounded within the social construction movement.

## 2.7 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER ROLES IN THE CONTEXT OF LESOTHO

The theory of social construction helps interrogate and challenge the belief that gender roles are fixed and defined from birth. It assists us to see through the taken-for-granted ‘truths’ socially constructed within the Sesotho culture, in order to create a new social order that can be sustainable for the future in a non oppressive way towards both men and women. Kuumba (2001:9) highlights ‘... gender refers to the rank of ordering of this social division, and subsequent statuses, on interlocking societal levels. The distinction between female and male spheres operates in the family, the economy, the religion, political system, educational system.’ In this study my interest has been on how this very order in the Basotho patriarchal culture has often left women as the passive receivers of male hierarchy. There is a tradition in Lesotho that at the birth of an infant, the first boy in the family is announced by a woman who beats the father of the baby with a stick. The significance of this is to show that the baby who is born is going to be the defender of the family and community. If an infant is a girl, her birth is announced by a woman by pouring a calabash of water on the father’s head, signifying a person whose responsibility is to do domestic work (Sechefo s a). However, on the assumption that culture changes both suddenly as well as gradually, there will always be exceptions to the rules. For example, when the

father of the newly born baby is in SA (South Africa) working as a migrant labourer, or doctors publicise the gender of an infant before its birth the tradition changes, indicating the changing nature of the social construct.

Gender too is a 'social construct and the creation of society' (Burr 1995, Gergen 1985, and Freedman & Combs 1996). 'This can mean that the categories, with which we as human beings apprehend the world, do not necessarily refer to real divisions. A radical example is that of gender and sex' (Burr 1995:2). Gender roles however have become to many Basotho one of those unquestioned 'truths' which have been sustained by Sesotho culture including the Christian church. These traditional forms of education entrenched gender roles which were, and are still sustained by dominant western and local Christian teachings. The Ministry of Education (1982:1) confirms that Basotho boys and girls acquire different gender roles; roles that generally benefit boys more than girls.

These dominant gender roles that are sustained by the Basotho culture today are beginning to blur. Basotho women during the twentieth century sought work in South Africa (SA) resisting the assumption of a man being a breadwinner bringing about another exception to the assumed truth. As Makoa puts it, 'in spite of the British High Commissioner for Basutoland (now Lesotho) in 1900 issuing a statement that prohibited the Basotho women from seeking work in South Africa, women transgressed the prohibition. These women who wanted to work in SA were labeled as "runaway wives" (matekatse)' (Makoa1997: 10). Makoa continues '... yet the fleeing of married women from Lesotho was critically significant, it signifies the growing gender consciousness among Basotho women.' Khamahali (1915:2) informs us that Basotho women could seek work in SA or become matekatse if their husbands were always beating them. This indicates that oppression in marital

relationship might be met with resistance. Taking Burstow's (1992:18) view 'women's vision may be seen as an act of resistance in its own right. Seeing out of our own eyes is itself disobeying the patriarchy.'

In the context of the Basotho patriarchal culture there is both a contradiction and a conflict of identities in that a man is both a protector and a perpetrator of violence in the family. This is verified by Burstow (1992:6): when she says 'the wife is maimed, violated, beaten, and protected by her man.' This highlights that the taken-for-granted stories/ identities in marital relationships are dislocated and deconstructed by the society.

## 2.8 DECONSTRUCTION

According to White (1991:27) 'deconstruction has to do with procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices. These so-called "truth", those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices and those familiar practices of self and relationship and are subjugating peoples' lives.'

Deconstruction has already been used in this study to explore non-dominant stories/gender identities such as the announcement of the birth of a baby in traditional Basotho culture. In this study deconstruction means finding alternate none dominant discourses that can empower Basotho women experiencing domestic violence within a cultural and Christian context in the belief that there are always contradictions.

Discourses are exposed often in language and language usually creates distinctions and divisions in the form of binary opposites of male and female, good and bad, right and wrong etc. In the context of this research language creates distinct gender roles and stereotypes. As Derrida, the poststructuralist (Powell 1997:26) says ‘in male-dominated societies, man is central (and woman is the marginalized other, repressed, ignored, pushed to the margins)’. It is in this marginalisation of a woman that a man might beat his wife.

These identities create differences. The Derridan idea of difference implies that identity is only possible because of that which is not that identity (Wolfrey 1998:7) and that which is not that identity is threatening. For instance in the Basotho patriarchal society a man can know his real identity but also he can know his identity by fear of that which is not male, ‘masculine’ but the ‘other’ (feminine) the ‘abnormal’ which might be threatening.

In deconstruction, ‘the meanings are not contained in a word by itself but by the word in relation to its context, ‘and no two contexts will be exactly the same (Freedman & Combs 1996:29). For example the term ‘woman’ and ‘man’ can have many different identities, depending on the context. The term ‘woman’ varies from ideal to victim’ to object of sexual desire, according to its context’ (Weedon 1987:25).

## 2.9 FEMINIST PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Feminist theology seeks to challenge any form of marginalisation, subjugation and abuse towards women and men in patriarchal society. In the context of this study, there is a focus on how feminist practical theology can contribute in healing and liberating men and women in marital relationships from the oppressing effects of patriarchy.

According to Ackermann (1991:107):

Feminism as the struggle to end sexist oppression, does not aim to reflect the views of, or benefit, any one specific group of women, nor does it seek the privilege of women over men. Feminism is commitment to the praxis of liberation for women from all that is oppressive. It sees sexist oppression as “of primary importance not because it is the basis of all other oppression, but because it is the practice of domination most people experience, whether their role be that of discriminated against, exploiter or exploited”.

This work has benefited me from many aspects of feminist practical theology and has been particularly informed by the focus on action leading to theory rather than the other way round (Ackermann 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996 and Ackermann & Bons-Storm 1998). Ackermann and Bons-Storm (1998:4) & Ackermann (1993:22) emphasise that the lives of women, the neglected category, should be important in the male dominated discourse.

Practical theology from a feminist perspective was born and exposed during the second half of the twentieth century. It has critiqued patriarchal tradition (Graham 1999:130). This research utilises feminist practical theology that gives all people a voice to expose the effects of patriarchal discourses.

Feminism questions, and challenges dominant ways of understanding gender relationships and the effects of patriarchy on people's lives (Thomas 2002:86) that disempower them in order to write their own liberating and healing identities. As Ackermann (1996:34) says 'a feminist theology of praxis should be understood as: critical, committed, constructive, collaborative and accountable reflection on the theories and praxis of struggle and hope for the mending of creation based on the stories of women/marginalized and oppressed people.' Feminist theologians in this respect are involved 'with women struggling against discrimination, violence and oppression' (Ackermann 1994:202).

In this study feminist practical theology is understood as feminist theology that wants the Christian church in Lesotho to be a vehicle of liberation, healing and transformation of the negative effects of patriarchal structures and practices on identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relations 'within the church and beyond the Christian community' (Pattison 1993:15).

Feminist theology calls for theologians to be involved in action rather than being observed, and it is calling for feminist theologians to liberate and heal the disempowered.

## 2.10 FEMINIST CONTEXTUAL LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Feminist theology is conscious that ‘theology is contextual because it is culturally and historically conditioned’ (Ackermann 1993:22). Within this context it seeks to liberate women from oppression and gives her a voice to speak. Ackermann (1994:206) says that ‘the task of feminist theologians is to interpret the unheard voices so that practices in ministry can be transformed continually to reflect on love and justice as values of the reign of God.’ For instance feminist theologians have therefore given me, a woman a voice to begin to challenge and question traditional theology, within the Basotho culture and the Christian church I belong to. It challenges and questions the idea that God has relegated a woman to a subordinate position. Since I started training with the Institute for Therapeutic Development (ITD) I began to discover the language for both my exclusion and dominant destructive patriarchal discourses around women within the ACL. Words have constitutive effects along with their taken-for-granted meanings, sometimes leading to the belief that ‘a woman is a man’s property he can beat her’ (Ministry of Gender, Youth and Sports 2003:4). This is often not said but it has been assumed and constituted as the truth within the language we use. In this sense language is never innocent (Foucault 1990:80)

Contextual liberation theology means a shift from global and unitary knowledges to localised knowledges (Bosch (1991:427). In the context of this study contextual theology sides with the marginalised, and the suffering (Bosch 1991:427) Basotho women in marital relationships. Ackermann (1993:22) points out that “feminist theology is concerned with liberating acts, and this concern is not only academic but concrete and practical calling for solidarity with the victims of oppression”. In this study feminist contextual liberation theology needs us to be very active and take concrete care against power imbalances in the household where some Basotho women experience injustice.

## 2.11 PASTORAL CARE

Pattison (1993:8) says that ‘historical practice of pastoral care has always been pluralistic, variegated and flexible according to needs and circumstances, as well as having an identifiable, care of healing, sustaining, reconciling and guiding.’ Pattison (1993:15) continues that ‘one of features of the experience of pastoral care which is very important is the fact that while pastoral care may be carried on primarily in, or on behalf of particular Christian communities, it cannot be directed solely towards Christians.’ Drawing from Pattison pastoral care is understood as caring for all vulnerable people, Christians and non-Christians. Sevenhuijsen (1998:131) sums this up when saying pastoral care is about ‘repairing of citizens so that they can once more take part in their normal participation.’ However, ‘pastoral care requires us ‘not to care for but to care with people who are in need of care’ (Kotzê & Kotzê 2001:7). Journeying together moves the pastoral position away from a top down approach towards a greater collaboration. In the context of this study this ties in with narrative therapeutic that human beings seeking help are experts of their stories. Louw (1998:27) puts it another way ‘in counseling the individual’s inner frame of reference becomes the focal point and the person is perceived as a living human document, the actual source of knowledge.’ This research contributes towards the transformation of the disempowering effects of patriarchy towards God’s kingdom that seeks love and care and empowerment of all.

## 2.12 FEMINIST PASTORAL CARE APPROACH

Pastoral care from feminist perspective has been used in this research to primarily care and listen to the stories of women and men. According to Graham (1996:174) feminist pastoral care ‘enables women to speak their lives authentically in a world where they are frequently ignored, belittled or misunderstood.’

The Basotho women in this work have ‘a voice to deconstruct androcentric traditions’ (Graham 1996:14 & 1999:130) and also ‘analyze assumptions of modernity’ (Bons-Storm 1996:73). Pastorally this work also assists Basotho women to reconstruct their own empowering ‘multiple experiences’ or ‘multiple identities’ Thomas (2002:86) without blaming the ‘other’ (Elliott 1997: 56) ‘in the age of uncertainty’ (Graham 1996: 1).

Although this research is not primarily therapeutic in nature it has made use of narrative pastoral care by allowing the participants to become experts of their stories. This tallies with what Louw (1998:27) says above, that ‘in counseling, the individual’s inner frame of reference becomes the focal point and the person is perceived as a living human document, the actual source of knowledge’ and ‘the experts in their own lives’ (Morgan 2000:2). Feminist pastoral care used in this study insists that women themselves should tell their experiences and stories rather than by the others (often men) around them (Russell & Carey 2003:72) as experts of their own local knowledge. As Ackermann puts it, ‘telling stories breaks the silence of women...’ (Ackermann 1996:46). In addition Anderson (1997:95) states that ‘when clients are narrators of their stories, they are able to experience and recognize their own stories, power and authority.’ In Foucault’s view women when telling their stories are able to challenge and to ‘resurrect’ their empowering knowledge and challenge their silencing knowledge from the disempowering effects of patriarchal discourses.

From the perspective of this study a feminist pastoral care approach is calling pastoral therapists to take the knowledge/experiences of women who seek care seriously as Bons-Storm 1996:71) highlights:

women looking for the “utopia of freedom”....hoping to meet “a gardener” with compassionate and inspiring attention, try to tell stories in pastoral care or counselling that do not fit in the

dominant sociocultural narrative and its roles for women, they are often not believed. The pastor or counselor does not look at women as persons with authority, able to name their experiences in their own voice, albeit a rebel voice.

## CHAPTER3: DECONSTRUCTIVE/CONSTRUCTIVE VOICES OF THE PARTICIPANTS

### Introduction

Based on methodological issues in chapter one and the theoretical framework used in chapter two, this chapter holds the actual text of the study with the voices of the participants for-grounded. The chapter begins with the individual interviews with women, and men and lastly the interview with the focus group. The researcher has selected the texts from the transcribed interviews and edited these by selecting the relevant conversations that are in line with the research question and aim.

### 3.1 THE VOICES OF THE FEMALE AND THE MALE PARTICIPANTS

#### 3.1.1 The Voices of Female the participants

##### **1. Female participant number one**

Mora is a lecturer and became very vocal when discussing the topic. Her two children are studying at the university (NUL). Her husband is employed but he is not the primary breadwinner. I invited Mora for an interview over the phone. Her response to my invitation was, ‘we, women suffer too much under men and nobody cares about us.’ Mora and I spent about thirty minutes speaking on the phone about her experience in her home. She said that she would be very pleased to be one of the participants in the study. She ended by asking that I should not write what she had discussed with me on the telephone. We met in her office and the conversation lasted for one and half hours.

*‘Matsela :What do you understand by the effects of patriarchy around Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships to mean?’*

*Mora: Men beat their wives because in Lesotho men have power and are ruling in the household. They are heads in the families because the society says they are the heads and are powerful. They beat their*

wives. It surprises me because the educated and the uneducated beat their wives. Married women experience domestic violence at home, at work and even in the Christian church. And some churches violate women because they do not ordain women. Because men abuse their wives physically and emotionally women do not perform well in what they do. Do you know what they say as they beat their wives?

‘Matsela: I do not think I know. Could you tell me what they say?’

Mora: Men, when beating their wives also verbally abuse them. When they beat their wives, they say,  
*‘I want to show you that it is not Beijing here, this is my family.’*

‘Matsela: How could they talk about Beijing when they beat their wives? Why Beijing?’

Mora: *May I tell you something? It is now that my grandmother tells me that my grandfather when he was alive physically abused her. My grandmother says that she remained silent about it because she did not want to leave her grandchildren and her house. She went on to say: When my grandmother heard my angry words she said, ‘but your grandfather was not totally bad. We never lacked what to eat.’*

‘Matsela: Why do you think your grandmother was silent about her abuse?’

Mora: *In short in Beijing it was agreed that men and women are equal in the family and at work. Our culture says that a man is the head in the family because he is the breadwinner. This is not true because in my family, I am the breadwinner. I pay the school fees for my children. Yes, in the past when women were not educated or when there were no textile firms women were always in the kitchen. Today many women are breadwinners.*

‘Matsela: Hmm!’

*Mora: Men are dominating and always feel powerful. This power they have makes them powerful and violent in the household. A woman who is a breadwinner is called a prostitute. In Sesotho I am not supposed to be a breadwinner. But now I am a breadwinner and all women working on the campus and men working on the campus are breadwinners. One husband when beating his wife says 'in this house you are one of my children'. Modern power which came from overseas came with education and this education gives women and men power. May I conclude by saying, I am not a child myself. In the indigenous Basotho men respected their wives because they spent the whole day at the khotla, only to come home at night. The Western education and Christianity tell us that women are unclean. Men who play soccer have to camp away from their homes because when they play they should be clean, not to sleep with their wives because they are unclean. In the Bible we are told that when men were preparing to go to war they were not supposed to sleep with women because they are unclean. (Mora became very emotional as she said all this).*

## **2. Female participant number two**

I first approached 'Mafiso in her office.' Mafiso works as an administrator at NUL. I explained the question and the aims to the research participant. She said, 'You know domestic violence is rife in Lesotho.' 'Mafiso is a woman who is in the early forties. 'Mafiso is also a small business woman. Mafiso and I met in her office.

*'Matsela: You said domestic violence is high and common in Lesotho. How can you explain domestic violence against women in marital relationships, and what makes it so high?*

*'Mafiso: Men are 'scared' of women who are independent because these women earn money. Women today are educated, they have money. They think that when we are independent, and we have money;*

*we want to take their headship. And yet we, women know that according to our culture men are the heads in the household. No one will take their headship. We have to respect them, and we do respect them.*

*‘Matsela: You said domestic violence is high and common in Lesotho. How can you explain domestic violence?’*

*‘Mafiso: Domestic violence against married women is a physical attack on a wife by a husband and sometimes when a man forces his wife to have sex with him when she does not like it. He forces her to have sex with him because he claims that he has paid bohali. It seems that because they pay bohali we become their property. Sometimes a man beats his wife when she buys something which she thinks it is necessary. He can beat his wife saying that she should get permission before buying anything. But with me my husband does not beat me when I have bought what I think is needed in the family but in some families women should have permission from their husbands before buying anything.*

*‘Matsela: Can you say something about domestic violence in this culture?’*

*‘Mafiso: It is bad because our culture expects a woman to tolerate it. Our Sesotho culture says that a beaten woman should not tell anybody about it. When a woman is beaten by her husband she is discouraged from informing her family. But today women whose husbands physically and verbally attack them can inform the police (Gender and Child Protection Unit)) (GCPU). In some villages women are told at the pitso that if their husbands beat or emotionally abuse them they should report that to the village chief. Women are well protected because they can inform the village chief and the police gender protection unit about their abuse.*

*‘Matsela: Do you think that all women have this protection?’*

*‘Mafiso: A woman who does not have children has no protection from the society.*

‘Matsela: *What does the idea of being a mother mean to you?*

‘Mafiso: *In Sesotho, a mother is a woman who has child/children. In fact for me a mother is any married woman who looks after herself, who dresses well, and respects herself and her husband.*

### **3. Female Participant number three**

Khalala is in her late forties and she is married. She works as a secretary at the NUL. She was keen to participate and contribute. I talked to her about my aim of the research study. We met in her office where she told me that she was worried about violence against women in marital relationships.

‘Matsela: *What makes you worried about domestic violence against women in marital relationships?*

Khalala: *In Sesotho a woman is a real woman when bohali has been paid. When bohali has been paid a woman rarely divorces her husband. Her family feels very proud of their daughter because bohali has been paid. When bohali is paid, it makes them rich. Some women who encounter domestic violence run away whether bohali has been paid or not. Some women are afraid to run away because if they run away they are called prostitutes ‘matekatse’. In the Basotho culture women are not allowed by their parents when bohali has been paid, even if her husband abuses her. That label makes some woman tolerate domestic violence or handle the knife by the sharp edge. In Sesotho culture women who return from marriage are not accepted in their maiden homes.*

‘Matsela: *Could you tell me what you think about ‘bohali’? What has it got to do with domestic violence against married women? (I asked these questions because it appeared that she upheld the ideas and the practices of bohali).*

Khalala: *It is ‘bohali’ that makes children to belong to her father’s family. What sometimes surprises me is when educated women do not respect their husbands. I am a breadwinner myself and my*

*husband is employed, but I respect my husband because he is the father of my children. Any way there is one thing I cannot tolerate, that is to sulk around the pot area when he has beaten me.*

*‘Matsela: What does respect for a husband mean for you?’*

*Khalala: It means that I should know that as a woman I am not equal to my husband, our culture tells us that. These new ways which came with the westerners cause conflicts in the households. It does not matter whether I am highly educated my husband is superior and I am inferior. Women talk about Beijing which says women and men are equal. For me this is not true. A woman will never be equal to a man.*

#### **4. Female Participant number four**

*‘Mabohlale is a woman who is forty years old. She has been working on the university campus for five years. She describes herself as a “born again” Christian. Before talking to her about this study, I was not aware that she is a divorcee. She has two children, a boy and a girl, who, she says, ran away from her husband. She accepted my invitation. We decided to have our conversation in my office.*

*‘Matsela: What can you say about domestic violence against women in the Basotho Culture?’*

*‘Mabohlale: Some of us, because of domestic violence, decided to leave our families. Sometimes it makes me feel guilty when I see my friends still in their marriage. Somehow they manage to stay in their marriages. Some women think that when a woman leaves her husband that she is a failure. In my culture if a man beats his wife that is an acknowledgement of love.*

*‘Matsela: How do you think other women might have managed to leave?’*

*‘Mabohlale: You know because domestic violence against women in marriage is too much in Lesotho, some women of my age and others younger than me are divorcees. I was divorced a long time ago’.*

*But sometimes we women have meetings at the well, when we have gone to draw some water. Here we share our experiences which we encounter in our own homes. Older women tell the younger women to sulk around the pot area when our husbands have beaten us. Some women do sulk around the pot area. I thought that this sulking around the pot area did not make things better in my household. I decided to go back to my maiden home with my children. I know there are women who prefer to sulk around the pot area instead of returning to their maiden homes. There are some who have lost their lives while sulking around the pot area. Another thing which women discuss at the well is that women should tolerate domestic violence for the sake of their children. Older women say that according to our culture 'a mother should hold the knife by the sharp edge' (meaning that a mother should tolerate problems, domestic violence and must be a mediator between her husband and children). But eventually I ran away with my children afraid of being killed.*

*'Matsela: Do you think women have some power in their homes?*

*'Mabohlale: Women have some power because I cook what I think will be good for the family. It is my responsibility to look after my house .I care for my children. As a woman I am expected to have children and to care for the whole family.*

*'Matsela: Could you tell me why you think that some men beat their wives?*

*'Mabohlale: Men when beating their wives tell them that they have paid bohali to marry them. The church also gives men power to beat their wives because our culture and the church say that a woman should be obedient to her husband. I agree that as women we should respect our husbands. There is another reason why men beat their wives. In our culture m it is said that if a man really loves his wife he shows it by beating her. There are times when a woman who is always beaten believes that her husband beats her because he loves her very much. Society also says that often a husband beats his*

wife out of love, meaning 'monna o shapa hobane a boulela' (this literally means that when a husband beats his wife that in Basotho culture is an acknowledgement of love).

### 3.1.2 The voices of the male participants

#### 1. Male participant number one

Liau is in his mid fifties and works at the university as a driver. I have known him for some years now and we often share life experiences with each other. He has a small farm and sells pork to the villagers. We met in my office and as usual he greeted me by saying, 'm'e Eli ('meaning mother Eli, a nickname for Eliza (my Christian name). He went on to say: *Nowadays when men are drunk they beat their wives. I do not know why they beat them when they are drunk.*

'Matsela: *Can you tell me something about your thoughts on why men beat their wives in marital relationships.*

Liau: *I do not know why men beat their wives, but when they do, it is probably because women in our culture are our children. A parent beats his/her child even when the child has made a small mistake. It is common because in this society a man is thought to be superior. In our culture it is not wrong for a husband to beat his wife. I am superior in my house even the Bible tells us that a man is superior and a woman is inferior; remember the story of Adam and Eve. But domestic violence spoils peace in the household.*

'Matsela: *So what is it then that you believe?*

Liau: *We men have something which I do not understand; some men beat their wives when they feel like it. As a man I believe that a man is strong, the head, and the ruler in the household, while a*

*woman is weak. In this country the family belongs to a man because he is the head, his wife is a minor. This is what I believe. Hmm.*

*‘Matsela: Could you explain why you make that remark? Does anything click in your mind that you can share with me?’*

*Liau: There is something which has just struck me. Do you think that women should employ men and women are powerful like men? Again there are women who are in charge of their family when their husbands have gone to the mines in South Africa. What do you think?’*

*‘Matsela: You have said that some women have power when their husbands are away. What do you think that has that to do with domestic violence.’*

*Liau: But the society tells us that a woman is very strong because she can put a ten litre bucket of water on her head while carrying a baby on her back. But history tells us that in times of wars and cannibalism men protected women and children. In my house it is me who protects all my children because women are physically weak. If a woman competes with her husband in the house by showing that she is as strong as her husband - that woman often is beaten. She threatens her husband by showing that she is powerful. But we must not forget that there are women who are not strong and men who just drink and do not care about their families. In our culture it is believed that some women are so powerful because they are witches, most of the witches are married women and men fear them.*

*‘Matsela: You mean women are sometimes too powerful?’*

*Liau: A witch is too powerful, they kill. But also on the radio and in the newspapers one hears men who have been beaten and killed by their wives. Marrying an educated woman is not right. They are too independent. I must be honest with you, some of us men sometimes are scared by educated women. The husband might always attack his wife physically because he might complain that his wife might forget*

*that she was a minor in the family. Our culture says that a woman must always be obedient to her husband.*

*‘Matsela: Could you explain how an educated woman can scare her husband?’*

*Liau: It scares their husbands because it makes them have money. They become breadwinners. In the past the role of a breadwinner was the husband’s. When they have money often they do not obey their husbands, some of them become too loose. Do you know what the word ‘bo-‘na’ means? Our wives forget this word.*

*‘Matsela: Bo-‘na, bonna is a new word to me. I think it can mean manhood. Can you say what it means to you?’*

*Liau: It means that a woman is me, her husband. She is my flesh. She will always be my follower. It means that I am always in front, she is always behind me.*

*‘Matsela: I would like you to respond to the question before. Could you share your thoughts about domestic violence against women in marital relationship?’*

*There was a pause.*

*Liau: I have answered that question.*

## **2. Male participant number two**

Thabang is the oldest participant in this research study. He has worked as an administrator for more than three decades at NUL. I find him respectful and gentle. After he had accepted my invitation, I discussed the research project with him in his office. During our discussion he said: Domestic violence against women in marital relationships in this country exists and yet we rarely talk about it.

There are some things or sayings which I think might be good but we misuse them. One which is well known and often said is that a woman, when beaten by her husband should sulk around the pot area. We met in my office for the interview. I began by asking him what he understood about domestic violence:

Thabang: *A married woman when beaten or when she has quarreled with her husband in this patriarchal society should not run back to her maiden home but should sulk around the pot area. This was a good tradition within the Basotho culture because if a woman, when beaten by her husband, could always run to her family home, who would care for her husband and children?*

Thabang continued: *I think a woman is expected to keep domestic violence against her in her home as a secret, not to tell her family because that might cause conflict between her family and the family of her husband. Sometimes it is dangerous to sulk around the pot area because some women have lost their lives. It is because their husbands keep on beating them and women keep on sulking around the pot area until their husbands beat them to death, I am telling you that some are in the grave now.*

‘Matsela: *In me ...* (Thabang interrupted me).

Thabang: *Yes, but few women are killed by their husbands. Let me tell you a true story about a woman I knew in Maseru (capital town of Lesotho), who was always beaten by her husband and always ran back to her maiden home. This woman did not want to sulk around the pot area. One day her brothers got very angry with their bother in- law. While the woman was at her maiden home, she phoned her husband and made peace with him. So the husband came to ask his wife’s family to pardon him and to take his wife back to their own family. The brothers of his wife were not ready to discuss anything with him, they did not know that their sister had forgiven her husband, they shot him and he died on the spot.*

‘Matsela: *He died on the spot?*

Thabang: *Yes, he died on the spot. I think I was very lucky to have an understanding father; a father who I think was very patriarchal. When I was a boy my father said that I should respect my wife because we are equal. He said that my wife might make mistakes like me because she is a human being like me.*

Thabang continued: *Let me tell you that what my father said still surprises me today. It is because boys/men in this culture are taught that women are weak and stupid. A boy/man if he is always with girls/women is ridiculed that he is 'Ntili'.*

‘Matsela: *What do you think your father was trying to say to you?*

Thabang: *I think he was saying that because we are all human beings, we are sometimes strong and sometimes weak. I should love my wife. I should not beat or abuse her in any way and I should take care of my children. In addition there are Basotho women who are breadwinners. Some husbands beat them thinking that they are competing with them.*

‘Matsela: *After all these things you have said, I would like you to tell me your thoughts on domestic violence against women in women in the context of Lesotho?*

Thabang: *Domestic violence is sometimes perpetuated by our culture when a woman is envisaged as a minor in the household. Our paying of bohali I think makes some men think that women are their property; they can do whatever they like with their wives. We men believe that we must be breadwinners. If we are not breadwinners we beat our wives. Domestic violence does not build up a family but destroys it.*

### 3 Male participant number three

After Setsomi accepted my invitation we met in my office to discuss my study project. Setsomi is a young man in his late thirties. He works as a cleaner at NUL. Setsomi is married with two daughters. His wife does domestic work and looks after their cattle which are also looked after by his daughters after school, as they attend a nearby primary school. The interview that follows took place in my office.

*‘Matsela: You said that your wife does domestic work and looks after your animals. This time could we talk about the effects of patriarchy on women experiencing domestic violence from their husbands and your thoughts about domestic violence?’*

*Setsomi: When we first met I told you that my wife does house work and looks after our animals, while my two daughters are at school.*

*‘Matsela: Yes you did.*

*Setsomi: Men beat their wives because they are not as strong as them, this is why he cannot say ‘I am going to fight with my wife, but I am going to beat my wife’. A woman is supposed to be under the control of her husband. To show that she is powerless she cannot decide anything without telling me. Husbands and wives are not equal. Sesotho and the Christian church tell us that husbands are heads and rulers in the household, while women are inferior, and weak. The father is in charge in the household. All these make a woman inferior to her husband. A man and a woman will never be equal, I am telling you. You know that we pay ‘bohali’, is this not another example that my wife is my property.*

*‘Matsela: Let us go back to what you told me about your wife who looks after your animals and does house work. Can you tell how the shepherd to you is envisaged?’*

*Setsomi: Yes she is a shepherd when I am at work and my children at school.*

‘Matsela: *If your wife when you are at work is a shepherd. Can you tell me how a shepherd to you is like?*

Setsomi: *A shepherd is always a man/boy but when there is a problem a girl/woman can be a shepherd, (because my wife is a woman) she can look after animals and protect them from thieves. A shepherd is a person who takes animals to good pastures and waters them.*

‘Matsela: *Can you say what you think about domestic violence against a woman in the household.*

Setsomi: *I do not like a man who beats his wife. I think because women are fragile, when their husbands are under the influence of alcohol they just beat their wives. My neighbour, who I think loves his wife, when he is under the influence of alcohol, even at Christmas, beats his wife.*

‘Matsela: *Can you say more about what influence men to beat their wives?*

Setsomi: *In the family a man can beat his wife if he thinks that domestic tasks are for his wife alone. I now see when I am talking to you that boys/girls and men//women can be seen strong. If people have no roles there could be no domestic violence in the household. Because a man beats his wife because he wants to show her that he is superior, his wife is inferior.*

#### **4 Male participant number four**

Mocholi and I live in the same village. He is a Lecturer at NUL. Mocholi and I met at my home.

He (Mocholi) began by saying: *Some men are terrible. They beat their wives out of nothing, they are encouraged to beat their wives by some of our Sesotho sayings*

‘Matsela: *Could you say which sayings might contribute to men beating their wives?*

Mocholi: *There is a saying that might be good or bad; it says that a married woman should tolerate being beaten by her husband everyday. Why should she tolerate abuse? Some women die while sulking around the pot area. This woman will continue to suffer in her own house because she is not allowed to reveal the abuse of her husband to her family.*

‘Matsela: *Could you...* (Mocholi interrupts me).

Mocholi: *A woman who sulks around the pot area is expected to love and cook for her husband and not to leave her children. She cannot leave her husband with her children. It is because she is a mediator between her husband and children; Another Sesotho saying says that she is supposed ‘to hold the knife by the sharp edge even if her husband always beats her.*

‘Matsela: *Hmn.*

Mocholi: *There is something which these sayings tell us. They tell us that a woman who is running to her maiden home will cause hatred between her home and the home of her husband. A woman in her household is a nurturer; if she is not around things often go wrong. Some husbands end up killing their wives, if they do not run to their homes. But I find it not right that a woman should tolerate domestic violence and sulk around pot area. ‘O lutse a ntse a khakhathoa. (Meaning she is often beaten).*

‘Matsela: *Can you say anything about the roles of these women in the family?*

Mocholi: *Look at the women here on the campus they work, and earn money. They are breadwinners like men. But what is funny is that when they get back home they still do domestic work.*

‘Matsela: *What are your thoughts about domestic violence?*

Mocholi: *Men misuse their power which is given to them by the society and Christianity.*

### 3.1.3 The voices of the focus group

The focus group met sometime later to work with the themes that emerged from the individual conversations. We agreed to use a flip chart to record our findings of which they would be in control. The aim was to reduce my own power. The flip-chart enabled the group to deconstruct/construct the THEMES that emerged from the INDIVIDUAL conversations (which are the headings in the following list). They also were given the responsibility to work with the themes already generated by the researcher from the individual interviews. Below the focus group discussed and deconstructed the themes that emerged from the individual conversations. The headings were the themes presented to them and the numbers indicate their own script on the conversation. The focus group also created new categories that did not fit with the themes developed from the individual interviews.

### 3.14 Identities emerged under every theme on the flip chart

#### (a) **Domestic violence against women in marital relationship**

- (i) Women are children
- (ii) No obedience between a husband and a wife
- (iii) Financial issue
- (iv) Women are taken as minors
- (v) Wanting to change a partner's behaviour which was accepted before marriage
- (vi) Men are breadwinners.
- (vii) Men are heads in the family
- (viii) The Christian church says men are heads
- (ix) Gender equality confusing
- (x) Beijing protocol

- (xi) In the church male and female are equal
- (xii) Christians say love your wife

**(b) Bohali (Marriage with head of cattle)**

- (i) Woman feels proud
- (ii) Woman becomes a property of her husband
- (iii) Bond between a husband and a wife
- (iv) Love
- (v) Makes a woman not to return to her maiden home
- (vi) Gives a woman an identity, dignity
- (vii) Legitimises children
- (viii) Makes the white man feel proud
- (xiv) Paid by the parents of her husband
- (xv) Paid by both husband and wife

**(c) Sulk around the pot area**

- (i) Love of husband
- (ii) Fear to lose identity
- (iii) Fear of parents and society
- (iv) Fear to be called a prostitute
- (v) Love of children

**(d) Handle the knife by the sharp edge**

- (i) Handle problems in the family
- (ii) Mediator
- (iii) Love and care of children

- (iv) Tolerate abuse

New themes that emerged from the focus group

**(e) The role of compromise and pretension by a woman in marriage**

- (i) Marriage is pretension
- (ii) Women are taught to compromise
- (1ii) Always beaten po,po,po ( sound of a stick)
- (iii) Husband and wife discuss problems
- (iv) Brides today pay bohali
- (v) White man pays bohali

### 3.2 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS AND REACTIONS ON THE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

In the light of my own ethical position within this research I comment here on my own process and bias within this research process. Being a woman, I found myself identifying with 'Mabohlale, when she was talking about a mother handling the knife by the sharp edge and the immense contradiction of this statement. Male dominated culture on one hand says that women hold the knife by the sharp edge to protect their family, children and love their husbands. This same knife however turns and cuts them to death. Women on one hand are permitted by 'men' to be strong when it suits them, but weak and at risk when it also suits them. I was glad of both the focus group and time in this research that helped give distance and perspective.

I found myself reacting to traditional Basotho culture over women's rights and the 1995 Beijing Declaration on women's rights. I identified with Mora in many ways, but particularly because we both

teach at NUL and she articulated much of what I also felt concerning this declaration. I experienced great anger over some of the judgments made by Khalala concerning the Beijing Declaration. To Khalala, the Beijing protocol is a foreign concept that is against the culture and should not be accepted.

However, during my conversation with Thabang, ‘respect’ emerges as an important discourse in the marital institution. In Basotho traditional culture, a woman should respect her husband and this word ‘respect’ means that a woman should be subservient to her husband. But what surprised me was that Thabang believed in what his father asked him to do. Thabang’s father who was very patriarchal said, *when married, respect your wife*. I reflected on his position of both/and here, in one way he is immersed in a culture that places women in a ‘bottle’, and yet in another way he has experienced something else from his own father. This something else may well be a Christian-like quality of love and respect that transcends the power struggles of one person or gender controlling another. This reminds me the letter of Paul to the Galatians I mentioned in chapter two when it asserts that ‘as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female, for all you are one inside Christ...’ Gal 3:27&28 (The Holy Bible. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) With Apocrapha.1909:200).

While in my conversation with Liau I found it very difficult to listen to his response, and my own pain and judgment moved into the larger picture of my society and my Judeo-Christian religion. This prevented me from being curious. But I pulled myself together and asked as curiously as possible ‘bo ‘na?’ If I were not limited by the research aims of this study I would find more about the question I asked above.

### 3.3 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER THREE

This chapter focused on the responses of the participants. Data was collected from the female and the male participants individually and the themes that emerged from the individual interviews were clarified by the focus group. I wrote my reflections and reactions on the conversations with the individual participants. Lastly the themes were then used in the next chapter to clarify and work with the data collected from the individual research participants.

## **CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter weaves together the voices of the participants and my voice as a custodian of this research. This is done through exploring and explaining the repetitive themes and Christian patriarchal discourses that have evolved from the first group (individual interviews), most of which were clarified by the focus group from the perspective of the following research aim which is tabled in chapter one.

Research aim:

4.1 TO EXPLORE AND DECONSTRUCT THE EFFECTS OF PATRIARCHY ON THE IDENTITIES OF BASOTHO WOMEN EXPERIENCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE IN MARITAL RELATIONS

4.1.1 The dominant voices of the patriarchal discourses on the identities of Basotho women in marital relationships

In the context of Lesotho, patriarchal voices are the normalising and the ab-normalising powers in marital relationships (White and Epston 1990 & Freedman and Combs 1996). Dominant patriarchal voices have language females into normalising roles which subjugate or marginalise them. This has also language males into roles which elevate them into a dominant position. In the context of this study, these normalising patriarchal voices have constructed the boy from birth to be the head, ruler, protector and food provider in the family, while the girl at womanhood does domestic tasks in her family, as stated. This can be seen in the previous chapter; where this dominant patriarchal discourse has been language by the women as well as the male participants.

These patriarchal discourses are apparent in the response of the research participants. Mora: *a man is the head because he is the breadwinner*. 'Mafiso: *men are heads in the family*'. Khalala: *as a woman I am not equal to my husband, my culture tells me that I am inferior*. Liau: 'women are children in my family. A woman is weak, a woman is a minor'. Liau continued to mention that *a Mosotho man is protector hence, a Mosotho woman must be obedient to her husband*.

From these responses it is evident that Basotho men are normalised and shaped into leading enviable positions and women into submissive truths or identities. Deconstructing these texts within a Derridan reading, a man is in the centre, while a woman is marginalized. Derrida (in Powell 1997:26) argues that "in male- dominated societies, the man is central (and the woman is the marginalized other, repressed, ignored, pushed to the margins)". In the context of this research what forms the centre is a Mosotho man, while what is on the periphery is his woman.

In spite of men being given the privileged positions (Makoa 1997:10) Mora speaks about traditions such as the khotla as neither a good place nor a bad institution, but just a way of ordering meaning in society and a way in which women were given a voice. This fits with a social constructionist understanding as described in chapter two. Mora highlights this when she says: *In indigenous culture Basotho men respected their wives because they spent the whole day at the khotla*. The power relationship here also fits with a Foucauldian understanding of a power relationship where male power is in relationship to women's resistance, giving women a form of power. The idea that women have power in the household is reiterated by 'Mabohlale insisting that, *women have some power because I cook what I think will be good for the family. It is my responsibility to look after my house*. In this way women are able to utilise their power to re-write their own stories. This fits with the theoretical framework in this research working with both narrative as well as social constructionist ideas.

However, from a feminist point of view it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, as Makoa (1997:9) argues, ‘in customary marriage (marriage with cattle), women are perpetual minors, while their men are superior’. This again illustrates the imbalance of power in the relationship.

#### 4.1.2 The effects of bohali on the identities of Basotho women in marital relationships

The above quote by Makoa illustrates a particular social construction; but no social construction has the whole story as there are many interpretations of bohali as well as contradictions and flaws. For example another interpretation is that women are highly valued, respected and honoured by this exchange of cattle. As in any belief and tradition it serves a role in creating stability and belonging in society. It is also true that this power imbalance is open to serious abuse.

Khalala says that it is bohali that makes children belong to their father’s family’. Khalala continues, *in Sesotho a woman is a real woman when bohali has been paid, then a woman rarely divorces her husband*. This identity, though a compromised identity, creates a sense of pride in the position of a Mosotho woman in a marital relationship. Maqutu also points out that bohali is a very important marriage ritual, ‘in the traditional culture marriage without an exchange of cattle for the bride is unthinkable. He continues to cling to his truth when he argues that ‘yet to say women are bought and sold would be a misconception and a distortion’ (Maqutu 2005:8).

When listening to Khalala a new discourse around bohali emerged, a discourse that traps a woman. She says that it might be very difficult for a woman to divorce her abusive husband, once bohali has been paid: ‘some women are afraid to run away because if they run away they are called prostitutes’. What Khalala says highlights that once bohali has been paid, the family of the woman does not accept the

runaway wife. This however is often hidden within the patriarchal structures that outwardly give a woman an identity or a sense of belonging.

*'Mabohlale: In the Basotho culture women are not allowed by their parents when bohali has been paid, even if her husband abuses her. That label makes some woman tolerate domestic violence or handle the knife by the sharp edge. In Sesotho culture women who return from marriage are not accepted in their maiden homes.*

Within the Basotho patriarchal culture, power is invested in the man. The hidden discourse and the taken-for-granted beliefs or narratives of 'inferiority of a woman' (Makoa 1997, Motebang 1997, Gender and Policy 2003 & Maqutu 2005) is powerful and emerges in conversations with the participants of the study that bohali can be used to turn a woman into her husband's 'possession'. Makoa (1997:5) observes that 'women are by law minors with limited independence as they are perpetually subordinated to their husbands... depending on their marital status'.

One woman in the focus group says, *'sometimes to a Mosotho man bohali means that his wife is his property'. He takes a stick and beats his wife, "po, po, po . (po po po is the sound of the stick as it beats on the woman).*

*'Mafiso complains, when a man forces his wife to have sex with him when she does not like, he forces her because he claims he has paid bohali. It seems that because he has paid bohali, we become their property.*

*'Mabohlale says that men when beating their wives tell them they have paid bohali to marry them.*

Thabang reflects that our paying of bohali, *I think makes men think that women are their property. They can do whatever they like with their wives.*

What 'Mafiso, 'Mabohlale and Thabang indicate is the immense abuse of power in the belief that bohali makes 'a woman a possession and vulnerable to domestic violence in customary marriage' (Gender and Development Policy 2003:4). Schuler (1992:161) likewise says 'because of 'lobola' 'bohali' in Sesotho, the general male believes that having paid for a wife, to beat her is well within a husband's rights. This reason relates to society's concept of a woman as the property and the dependent of a male protector, father, husband, and son. One man in the focus group states, *sometimes bohali loses its meaning because a bride pays half of her bohali and the other half is paid by the bridegroom.* This is an interesting comment in that it indicates how culture changes and old power structures lose their grip. It is interesting that as time goes on, in the context of Lesotho, rituals adapt. It could mean that the ritual of bohali is changing into a ritual of giving money to the bride's parents from both breadwinners. This changes the traditional belief that bohali is paid by a man. Social construction in the context of this study indicates that discourses are changing, and are culturally and historically conditioned. This fits with Dockery (1991:14) when he refers to this time as a 'dislocating' time, a time of many truths/identities (Graham 1996:1).

### 4.1.3 Sesotho sayings around gender identities on women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships

#### 4.1.3.1 Sulking around the pot area

‘...one has an identity because it is permitted by the social rituals of which one is part; one is allowed to be a certain type of person because this sort of person is essential to the broader game of the society’ (Gergen 1991:157).

In Lesotho, domestic violence is often fed by Basotho patriarchal sayings around gender identities such as ‘sulk around the pot area’. A physically beaten or emotionally abused ‘woman must sulk around the pot area’ (Machobane 1996:39). ‘Sulking around the pot area’ can be seen as both resistance, as well as a trap of disempowerment that can silence and kill some women in marital relationships. However in the context of Lesotho, as women gain power, men also are resisting it. A male participant, Thabang states that that *some husbands beat their wives thinking that they are competing with them*. This could mean that when change happens, abusive practices intensify. Other complicating factors come into play when women feel the pressure of protecting their children.

As Mocholi puts it: *a woman who sulks around the pot area is expected to love and cook for her husband and not to leave her children*. This places mothers in a particularly difficult position in an abusive relationship. During my conversation with the research participants it became obvious that the Sesotho saying sulk around the pot area, can be helpful and yet can be open to abuse in marital relationships. In my conversation with Mora, one might think that women who sometimes endure domestic violence can remain subservient to domestic violence for the sake of their children. For example Mora notes: *my grandmother says that she remained silent because she did not want to leave her grand children and her home*. Mora’s understanding is that her grandmother stayed in an abusive

marriage because of her home, husband and children, and because of her husband who was a food provider. Her grandmother seemed to have little choice but to live within the dominant discourse and social construction of 'gender roles' of a Mosotho woman (Ministry of Education 1982:1). However as society changes, so are the social constructions. As more opportunities of empowerment particularly through employment, women are becoming less accepting and less tolerant of domestic violence. These ties with what Dyer (2001:10) states 'in Basotho traditional culture men have the final word in the family, but now because women are working a man's word is not final anymore.' The traditional Basotho women in the past tolerated domestic violence because they were not educated; there were no textile firms, so they did not earn money.

In addition, Mora's statement above signifies that the identities of her grandmother and the older women who talked with 'Mabohlale and other younger women at the well were/are embedded in the traditional gender roles because of their age. Looking after children and house gave women in traditional Lesotho a respected identity and within this they were given a certain power. 'Mabohlale: *older women tell the younger women to sulk around the pot area when our husbands have beaten us.* Younger women like 'Mabohlale and Khalala vowed that they cannot tolerate domestic violence they encounter in their homes. Khalala remarks that *there is one thing I cannot tolerate, that is to' sulk around the pot area' when he has beaten me.* Khalala cannot tolerate domestic violence because the times have changed and women have other choices now.

'Mabohale, a divorcee, upholds her reasoning by selecting stories of women who have been killed by their husbands while sulking around the pot area. *I ('Mabelvale) thought that this sulking around the pot area did not make things better in my household. I decided to go back to my maiden home with my*

*children*. It seems that sulking around the pot area might have given her the space to make this decision. She may not make this decision without sulking around the pot area and realising that it was not bringing her the preferred outcome of a life giving practice.

Thabang and Mocholi also said it might be dangerous for a woman to sulk around the pot area as they could be placing their lives in danger. They also say it is similarly dangerous if a woman runs to her family when her husband has beaten her, because it causes hatred between her family and the family of her husband. They encourage women to hide it thus exposing this enormous contradiction within the text. Thabang says: *a married woman when beaten or had quarreled with her husband should not run back to her maiden home.*'

Mocholi: *if a woman does not sulk around the pot area that causes hatred between her maiden home and the home and the family of her husband.*

Thabang tells a story that upholds the status quo of a woman who kept running to her family to complain about her husband who beat her, instead of 'sulking around the pot area'. Thabang tells us a story that one time when the man went to fetch his wife from her maiden home, *his brothers-in-law shot him, he died on the spot*. This indicates that there are several consequences including dangers in altering the taken-for-granted truths. These women and men in the study support their beliefs by selecting extreme stories. It also indicates that we select the stories that uphold our beliefs.

These multi-layered and selected stories place women in a very vulnerable position. What remains clear is that it is the women in these stories that suffer either blame or death as indicated by the following texts from the participants:

Mabohlale: *there are some who lost their lives.*

‘Thabang: *I am telling you that some are in the grave now.*’ Mocholi: *‘some husbands end up killing their wives, if they do not run to their homes.*

Mocholi: *a woman has to hide her abuse because of her gender roles, if a woman when beaten by her husband could always run to her home, who would care for her husband and children?*

Women in the focus group used very strong language in this respect when they said

*marriage is nothing but pretention and compromise.* Within the current postmodern context of different opportunities and changing meanings around marriage, it could indicate that these women have more choices to redefine what it means to be married and make the marriage work in spite of not being in love. It also opens other alternatives for these women. Women find multiple stories/ identities (Thomas 2002 & Elliott, 1997) by redefining the Sesotho sayings that silence them. Patriarchy as a social construction appears then to begin to lose its power of gender stereotypes and gender roles that turn women into helpless sulkers around the pot area. However in Basotho culture there is another saying that entraps a Mosotho woman in abuse that turns women into ‘handlers of the knife by the sharp edge.’

#### 4.1.3.2 Handle the knife by the sharp edge

In chapter two I discussed that in the Basotho culture ‘a mother handles the knife by the sharp edge’ in the family. A mother must handle the knife by the sharp edge means that when there is a problem in the household she must be a peace keeper, an arbitrator. Mocholi notes that a woman is trapped within the marriage and left her to handle the knife by the sharp edge in that *a woman who sulks around the pot area cannot leave her children and her husband. It is because she is a mediator between her husband*

*and children.* According to this saying a woman resists power by handling the knife by the sharp edge. According to Mocholi a mother has to mediate and traditionally be the go between in the family, also says that; *a woman is supposed to handle the knife by the sharp edge even if her husband beats her.*

Khalala: *That label makes some woman tolerate domestic violence or handle the knife by the sharp edge.*

‘Mabohlale: *I ran away from this knife with my children.*

These statements hold immense contradiction in that the knife is constructed for many uses depending on the context and the interpretation of the use of the knife. The knife both represents power as well as danger for the women participants.

#### 4.1.4 The history of gender roles in the context of Lesotho

In the light of the argument being developed in this research study men hold both ‘dominance’ and ‘centrality’ (Makoa 1997, Motebang 1997, Letuka 1998, Gender and Development Policy 2003 & Kotzé and Kotzé 2001, Powell 1997).

Mora is questioning and challenging a long history of patriarchal culture in Lesotho. For instance Mora says *‘our culture says that a man is the head because he is a breadwinner, but I am a breadwinner in my family.’* This again brings with it ambiguity and the opportunity for new systems to emerge. This ambiguity is further exposed by Setsomi when he says, *‘yes my wife is a shepherd when I am at work and my children are at school.’* Setsomi’s wife is doing a man’s role by looking after animals. While Setsomi is doing women’s role at work, his wife is doing men’s work at home. It would appear that Setsomi is not aware of this contradiction. The emergence of a new social construction then becomes a slow process of growing awareness.

‘Mafiso informs us that, *me my husband does not beat me when I have bought what I think is needed in the family but in some families women should have permission from their husbands before buying anything.* But some men like ‘Mafiso’s husbands do not beat their wives. This new social construction brings the opportunity for a new social construction of culture where gender roles are not based on gender division, maleness or femaleness of a human being.

Mora, Khalala and Setsomi are breadwinners. They say that the position of the breadwinner cannot be a position of men alone. From the perspective of this research, it is interesting that Setsomi, a male participant questions and challenges androcentric discourses. The socially constructed dominant discourse around patriarchal discourse says that a breadwinner is a male position and yet today women who are educated or work in textile industries earn money.

‘Mafiso says, *sometimes a man beats his wife when she buys something which she thinks is necessary, he can beat his wife, saying that she should get permission before buying anything. It seems because men have been taught that they are in charge and are food providers in the family they want to monitor their wives wages.* However, what ‘Mafiso says above highlights that this story illustrates the power a man has over his wife is beginning to erode through the fact that women are bringing in a wage. This has a lot of power to disrupt the traditional power structure.

Setsomi says: *if people have no gender roles there could be no domestic violence in the household.* This concurs with Burr (1995:2) when she states that the categories with which we as human beings

apprehend the world do not necessarily refer to real division. A radical example is that of gender and sex.

Here women seem to be creating a new identity and a discourse of empowerment through modern education and employment, while men are losing their socially constructed identity as they desperately cling to old patriarchal ways that attempt to control their wives. Liao says, *marrying an educated woman is not right, they are too independent.*

#### 4.1.5 Identities in the postmodern culture in the context of Lesotho

##### 4.1.5.1 The influence of modern and postmodern cultures

It can be seen from the research thus far that there are many assumptions around gender identities (Lowe 1991:43 & Bons-Storm 1996:78) calling for many multiple identities ( Thomas 2002). As times change so do beliefs and assumptions. This research, working with post-structural thinkers and theories around social construction, views the current times as 'postmodern' in which meanings and beliefs are negotiated and mediated through culture. These beliefs hold multiple meanings. During my conversation with each participant multiple identities of women in marital relationships emerged. “Postmodern culture proposes that we live in a world of multiple realities. Accordingly “reality” as such, is context-dependent, socially constructed, and mediated or constituted primarily through language” (Kogan &Gale 1997:102).

Liau highlights that sometimes *a woman becomes the head in the family when her husband is not around. There are women who are in charge when their husbands have gone to the mines in South Africa.* This suggests that women when their husbands are not around, do double job.

Mora says, *women are breadwinners and some work at the textile firms.*

Mocholi: *look at women here on the campus, they are working, they earn money. They are breadwinners like men.*

Mora, Liau and Mocholi describe women in marital relationships in Lesotho as having many identities; they are empowered through education to re-invent themselves. Yet Mocholi says that *what is funny is that when they get back home, they still do domestic work.* What Mocholi shows is that a woman is living in two worlds. When she is at home she goes back to her traditional gender role. This is also observed by (Burstow 1992:10) who states that ‘most married women correspondingly, find themselves with two full time jobs-one at the workplace and one at home.’

Mora says that *modern education which comes from overseas, gives women and men power.* Modernization has brought transformation through education as well as an economical system that has offered women opportunities of independence.

Khalala argues that *even if they are educated they are inferior and they are not equal to their husbands.*

‘Mafiso observes that *men think that when we are independent, we have money we want to take their headship. And yet we know that according to our culture men are the heads in the household. No one will take their headship. We have to respect them, and we do respect them.*

The voices of 'Mafiso and Khalala indicate that modernisation has brought both change through education as well as challenges in identity. Khalala goes on to say that *'even if they are educated they are inferior and they are not equal to their husbands.* This implies that yet again on the surface there is a lip service to equality whereas beneath this lies a large patriarchal discourse of inequality. Understanding these changes of gender identities has not been easy in this patriarchal culture. The new idea that a Mosotho woman and a man in the family are equal is confusing and this might engender domestic violence in the house. This could indicate that on the surface people accept government policy on gender equality, but the 'grand narrative' or belief system that men are superior remains prevalent in Lesotho.

During my conversations with the participants it became clear that the fixed and distinct gender stereotypes and gender roles in patriarchal society are not working anymore. In the midst of these many and confusing identities a problem of instability in which both gender stereotypes and gender roles sway between old traditional practices and new ways of seeking identity might cause instability.

#### 4.1.5.2 Constructing life giving identities beyond gender roles and stereotypes in marital relationships in the age of postmodernism

Freedman and Combs (1996:28) say that it is in language that we construct reality and the world we live in. 'It is in language that men and women can construct' their own preferred life giving identities or stories that are beyond their patriarchal traditional roles.

'Mabohale observes, *women of my age and others younger than me are divorcees.* She said, *I was divorced long time ago.* What 'Mabohlale says shows that it is in language that patriarchal discourses are deconstructed. It is in language that Basotho women in marital relationships construct identities

beyond roles in which they might have previously taken-for-granted and may have been trapped into submissive gender roles.

Mora: *I am a breadwinner. I pay school fees for my children. Yes, in the past when women were not educated or when there were no textile firms women were always in the kitchen. Today women are breadwinners.*

‘Mafiso and Mora describe themselves as breadwinners and independent because they earn money, while Mora further describes herself as a woman who cares for the education of her children by paying school fees; this is a great cultural change and shift from her own mother, who lived as a ‘minor’ under the protection of her husband. What Mora says deconstructs the text by bringing her voice to construct her many truths. Mora: *yes, in the past when women were not educated or when there were no textile firms.* Above Mora deconstructs the text by bringing the past to the future as a voice that constructs her many identities. Any newly emerging discourses will bring with them benefits as well as problems.

However ‘Mafiso and Khalala, in other texts say that even if they are educated, they are inferior and they are not equal to their husbands. This implies that yet again on the surface there is a lip service to equality whereas beneath this lies a large patriarchal discourse of inequality. ‘Mafiso says, *we shall always respect our husbands because culture says that they are superior, we are inferior.*

Mafiso and Khalala believe what the culture tells them. Khalala says, *these new ways which came with the westerners cause conflicts in the households.*

The introduction of western education and economic independence has created instability in the Basotho traditional culture. ‘In Sesotho traditional culture men have the final word in the family, but now because women are working a man’s word is not final anymore’ (Dyer 2001:10).

During my conversation with Thabang, he too was trapped into his own contradictions. On one hand he talks about a man being in control in the family, and yet he clings to his father's wisdom that says he should respect his wife because they are equal. It seems that there are many wise men throughout the ages who have known this greater truth, deep wisdom and respect regardless of local culture. Thabang explains it this way, *I think he (my father) was saying that because we are all human beings we are sometimes strong and sometimes weak, I should love my wife. I should not beat her or abuse her in anyway.*

Thabang, because of his father's wisdom is freeing himself from fear and from being trapped by the effects of patriarchal discourses around the institution of marriage.

#### 4.1.5.3 Fear of change with both women and men's voices

Within this changing paradigm of male dominance comes 'uncertainty' (Graham 1996:1). She says that 'in this age of uncertainty,' the identities of both men and women are 'fluid,' unlike the definite identities of modern culture. Within this age of uncertainty this research exposes fear, in both men and women, fear of the change that is taking place in Lesotho.

*'Mafiso: Men are scared of women who are who are independent because these women earn money. Women today are educated, they have money, and they think that when we are independent, we have money we want to take their headship. And yet we, women know that according to our culture men are heads in the household. No one will take their headship. We have to respect them.*

*Liau: It scares their husbands because it makes them have money. They become breadwinners. When they have money often they do not obey their husbands, some become too loose.*

Thabang: 'There are Basotho women who are breadwinners. Some husbands beat them thinking that they are competing with them.'

What 'Mafiso, Liau and Thabang say indicates that the breadwinner discourse appears to be such a powerful discourse in a patriarchal society that it is difficult to find ways out of it; in that the more Basotho men lose their power or the more men are disempowered in one way or the other, the more they cling to their identity as heads at their families they beat their wives.

Liau: *When they have money often they do not obey their husbands, some become too loose.'*

It might seem that from the following conversations with female and male participants the fear of change makes women, as well as men, return to the old practices and that are both outdated and abusive. This is shown in the following text:

'Mafiso: *Men are scared of women who are independent because these women earn money. We, women know that according to our culture men are heads in the household. No one will take their headship. We have to respect them.'* These indicate that men and women are intimidated by change and are trapped in a Basotho traditional discourse that labels a woman who is working as a prostitute. 'Mafiso, because of fear, might want to assure men that women who earn money cannot take their husbands' headship. I was struck by 'Mafiso's predicament and her fear of transformation. It seems that when people are scared of transformation that is taking place in Lesotho they turn back to the pre-modern and modern culture.

#### 4.1.5.4 Transformation from modernity to the postmodern age in the context of Lesotho

Building on the transformation that has taken place educationally and politically in Lesotho, culture is gradually evolving. According to Graham (1999:200) ‘modernity introduced a discourse of human rights, of reason, empiricism and science; and it allowed women and their allies to exploit the discourse of Enlightenment and emancipation to advance the course of women.’ In chapter two (see 2.2) the signing of The UN conventions and declarations by the Lesotho government on human rights was a part of this. Basotho women are given a voice to deconstruct patriarchal discourses and practices around the institution of marriage. The government of Lesotho has ratified and incorporated CEDAW, and the Beijing Declaration of 1995 (Makoa 2007 & The National Vision 2020 2004) in its pursuance of gender equality between women and men. These conventions give Basotho women a voice to deconstruct and challenge patriarchal discourses and practices around the institution of marriage. Yet in this time of uncertainty Makoa (1997:5) states that freedom of women is either denied or constrained by a battery of national laws, societal norms, taboos, traditions, customs, institutions and the ideology of patriarchy. Makoa also says that ‘customarily women are perpetual minors and always under the guardianship of someone. Khalala indicates that *women talk about Beijing which says men and women are equal. For me this is not true. A woman will never be equal to a man. These new ways which come with the westerners cause conflicts.* The focus group brought up the issue that the Beijing Declaration sometimes engenders domestic violence in the household. What Khalala says indicates that when change happens, it relieves tension and blame to find something to ‘blame’ such as Western culture. This then releases any accountability within Basotho people, that if you can blame the ‘other’ the one who is de-centred or outside; that is the Western society.

Mora: *men when beating their wives verbally abuse them, they say, ‘I want to show you that it is not Beijing here, this is my family.’* This shows that some Basotho men are really frightened to let go off

power control, hence that their fright renders them more controlling and emotionally and physically abusive. This can imply that the structures and the laws put in place to empower women are not necessarily helpful, unless there are men's groups that can assist them in finding a new identity in the new order. This might be that in any transformative process there is an uncomfortable period of instability until a new order or discourse is arrived at.

#### 4.1.6 The role of the church in supporting the status quo

As Lesotho has integrated Christian beliefs into the traditional patriarchal practices, the church also has fed into gendered roles and stereotypes that tend to marginalize women and promote men in the Basotho culture (Makoa 1997).

*Mora: Married women experience domestic violence at home, at work and at the Christian church.*

*Mabohlale: The church gives men power to beat their wives because our culture and the church say that a woman should be obedient to her husband.*

*Liau: She (woman) is my flesh. She will always be my follower. It means that she is always behind me.*

According to Mora and 'Mabohlale the church supports the status quo in marital relationships by giving men power and advocating that women should be submissive to men in the community and the church. Liau is entrapped in a dominant religious discourse of power that the man is superior. The Christian church unconsciously supports the gender status quo, as the church upholds the dominant patriarchal discourse that women are inferior while husbands are superior through the scriptural voices. Makoa (2007:6) highlights that in the Leselinyane La Basotho the Christian missionaries said, in the beginning the woman was created for a man as his help mate and companion...the first woman was a free gift to the first man given with Divine munificence unconditionally.' Liau says, *the Bible tells us*

*that a man is superior and a woman is inferior; remember the story of Adam and Eve.* Liau, along with the dominant voice in the church in Lesotho supports the story of Adam and Eve through the belief that in the scripture it is written that a woman is made up of a man's rib.

However, discourse is never free of contradiction. The Christian church, also preaches equality. Paul for example states, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female, for all you are one in Christ" (The Holy Bible. New Standard Version with Apocrypha 1909:200). In addition, drawing from Bosch (1991:427) contextual liberation theology is counter-hegemonic and sides with the weak and suffering.

## 4.2 CONCLUSION

### 4.2.1 Value of this study

This study presented women with an opportunity to break the silence of their suffering in their own homes, in order to re-write their preferred stories, without needing to resort to blaming anybody. In the traditional Basotho culture, a woman in a marital relationship is not supposed to talk about the abuse she experiences in her home. Women are expected to suffer in silence. This silence is enforced by Sesotho cultural sayings such as, 'a woman sulks around the pot area' (Machobane 1996:39) and 'a mother handles the knife by the sharp edge', which deem it heroic for a woman to stay in a marriage, even when things are not right in the family. Another saying that supports the practice is that, when a man beats his wife that is not abuse but an acknowledgement of love. 'Mabohlale: *There are times when a woman who is always beaten believes that her husband beats her because he loves her very much. Society also says that often a husband beats his wife out of love, meaning 'monna o shapa hobane a boulela' (this literally means that when a husband beats his wife that in Basotho culture is*

*an acknowledgement of love*). Khalala: *In my culture if a man beats his wife that is an acknowledgement of love.*

However, feminist pastoral care creates a safe space for women to find a voice for their own muteness. Feminist pastoral care gives a space to a woman who is entrapped in patriarchal discourses around domestic violence in marital relationships to move beyond patriarchal discourses that engender domestic violence. For example, a woman in the focus group was bold enough to speak about her abuse in a marital relationship publicly *my husband has been beating me since we got married*. Feminist pastoral care was utilised in this research to give female participants in this study a new context, discourse and a voice to re-write their own preferred identities. In Foucauldian understanding women are given a voice to ‘insurrect’ or ‘resurrect’ their subjected/ subjugated identities in order to write their life giving identities or stories.

It was through our commitment to discursive conversations that disempowering patriarchal structures and practices began to loosen their hold over women in marital relationships. During these conversations with the research participants empowering identities and stories emerged. For example Thabang says *my father said that I should respect my wife because we are equal*.

It was during the examination and the analysis of the themes that emerged from the conversations of the individual participants that the focus group deconstructed the disempowering effects of patriarchal discourses on women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. For instance men in the focus group subvert patriarchal discourses, *why do women tolerate domestic violence*. This dialogue

invited and assisted female and male participants to expose, and deconstruct some disempowering discourses that engender domestic violence in the home in marital relationships.

Listening to the research participants' voices deconstructing the disempowering effects of patriarchy on the identities of women in marital relationships was important; because women were able create their own powerful identities.

#### 4.2.2 Practical recommendation from this study

Within the current discourse of male abuse this research revealed a major factor concerning the isolation of women's voices, sustained by a culture in which women are not encouraged to speak out about abuse. If discourses and social construction are formed as we talk together and decide things in a group, it would stand to reason that an outcome of this research could be to form more support groups for women who have experienced domestic violence in marital relationships. These women could utilise their experience to assist other women to find a voice. This in turn will help to deconstruct patriarchal discourses that engender domestic violence in marital relationships in order to empower them to resurrect their preferred subjugated story identities or generate their own liberating and life giving identities.

In the light of these findings it might be helpful for Lesotho legislature to revisit Customary Laws in order to allow Basotho women in marital relationships to re-write their stories in the light of the historical social constructions of gender. The Lesotho government is signatory to international statutes, which in the study conflict with traditional practices at a micro-level. For instance The Beijing

Declaration 1995 and CEDAW (National Vision 2020 2004, Chaka-Makhooane et al 2000 & Makoa 2007) legislate greater equality between husband and a wife. This research highlights the problems in knitting together such statutes with the lived experiences. It is important to find ways of helping these new laws to exist in harmony with traditional laws. In other words it is important to find new social constructions that are able to accommodate traditional beliefs.

From the perspective of pastoral care within the church, there is a need for greater support. There could for example be a role in constructing a website (for those who have access to the internet). Women could share their domestic violence stories in their marital relationships and have access to therapeutic conversations with a feminist therapist at their convenience, in order to be empowered.

#### . 4.2.3 Future ideas for more studies

This study worked with both women and men in order to expose some powerful disempowering patriarchal discourses that affect the identities of Basotho women experiencing domestic violence in marital relationships. I was wondering what if there were more men's groups in Christian churches that helped men to expose these belief systems in order to find a transformation that would work for both men and women. I was also wanting to explore questions such as what is it that men are afraid of or what would it be like to be a man under these belief systems in today's world?

While I was doing this study it became clear that Basotho men in marital relationships need to be given a platform to speak. The dominant discourse of male advantage showed that the majority of the

male participants in this study appeared blind to their own privilege and this has forbidden them from taking full responsibility of male oppressive actions against women in marital relationships. This informed me that for this reason, some Basotho men maintain disempowering and dominant patriarchal discourses that are destructive to them as well as their partners. Ackermann (1991:107) highlights:

Feminism is commitment to the praxis of liberation for women from all that is oppressive. It sees sexist oppression as “of primary importance not because it is the basis of all other oppression, but because it is the practice of domination most people experience, whether their role be that of discriminated against, exploiter or exploited.”

#### 4.3 THE VERY LAST NOTE

As I mentioned above, I am conscious that this study was not done from a place of neutrality and this has been a great limitation and challenge for myself as a researcher as it has blinded me from seeing other legitimate ways of understanding women, particularly their abilities through the ages to live well with the historical discourses into which they have been born.

**APPENDIX:**

CONSENT FORM FOR A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I understand the research study because the researcher explained it to me.

I understand that I can ask questions if I need clarification.

I am aware that all the information I give will remain confidential.

I am aware that all the materials used to collect data will be destroyed after the completion of the study.

I volunteer to be a participant of the study, I can quit whenever I want to.

PARTICIPANT.....

DATE.....

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