

**GENDERED CONSCIOUSNESS AS WATERSHED OF MASCULINITY:  
MEN'S JOURNEYS WITH MANHOOD IN LESOTHO**

**by**

**Tlali Abel Phohlo**

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**SUPERVISOR: Dr. D.J. KOTZÉ**

**CO-SUPERVISOR: Prof. A.P. PHILLIPS**

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## Declaration

I, Tlali Abel Phohlo declare that '**Gendered Consciousness as Watershed of Masculinity: Men's Journeys with Manhood in Lesotho**' is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

*Tlali A Phohlo*  
.....

Signature

**Tlali Abel Phohlo**

*25/02/2011*  
.....

Date

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I dedicate this study to all women and men of Lesotho, who are engaged in the transformation of gender relations, and advocate for the wellbeing of women and children in this country.

## Summary

This study explores the operations of Sesotho masculinity: its dominant ideas and practices and their effects on Basotho women and men and this latter's resistance to a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho. It challenges a deep running belief among the Basotho that being born male necessarily means being born into a superior social position and status that is naturally and divinely sanctioned. It investigates how the dominant postcolonial discourse called *sekoale* (a return to the traditions of the ancestors) and the Christian churches' discourses of the "true"/"authentic" Christian life, framed by the classical biblical and confessional dogmatic traditions, actually support and sustain this belief and so reinforce the imbalance of power in favour of men in the order of gender relations in Lesotho. On the contrary, through the principles of the contextual theologies of liberating praxis, social construction theory, a narrative approach to therapy, gender-ethical consciousness and participatory approach, the study argues that masculinity and ways of being and thinking about men are socially constructed through historical and cultural processes and practices. It is in these processes and practices that Basotho men have been and continue to be advantaged and privileged over women.

This study has challenged this situation by tracing the existence of alternative, more ethical ways of being and thinking about men in those historical and cultural processes and practices; ways which are more open to women and children and their wellbeing in the everyday life interactions. In this way, the study argues for a gender-ethical consciousness, which, in particular, invites Basotho men to engage in a reflection on their participation in a culture and practices which oppress the other, especially women and children. It invites Basotho men to accountability and responsibility. In this sense a gender-ethical consciousness is understood as watershed of masculinity in Lesotho. The participation of a group of Basotho men who offered to reflect on their relationship with the dominant masculinities, demonstrates how Basotho men are struggling to transform yet they fill us with the hope that change is possible.

## **Key words**

History, Sesotho masculinity, *Sekoele*, Bosocho/Sesotho, The Christian life discourses in Lesotho, Contextual theologies, Social constructionism, Narrative approach to therapy, Gender-ethical consciousness, The Reflecting Team, Pastoral Care of Men.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### BASOTHO MEN AT THE CROSSROADS

#### 1.1 Introduction and Background

Spence (1968:8) identifies the distinctive feature of the Basotho people as their sense of corporate identity and their history as a classic epic of struggle to survive in an environment rendered hostile by danger of annihilation by powerful tribes and Dutch farmer's trekking into the interior from the Cape. This history takes us into the heart of the traditional operations of Sesotho masculinities whose history cannot be separated from it. The theme of war, therefore, runs through and shapes specific aspects of the traditional Sesotho masculinity. The second theme is that of politics. With Lesotho becoming a British dependent, we see other forms of masculinity emerging as a result of the interaction between the Basotho and the British imperial colonialists. The third theme which appears to have played a role and continues to, is how the Basotho men came to think about themselves is labour migrancy, to be specific, mining. The fourth theme refers to Christian churches. The encounter of the Basotho people with the Christian missionaries is one area that cannot be ignored if specific operations of masculinity in Lesotho are to be understood.

These four themes provide historical structures within which this research is going to engage in the study of the operations of masculinity in Lesotho today. How the operations of the present dominant masculinity in Lesotho today are related to these historical structures, is very important to this research. They provide it with deeper understanding of the operations of masculinity and the challenges it is faced with in today's Lesotho.

One of the biggest challenges masculinity is faced with is a gender-ethical consciousness which is gaining momentum in today's Lesotho. The measure, as I will demonstrate in the coming chapters, with which most Basotho men resist this new consciousness, suggests that the hitherto accepted patterns of masculinity and manhood are at a crossroads. The accepted ways of being a man and thinking about men and men's thinking about themselves are at the point where they are being questioned by this gender sensitive consciousness. It demands alternative masculinities which would be more ethical, that is, the masculinities which would recognise women as equal

partners in the construction of a more human society. This is the challenge ushered in by a gender-ethical consciousness which this study seeks to advocate.

How Basotho men react and interpret the questioning of this new consciousness and how those interpretations impact on their perceived identity as men, seems to be taken for granted by those who desire some transformations in the order of gender relations in Lesotho today. There appears to be an assumption that men accept the gradual change in this area, but what I experience is a resistance to it. I have sensed it not only from the group of the Basotho men who form the Reflecting Team in this research at the beginning of our group sessions. I have also sensed it in the students preparing for Catholic priesthood at the seminary where I taught, not withstanding the numerous men I encountered in ministry as a priest in the Catholic Church. Speaking to these other men about the present situation, I sensed a tendency to return, with nostalgia either to the history of the Basotho, trying to find in it some justifications of the questioned patriarchal structures of male entitlement and domination or to what is in the popular parlance called *Sesotho*. Most of their claims are well supported by the current dominant socio-cultural postcolonial discourse referred to as *sekoale* – the return to the ancestral customs, traditions and practices. Within the context of the Christian churches, the resistance is grounded in specific religious beliefs, traditions and practices which sanction male domination as the will of God. Specific biblical texts are cited and interpreted to demonstrate how the rising gender-ethical consciousness is ungodly and against the “authentic” Christian spirit.

## **1.2 Research Questions and Aims**

In order to be focused, the study needs to be guided by clear research questions and aims. Without them the study would be hard to follow.

### **1.2.1 Research questions**

Looked at close range, the resistance of the Basotho men to a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in the modern Lesotho appears to be grounded in the essentialist belief that being born male or female necessarily means being born into a given social position that is naturally and divinely sanctioned. This seems to constitute the core of the present dominant masculinities in Lesotho. It is assumed by many Basotho that maleness gives those who are born



male what those who are born female cannot naturally receive and do and vice versa. In my view, this belief runs deeper in our everyday social interactions across the gender divide more than most of us are aware of. I believe that a genuine social transformation called for by the rising gendered-ethical consciousness in this country will occur when this reality is named and given due attention. On the basis of this situation I am asking the following questions which this study seeks to respond to.

1. What are the dominant ideas and practices of the present Sesotho masculinities and their effects on Basotho men?
2. What are the characteristics and tactics of the dominant philosophy of life called *sekoele* that encourage the present Sesotho masculinities not to accept change in the order of gender relations?
3. Is there within *sekoele* the possibility of an alternative more ethical masculinities and how can social construction theory and narrative approach to therapy contribute in the process of the transformation of the dominant Sesotho masculinities?

### **1.2.2 Aims of the research**

In line with the questions above, the following are the aims of this study.

a) *To explore the dominant ideas and practices of Sesotho masculinities and their effects on Basotho men*

Aware that masculinity does not mean one and the same thing, I want to explore the history of masculinity in Lesotho in order to find out how Basotho men have been differently affected by it. The purpose is to find out how the present masculinities in their wrestling with the gender sensitive consciousness are framed by those masculinities in the past epochs. This should not be understood to mean to search for a continuous correspondence between the present dominant masculinities and those of the past. This point will be clarified in the second chapter where the notion of history and the historical method are discussed. It will also be clarified when social construction theory in which this study is positioned is described. It suffices here to affirm that the past has the privilege of laying structures within which we think about realities in the present. In this sense, in this study, it is suspected that the present forms of masculinities in Lesotho operate within the structures laid for them in the past by the past masculinities. Here lies the edge

of the gendered consciousness. It wants the present dominant masculinities to free themselves from the shackles of that past to become ethical in the order of gender relations today.

b) *To explore and describe the characteristics and tactics of sekoele which encourage the present Sesotho masculinities not to change*

Another aim of this study is to explore and describe the characteristics and tactics of *sekoele*. The purpose of such exploration is to shed light over what sustains the Basotho men's resistance to change in the present order of gender relations. The privileged position of power the Basotho men enjoy over women in the present order of gender relations is suspected to be operating in their resistance to change in this area. It appears that they are not yet ready to relinquish the benefits yielded by their privileged position of power. As it will be demonstrated in the third and fourth chapters, they hold onto the traditionalist and essentialist ways of thinking about their masculine identity even, with the effect that others, women and children, suffocate. This study therefore seeks to uncover the strategies and the tactics employed by the Basotho men to secure the status quo. One of the tactics they employ is to position themselves as defenders of the cultural heritage and identity of the Basotho as a nation. The third and the fourth chapters uncover these tactics and strategies. Thanks to the social construction theory in which this study is positioned, such tactics and strategies and the power relations they engender can be effectively assessed and challenged. Through the help of the theological method of the contextual theologies of liberation, the tactics and strategies employed by the male dominated consciousness within the Christian churches in Lesotho is challenged. The suspicion of this study is that, specific church discourses about "authentic Christianity" and the emphasis on the "return to the biblical sources" sustain the existence of the imbalance of power between men and women within the Christian churches.

c) *To explore the possibility of the alternative more ethical masculinities within sekoele*

The third aim of this study is to rethink the specific Sesotho and Christian traditional customs and practices in which the order of gender relations appears to be embedded and codified. By rethinking them, I believe there is a possibility of uncovering beliefs, traditions and practices that can contradict the present male domination upheld by the current philosophy of *sekoele* and the Christian churches' discourses in Lesotho. The goal is to find within *sekoele* and the Christian

churches' practices themselves, the alternative masculinities that can challenge the present dominant masculinities in their claim for themselves of the position of natural and divine entitlement. The search is for the more gender-ethical masculinities; the alternative life giving ways of being men. The present dominant masculinities seem to work against Basotho men in many ways: family relations; health wise (HIV and AIDS) etc.

With the above research questions and aims in mind we can now situate this study within a broader framework which would give substance to the concerns of this study in particular. For these reasons I turn to the review of relevant literature that can further assist in understanding the direction this study wants to take.

### **1.3 Literature Review**

The following preliminary literature review highlights important issues relating to masculinity especially in the context of Lesotho already raised by researchers in their fields of study. This study stands on the shoulders of these studies as it explores the operations of masculinity in Lesotho in view of tracing the existence of alternative more ethical ways of being men in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness.

Ritzer (1997:8) describes postmodern social theory as a theory that shuns the "idea of a single grand perspective" and is very suspicious of the so called "world views, metanarratives, grand narratives and totalizations". Rosenau (1992:8) notes that postmodern theorists tend to "offer indeterminacy rather than determinism, diversity rather than unity, difference rather than synthesis, complexity rather than simplification". Within this perspective, masculinity cannot mean one and the same thing, every where, all the times. Bhabha (1995:57) remarks: "To speak of masculinity in general, sui generis, must be avoided at all costs". This means there is no unified conception of men as subjects. We must learn to appreciate the particularities of their histories and cultures. Otherwise masculinity would turn into a grand narrative.

The present study in its consideration of the journey of the Basotho men with masculinity and manhood in Lesotho is aligned to this position. Given its positioning within the social construction theory which upholds postmodern assumptions about realities, it challenges all the totalising views about the Basotho men. Otherwise the possibility of tracing the existence of

alternative more ethical masculinities would be difficult in the present situation where a gender sensitive consciousness is challenging the Basotho men to change.

For some time now masculinity has attracted attention of researchers in different disciplines: social psychology, sociology, health, politics etc. (Tatham 1992; Edley & Wetherell 1995; Seidler 1994; Horrocks 1994; Leach 1997; Pringle 1997; Lee & Owens 2002; Taylor 2005). The interest has been sparked by theories and practices of feminism as they challenged the normative social roles prescribed and maintained by the logic of patriarchy (Berger, Wallis & Watson 1995; Seidler 1994; Horrocks 1994). Along with feminism, social and cultural transformations have also stimulated the researchers' curiosity (Edley & Wetherell 1995:4). The same curiosity is behind this study.

There is a wealth of sociological, anthropological and legal studies on the Basotho women's struggles within a patriarchal society of Lesotho (Ashton 1952; Spiegel 1980; Gay 1980; Coplan 1987, 1994; Murray 1979, 1981; Malahleha 1985; Seeiso, Kanono, Tsotsi & Monaphathi 1990; Epprecht 1993, 1995, 1996). These studies have explored how the Basotho women have been affected by men's migration into the mines of South Africa and how this undermined the traditional conception of masculinity among the Basotho. What becomes apparent in these studies is the politics of gender relations in both colonial and post colonial Lesotho. Within this orientation, Epprecht (1996:198-199; 1995:36-42) raises two other important issues, so relevant to this study. The first one concerns the relationship of the Basotho men and the imperial British men. As it shall be demonstrated in the second chapter, the race element is not insignificant in the identification of the dominant ideas and practices of the traditional Sesotho masculinities. It is within the racial struggles between the two races, that the issues of gender emerged. The second important point concerns the relationship of the traditional Sesotho masculinities with chieftaincy and its impact on gender relations. The debates (Basutoland Report of the Administrative Reforms Committee 1954) about hereditary chieftainship, especially around the issue of women chiefs and regents as well as ineffective chiefs raises inquisitive minds to find out how chieftaincy and masculinity have actually journeyed together among the Basotho. In the light of this relationship, I shall demonstrate that what chiefs are in the consciousness of the Basotho as a nation, is what men are in their households. These issues are covered in detail in the second chapter of this study.

Besides the issues raised by the history of the Basotho, there are other social changes over time which raise issues of relevance to this study. Matlosa (1992) for instance, has explored the issue of retrenchment of the thousands of Basotho mineworkers in South Africa. He asks whether there is capacity of Lesotho's rural informal sector employment to absorb them. While Matlosa's concerns are purely economic, the question he is asking has far reaching repercussions on masculinity issues in Lesotho. How would this situation shape these men's sense of being a man? How has mining industry shaped the way they thought about themselves? These questions are not taken for granted in this study. The third section of the second chapter addresses them.

Kimane and Nthimo-Makara (1998) have studied the gender dimension of migration of women in Lesotho; Musvidziwa (2003) researched the urban housing variable of gender and Basotho women as tenants; Dyer (2001) has investigated the gender relations in both at home and at the workplace in Lesotho where large numbers of women are employed in the Garment Factories. Mokhothu's (1998) study that links housing loan schemes and gender relations among the educated in Lesotho highlights the shifts in the gender roles between men and women in Lesotho. The shifts are well articulated by Epprecht (1996:184; 1995: 39) when he says "Basotho women by necessity have assumed *de facto* responsibility for many customarily masculine tasks". Of women chiefs he comments: "Among the Basotho, female chiefs were generally at least as well regarded as the male"; "By almost all accounts, the sex of women chiefs was not a factor in diminishing the respect they received from their subjects and peers since they were, in essence, 'honorary men'". The focus of these studies is women, and understandably so, within the experience of their being disadvantaged by patriarchal systems.

In this study the focus is on Basotho men. How they cope with these changes is very significant. In the context of American society Balswick (1992) argues that men are at the crossroads in search of new ways of being beyond traditional roles and modern options. Horrocks (1994) argues that masculinity is in deep crisis in western society. In south Africa, the interest in how men are changing within the context of the historical and social climate of that country attest that how men cope with changes overtime cannot be underestimated (Morell 2001). The experience of being a man in Lesotho is not an exception. A gender-ethical consciousness sharpened by the social changes occurring there in, challenges Basotho men to reconsider their traditional ways of being and how they think about themselves.

The situation just highlighted in this introductory literature, further clarifies the focus of this study as it is articulated in the research questions and aims in the previous section. It also raises a need for clarification of the epistemological and methodological frameworks within which the operations of masculinity will be dealt with in this study. The study would be hanging in the mid-air if it did not clarify these issues. As it is undertaken within a theological department, practical theology, it must also be clarified that these epistemological and methodological frameworks are to be understood in this context. Practical theology is action oriented and aims at transforming a society in favour of the wellbeing of all who live in it in the light of the Christian faith. For this reason, the epistemological and methodological frameworks of this study should be such that they contribute to this purpose.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Framework and Methodological Considerations**

This study of the Basotho men's journey with masculinity is positioned within three epistemological frameworks: the contextual theologies of liberation, the social construction theory and the narrative approach to therapy. The three value the basic orientation of postmodern theory and its basic concepts.

##### **1.4.1 Contextual theologies of liberation**

A contextual approach to theology marks an epistemological break from a traditional way of doing theology (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:4-7). According to Segundo's (1976:7-38) method of the hermeneutic circle, the break starts with a suspicion that our perceptions of realities are intimately bound up with a prevailing social condition; when we start to raise questions about our perceptions of the present order of things; when our interpretations of scriptures change along with the new questions we are asking about the present condition. In this perspective, De Crunchy (1994: 9-12) and Bevans (2002: 9-15) emphasize that theology is, and, must be, contextual. According to Bevans, "it must take into more serious account the context in which a particular theological effort is articulated" – the concrete historical processes, intellectual currents, cultural shifts, and political forces. He argues that these factors are always linked to the "oppressive nature of older approaches" which are biased against non western experience of faith. For this reason, this study holds that no one approach can claim universal validity. All

theologies are contextual. Even the so called confessional theologies are contextual theologies. As De Crunchy argues, in a post-modern perspective, a variety of theological paradigms arising out of different contexts and using different methodologies makes all theologies equally valid.

Bosch (1991:424) describes the characteristic elements of a contextual liberating approach to theology. It starts with a suspicion that western science, philosophy and theology serve only the interests of the west. According to Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:5), it questions the universal claims of western theology. As Bosch states, it rejects an idea of a static world which is only explained without being changed. It takes commitment to the poor and marginalised as the first act of theology and that doing it, can only be done with them. Like Bosch, Ackermann (1996:39) stresses the validity of experience of its doers and their commitment to a “liberating praxis” in society. Rakoczy (2004:4-27) and Dube (2003:84-100, 2003:101-112) typify this element in the context of women in the context of the church and HIV and AIDS respectively. Cone (1970) and The Kairos Theologians (1985) do so in the context of racial discrimination in the United States and South Africa respectively. According to Bosch (1991:424) a contextual approach to theology puts more emphasis on ‘doing’ rather than ‘knowing’ and speaking. Its point of departure is praxis or experience and then shifts to reflection on theory. Gutierrez (1988: 11), who is regarded as the father of liberation theology defines theology as a “critical reflection on praxis in the light of the word”.

In the context of this study, the contextual approach is used to engage in the present dominant gender discourses about masculinity sustained and supported by the *sekoete* philosophy and churches’ discourses about “authentic Christianity”. All the discourses which oppress not only women and children but also men themselves are looked at with suspicion. It is committed to a liberating praxis of the Basotho society in which inequality between men and women is rife. It is committed to the recognition of women as equal partners with men in the construction of a more human and just society. It is committed to an exploration of an alternative theological discourse that would encourage and enable Basotho men to seek more life-giving ways of being a man; ways that would *do* the right things to others, women and children. The contextual approach to doing theology in this study, embraces a postmodern theological position in the way God and God’s will are conceptualised. It stands in sharp contrast to how God and God’s will are

conceptualised within *sekoale* circles. Herholdt (1998:217) captures the heart of this preferred perspective in the following words:

The will of God is [...] not a predetermined decision that Christians need to discover in a passive mode of obedience. Christians, and for that matter all people, are afforded the right to some human input that determines the “plan” for their lives. Many choices are possible, but in the variety of options we are guided by God as creative participant in our lives. Humans need not plug in to a blueprint that renders their own efforts and creative potential sterile, but co-creators.

#### **1.4.2 Positioning pastoral therapy in a contextual approach**

The contextual approach with its emphasis on ‘doing’ theology goes beyond a mere practice of theology to true participation among all the participants. It does not regard only academic theologians or clergy as theologians. It is done by all people who are struggling with a comprehension of the presence of God in our human conditions (Bosch 1991:427). This position dovetails well with the qualitative participatory action research method (Denzin & Lincoln 1994; McTaggart 1997; Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7-10) adopted in this study. In this study, Basotho men are considered as participants in the struggle to understand the presence of God in their manly situation.

According to Kotzé (2002:25-29; see also Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:7), in the context of pastoral care, counselling and therapy, the participatory method is committed to ethical practice in which the researcher and the subjects of research are engaged in co-searching for new knowledges; a collaborative endeavour in which both “co-create the understanding, realities and decisions”. It tries by all means to avoid knowing “*for* people what is good for them”. Instead it stresses knowing “*with* them”. It provokes an agency of “not to care *for* but care *with* people who are in need of care”. Hess (2006:2-7) criticises traditional methodologies which “research people as objects or subjects of interest” and opts for an “ethical position of mutual accountability” between the researcher and the participants. In favour of the notion of relational responsibility, Gergen and McNamee (1999:xi) censure a tradition of individual responsibility in social research where “hierarchies of knower versus the ignorant, active versus passive, leader versus follower” are upheld. In the light of this method, I formed a Reflecting Team (Janowsky & Dickerson & Zimmerman 1995; Anderson 1991) comprising of ten (10) Basotho men as participants in this



study. In the light of the understanding of research as an ethical practice, I regard these men as co-researchers in this study.

These men have accepted to reflect on their experiences of the dominant masculinity discourses in their lives. The criteria for their participation were that they should be husbands, fathers, members of general society and church goers. I regard these criteria as representative of the sites of expression of the dominant masculinity discourses in Lesotho. They were invited through announcements during Sunday church service of a Catholic congregation called Mofumahali oa Lefatše in a place called Mazenod. Before we started with the meetings I explained the nature and the purpose of the study to them individually. I gave them formal information letters (see appendix A – English version) and consent forms (see appendix B – English version) written in Sesotho language. The basic format of these documents is adopted from Kotzé and Kotzé (2001:189-192) with some modifications to suit this study. Members of the team decided on the themes for discussions. My interaction with them was informed by the narrative approach to therapeutic conversations (White & Epston 1990; Freedman & Combs 1996; 2004:137-155; Payne 2000; Morgan 2000).

With regard to the aims of this study, concerning the first aim I availed a summary of my findings from the reading of the Lesotho historiography to the team members. I asked them to check my interpretations of issues. Together, we analysed masculinity discourses in specific Basotho traditional beliefs and practices. Concerning the second aim, I invited them to reflect on the values of the present dominant masculinity in their lives and how *sekoele* practice encourages them to preserve the status quo. With regard to the third aim, the team members were encouraged to search within *sekoele* itself possibilities of alternative more ethical ways of being men.

### **1.4.3 Social constructionism**

The social construction theory is adopted in this study to understand the experience of masculinity in Lesotho. The theory holds that what we take to be knowledge of the world and self, in this case, being a man, finds its origins in communal interchange. The theory maintains that central to the community is a shared language and that this language serves “to make real” the objects or events within that community. These assumptions do not only unsettle our traditional beliefs in truth, objectivity, and knowledge beyond history and culture. They also

question the right of any particular group, scientific, religious or otherwise, to claim ultimate authority of knowledge. In short, social construction theory exposes the ideological saturation of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Gergen 1995, 1999, 2001; Gergen & Gergen 2003; Wittgenstein 2003; Martin 2003; Burr 2003). The relevance of social construction theory to this study lies in tying together language, historical processes and cultural situations. Within this framework any consideration of gender issues, masculinity issues to be precise, beyond history and culture are highly questionable. The theme of language in particular, is relevant in as far as it constitutes social practice or social action (Gergen & McNamee 1999: x-xi; Burr 2003:46-61). Berger and Luckmann (1966:49-61) assert that language is created in, and has its primary reference to everyday life, and at the same time, objectifies and typifies our experiences.

There is a tendency in a movement known as *sekoele*, to interpret events and social realities, including masculinity which is at the heart of this study, in non-historical terms. *Sekoele* is considered in this study as a social construction as the third chapter will demonstrate. Rakotsoane (2004) stresses the importance of *sekoele* in Sesotho language. It must be rescued from being eroded in the encounter with English language in particular. Khaketla and Elias in the preface of Matšela's (1990: i-ii; 2001:7-8) works, respectively, raise the issue of connection between language and Sesotho socio-cultural realities. Khaketla laments misuse of Sesotho language in expressing certain social realities and thereby giving the impression that the Sesotho language is a body of fixed signs representing an essential social identity of authentic Mosotho that exists in its purity from the origin. Elias, on the contrary, suggests that this purity is affected by social changes overtime. Matšela (1990: iv-v) argues for Sesotho customs and traditions. For him ancient Basotho traditions have a capacity to penetrate the present and future like threads in a blanket. They form a cultural identity that has to be protected. Mokhehle (1976) argues for *sekoele* in the arena of politics. He expresses his belief in an "unspoiled Basotho society" and Basotho culture "in its indigenous and purer form, unadulterated by any foreign culture". Guma (1966: i-ii) presents another aspect of *sekoele* that immediately touches upon the subject matter of this study. It has something to do with the observance of "Truth" as it is embedded in Sesotho ways of forming "real" men and ways of thinking about masculinity.

From these references it becomes apparent how *sekoele* can function as a movement of resistance to change. Its implication for the order of gender relations should not be underestimated. With its

regressive and foundational orientation, it brackets the historicity of the social reality of masculinity in the name of its essential “purity” which it calls by a generic name, *Sesotho*.

Social constructionism with its poststructuralist slant supports this study to engage in dialogue with *sekoele* practice. The thoughts of Michel Foucault (1970; 1972; Gordon 1980; Sheridan 1980; McHoul & Grace 1993; Kelly 1994; Besley 2001) about the formation and function of discourses and the effects of power/knowledge on person’s identity are significant to the theme of this research. White (1992: 121), in his practice of narrative therapy has steered around social constructionism when positioning himself theoretically. I want to follow in his footsteps. Because of this positioning he was able to identify and deconstruct dominant discourses within a therapeutic context. In the case of this study, this theory will assist in identifying dominant *sekoele* discourses, especially those related to issues of masculinity in the present Lesotho with the aim of deconstructing them. Social constructionism subverts and objectifies the realities taken for granted and practices. It uncovers the disembodied or not contextualised truths and ways of speaking that conceal their ideological biases and prejudices. In this light, *sekoele* practice in terms of masculinity is challenged because of its biases and prejudices against others such as women and children.

Foucault’s historical analytical methods of archaeology and genealogy described and adopted in the next chapter and implied in chapters three, four and the first part of chapter five will assist this study to uncover prejudices and biases of the dominant masculinity discourses in Lesotho. They are employed to deconstruct those discourses which support and sustain oppression of women; to show that there already exist some traces of alternative more ethical masculinities in the very history of those discourses. The traces are highlighted to challenge the present dominant masculinities to seek alternative ways of being men in the present. From a theological point of view, these traces should be situated in the Christian discourse because this is where the life of Jesus is a very important alternative way of being a man. For this reason a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study should be seen as part of the contemporary Christian discourse which, perhaps many Christians, especially men, find it difficult to accept.

Foucault’s historical methods allow an exploration of masculinity discourses of each period and their effects on Basotho men while they suspend them in order to consider the present situation.

For instance, they will enable the suspension of the discourses about Moshoeshoe as the founder and the leader of the Basotho nation in order to allow seeing him as a man who had vested interests in his dealings with other men, to dominate not only them but also women and children. From this angle the strategies and tactics he used to achieve that domination are revealed. It will be revealed how violent he could be if and when people resisted his domination. The story of him beating a woman who wanted to keep her baby boy whom Moshoeshoe wanted to keep as his “servant” because he had paid bride wealth for her husband, shows to which extent the manful discourses of his time had taken grip on him. This story is explored in the second chapter. What is important for now is to note how incidences such as this are not insignificant in the history of chieftain and commoner masculinities. They are part of the process of the birth of the chieftain and commoner (general) masculinities in Lesotho as we know them today. In this study Moshoeshoe, who is mostly seen by historiographers as the founder and a great leader of the nation, is seen as a man who successfully achieved domination of other men and women through the practice of cattle raiding, *mafisa* system (cattle loaning) and paying *bohali* (bride price) for poor men.

In short, social construction theory together with Foucauldian ideas on power, engages a critical discourse analysis. According to Fairclough (1992; 1995) and Burr (2003:170-171), the primary concern of critical discourse analysis is the relation between language and power; the practices implied in specific discourses; conditions and social structures and relations that shape the context of discourses. Its purpose is to expose some power imbalances hidden behind them. Thus understood, critical discourse analysis is a relevant tool to analyse the Lesotho historiography taken in this study as a resourceful text in which operations of masculinity are inscribed alongside specific cultural beliefs, customs and traditions mostly referred to by a general name, “*Sesotho*”.

#### **1.4.4 Narrative therapy**

The narrative approach to therapy (White & Epston 1990, Freedman and Combs 1996; Payne 2000; White 1995, 2004) is also employed to collaborate with the contextual approach of liberation theologies in the study of masculinity in this study. It “seeks to be a respectful, non-blaming approach to counselling and community work”. It always maintains “a stance of

curiosity, and always asking questions to which you genuinely do not know the answers” (Morgan 2000:2). The connection of narrative therapy and community work (Dulwich Centre Publications 1999, 2002, 2003) witnesses to the effectiveness of narrative therapy in working with people of different social locations; among them men (Jenkins 1990; Pease 1997). By its adoption of a poststructuralist perspective (White 1997:22-235), narrative therapy can challenge *sekoele* practice which tends to define social identities in terms of the truth of human nature, in this case masculinity. On the contrary, it offers an alternative of seeing that which is referred to as nature/ “*Sesotho*” as a product of systems of interpretation which often conceal issues of power. Narrative therapy has the capacity to address issues of power (Freedman & Combs 1996:37-40; White 2004: 152-157, 168-171) which appear to be at the heart of masculinity in general. This research through the help of a narrative approach to therapy seeks to highlight those issues of power in the operation of masculinity in Lesotho and to suggest life giving transformations in the lives of Basotho men. The members of the reflecting team of this study are seen as the first beneficiaries of this approach.

### **1.5 Organisation of Chapters**

Because of the use of the Basotho history by Basotho men to justify male domination, I have found it relevant to investigate this history to find out how the present operations of masculinity are related to it. This forms the content of the second chapter. Searching for this relationship amounts to doing the history of masculinity in Lesotho. Through this historical analysis, the history itself of the operations of masculinity in relation to the issue of gender is created. The third chapter concentrates on the current practical philosophy of *sekoele*. The core of it is the exploration of the strategies and tactics employed by this philosophy to encourage Basotho men to resist transformation in the order of gender. In the fourth chapter the nationalistic tendencies of the operations of masculinity that surfaced in the historical analysis and uncovering of the tactics of the resistance movement is further investigated. The dovetailing of masculinity and nationalism in Lesotho is not left unchallenged as it is identified in this study as one reason behind the men’s resistance in the order of gender.

The fifth chapter explores the fourth relationship between the present dominant masculinities with Christian churches. As with the second chapter on the history of masculinity in Lesotho, the

history of the operations of masculinity in the context of Christian churches is explored. In a sense this chapter is the continuation of the second chapter. But what forms the core of it is how specific religious beliefs, traditions and practices reinforce the Basotho men's resistance to transformation in the order of gender. Through the help of the contextual theologies of liberation a criticism of male domination is launched.

The sixth chapter concentrates on how Basotho men today can be assisted to face the challenges of the gender sensitive consciousness and seek some alternative, more ethical ways of being a man. The seventh chapter is about my personal reflection on the research and the conclusion of the study.

### **1.6 An Important Remark about the Text**

Before proceeding to the next chapter, there is an important remark in order, at this juncture, in this introductory chapter, about the sources employed in this text. A critical reader, with a broad academic background, will notice that the sources are mostly drawn from a body of literature published before the year 2000, and might, for this reason, wonder about the contribution of this text to the current debates on gender issues beyond 2000 in Lesotho. This situation draws attention to the challenge this study was faced with: the slow pace of and limited access to the broadband system in Lesotho, and virtually non-existent relevant theological literature on the Christian experience beyond 2000 in this country. Concerning the challenge of the slow pace of the broadband system, this study is very much aware of this gap, and it acknowledges the limitations it could impose on it with regard to the positions it has taken on the subject matter of gender relations in the context of Lesotho. This acknowledgement is very important, because the issue of gender is one of the topical issues that dominate discussions in the everyday social interactions globally. The study had to work within the limits imposed on it by this situation. With regard to the lack of relevant theological literature from Lesotho, the study bridged the gap through the contribution of the members of the Reflecting Team. With this situation in mind, the reader is beckoned to appreciate the contribution of this study to the current debates on gender issues in Lesotho.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A HISTORY OF SESOTHO MASCULINITY

#### 2.1 Introduction

The present accepted ways of being a man and thinking about men in Lesotho, urges me to investigate the history of masculinity in this chapter. I want to, first, explore how the present dominant operations of masculinity in Lesotho are related to the ways of being a man and thinking about men in the past epochs. To explore this relationship amounts to doing the history of the present dominant masculinities. And this is the core of this chapter. I want to investigate manly discourses of the preceding epochs because they provide a structure within which the operations of the present dominant manly discourses which privilege men over women in Lesotho can be understood. Secondly, I want to challenge the present dominant masculinity discourses which tend to perceive and interpret men as a collective and unified metaphysical entity on the basis of this history. I want to demonstrate that masculinity can mean different things in different times. For this reason, I want to encourage those ways of being which represent ethical ways of being a man in the order of gender relations. I argue that, within the history of the operations of masculinity itself in Lesotho, there have been, and still are, different modes of being a man. I argue that the different modes of being a man have been engaged in a struggle for domination, not only over other men but also over women and children.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to trace, within this context of a struggle for domination, the ways of being a man which make present an alternative more ethical consciousness in the order of gender. I believe that such vestiges can serve to challenge and engage in dialogue those present dominant ways of being a man which tend to put men at the centre of social organisations of the Basotho society even at the expense of women and children. This is important given the orientation of the philosophy of *sekoele* which justifies resistance to change in the order of gender on the basis of thinking about Basotho's historical past as a sort of sacred cow that cannot be altered. For this reason, the inquiry into the history of masculinity in Lesotho is determined by the conditions from which it is made, the present dominant masculinities, and it has to be critical. The inquiry serves the concerns of the present, not the past.

Engaging in the study of this history is very significant and relevant to the questions and aims of this study. This study seeks, first, to explore the dominant ideas and practices of the present dominant Sesotho masculinity and its effects on Basotho men. Secondly, it wants to identify the characteristics and tactics of the dominant philosophy of life called *sekoele* that encourage the present dominant masculinities not to accept change in the order of gender relations. The way this philosophy uses the historical past of the Basotho to reinforce men's resistance to change in the order of gender is behind the exploration of this history. Thirdly, I want to find out whether there is within the *sekoele* outlook itself, in terms of this history, a possibility of an alternative more ethical masculinity that can challenge the present forms of resistance of Basotho men to change in the order of gender relations. I want to explore whether there is something in terms of Basotho's history, in terms of beliefs, traditions and practices, which can help to understand the present ways of being a man and the challenges they face.

## **2.2 History and Method**

For methodological purposes, to do the history of the present dominant masculinities in Lesotho, I rely on Foucault's (1972; 1979) archaeological and genealogical methodologies. The archaeological method brackets all the "truth" and "internal deep meaning" claims of the discourses about the object under study to concentrate on the mode and condition of its existence. In the case of this study and in particular this chapter, the present dominant discourses of manhood in Lesotho are bracketed to reveal the mode and conditions of their existence. The archaeological method analyses how one discourse comes to be substituted for another to reveal their historicity or temporality. It challenges undifferentiated reference to change by emphasising discontinuities between discourses. It tries to establish the system of transformations that constitute change. In short, the archaeological method demonstrates that what appears to be a continuous development of meaning is, in fact, fractured by discontinuous discursive formations. In the case of this study, what this means is that there are no finalities, no hidden underlying significations and metaphysical certainties about being a Mosotho man or being men in general, for that matter.

The genealogical method rejects out of hand the tendency of the traditional historical method which interprets history as a continuous progression of events toward some finality. It challenges



the notions of hidden deep meanings, truth in itself, and interiority. It reveals that things, in this case masculinity, do not have essence; that their essence is the product of historical vicissitudes (Foucault 1971:139, 142, 151). The genealogical method focuses primarily on that which conditions, limits and institutionalises the formation of discourses. In this chapter attention is given to the conditions, limits and institutionalisation of the formation of specific masculinity discourses in Lesotho. In his “The Discourse on Language” appearing as an appendix to the American version of *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault (1972:234) establishes the relationship of the archaeological and genealogical methods. Whereas the archaeological method strategically suspends totalities and unities, though it does not reject them out of hand, the genealogical method serves to deconstruct them. Through a sustained use of the genealogical method in his historical works, *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1979; 1980) demonstrates the deconstructive edge of the method. He gives attention to the relations of power, knowledge and the body in modern western society. He insists that history is actually a struggle for domination. On this basis, the genealogical method questions and rejects any assertion of the singular truth, refuses to accept absolutes and demonstrates that the past is an effect of a specific historical discourse. In Foucault’s (1980:114) words:

The history which bears us has the form of war rather than that of language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no ‘meaning’, though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail – but this is in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles of strategies and tactics.

Through the principles of strategy and tactics, the genealogical method exposes how all history comes about through participation in a struggle of competing discourses. The effect of this struggle is the authorization of certain discourses, giving them a status of the truth, and certain people to articulate that truth while they hide their own vested interests. The genealogical method therefore, unmasks the vested interests and deprives those who benefit from the truth of the discourse, the reassuring stability of life. It is a method of diagnosing and grasping the significance of social practices from within them. History becomes “effective” to the extent it does this (Bouchard 1980:154). In short, the genealogical method, as Foucault (1982: 208) would put it, serves to explain the different modes by which human beings are made subjects in a given culture. The implications of the genealogical method for the purpose of this study are enormous.

The hitherto authorised masculinity discourses which have acquired the status of the truth about men in Lesotho are challenged. The vested interests which perpetuate male domination are questioned.

The social constructionist perspective, adopted as one of the theoretical frameworks of this study, endorses the position of the genealogical method. It affirms that history in terms of tradition represents “different social contexts [which] evoke different selves” (Van der Lans, 2002:32). In his historical works, *Birth of the Clinic* and *Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault (1973; 1979) has demonstrated how the past constitutes the web of our present experience. We think about realities within structures that have been created in the past. In the context of this study, and in particular, this chapter, the present situation of the accepted ways of being and thinking about men in Lesotho is seen as a product of structures created in the past. In this perspective, Basotho men are seen as participants in concrete social contexts which cannot be detached from their discourses and time. Today, the present dominant Sesotho masculinities appear to be at a crossroads. They are challenged by a growing gender-ethical consciousness which demands some shifts in the ways Basotho men think about themselves in relation to women.

### **2.3 Organisational Remark**

Given the wide range of the history of masculinity in Lesotho, I have conveniently broken this chapter into three parts. The first deals with the theme of war; the second, with the political dimension of masculinity in Lesotho; the third, with Basotho men and labour migrancy. The other, which could have made the fourth part – Christian churches and Basotho men, has been reserved for the chapter on male domination and theologies of liberation, given its theological content.

## PART ONE

### BASOTHO MEN AND WAR

#### 2.4 Basotho Men as Hunters and Cattle Raiders

The Lesotho historiography about the beginnings of the Basotho as a nation in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and anthropological studies have noted the existence of the phenomenon of cultivation of land, hunting, cattle raiding, and war among major activities of men during this period. These activities came to be seen as the proof and the test of a man's masculinity (Laydevant c1974:23-27; Casalis 1861:16; Arboussert 1991:129; Makoro 1965: 28; Thompson 1975:55-56; Leoatle 1986:15-17). According to Casalis (1861:61-64) Letsie and Molapo, were driven by ambition of a Basotho man to prove their manly character by engaging in war, against their father's will when they led a troop of about four hundred men to attack the Korannas. When Moshoeshe in 1835, directed an expedition of about 700 men against the Bathepu in the Eastern Cape, this was an occasion for his sons to test their bravery, a trade mark of manhood. It was in this venture where Moshoeshe sustained losses that caused him his brother's life, Makhabane (Thompson 1975:83). Cattle raiding was not peculiar to Basotho men. Casalis (1861:38-39) narrates a story of his encounter with the Korannas who had captured a large herd of cattle from the 'Tembukis', (Bathepu).

#### 2.4.1 Cattle raiding: a means of accumulating wealth for chiefs, bonding with and controlling subjects under the *mafisa* system

Cattle-raiding was not only a manly game. It was also a means of accumulating wealth for men, more especially for chiefs. It epitomises, therefore, another dimension through which masculinity of the time came to define itself, wealth (Laydevant c1974:70). It afforded a man a means to support his family. Leoatle (1986:26-27) notes the reason behind the joint cattle raid expedition of 1835. Moshoeshe, Moorosi and Makhabane decided to invade the Bathepu because Makhabane had had intentions of killing their father, Mokhachane, for neglecting his mother of junior rank, leaving her house with no cattle. Moshoeshe discouraged him and suggested an alternative option in cattle raiding. Joele raided 'Masekoati's' cattle against his father, Molapo, who he thought did not wish him (Joele) to be wealthy while Jonathan captured the cattle of Makunyapane (Sekese 1893).

Most of the flocks and herds captured in war became property of the chief (Casalis 1861:155; Sanders 1975:15, 32; Ellenberger 1912:129). The subjects regarded it a favour to become their depositories and guardians under what came to be known as *mafisa* system. The reward for taking care of these animals was their general use including consumption of their milk and meat of the aging ones. This arrangement achieved two important things: a social bond between the chief and his subjects as well as making a chief to be perceived as a supporter of his community. It was very rare for a chief to share the booty with the subjects who participated in the fight in which the animals were captured. In case he did so, he enjoyed the privilege of selecting the best and left the rest to his men. Why? Casalis remarks that wealth would endanger the stability of his power. Moshoeshoe devoted his energies and time to cattle raiding among his neighbours (Sekese 1892; 1900; 1909) and under the *mafisa* system consolidated his status as chief, allowing them to keep the cattle he captured from them and so they became his subjects (Thompson 1975:55, 57; Sanders 1975: 14-15, 23 32; Nchakala 1891; Ellenberger 1912:230-231; Sekese 1913). Taylor (Hadley 1972:43-44) relates how Molapo, as a young man, accumulated his cattle wealth by organised border raids. By the *mafisa* custom he distributed a bulk of them to his common men-folk subjects or headmen. At will he would call them for inspection and the caretaker had to produce the skins of the dead animals. On one occasion he 'ate up' a certain Ananias and his house for annexing one head of cattle.

Looked at a close range, the practice of cattle-raiding, did not only represent a strong pining for power among men. It was also a condition under which some men emerged as above all others on the social scale. This reveals the construction of the heart of Sesotho chieftaincy as we know it today. Chiefs are men who emerged on the topmost range of the socioeconomic ladder through the practice of cattle raiding. It is these men who have determined the constitutive elements of chieftaincy accepted as Basotho's cultural heritage today. Cattle-raiding therefore is a condition of the emergence of a kind of social stratification or classification of two types of masculinities, *chieftain* and *commoner* and the power relations between them. As this chapter unfolds we will see how the commoner masculinity will later challenge the authority of the chieftain masculinity. Moshoeshoe is the embodiment of the most successful chieftain masculinity. He is the one who set up structures within which we think of chieftaincy in Lesotho even today. The relationship between chieftain and common masculinities and women will become apparent as the chapter

unfolds. The identification of chieftaincy as a form of masculinity is significant in that, first, it challenges those interpretations which define Sesotho masculinity as a single entity of essential, ontological and spiritual order, something which makes it ahistorical and so conceal the issues of power relations. Second, it questions interpretations of chieftaincy which do not think about it as a form of masculinity which is an outcome of power relations itself, but as a necessary pre-given part of a social order, sanctioned by God, branded as essential to Basotho as a cultural and ethnic group as *sekoele* believers tend to think. On the contrary, the argument of this study is that chieftaincy in Lesotho is a product of the operations of male power.

#### **2.4.2 The *mafisa* system: a means of control, consolidation of chieftain masculinity and subjugation of commoner masculinity**

The accumulation of wealth through cattle raiding gave men who achieved the status of a chief in this way an added advantage over other men, especially the poor, their women and children. For instance, Moshoeshoe had some male dependants referred to as *bahlanka* (servants) (Thompson 1975:61-62; Casalis 1838:5; Backhouse 1844:375). These men served him as herbalists, rainmakers, diviners, praise-singers, *phala* (village criers), personal attendants and herdsmen. They came from the underprivileged section of the community. They depended on him for survival. He provided *bohali* (bridewealth) for them. Their wives became maids of the chief's senior wives and worked in their fields. Their children became the chief's children by virtue of the cattle he gave in bride wealth for their biological fathers. These children came to be known as *bana ba khomo* (children of the cattle) and they inherited their parent's status of servitude and supplied free labour to the chief. Thompson and Sheddick (1975:12; 1954:109-110) respectively observe that within a generation or two the *bahlanka* antecedents merged into their patron's family. By 1830s the number of "propertyless" men had increased while that of "men of substance" as Thompson distinguishes them, had diminished due to the spate of wars popularly known as *lifaqane* (1975:61-62).

This social stratification or classification sometimes appears to have affected women negatively. Arbousset (1836: 147-153) witnessed an incidence where a young woman who was a wife of one of Moshoeshoe's *bahlanka* (servants), resolutely and assured wanted to keep her boy child after the death of her husband. Moshoeshoe argued that she could not because he paid *bohali* (bride wealth) for her deceased husband. An unidentified Mosotho male friend of the woman tried to

intervene and spoke in her favour. Moshoeshoe in rage violently attacked the man with stones and blistering words. Upon return from the fleeing man he ordered the widow into a hut and whipped her with a stick. He would not even listen to Arbousset who also pleaded the case for the woman.

The story of Moshoeshoe typifies the operations of male power behind most acts of violence against women and children in Lesotho even today. The defence of Moshoeshoe's behaviour against Arbousset's public reprobation of it agitates a more gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study. In terms of this consciousness, the woman's unnamed male friend and Arbousset represent traces of a more gender-ethical masculinity sought to engage in dialogue with the dominant consciousness represented by Moshoeshoe in this episode. Thompson's (1975:97) cynical remark, questioning Arbousset's intervention as infringement of Moshoeshoe's customary right demonstrates how other men, even if they have not committed acts of violence against women can participate in oppressive practices in the community. "Now this person, who was still a mere unmarried lad, twenty-five years of age, was humiliating him, the king, in the presence of his subjects for standing on his customary right". This attitude will be challenged in the next chapter on the *sekoale* (a return to the traditions of ancestors) outlook, which encourages the present dominant Sesotho masculinity to resist change in the order of gender relations on the basis of the defence of "customary rights" of men and tradition in general even when it is at the detriment of women and children.

From this historical evidence, it becomes clear how wealth can easily turn into a tool of subjugation and domination in the hands of men. It is in this sense that *Mafisa* system is seen as a form of control not only of the commoner masculinity but women and children as well. That which has been acclaimed as "kindness and generosity" and "an act of outstanding mercy" by Sanders (1975:22, 32) appears to have been a means of control of other men, women and children by this man, Moshoeshoe, and his sons who inherited chieftaincy from him. Lapointe (1986:27) is, therefore, correct to assert that "if traditionally Basotho consider the succession of chiefs hereditary, many historic cases show that a chief could gain the upper hand because of his cunning, his political acumen or his influence over a group even if he had not hereditary right". Moshoeshoe is a typical example. Laydevant (c1974:27,70) notes that according to traditional Sesotho custom, men of a tribe belonged to the chief and were at his service, cultivating his

fields, running errands, assisting at court cases and always on the alert to take arms for fighting or hunting. This control, on the part of common men, relented when many of them started to acquire cattle by their services on the farms of White people in the Cape colony (Casalis 1861:155-156). This time round the cattle wealth helped the commoner masculinity to subjugate women even further. Women became men's property just as poor men were to Moshoeshoe and his sons. Chief Jobo is on record alluding to an ancient Sesotho adage: "a woman has no chief but her husband" (Cape of Good Hope 1873:55). This maxim resonates well with the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment in Jewish biblical tradition where women are portrayed as their men's property in the same breath as oxen and donkeys (The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version – Exodus 20:17).

Today this consideration of women folk has to answer for itself in the court of an alternative more ethical consciousness or gender-ethical consciousness as women become more and more aware of and dissatisfied with their subjugated situation. Women and Law (1998) challenge both customary law enshrined in Section 18 (4) of the Constitution of Lesotho (Government of Lesotho 1993) and common law which deem all women to be perpetual minors whose guardianship is passed along male lineage and their rights are not recognised. If and when at all they are, they are always linked to men's. Mokhothu (1998) highlights the conflict between culture and practice as she explores the opportunities open for educated women in accessing housing loans. Muzvidziwa (2003:159-161) notes how women's aspirations to have houses of their own are often frustrated by practices which deny them access to land because they are women.

In one of the research sessions where we engaged in exchange of thought about Basotho men's attitude toward women, members of the Reflecting Team admitted to a prevalent attitude which saw women as mere objects serving men's interests and expressed their desire for change in this regard. One of them shared his experience of his father whom he described as "a man who used to frustrate my mother". "I thought he was mad but discovered I behaved like him toward my wife when I got married. Thank heaven I now see what I have been doing to her. I want to value her as a human person worthy of my respect."

### **2.4.3 The *lifaqane* wars as a condition for the emergence of Basotho men as makaota, cannibals: the consolidation of chieftain masculinity**

With the break of the *Lifaqane* wars in 1822 we see another face of Sesotho masculinity other than the one supported by cattle raiding and hunting. Warfare was no longer an enterprising game of a small group of warriors as was with cattle raiding (Sanders 1975:29-30; Damane & Sanders 1974:13-14). It became invasion on full scale by starving multitudes which got out killing chaotically, destroying villages and seizing stock and grain (Leoatle 1986:3-21; Laydevant & Tjokosela (1965:49-76). Under this condition we see two types of men emerging: *Makaota* (the lean ones), who survived by hunting and *Malimo* (cannibals), who survived on eating other humans. Basotho chiefdom emerged under Moshoeshoe as national leader over and above his *ba-Mokoteli* family during this time. Many of those who came to increase the number of his subjects were attracted by, among others, his wealth (Damane & Sanders 1974:2-3; Coates 1966:19-23) and not by his moral purity as the *sekoele* believers tend to interpret as we will see in the next chapter.

### **2.4.4 The *lifaqane* wars and a woman leader**

Of great significance in the context of this study is the emergence of a woman leader, 'Manthatsi, alongside male figures of the likes of Moshoeshoe. Thompson (1975: 34, 40, 68) notes how it was unusual for a woman to attract many adherents and rule in Sesotho custom. In the context of this study 'Manthatsi stands out as a symbol and witness of the presence of a consciousness that affirms women in a history that appears to be dominated by men and interpreted in masculine terms by most historians today. She challenges an assumption which excludes women by virtue of their femininity as makers of national histories and participants in public social affairs of a community. Of equal importance are the men of her people who acknowledged her as their leader rather than discredit her as it happens within the *sekoele* orientation which justifies male supremacy on the basis of men's historic achievements. With 'Manthatsi as a historical figure, the *sekoele* philosophy is challenged on the basis of its own terms. In this study those men who acknowledged 'Manthatsi remarkably stand out as a paragon of an alternative masculinity that is not threatened by women's participation in the public domain of politics dominated by the masculine gender. Makoro (c1965: 13, 23-25), Sanders (1975:29) and Ellenberger (1988:45) note the qualities that won her respect from her people. She was



strong, brave and intelligent, qualities commonly associated with men of the likes of Moshoeshoe. She commanded and led the Batlokoa warriors in wars. She sat with men at the *khotla* (the court) and officiated on litigations; imposed fines on law transgressors. Though she had allowed to be taken by her husband's brother after his death under a traditional custom of *ho kenela* (levirate), she never allowed the man to put his nose in the governmental affairs of the people looking up to her for leadership.

#### **2.4.5 Wars over land: the emergence of Sesotho nationalistic masculinity and the colonial/imperial masculinity**

War did not stop with the passing of the *lifaqane*. Basotho men continued to fight other wars, this time, mostly over land, and not just for survival in the sense of *lifaqane*. This marks a new phase in the transformation of Sesotho masculinity. An element of race and colour becomes part of Basotho men's consciousness, the effect of which was the strengthening of their sense of ethnic and national identity. Leotle (1986:28-52), Laydevant (1954:49-94), Laydevant and Tjokosela (1965:49-76), Damane and Sanders (1974:3-8) and Sanders (1975:180-315) have explored a series of wars that ensued upon the arrival of white farmers in 1836, wars over land and sovereignty: Soldiers war 1852; Senekal's war 1854-1858; Seqiti war (1865-1868). These wars are in essence wars over land caused by the boundary, known as the Warden Line, created by Major Warden of Bloemfontein. Orpen (1857) has explored how, land as a result, has been the cause of war between the two nations.

In the context of this study all these wars underscore some aspects of the operation of masculinity in Lesotho which tie together concepts of land, economy, security, independence and rights (Spence 1968:10-12; Smith 1939:141-177; Laydevant 1957:72-86; Sanders (1975:222,224). These are the things Basotho men were ready to die for (Casalis 1861:157-158,159,160-162). By protecting their land Basotho men protected their right, stability and wealth. This dimension is often overshadowed by the emphasis on "stock theft" by most historiographers (Sanders 1975:213-315) whose commentaries, for instance, Theal (1886), have put it at the centre of the Senekal and seqiti wars.

For this reason, it can be appreciated why the theme of land still remains as sensitive as ever. Embedded in Basotho psyche that feeds their sense of national identity (Rosenberg 2008:32), it

seems to have acquired new significance within the *sekoale* philosophy. The present physical borders of Lesotho are interpreted as a symbolic reminder of an escape from total annihilation of Basotho's nationhood and the need to defend it (*Moafrika*, 3003). Within this orientation, men are often emphatically reminded of this point so that the impression is created that nationhood and manhood belong together. This link is used to serve the reinforcement of an attitude of resistance to any form of transformation in the other areas of ethnicity of the Basotho. As a distinct ethnic group, their traditional rules and practices that regulate relations in the order of gender are also heavily guarded.

Customarily land has been allocated to men. Men are having a right to it because they are believed to be providers of their families. Because customarily women remain minors even after marriage, they cannot own property, let alone land. For this reason women cannot own it in their own right. They only have access to it through their husbands. In this way land has become a symbol of men's economic security, independence, things which women are customarily deprived of. For this reason, today land has become a gendered issue in which practices and laws that deny women's right to access and own it are being questioned. Matete-Lieb (1995:80) and Muzvidziwa (2003:150-151) argue that the Lesotho legal system, customary and common, regulating marriage, discriminates against women by making it difficult for them to have access to it. For instance, the Deeds Registry Act of 1967 requires that no immovable property may be registered or transferred in the name of married woman in Community of Property. Whereas Basotho men had to fight for land with the Boers of the Orange Free State in the past, today women have to face men to have access to it.

After the death of Moshoeshoe in 1870, there are two other wars that are significant in the lives of Basotho men: the so called Moorosi and gun wars in 1879 and 1880 respectively (Laydevant 1954:94-103; Germond 1967: 341-385; Hadley 1972:48-91; Damane & Sanders 1974:7-8; Damane 1986:87-94). These wars underscore the element of power which is often associated with being a man.

#### **2.4.6 The so-called Moorosi war as a war of masculinities: who has the last word?**

Historiographers Theal, Taylor and Damane (*Basutoland Records*, ii. 263; Hadley 1972:48; 1960:27-39) respectively emphasise that the Moorosi war was provoked by his intransigency and

insubordination by refusing to give up his son Doda to the colonial authorities to face charges for his criminal behaviour. The offence, according to Damane (1986:88) consisted in theft of horses of white farmers of Lady Grey in the Eastern Cape. However a closer look at the events and the atmosphere at the time suggest that there was more to this war than what these historiographers have stressed. I propose that masculinity and power were probably the most influential factors in that war. The link between masculinity and power is very significant in the context of this study which seeks to explore some dominant ideas and practices of Sesotho masculinity and its effects on Basotho men. Power seems to be one of the dominant discourses that operate as a pillar of resistance to any form of transformation in the order of gender relations among Basotho men today. Men seem to enjoy the last word on what happens and what does not in their families and communities at large as we discussed in one of our sessions of the Reflecting Team.

As Burman (1981:132) remarks, we are historically at the time when the imperial magisterial rule was at its height seeking to assert its authority over the “natives”. They had devised a policy on “Native Affairs” which sought to “undermine the power of the chiefs and replaced African institutions with colonial ones”. Though he puts more emphasis on Doda’s case of theft, Damane (1960:29) also acknowledges that the manner of governance of many colonial magistrates left much to be desired. They imposed their orders which they expected to be obeyed without resistance. Taylor (Hadley 1973:22-23) cites an example of Colonel Griffith, a resident commissioner in Lesotho. On one occasion he asserted his authority over Basotho men and their chiefs over a land dispute. When one party suggested that the demarcations were done by Moshoeshoe, Griffith told them that Moshoeshoe was dead and anyone who challenged his demarcations should do it at his peril. And any resistance was interpreted as a show of disrespect. Now, this combined with the desire of Moshoeshoe’s sons to be the only chiefs in the territory (Damane 1960:27-28), it becomes apparent how the so-called Moorosi war was a struggle over power and not Doda’s “criminal behaviour”.

When Hamilton Hope was designated magistrate of Quthing, Moorosi was the principal chief and a man of great influence in the new administrative colonial district (Burman 1981:110). The relationship between the two underscores a struggle for power about whose word was the last in the land Moorosi claimed as his. The story of Moorosi and Hope serves as a key to understanding the effects of the colonial struggles on Basotho men’s identity in general, their

sense of self and being a man. A man is a man to the extent to which he resists the domination of another, especially a man of a white race. This will become clear in the next two chapters on the philosophy of *sekoele* and Sesotho masculinity and nationalism.

In her description of the events that led to the war, Burman (1981:108-131) mentions dramatic incidences which allow the interpretation of this war as the war of masculinities over power. In a letter of Mr Hope, the resident magistrate, to the Governor's Agent in Basutoland cited by Burman (1981:111-115) the elements of both the colonial and imperialist, the chieftain and the general Sesotho masculinities are well displayed, all embroiled in power struggle. The magistrate describes his encounter with Chief Moorosi and his men where his authority to give laws and their enforcement was heatedly challenged by the chief. The chief confronted him for fining a certain Raisa without his *consent* (my emphasis). Raisa had burned the cornfield of a widow he wanted to have as a wife under the *kenelo* (levirate) custom. The woman refused. As far as Moorosi was concerned the magistrate was subordinate to him and had exceeded his authority in adjudicating in Raisa's case.

In the context of this study which seeks to establish vestiges of an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness in the history of the Basotho, the case of Raisa raises an even stronger desire for the consciousness. When the chief asked his men whose people they were, whether Magistrate's or his, to which the men responded in their chief's favour, the plight of the widow in question was relegated into the shadows of men wanting to assert their power over each other. When in response the magistrate emphasised how he disliked the chief's and his men's display of disloyalty to the government he also sidelined the widow's predicament to assert himself over the chief and his men. He told them he could not tolerate any disrespect of the government from the subject of the queen and those who did, would be treated as rebels. In the presence of his entourage the chief told the magistrate that he was the supreme chief in the region and the magistrate was his subordinate. He remained un-reconciled to the imperial magisterial imperative (Burman 1981: 115, 118).

The element of power which appears to be part of the dominant discourse of masculinity as it operates among Basotho men is displayed in this episode of Moorosi and the imperial magistrate. It is entangled within a tendency of men to assert their authority and strength over others. By

asking his men whose they were between him and the magistrate, Moorosi was assertively demonstrating his chiefly power and strength which he believed was under threat with the encounter with another power and strength wrapped in imperial administrative garb. This becomes obvious in the light of chieftaincy as a form of masculinity that seeks to dominate all others as we have seen above. This episode demonstrates the fear of being undermined when one believes he has already achieved recognition by those he has successfully dominated.

Behind the labelling of Moorosi as a “rebel”, and his son as a “criminal”, lies this thirst for power to subjugate them by the imperial masculinity and their intent to resist that subjugation. Combined with the announcement in October 1878, of the colonial government’s intention to disarm the local men in the region, it is not hard to see the war as part of the struggle for domination and resistance between the imperial and the local men. Lagden (1909:486) observes how Basotho men were apprehensive of the attitude of some of the magistrates who advocated suppression of the power of chieftainship. This war referred to as Moorosi’s rebellion against “lawful authority”, looked at from this angle cannot only be called a war of resistance to imperial subjection (Lagden 1909:489-490) but also the war of male power.

Lagden (1909:484-486) argues that the Baphuthi, at intervals had been detached from the Basotho. He suggests that the speed with which the decision to bring them under the jurisdiction of the Quthing magistrate may have been influenced by two factors. Letsie, the paramount chief, or the magistrate himself had interfered in purely “native affairs”. Damane (1960:27-28) suggests that the sons of Moshoeshoe were out wanting to subdue all the chiefs in Lesotho so that only they remained chiefs in the whole territory. All these factors came into play in the so called Moorosi war. They left him discontent and he expressed it by a show of resistance which Lagden called “disobedience and threatening demeanour”. Matters came to a brink when Doda, Moorosi’s son, challenged the magistrate over an order to have widows pay tax (Damane 1960:30; Burman 1981: 119 Lagden 1909: 487). He was accused and indicted for defying the law and resisting lawful authority among others. He was sentenced to four years in jail but later escaped in 1879. His father stood by him and this sparked the war (Damane 1960:31-32).

In the context of this study, which among others, seeks to find the traces of an alternative more ethical masculinity among the Basotho, Doda’s case just as Raisa’s, underscores the disregard of

an alternative consciousness when men's interests are at stake. It is a matter of either dominating or being dominated. The two cases demonstrate the ways in which the cause of those in the margin can sometimes be used not for their benefit but as a means to achieve a purpose for which they count for nothing in the hands of the powerful men. It is this kind of self serving interest, embedded in gender relations and especially power which exploits the plight of the vulnerable members of a society, such as women and children that is being questioned in this study.

#### **2.4.7 Basotho men's resistance to the colonial/ imperial masculinity further strengthened**

When the colonial parliament in the Cape passed the Disarmament Act in 1880 in the region, Basotho men resisted it (Hadley 1972:56-66). I am interested in the racial and gender issues that lie underneath this resistance. The racial factor seems to underscore a nationalistic sentiment which appears to frame the present dominant Sesotho masculinities in ways that reinforce resistance to desirable changes in the order of gender relations as called for by a gender-ethical consciousness advocated for this study. Laydevant and Tjokosela (1965:105) Taylor (Hadley 1972:55) Spence (1968:11) Burman (1981:133) observe that for years Basotho men had been encouraged to go to work in the Kimberly diamond mines and the railways and had been authorized to purchase guns with the money they earned. Lagden (1909:486, 492) and Spence (1968:11) note that the very announcement of the intention to disarm coupled with hut tax doubling, sparked intense agitation; peoples demeanour changed and the spirit of distrust toward the colonial government fermented.

The account of Taylor (Hadley 1972:56) and Lagden (1909:493-498) about the encounter of the prime minister of the Cape colony, Mr Sprigg with the Basotho chiefs and their men on the issue of disarmament highlights the issues of race and gender operative in the whole debacle. They record how the prime minister made speeches full of commonplace clichés to which Basotho men responded contemptuously. If they disarmed they would be more focussed in the path of progress, civilisation and education and so would become prosperous etc. On the contrary Basotho men interpreted the move as a subtle strategy to emasculate and turn them into slaves, something which touched on the then accepted image of being a man. Asking the prime minister how would they, in the future preserve law and order in the country if they were turned into women by being deprived of their arms, Basotho men tied their identity to guns. But in the same

identification women were assigned a social position which appears men were reluctant to assume.

Germond (1967:341-385) and the Cape Parliament (1872 -1884, G. 13-80: 38-65) report about the national *pitso* (public gathering) of October 17, 1879, in which the issue of disarmament was discussed in the presence of about seven to ten thousand Basotho men. The colonial prime minister revealed a supremacist attitude toward them. He depicted them as “little children” who could not guide themselves, while he portrayed the government representatives as a “father” (Germond 1967:345; Lagden 1909:495), charged with a duty to guide them, especially on the issue of guns. He appealed to them to “Become Europeans” by surrendering their arms (Germond 1967: 348). Lagden (1909:507) who later became the Resident commissioner believed that the mind of the Basotho was aversive to innovations of any sort and he lamented how the government decision to disarm them put him in an equivocal position as government representative and a “father” to the whole Basotho nation.

The positioning of Basotho men as “children” and imperial agents as “fathers” is a key to understanding the racial and gender factors which operated behind Basotho men’s resistance. They did not entertain an idea of being reduced to a status of mere childhood which is even below that of women, while the imperial men were elevated to a superior position. Letsie, the paramount chief, and Tlali Moshoeshe, diplomatically expressed their displeasure in the metaphor of nail pare and the knife in the hand of a child respectively (Germond 1967:350): “Our wives do the same to our children when they scratch people ... will [they] snatch it away violently at the risk of wounding him?” Lagden (1909:495) observes how the colonial prime minister condescendingly questioned this sense and displayed a superior form of masculinity: “I find that the possession of a gun on your part is a mere sentiment; some of you think it makes a man of you to have a gun. The Government, your father, does not think so”. The closing remark of Mr Sprigg, the prime minister, acutely reveals the imperial supremacist masculinity by further questioning the intelligence of Basotho men on the issue of guns: “If you are intelligent you will understand that your duty is to surrender your arms”. Basotho men resisted this display of supremacist attitude which reduced them into a nation of little children, whose customs were perceived as inferior and superseded by the colonial laws (Lagden 1909:496, 504-505).

In the account of his personal, eye witness experience of the gun war in the north of the country, Taylor (Hadley 1972: 55-91) suggests what he perceived to have been the primary reason of the war other than resistance to give up guns. He was almost assured that “deep down in the heart of every black man, an intense desire to drive the white man out of South Africa” (Hadley 1972: 55) was blowing behind the resistance. According to Laydevant and Tjokosela (1965:105-106), among the Basotho the prevalent belief was that they were targeted because they were a black race. The interventions of some of the principal chiefs (Mohlelebe, Tsita Mofoka and Tsekelo Moshoeshoe), as well as Letsie, the paramount chief himself explicitly expressed their suspicion that an element of race and colour were factors behind the disarmament move (Germond 1967:346,348; Lagden 1909:494,505-506).

With this suspicion, it is not far-fetched to conclude that, probably, the gun war was not just about defiance of authority but at a much deeper level, it was a war of races, one seeking to dominate and the other resisting that domination. It is in this context that gender issues simmer; issues of men’s power over women. Cemented with a racial component, this sense of being a man seems to have propelled the steam of Basotho men’s resistance to the imperial supremacist tendencies. Within the *sekoele* outlook this racial element frames the nationalistic and the ethnic sentiment that looks at the other ‘nations’ and ethnicities as a potential threat to what is popularly referred to as *Bochaba ba Basotho* (the constitution of the *sothoiness* of the Basotho as a people) or simply *Bochaba* (cultural identity/nationhood). These notions and their implications for the order of gender relations are explored in the next consecutive chapters on *sekoele* and masculinity and nationalism.

For the reasons of race and gender, I concur with Burman (1981:133) when she argues that the policy of disarmament was to be unpopular among Basotho men. Owning a gun had by then been regarded as a sign of manhood and to be disarmed was equal to being reduced to the status of women and children by the British imperialists. A gun symbolised the Basotho’s male power both in terms of race and gender. The fact that dispossessing men of their guns was interpreted as a reduction of men to the status of women reveals that guns were not a women’s thing. The implication for women is that they were never seen as defenders of the nation. They depended on men for their security. This stands in sharp contrast with women joining the military and become defenders of the nation today. Burman (1981:118-119) further observes that during the stalemate



between chief Moorosi and Magistrate Hope, the latter thought Moorosi was seeking to extort promise out of him to acknowledge his authority as superior to his. Moorosi's response to Magistrate Hope when this latter wanted him to come to a meeting with his men unarmed captures not only the depth of Basotho men's resistance to the imperial supremacist tendencies but also resistance of another male power. Guns provided them that opportunity:

I will not leave my weapons at home when I go to 'pitso' to speak with a chief. I cannot leave my weapons. Intercede for me to the effect with the magistrate. Ever since I was born it has been our custom; I have not invented it, it is so from ancient times. Even when I go to my lands I take my assegais; all these people here can tell you, it is our national law.... If the magistrate says I must leave my arms then it is that he refused to see me; we shall not meet, and the magistrate will prove that he does not wish to speak with me. See you, I do not want to talk stark naked, this is my nature. Even to pay hut-tax I go with these arms; they do not prevent me from paying Tax, I pay it all right.

Moorosi's consideration of the relationship between a man and a gun as expressed in the acts of the Cape Parliament helps us to understand even further the attitude of Basotho men toward disarmament act: "...when a bull goes to pasture, he does not leave his horns in the kraal, he goes out with them, that he may defend himself by them from his assailant and gore it also" (Cape Parliament 1872-1884, A. 49-79: 12).

Despite all the resistance, the Cape government ignored Basotho men's concerns and on April 6, 1880 issued a Proclamation decreeing the ban, not only of guns, but also traditional weapons like spears and assegais, the very things that had come to define a man's identity even before the introduction of guns. In this way Basotho men were incited to "insubordination and change of character of obedience into disobedience" (Lagden 1909:500, 501,503-506). Taylor (Hadley 1972:56-57), Lagden (1909:511, 537) and Laydevant and Tjokosela (1965:106-107,108,111,113) relate how only one chief in the country, Jonathan and with some men under him obeyed the government orders with the exception of his half brother, Joel. A serious cleavage of few "loyal" and majority of "disloyal" was created as a result. The latter group derogatively called the former *Mateketa* (betrayers) while the former in turn called the latter *Mabelete* (the uncontrollable), or *Marabele* (the rebels).

The notion of “betrayal” is very significant in the context of this study which seeks to find out what is it that makes it hard for Basotho men to accept change, something which is reinforced by the *sekoale* philosophy. With its strong sense of nationalism and ethnicity, as we shall see in the next chapter, this philosophy implies that those who do not defend the cause of *Basotho* (sotho) are betrayers. In my opinion it is this fear of being labelled a betrayer which operates behind Basotho men’s resistance to change in the order of gender relation. They fear to be labelled betrayers of the cause of men as a gender-ethical consciousness is challenging them to reconstruct some of their ways of being men.

#### **2.4.8 (a) The gun war: a test and an opportunity for chieftain masculinity**

The case of Letsie, the paramount chief, helps us to understand the craving for power that is at the heart of the chieftain masculinity. In the event of the eruption of war, Letsie was halted between two expedients. In turn he shifted sides, appearing to submit to the government while encouraging resistance at the same time and this engendered the rift of mistrust between the loyalists and the nationalists who rejected the government on the issue of arms. His irresolution created a condition under which Masopha, his younger brother, emerged as the leader of a national cause. The majority of the Basotho and their chiefs, Lerotholi included, believed in that cause (Lagden 1909:511). Burman (1981:139) argues that the advised submission of Letsie left him in an uncomfortable position of advocating a policy the vast majority of his people and fellow chiefs opposed. Masopha scoffed at his elder brother, Letsie’s rule. He refused to fulfil his duties toward him as he was hoping to replace him in the paramountcy (Germond 1967:391).

Along side Masopha and Joel, Lerotholi, made a name for himself by leading a large body of men (Hadley 1972:58) defying his father, Letsie, the paramount chief, who had submitted to the government’s demand (Lagden 1909:512; Burman 1981:139,141). He tried to intercept the arms Letsie was delivering to the government (Germond 1967:353,354,355,356,362,363; Lagden 1909:512-513). He, together with his brothers was perceived to have courageously defended a national cause (Germond 1967:389). By succumbing to the government pressure, Letsie had become a “broken reed” which could no longer be relied upon (Lagden 1909:513). In one incidence, when Letsie was persuaded by the prime minister to write a letter of humble submission of the whole nation, shortly before the war broke up, Lagden (1909:518) argues that

as a matter of fact, Letsie had no authority to pledge submission of others. It is in this context that Masopha and Lerotholi, emerged as heroes. Lerotholi was trusted by the majority of the resistant party to negotiate on its behalf with the imperial agents (Lagden 1909:524). According to Burman (1981:139) not only Masopha pined for paramountcy. Lerotholi also saw his chances. If he were to get it he had to be on the side of his powerful uncle in the opposition to disarmament. With Masopha and Lerotholi we see power struggle galore at all levels.

The most important issue, so relevant to this study is the degree to which the resistance to disarmament became a condition under which chieftain masculinity was further reinforced by a nationalist sentiment. A chief is a man who defends the cause of the nation and not so much the one who enjoys a birth right. What is even more interesting is the very notion of nation itself. The notion arises in the midst of men's struggle to defend a masculine cause, a right to possess a gun. Men's cause, in a sense, gives birth to the essential aspects of being a nation. I think it is this strong link of Sesotho masculinity with Basotho's nationhood which, within the *sekeole* orientation, makes it difficult for men to accept change. If a change is perceived to undermine and discredit what is often referred to as *Bochaba ba Basotho* (the nation-ness of the Basotho), a quality of being a nation as Basotho, such a change is likely to be rejected. And not only chieftaincy, but also masculinity in general, are put right at the centre of this quality. Those men who come out very strong in the defence of the traditional masculinities tend to be acclaimed by most Basotho men. The issue of *Bochaba* and how it is used to defend men's interests will be further explored in the fourth chapter on Sesotho masculinity and nationalism.

#### **2.4.8 (b) The bull as a symbol of strength of a man**

Laydevant (c1974:27) and Jingoos (1975:31-33) have graphically noted the symbolic meaning of a bull in the midst of disputes between chiefs among Basotho. By sheer human power a bull was slain, its right shoulder ripped out. According to Laydevant its meat was roasted and eaten while the bull was alive. Jingoos witnessed an incidence where the entire bull was eaten raw in twenty minutes leaving only intestines and bones. Taylor (Hadley 1972:61-62) also mentions how during the gun war, they heard of Chief Joel preparing his men and how they feared for their lives. At a huge *pitso* (public gathering) he had a bull brought in the midst of the people and had one of its legs ripped off from the thigh alive.

This was a symbol and omen of victory and power of a man in the midst of wars. What is not clear is whether this was immediately directed to his brother he wanted to permanently un-seat from the district chieftaincy (Hadley 1972:92). We can only speculate, given that his elder brother, Jonathan, had sided with the colonial government and that a huge defection from him had taken place. His brother, Joel, de facto if not de jure, had become the authority in the district. Two things are clear though. First, like the rest of the Basotho men in the country, Joel and his men were resisting the imposition of the colonial supremacist masculinity under the guise of the government authority in the form of the parliament in the Cape and its administrative organs in the country. The government administrative agents were identified as immediate embodiment of this masculinity. The symbol of the bull could apply to them also, at least towards its agents in the district. Secondly, chieftaincy as a form of masculinity that seeks to lord it over others, this war, at least for a while, gave Joel opportunity to lord it over the men of the north of the country. The symbolic act of ripping the ox's thigh was a statement to his half brother, Jonathan. As long as Joel had a large following of men, he was the chief and the Sesotho maxim that *morena ke morena ka batho* (a chief is a chief through the people) became true of him. Joel was the Bull which prevailed over a weak bull, Jonathan.

The symbol of a bull acquires some significance within the context of this study. First, it raises questions about the relationship of masculinity and the rest of creation. It raises a significant issue at the heart of the barrier to create an inclusive and respectful humanity on earth. Second, it reinforces attitudes of male aggression whether positive or negative: positive in the sense of defence of person's perceived right; negative in the sense of it as a proof of male power and strength to dominate others not sparing physical force as the preferred means of solving issues. Of interest in this study is men's violent ways against women and children. In one of our Reflecting Team's meetings we identified how the very language we use to describe what it means to be a man may incite men to violence without them being aware of it, especially aggression against women. One such example is depiction of a man's penis as a symbol of a knife and/or spear. According to a popular parlance a man's knife should have a sharp cutting edge. His spear should not be dry. It must always be wet with blood, meaning a man must always engage in sex if and when he wants. In the context of HIV and AIDS, the dominant language and symbols of masculinity posit a huge challenge in curbing the disease. Women often become

victims of the dominant masculine language and symbols. One member of the Reflecting Team recalled some words of a song by a popular male singer of the so called traditional music:

Thekeng ho 'na mona ke tomanyana. Ke hlabile motho ka lerumo tlasa mokhubu; a qetella ka ho ruruha mpa. Monongoaha ke bona eka mohatsa'ka o tla tsoala mafahla. Ke seliba se sa phesheng ke lula ke kopotsa kamehla – *I am so robust at my waist. I have stabbed a person with a spear below the navel and she ended up with a swollen belly. This year my wife might give birth to twins. I am a fountain that never dries up. I am always gushing out.*

The team members identified this type of language and symbolism as standing in the way of many Basotho men in understanding the 2003 Sexual Offences Act protecting women and children from sexual exploitation. Within marriage, sex is interpreted by most men as their entitlement and right. For boys it is a proof of masculinity.

#### **2.4.8 (c) The aftermath of Gun war: a boost of Sesotho nationalistic masculinity**

Taylor (Hadley 1972:92) and Germond (1967:356) mention some results of the gun war. Besides distress and property damage, they mention a loss of respect for white men. I am interested in this latter because of its relevance in this study. In Taylor's words "the old confidence in, and respect for, the white officials had been lost, never to return". The "Basuto put their fingers to their noses, and haughtily told us that if we wanted *their guns and their cattle* (my emphasis) we had better come and fetch them" (Hadley 1972:90). I want to draw attention to the mention of guns and cattle by Taylor. These two were the things that defined the dominant sense of self of men at that time. The gun war had touched the centre nerve of the dominant Sesotho masculinity of the time. For this reason the obedience and control the white officials once enjoyed in their seigniorial position (Hadley 1972:21-22) had gone. The Queen of England was considered dead in the country and her power departed. The Basotho chiefs were considered superior to her (Germond (1967:387-388; Tylden (1950:176,177,178). Basotho men were taken in pride defeating the once deemed invincible race: "They would say that now they had a bull of their own that was far stronger than the British bull, and that around this their own bull, they should rally, and then they would be able to cope with the other bull". Tylden notes this attitude expressed in the new song which they had adopted and sang wildly at their dances: 'we refused to give up our guns, and we have them still, and we will not give them up'.

They had conquered white men. Mangoela (1921) has made an extensive collection of praise-poems of Basotho chiefs and other warriors extolling their heroism in all the wars they have fought. The gun war praise-poems are found in a good number in this work. In a sense these poems are not only a carrier of Basotho national history but also of Sesotho masculinity. Damane & Sanders (1974) and Kunene (1971:1-20) have made an extensive study of them. The latter, in particular, has argued that the purpose of these poems is to extol the virtues of manly prowess, courage, valour and fighting skills of the hero.

Germond (1967:390) has noted a new consciousness Basotho men had grown toward Europeans as a result of the gun war. Chiefs and subjects alike learnt that “‘Europeans’ friendship is more harmful to them than their enemy can possibly be”. Before the war, they believed that the English could subjugate their former enemies in the Orange Free State. That belief was lost. They discovered themselves and their unity as reliable resource in the defence of not only their country, but also the cause of men. Colonel Griffith in one of his communications to the government in the Cape lamented how, without its support, they had become a laughing-stock to the whole country while Masopha and Lerotholi roamed around (Lagden 1909:513,514). The Sesotho masculinity prevailed and the white imperial and supremacist masculinity was humiliated.

#### **2.4.9 The *pitso* and the imperial masculinity: a subversion of the chieftain and traditional general Sesotho masculinities**

Germond (1967:517) notes that in urgent national matters, Moshoeshe would summon a *pitso*, an assembly or public gathering (Dieterlan 2000:357) for consultation in which freedom of thought and speech, were exercised as a matter of national right of subjects. They expressed their opinion on the chief’s conduct quite openly and if they disapproved of it, they said so with “virile and eloquent boldness which the most fiery Roman tribune would have envied”. Smith (1939:39) says men had “equal rights, with the proudest to say his say”. Thompson (1975:63-64) remarks that only circumcised male folk were allowed to participate. It is worthwhile to note that women did not enjoy this freedom of thought and speech. The right was exclusively a prerogative of men. Spence (1968:13) notes that in the 1930s the practice of *pitso* declined in significance.

However, it is important to also note that when the practice was still working and adopted by the imperial rulers, the chiefs did not have the last word. The imperial governor did. The chief participated like other men (Hadley 1972: 22). As far back as 1875, Colonel Griffith, the cape governor's agent in Lesotho, used the forum to the benefit of the colonial government. Contrary to how it was used by Basotho chiefs from Moshoeshoe (Basutoland Constitutional Handbook 1960:23-26). It became a forum "of high political value" that enabled the government to acquaint the people of laws and regulations; correct wrong impressions and mould public thought not to seek their opinion (Lagden 1909: 483-484). In 1941 Maputseng Lefela (Edger 1987:130-137), among other things, laments the replacement of the *pitso* practice and tradition by imperial proclamations, establishment of the National Council and Board of Education. And with sadness he notes that in this way the "right of people" to meet with their chiefs was thwarted.

In the perspective of this study, it is important to note that traditionally, when the "right of people" was referred to, women were excluded. The concept of "people" in this regard exclusively refers to male folk. For this reason, it is important to observe that that which was traditionally used to the advantage of men over and against women, was now turned over and used against men themselves. They experienced insignificance they once subjected women to. It was now their turn to taste their own medicine. In the perspective of this study, when Maphutseng lamented, he was lamenting for a situation in which male domination was the norm. An alternative more gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study, precisely challenges this situation in the contemporary Lesotho. It challenges men to be ethical. The concept of "ethical" will be further explained in the sixth chapter where alternative ways of being men will be explored. By way of anticipation, the concept is about considering alternative ways of being and thinking about men and how they relate to women in an ethical way. The ethical way of relating to women emphasises acknowledgement of women by men as human subjects whose human dignity and wellbeing should also count in society.

Smith (1939:345) describes the freedom with which men, the "people", expressed themselves at *pitso*s. In 1891, when Letsie, the paramount chief wanted to elude the custom of succession to the high office among the Basotho by suggesting the younger Maama as heir over Lerotholi, one of his councillors overtly rebuked him: "Letsie, ua hlanya – Letsie you are mad!". Machobane (2004:134) observes how this audacity in freedom of thought and speech was little tolerated by

the imperial agents who perceived it as a demonstration of a lack of respect and insolence and they suppressed it with threats or with legislation. For this reason, I think that the adoption of *pitso* practice by the imperial administrators was another way chieftaincy got subjugated under the imperial authority, thus forming a hierarchy of power in which the one considered lesser was subordinate and bound to unquestioningly submit to the whims of the most powerful. That which was demanded of general men by their chiefs was now demanded of them by the imperial authority. Whatever may be the case, the important point about this transformation of the practice of *pitso* is that masculinity, in what ever form, is dependent on a situation and time. It belies the claims which want to consider it as a homogeneous foundational ontological entity that exists in its purity as the *sekoale* philosophy would want us to believe as we will see in the next chapter. It puts under the spotlight the issue of power relations not only between the races but also between men and women in the order of gender. For this reason, it is important to investigate how these masculinities considered women.

#### **2.4.9.1 The traditional Sesotho masculinity and women**

Chief Jobo is on record as alluding to an ancient Sesotho maxim: “a woman has no chief but her husband” (Cape of Good Hope 1873:55). The implication for women is that their status in traditional Sesotho custom is that of perpetual minor. Duncan (1960:4) notes that before marriage, they are considered their father’s children; at marriage, their husband’s; during widowhood, they are children of their husband’s heir. Chief George Moshoeshoe (Cape of Good Hope 1873:45) attests to a practice which gives the eldest son in the house a right to inherit his entire father’s property. A widow can inherit it only if she has no male offspring.

Though I have made a distinction between the chieftain and the commoner or general Sesotho masculinities, it seems there is no difference in their regard for women. In this case the notion of “chief” seems to be synonymous with the exercise of power over the other. In the case of a man in the family, power is exercised over the woman and the children. In the case of a chief in the common traditional sense, a chief is a man who exercises power over other men and women. How has this affected women, and how they reacted to this type of male domination, has been sufficiently and critically explored by Epprecht (1995; 1996; 2000). What is important in this study is to search within this history of male domination some incidences which contradict it.



Such incidences are interpreted in this study as ruptures of an alternative consciousness which can be used to engage in dialogue Basotho men of today in the search for alternative more ethical ways of being men in as far as gender power relations are concerned.

#### **2.4.9.1 (a) Senate: a challenge to the traditional Sesotho masculinity**

Senate was the first and the only daughter of Letsie by his first wife, 'Masenate. Historiographers and social anthropologists (Roseneberg, S., Weisfelder, R.F. & Frisbie-Fulton, M. 2004:374; Lagden 1909: 583; Ashton 1952: 197; Cochet's Diary, 17 Jan.1870, P.E.M.S; Jones, G.I. 1966:70-71) have noted that Moshoeshoe designated her heir to the paramountcy. According to Machobane (1952:34-39) she was presented at a *pitso* (public gathering) and was made to take an oath after which she was given a club of rhinoceros horn, a precious stone and a *sepetja* (bracelet). The rhinoceros horn was the symbol of power (Casalis 1861:220; Machobane 1990:7-8). According to Machobane (1952: 40-48, 49-60), she joined Basotho warriors in battle and developed equestrian and military skills as part of leadership training. When she became pregnant by Lefojane, Moshoeshoe's junior son, she forfeited succession. She had disappointed her grandfather, who wanted her to remain unmarried but to the nation.

According to Roseneberg, Weisfelder and Frisbie-Fulton (2004: 300-301, 374) and Lagden (1909: 583) Moshoeshoe made another arrangement with his granddaughter. In an effort to reconcile his feuding eldest sons, Letsie and Molapo, he arranged for Senate to marry her cousin, Josefa, Molapo's eldest son. Molapo's family would receive the cattle, something which symbolically made Senate a "husband" in the marriage (Damane 1950:101). Their male offspring, Motšoene remained within the house of Letsie and was thus in a position to inherit the throne from his grandfather. Moshoeshoe presented him at a *pitso* as heir to the throne after Letsie. It never happened because of the mental condition of Josefa and Lerotholi's strong claims to the throne. Lerotholi is Letsie's son by his second wife. Before her union with Josefa, Senate was, by Moshoeshoe, arranged to marry her female cousin, Manella, Lesaoana's daughter. Lesaoana was a son to Moshoeshoe's brother, Makhabane. In this union Senate was designated a 'man'. Manella and Lerotholi raised a son who succeeded him as Letsie II.

The figure of Senate and her role in the history of chieftaincy among the Basotho raises the question that an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness, is asking in the present order of

gender relations dominated by patriarchal structures in Lesotho. How or in what ways did the decision of Moshoeshoe influence an attitude that sees women as unfit of the highest office in the land and continues to do so even today? How did this decision operate later when Lerotholi succeeded his father Letsie? The weight of the question can be well appreciated in the light of the second article of the laws of Lerotholi which made succession to the highest office a male entitlement in 1903 (Melao ea Lerotholi 1980:5). The point I want to make is, the present order, where only male stock qualifies for the office, is a product of historical vicissitudes rather than “the will of God” prescribed in the so called natural order as it is sometimes implied within the *sekoele* orientation.

#### **2.4.9.1 (b) Chieftain masculinity and women chiefs against the imperial masculinity**

Epprecht (1995: 34-37, 38) argues that a close analysis of hereditary chieftaincy which had been traditionally dominated by male folk became an avenue for Basotho women in public politics. Their involvement provoked the contempt of the imperial agents (Lesotho National Archives, High Court – LNA, HC 6/1943; Basutoland National Council – BNC, 1950, 87-96). In the Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs, the imperial agents expressed their suspicion of ulterior motives of some ambitious men pulling the strings from behind (Public Record Office – PRO. Dominion Office – DO, 1935, 119/1055). In the Report of Sir Henry Moore on administrative Reforms Committee (1954:8), the imperial agents discouraged the installation of women chiefs by advocating for an all male-administration as more “modern” and more apt to enforcing unpopular policies which could be resisted by the people. They doubted women chiefs because of their belief that they were “severely handicapped by reason of their sex” and so recommended less pay for them. The male chiefs rejected the proposed reform forthright. In the same manner they rebuffed the proposal of the Resident Commissioner in the National Council (Basutoland National Council 1950, 95-96) which depicted women as mentally lacking in strength of character to enforce good discipline on the basis of their sex. These male chiefs and the general men who accepted to serve under the women chiefs mark a historic rupture of an alternative consciousness which recognises the human agency of women. Their decision to stand with the women chiefs strengthen the craving of a gender-ethical consciousness which will not be quenched until Basotho men of today and the future would be ready to engage collaboratively with women in the building up of a more humane society.

It is important to note that though they were opposed to women chiefs, the imperial agents themselves also acknowledged the competence of some of them. In the 1935 Confidential Reports on Native Chiefs, (Confidential Report 1935; PRO, DO 119/1055) Chieftess 'Malerotholi is praised for ruling with distinction and integrity. In 1942 Judge Lansdowne interviewed ten women chiefs and found them all of "acute intelligence (LNA, HC 27/1942). Chief Jeremiah Moshoeshoe, acknowledged the abilities of chieftess 'Makopela in conducting chiefly duties. He said no man could match her in the whole of the Mafeteng district (LNA, HC 27/1942, 27). Jingoos (1957:152-153) gives a personal experience of serving under a woman regent. He witnesses to the ambition and determination of Chieftess 'Maboshoane to stay in power even against her own son. In the papers of the High Court of 1926 (LNA, HC, 685/1926) a woman chief by the name of 'Maletapata, seized some portions of land she claimed were hers. In this light, it is astonishing, that men who themselves had been subjects of a woman, Queen Victoria and later Queen Elizabeth II, would be that negative about Basotho women as leaders. The suspicion of this study is that not only their imperial masculinity influenced that attitude, but also their racial supremacist attitude. Could these two factors have played a role in the decision of those Basotho male chiefs to support their women chiefs? Rationally, this would make sense to think so, given that male Basotho chiefs themselves were often victims of the imperial supremacist masculinity as we have seen previously. The racist inclinations of the imperial masculinity drove some Basotho male chiefs to be in solidarity with their women counterparts. In as far as the racist factor was concerned both of them were faced with the same challenge.

Against this backdrop, it makes sense to assert that the power struggle between men can sometimes become a condition under which the agency of women to engage in the public social life is publicly recognised by men. This in itself belies and subverts the common attitude among men against such an agency. The question is why, men even in the face of this reality today, would continue to hold on the belief that women are unfit for leadership positions because of their sex. In the perspective of this study, this situation demonstrates the struggle of the dominant masculinity discourses circulating in the Basotho society, refusing to accept women's agency. Identifying such discourses is of utmost importance in the efforts of transformation in the order of gender. This is what I believe is missing in the present efforts in Lesotho and works against them.

#### **2.4.9.1 (c) Women Chiefs and women emancipation**

The contribution of women chiefs in the cause of women rights to vote and stand for election is noteworthy. Chieftesses 'Mamathe, and L. Bereng used the public space traditionally reserved for men, *pitso*, to encourage their women audience to free themselves from slavery (Basutoland Constitutional Commission Verbatim Record of Evidence Heard 1963: 660, 775). One of 'Mant'sebo's first acts as paramount chief was to reverse the colonial administrative law meant to regulate women brewers with the intention of discouraging them from migrating into urban areas. She stood against the administration's attempts to impose taxation that would indirectly give the police to scare "vagrants", mostly women, out of urban camps (BNC 1941, 19, Native Administration, 100). In 1962 Chieftesses 'Mantsebo and Makopoi took a stance against Sesotho customary law which prohibits a woman to use her husband's property in his absence. They supported a revision of inheritance laws to give women autonomous access to credit and use of family property in the absence of their husbands (BNC, Report on Wills, Estates and Marriages 1962: 17).

The women chiefs and their use of a social space traditionally reserved for men, in favour of other women, remarkably appeals to a gender-ethical consciousness promoted in this study. Combined with the support of their male counterparts, the use of this space by these women sets a solid ground for a possibility of transformation in the present order of gender relations which seems to be resisted by the present masculinity dominated by the *sekoele* outlook. It is a testimony of the presence of an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness, already operating within historical processes that came to shape them, a new course for the Basotho as a people. This consciousness challenges the *sekoele* attitude not from outside but within its avenue in as far as it has identified authentic *Sesotho* with the past of the Basotho. And here lies the difference between conventional conception of history and the one adopted in this research. In this research history is not progressive and continuous. It is discontinuous in the sense that it is about ruptures of specific moments which subvert the dominant practices and norms of the time in response to the anxieties of the same time. From the perspective of this study, the present resistance of Basotho men to transformation in the order of gender is one of the anxieties of the Basotho society that should not be taken lightly.

#### **2.4.9.1(d) ‘Mants’ebo: a challenge to chieftain masculinity**

Duncan (1960) has traced Sesotho laws and customs through the study of court cases. One such court case, between chief Bereng and chieftainess ‘Mantsebo, raises the issue of the status of women within the chiefly class and exposes the sexist masculine element that had come to dominate chieftaincy until then (1960: 3-6, 16, 20). In this case the plaintiff made two objections against ‘Mantsebo becoming paramount chief. The first refers to her being a woman which according to him, made her incompetent to succeed to a chieftainship or hold the office of regent and acting as paramount chief. The second was that for the same reasons she was incompetent to be the guardian of a child or to administer any estate; but that on the contrary she was herself under guardianship.

According to the traditional law and custom referred to here, only a male head of the family had such ‘locus standi in judicio’, not a woman. The judge turned down the plaintiff’s customary claims by citing a practice within chieftaincy itself which had, out of distrust of paternal uncles who acted as controller and administrator of the affairs of the widow’s family, allowed instead, the women concerned assume such roles in the place of their minor male heirs. The judge also found that already in 1938, there were women chiefs who held office of chieftaincy in their own right (Duncan 1960:5-6). Duncan (1960:6) rightly observes that the judgement asserts the change in the position of women in the chiefly class in the eyes of the law. Like their male counterparts, they enjoyed the same privileges of being guardians, estate controllers, and administrators of their house affairs without any control over them by a male relative, something which was not the case among the commoners. In the light of this, Mantšebo appears as a partially successful symbol of the transformative edge of a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this research. It is partial in the sense that it operated in favour of a specific class of women, chiefs, not for women of the commoners’ class.

#### **2.4.10 Feminine manhood**

In one of our Reflecting Team sessions, when we were discussing the ‘stuff that made a Mosotho man’, one member remarked that the biological features do not necessarily make a man. Manhood is what male persons do though what they do is not exclusive of their sex. He insisted that women sometimes do things customarily expected of men. One member asked him what he

would call women who performed “manly acts”. He replied that they are called “men”. From there on whenever we talked about manhood we would be conscious of what came to be known as “feminine manhood”. Those male persons who do not do or perform manly acts as expected become “woman”. They cease to be men while they remained male. This type of men, team members decided to call “woman men”. A “woman man” is a kind of demotion from manhood status and male entitlement. It is a disgraced status a male person is relegated to when he does not live up to the expectations of a male person. One member of the team, the one who came up with the notion of feminine masculinity, was not comfortable with this description. According to him, it belittles the “feminine men’s” (that is women) agency, capabilities and achievements in their own right as we saw with the women chiefs above. However, for most team members, “man” is just a title a male person can be stripped off if he does not live up to the expectation of the male persons in the community. The same title can be conferred to female persons who rise above the expectations and beliefs about female persons in the society. According to some members of Reflecting Team, ‘Manthatise, Senate, ‘Mantsebo, featuring in this chapter are in their own way representatives of feminine masculinity.

The concept of feminine masculinity as it was qualified by some members of the Reflecting Team appears to be problematic in terms of a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study. The team member who questioned it seems to have sensed how masculinity constituted itself a standard of femininity and challenged other members about it. And this is what this chapter is doing. The concept does not acknowledge the autonomous agency of women as human subjects. Instead it casts them under the shadow of an already privileged masculine lot and dissipates within it. And this is a demonstration of the depth of Basotho men’s regard of women. It gives a hint to the relations of power in the order of gender. It gives us an idea about the social customs and practices which regulate how most Basotho men relate to women in the everyday life. A gender-ethical consciousness investigated in this study is critical of this situation and it wants change.

## **2.5 Summary**

The most important thing this first part of the chapter has revealed is the operations of power relations within the traditional Sesotho masculinities and their relationship with the British

imperialist and colonialist masculinity. Through the help of the Foucauldian analysis of history called archaeology and genealogy, it was revealed why the notions of the traditional Sesotho masculinities should not be considered as notions of a deep meaning or representations of the truths about manhood in itself in Lesotho. On the contrary, this part focused primarily on the conditions, limits and institutionalisation of the formation of masculinity discourses in Lesotho. Through this approach, it was revealed how specific forms of masculinity are a result of participation in a struggle of competing discourses of manhood down the history of the Basotho. The effect of this struggle has been that specific discourses were authorised and certain people to articulate the truths of these discourses while they hid their own vested interests. For instance, it was revealed how the phenomenon of cattle raiding became a condition under which two forms of masculinity emerged: chieftain and common. The former through a system called *mafisa* was able to subjugate not only the latter but also women and children and further consolidated its superior position through wars. Moshoeshoe and his sons appear to have benefited from this situation and that is how they became chiefs. Today his grandsons are still benefiting from it. Wars whether of survival, *lifaqane*, or over land became a frame within which manhood in general came to be constructed. Wars over land commonly known as wars over Warden Line, in particular, also became a condition under which a strong nationalistic sentiment came to be associated with being a man, so that manhood is placed right at the centre of Basotho's nationhood. Land became a symbol or metaphor of economic stability, independence and right. Because of the so-called Warden Line, Basotho men came to be reinvented or reconstructed as thieves with no rights over the land they thought theirs. Moorosi war elucidates the power factor as most essential to chieftain masculinity. With the Gun war, nationalism and power are further absorbed into the sense of being a man in general. Most importantly, we have explored how Sesotho masculinities, whether chieftain or commoner, regarded women. In the context of these contours, I tried to search for alternative more ethical operations of masculinity that would acknowledge and respect the cause of women. In the next part I continue the search for the existence of this alternative consciousness within another frame of masculinity I refer to as political masculinity.

## PART TWO

### THE DECLINE OF CHIEFTAIN AND IMPERIAL MASCULINITIES

#### 2.6. The Emergence of the Sesotho Political Masculinity

In the aftermath of the gun war, Lesotho was de-annexed from the Cape colony (High Commissioner's Proclamations and Notices, 1868-1909: 94) and became British imperial dependent on 18<sup>th</sup> March, 1884 (High Commissioner's Proclamations and Notices, 1868-1909:72-73). Lagden (1909:554-562) explains the conditions under which Basotho became British subjects. First, they had to expressly declare their willingness to become British subjects; second, to be obedient to the laws and orders of the Commissioner under whose authority they would be placed; third, and to pay tax for administrative expenses of their country.

Prior to this event, the Commission on Natives Laws and Customs of 1883 had already pronounced its position on the so called native laws and customs (Report and Proceedings 1883, B-1, OD2530/84). They must not be "repugnant to humanity and justice as well as to Christian law and feeling." Winston Churchill, cited by Coates (1966: vii) slammed critics who disparaged and charged the motives of what he called Britain's colonial achievement, putting an end to wars and "savage customs".

These are the conditions and structures under which new forms of masculinity would emerge. I refer to these forms by a general term – *political masculinity*. At their core, the political masculinities were framed by resistance to a supremacist imperial attitude and shuttling between juxtaposition of parallel cultural systems, being a Mosotho man on the one hand, and a British subject on the other.

It is within the parameters of this cultural dualism, that I want to investigate the operations of the political masculinities, their dominant ideas and practices and their effects on Basotho men. I also want to identify, within this search, some traces and ruptures of a more gender-ethical consciousness that would serve as a concrete historical basis, on whose grounds the present dominant masculinities can be engaged in dialogue to consider change in the order of gender relations today.



### **2. 6. 1 The Basutoland National Council as a platform and a matrix of Sesotho political masculinity: A challenge to the chieftain and imperial masculinities**

One of the significant imperial administrative establishments that became an opportunity for new expressions of masculinity was the Basutoland National Council, founded in 1903. The council functioned under the Resident Commissioner's regulations, in his capacity as the representative of the imperial power and the highest authority in the land. Only five of its hundred plus members approximately, nominated by the Resident Commissioner were commoner men. The rest were chiefs of all ranks and the Commissioner was its president while the paramount chief became the 'chief councillor' (Machobane 1990:76-125). This small number of men of the commoner class, which would increase over time (Spence 1968:20-21), was the beginning of the development of Sesotho political masculinity which is going to challenge in earnest both the chieftain and the British imperial masculinities (Machobane 1990: 112). Using the Council as a platform, together with other formations such as the *Bahlalefi* (the sophisticated/educated) and the *Lekhotla la Bafo* (the Council of Commoners), they articulated aspirations of the "common people" vis á vis the imperial and chieftain powers (Machobane 1990:126-129). It was this section of the society that, in my opinion, represented a new brand of masculinity along side the chiefly and the traditional general Sesotho masculinities. Of importance to this study is how the political masculinity related to women.

### **2.6.2 The Basutoland Progressive association and the political masculinity**

The *Bahlalefi* (the Sophisticated) or *Matsoelopele* (the Progressives), as they were called by the ordinary commoners, had not been educated in the traditional *lebollo* institution but in the mission schools. In 1907, they formed an association whose purpose, according to them, was selfless service to the country and humanity (Machobane 1990:129). They criticised the National Council as a council of chiefs who only represented their own interests. In 1916, the most pointed attacks of the *bahlalefi* on chiefly abuses focused on the traditional custom of *letsema* (free labour on chiefly fields) and the chiefly judicial duties (PRO, CO. 417/350, (1916) no.750; *The Time* 5 December 1919; *Mosotho Friend* 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1921; Spence 1968:15-17; Machobane 1990:137-139). They accused chiefs of deliberately delaying the settlement of land disputes so that they turned into criminal cases from which they would extort fines for their personal gain. They were accused of denying common people a right to appeal against their own

judgements while they confiscated their property. Phamotse (*The Star* 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1919; *The Friend* 4<sup>th</sup> May 1922) called for the establishment of an alternative justice department under the direction of the qualified magistrates rather than chiefs and their men. Marung (*Naledi* 25<sup>th</sup> November 1921), among others, charged them for turning the Basotho into their property just as Europeans did. Marung also incriminated the missionaries of collaborating with the imperial intent to deprive the Basotho of their rights through their preaching. Another, a certain James N. Phalatse (*Naledi* 25<sup>th</sup> November 1921), was audacious in denouncing chiefs as useless and called upon the replacement of chieftaincy with a republican type of government. Not even the authority of Griffith, the paramount chief, was spared from the stinging attacks of the *Bahlalefi*. In 1922 his authority was at its lowest ebb as a result (Machobane 1990:165). At one stage, the Resident Commissioner was warned about a secret plan to depose him and put his half brother, Makhaola, in his place (PRO, CO 417/683 no.53).

The association had about thirty women in its own ranks (Machobane 1990:130). The presence of women in this male dominated association marks a historic rupture of an alternative gendered consciousness advocated in this study. It deconstructs the tendency to make Basotho's history exclusively a history of men. It marks another phase of the political dimension of the cause of women on a serious note in the modern Lesotho. In the light of the chieftain masculinity which subjugated other men and considered them as its property, and the general masculinity which in turn did the same with women, the progressive association, the participation of women in the struggle against oppression and exploitation should inspire the women of today to do the same in the feminist struggles against male domination. They put under the spotlight the struggle of power relations not only between men of different races and social classes, but also between men and women in general in the Basotho society.

With the *Bahlalefi*, a shift in attitude among Basotho men toward the authority of chiefs began. They challenged the chieftain masculinity which had come to constitute itself as an organising norm of the Basotho's social life. That is, they challenged the then normalised relations of power between the chieftain and common masculinities. Traditionally Basotho men formed a distinctive social group around the figure of a chief. And this made them a collective idea held together by a core centre which came to be identified with the figure of a chief. By challenging the authority of chiefs, the *Bahlalefi* challenged the core centre of the traditional masculinity. This time the

struggle over power, had taken a new form. It was no longer a struggle between men. It was a struggle between the masculine and the feminine genders. That the *Bahlalefi* had within their own ranks women, made women part of the history that challenged the domination of one social class of men. Today a gender-ethical consciousness challenges the present Basotho men to be part of a history in which women struggle for their own liberation from the domination of men themselves. It challenges the women of today to join up forces in the construction of a more human society, where the welfare of all is valued. The *Bahlalefi* demonstrate that any order that is experienced as oppressive will always be questioned just as a gender-ethical consciousness does to the present dominant Sesotho masculinities. And the attitude of the *Bahlalefi* as well as that of the *Lekhotla la Bafo* discussed below represents an historical testimony of the ruptures of this consciousness as early as the beginning of the last century.

### **2.6.3 The Lekhotla la Bafo and the formation of the radical and the partisan political masculinity: A challenge to the authority of chiefs**

In 1920 a political formation called the *Lekhotla la Bafo* (the Commoners' Council), was founded by Josiel Lefela, a staunch nationalist who virulently opposed the British rule and the Christian missionaries (*Naledi*, 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1920; 30<sup>th</sup> September 1921; 18<sup>th</sup> November 1921; *Mochochonono* 9<sup>th</sup> March 1921; PRO.CO 417/646; Khaketla 1970:39). Edgar (1987:8) enlists his disapproving views about chieftaincy and the National Council of which he was a member. His views were in substance similar to those of the *Bahlalefi* seen above (PRO. CO 646/3).

The extensive collection of the essential documents of the *Lekhotla la Bafo* (Edgar 1987: 56-60, 61, 119,120) attests to the kind of attacks the British rule and the National Council were under. The Council was seen as a replacement of the traditional *pitso* which gave the “people”, meaning men, active participation in the national affairs. It was perceived as deprivation of a right to be heard. I have already shown, above, how the practice of the *pitso* was traditionally a men's forum which excluded women and how the British imperial agents used it to subvert both the chieftain and the common masculinities. What I want to put under the limelight again here, is how men who lament its replacement with the National Council by the imperial agents as a deprivation of a ‘right’ to participate in the national affairs, were themselves not so sensitive to women within it as a customary practice. This insensitiveness is the concern of an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness explored in this study. It gets agitated by a self-serving

attitude which seems to shape the way Basotho men think about themselves and the privileges patriarchal social structures afford them at the exclusion of women.

Though the *Lekhotla la bafo* criticised chiefs, they were not against chieftaincy as such, as an institution. The Presidential Address of 12<sup>th</sup> March 1930 at Thaba Bosiu (Edgar 1987:113-119) calls for the defence of the traditional institutions: hereditary chieftainship and *Lebollo* (to be discussed in the next chapter) from the Europeans' invasion, the Resident Commissioner and the Christian missionaries. These latter were depicted as "those who are reviling the institutions of our departed fathers". The Chiefs were only criticised because they "are now playing into the hands of our enemy". Among these enemies were the Progressives (*Barutehi* or *Matsoelopele*), who did not cherish chieftaincy as a birth right. What I want to highlight in this study is that the defence of chieftaincy as a birth right by the *Lekhotla la Bafo* was an endorsement of the chieftain masculinity which recognised only males as heirs to the office of the paramount chief. It is this chieftain masculinity that would be challenged by 'Mantšebo later in 1940 when she became the paramount chief.

#### **2.6.4 The Lekhotla la Bafo and women**

Of importance to this study is how such a radical formation regarded women. Edgar (1987:119) remarks that, at the Presidential Address at Thaba-Bosiu, where the association business and political action and comments on current issues were discussed, women, albeit in small numbers, were present and participated. Edgar rightly observes that this "was a notable departure from male-dominated traditional pitsos". In the same vein, Epprecht (1995:44) remarks that, despite fundamental hostility to women's emancipations of its early radical members, *Lekhotla la Bafo* attracted women into its own ranks and allowed them to speak in their public gatherings, something which went against the customary practice. Indeed, for an association which called for the defence of the traditional institutions of *lebollo* and chieftaincy which upholds the supremacy of the male folk, it is remarkable that it accorded women space in its own ranks at all. I regard this as part of a rupture of an alternative consciousness taking shape within the struggles of masculinity itself. To put it somewhat strongly, within every struggle for rights and recognition by the male folk, there will always be a struggle against men's supremacist tendency itself. It is in this sense that a gender-ethical consciousness is perceived as a deconstructive watershed in the

history of masculinity in this study, whether positively or negatively. The following examples demonstrate this point.

When Mikaele Molelekoa (Edgar 1987:120-121) challenged the “men of Leribe” present at the presidential address at Thaba-Bosiu on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1960, for not being brave in the defence of the country against the ‘Union Government’ in South Africa, he appealed to women to shame them. He asked the women present to ask the men to give them their trousers to engage in the struggle. I want to argue that Molelekoa’s appeal should not be seen as an acknowledgement of women’s participation in men’s struggle. Behind this shaming, lies a deep contempt for women implicit not only in the political masculinity of the time but also in the Sesotho masculinity in general even today. To understand the edge of this shaming we would need to ask ourselves how men would feel and react if they were to be asked to wear the women’s clothing. In this shaming it becomes clear how being a man is defined in terms of what it is not, a woman. According to the police report about this meeting, women publicly denounced the government (LNA, S3/22/2/4). If women were brave to deplore the supremacist imperial government, it was shameful for men not to do anything. As McLean (1996:18) has argued “when women are considered to actually look like men, it often results in ridicule or abuse”. In this way the assumed women’s inferiority was used as a standard of shaming the unmanly behaviour of the “men of Leribe”. This deep contempt of women often blinds men to see the achievements of women even when they are displayed in our Basotho history.

In 1943, for instance, in the health sector, women, as workers, challenged the racist policies of Maseru hospital administration and went on strike (Basutoland, *Medical and Public Health Report* 1943). Twenty years later, in 1961, they condemned the sexist and racist policies of the imperial administration (BNC, *Report of the Select Committee* 1961: 161-175). The participation of these women in the struggle for political rights in Lesotho is important even if it was used to shame men because of the assumed “natural” inferiority of women. It challenges and subverts the dominant sense of being a man which has historically thrived on despising women and femininity in general. It is this sense of being a man which undermines the present transformation efforts in the order of gender relations. And it is more and more indefensible in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in the modern Lesotho.

### **2.6.5 Mokhehle, Leabua and Matji as representatives of different faces of Sesotho political masculinity and their attitude toward women**

The study of Epprecht (1995) on women and gender politics in late colonial Lesotho, challenges interpretations which associate women with conservatism as opposed to men's radicalism and offers a critical look into Basotho women's participation in what he characterised as a 'masculine domain of politics'. Most significantly relevant to this study is how this masculine domain of politics as represented by Mokhehle, Leabua and Matji walked with women. Mokhehle and Leabua have been the main political protagonists in Lesotho's politics and their trends even up to today. They have framed the dominant ways of thinking about politics in general in Lesotho. Both of them became Lesotho's prime ministers. Matji, whose name is not known to many Basotho of today because of the domination of Lesotho's political history by the two men, merit our attention in this study. To put it even strongly, he is resurrected from the limbo to which he was thrown by the mechanisms of the operation of power in the dominant political landscape still controlled by Mokhehle and Leabua even as they lay in their graves. Matji represents an alternative consciousness advocated in this study, a more gender-ethical consciousness. Khaketla (1970:36-38, 51) depicts Mokhehle, as a man of "granite determination" and "passionate patriotism" who became a casualty of prejudice of what he calls "white stock". He (1970:16-33) portrays Leabua as the author of Lesotho's political stalemate of 1970 and Matji, as a man of independent mind who stood up against men such as Mokhehle (1970:52, 55-56). From the perspective of this study, Matji challenges the today's Basotho men's political will to stand on the side of women when the mechanisms of male power seek to marginalise them.

The mouth piece of Mokhehle's political formation, (*Makatolle* 29 March 1965; 5 April 1965) encouraged women presence into its own ranks. A woman by the name of 'Maposholi, was one of them but later defected to Mokhehle's rival party, MFP (Marema-tlou Freedom Party), and she became an object of derision of her former party, the BCP (Basutoland Congress Party). The women's league of the BCP carried a knobkerrie, a traditional man's weapon but now adopted as a party symbol and they were renowned for publicly despising male authorities, whether missionaries, colonial officials or chiefs. A group of their members closed a school in Teyateyaneng as a protest against tuition increase (*Basutoland News* 28 February 1961). Commenting on women's participation in the anti colonial insurrection in Maseru in 1961,

Epprecht (1995) remarks that these women had been radicalised by their involvement in the political gatherings they attended.

However, Epprecht (1995:45-46) argues that despite this apparent radicalism, the leaders of the movement harboured a respect for “tradition” something which perhaps was stronger than the commitment to women’s rights. According to Epprecht, this respect for tradition, which I want to call a masculinist respect for tradition, was also a strategy of the political masculinity to win male folks who were mostly migrant labourers in South Africa and were renowned for their commitment to a traditional customary life. For these male leaders, women’s humble domesticity, upheld as a Christian ideal was combined with men’s customary rights over women and it served the interests of the political masculinity. Epprecht’s argument is substantiated by the general attitude of these men toward women within such a politically radical formation. They suspected politicised women’s aptitude to raise children well and saw them as unfavourable to family peace. They wanted women skilled in cooking and laundry work (*Leselinyana*, 22 April 1961; *LANTA Echoes*, 27 June 1964: 4). Epprecht (1995:46) observes how the women within the movement never challenged the patriarchal attitudes of these men. However, one woman is on record, in the Basutoland National Council (BNC, 1964, 1114) for testing Mokhehle on his take of women.

According to *Verbatim Record*, A/AG. 109/PV 49, p.15, cited by Khaketla (1970:55), Mokhehle is on record criticising the British government on 1960 general elections by not allowing women to vote because they were not tax payers. But later in the year when the Constitutional Commission sought public opinion on the form of the new constitution, Mokhehle advised his followers to oppose any proposition that granted women voting rights. In the perspective of this study, this act of Mokhehle reveals the double standards of the dominant political masculinities in Lesotho’s political landscape. They have a tendency to use women for their advantage and political gains. According to Khaketla, the reason was the fear of a rival political formation, BNP, which had a huge women following. Khaketla further shows that his followers did indeed buy into his opinion with the exception of one branch led by a certain Mr Robert Matji. According to a woman party veteran interviewed by Epprecht (1995:49), the reason why the party did not want women to vote in 1962, was that they thought women were not matured in

politics and knew nothing about independence and were more susceptible to be used by certain people.

It would not be far-fetched to conclude, therefore, that the male stock was behind Mokhehle's political ambitions and this makes the personality of Matji an interesting representation of another face of Sesotho political masculinity which was suppressed by the face represented by Mokhehle. Mokhehle represents a political masculinity which used women for male serving purposes. In the perspective of this study, Matji becomes an embodiment of a political, more gender-ethical masculinity so desirable in the present Lesotho's political landscape. His position contradicts the tendency of the present dominant political masculinities to use women for their political gains, as Leabua also did, to dominate the rival political formations. Matji, as cited by Khaketla (1970:55-56), stood up against his leader in support of women enfranchisement. In his letter to Mokhehle, he reminded him that national unity without women support was of no value:

It becomes a phrase reminiscent of the days of slavery when some bestial men considered themselves overlords of other human beings. Are we not emulating these same overlords when, perhaps for tactical (and bad tactics) reasons we arrogate to ourselves the right to deny our women fundamental right to participate in the government of the country?

In the context of this study, Matji, in the position he took, marks the presence of an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness that, it seems, will always refuse to be subjugated in the face of a raw human pining for dignity, justice and rights for all in a society. It will always criticise men who bend women to their own interests as is the tendency of the dominant political masculinities of the contemporary Lesotho, framed by Mokhehle and Leabua. Epprechet (1995:47) rightly praises this honourable stance for seeing women's emancipation as an integral part of the struggle for democracy within political formations and the nation as well.

## **2.7 Summary**

In this second part we have explored the operations of Sesotho masculinity within the framework of the politics of emancipation from both the British colonial and the traditional chieftain dominations. In this context we see the rise of manhood quite different from the traditional masculinity in an unprecedented fashion. Within the *Bahlalefi* and the *Lekhotla la Bafu* circles, we see the decline of the authority of the chieftain and imperial masculinities and the rise of



different masculinities that could challenge the supremacist and exploitative tendencies of the former. With the *Lekhotla la Bafo*, we see traditional manhood stretched between the traditional value system dominated by chiefs on the one hand, and a new political dispensation under the British imperial rule on the other. The influence of both systems left Basotho men with one foot in the traditional ways and the other in the modern political ways of the British rule. Despite its radical attitude, we see this political masculinity still resistant to radical transformation in the order of gender relations. However, I have argued that an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness refused to be subjugated by the faces of the political masculinity represented by Mokhehle and Leabua. Matji has been identified as the embodiment of this alternative consciousness, so desirable, in Lesotho's present political landscape. In the next part we turn to yet another framework without which other dimensions of the operations of masculinity among Basotho men cannot be understood, labour migrancy.

## **PART THREE**

### **LABOUR MIGRANCY**

#### **2.8 Introduction**

Van der Wiel (1977:91-96) has explored the effects of the migratory labour system on the social and economic changes on Basotho men. In the last section of his book, he explores the extent to which the migratory labour system influenced Basotho men in their acquisition of skills, knowledge, new norms and values. In this context he made a curious observation. Little had been known about these men during their absence at home. They never revealed to their families any details about their daily lives in the mines: what exactly their job was, their work mates or leisure activities. In this part I want to highlight the effects of the mining experience on Basotho men.

##### **2.8.1 Basotho men as miners**

Guy and Thabane (1988) have studied a relationship between labour migrancy and mine work and Basotho ethnic identity. Maloka (2004) has explored the everyday cultural features of labour migrancy and life on the mines and how it has impacted on the social consciousness of the Basotho men since the discovery of gold in South Africa in 1886 up to the 1940s. Epprecht (1996:190) in his study which ties gender and history together suggests that probably the attraction of men to labour migrancy in the mines was the tests of endurance and masculinity mining experience offered. Jingoos (1975: 23-24, 59) mentions the things that motivated young Basotho men of his time to go to the mines. Besides the lack of cattle for bride-wealth, he testifies to how from boyhood, men grew up with stories about working in the mines because almost every man, at some stage of his life went there to earn money. In the same vein, Ashton (1952:164) has noted that curiosity, the adventurous spirit and the admiration of those who returned with exciting stories and their desirable success with girls were factors that enticed young Basotho men to the mines, and this had cast a spell on them that they regarded as an essential part of becoming a man to work in the mines. Maloka (2004:12, 95-96) observes that around the years 1890 to 1930s, Basotho had accepted as a practice that a man should go to the mines at least once in their life time. According Jingoos (1975: 63, 64, 65, 69) underground work turned a man into a hero in the mines. It exposed men to deadly accidents and this made them truly heroes. Those working on the surface were disparaged and labelled as indolent and weakly.

Coates (1966:81-89) gives a detailed description of the life of a Mosotho man in the 1960s, from the day he left home for gold mines to the day he returned and the effect of it on the country. He (1966:81-82, 85) compares mines to a kind of education for those whom *lebollo* had prevented from having anything more advanced. Coplan's (1987:415) anthropological study implies that some how *lebollo* prepared young Basotho men for the hard work in the mine.

A vacation seminar organised by the Agency for Industrial Mission (AIM) for students of the theological seminaries in Lesotho, in 1976, has highlighted the complex dimension of labour migrancy in the mines and its effects on Basotho men and their families: broken homes, loneliness, negative impact on children; prostitution, corruption, drunkenness, homosexuality in the compound; on the job, fear and frustration, racial tensions and resentment underground. Jingoos (1975:56-71) also gives an account of Basotho men and the mines. He remembers his family sending someone to search for his father who had spent three years in the mines without coming back home (Jingoos 1975: 59).

Some of the effects of the absence of husbands and fathers have been acknowledged by the members of the reflecting team of this study, both as children and later as fathers themselves who had to be absent from their own wives and children due to labour migrancy in general. One member of the team shared with us his experiences of being arrested by a feeling of an emotional distance between himself and his wife and children as they now shared a living space under the same roof. As a coping mechanism, this member says he sometimes storms out of the house searching for the company of other men in the village. On reflection, I got the impression that this member was experiencing a real disparity between who he was in the public space of masculinity or public world of work associated with men, and how he could allow himself to be at home, commonly viewed as a private space of men and also associated with women and children by most men. He was faced with the challenge of reworking a new relationship between the two realms in his life. He was challenged to redefine his involvement and participation within the realm that had also come to be associated with women and children. In my view, the storming out of the house appeared to be a kind of escape from the women's and children's realm into the public space of men. By so doing, he was kind of turning his back on relationships with his wife and children in search of the security of a masculinity that was threatened to be lost

in the realm associated with women and children. In another session, when we were discussing how men cope with boredom, the issue of men flocking in shebeens and taverns was identified as men's public space where male camaraderie men seek could be found and their masculinity affirmed. Was the team member searching for this camaraderie and affirmation when he stormed out of the house? I asked myself.

As he spoke, I also sensed a tendency among most Basotho men to define their homes as private space and a background which supports and sustains their involvement within the public space of work, which is really what matters to them. They interpret their participation within the public work space as for the wellbeing of the family and the children children. This is what appears to constitute the male identity and sense of being a man for most Basotho men, and it does not take emotional relationship with women and children as very important. It is this identity and sense of being a man which also poses one of the greatest challenges for men if and when they experience retrenchment from the mines and the experience of unemployment in general in the modern Lesotho.

### **2.8.2 Mines and the subordination of Basotho men**

A closer look at the relationship between the mines and Basotho men reveals the extent to which they changed roles as they shuttled between home and work place. Maloka (2004:90) argues that, Basotho men's journeys to the mines, and their sense of space and mobility, has sharpened their sense of distinction between home and work. Home means Lesotho as different from the place of work, South Africa, designated as *makhoeng* (the place of whites). Oscillating between these two spaces has shaped Basotho men's experience and their sense of identity. The jokes they told and songs they sang as a way of coping with anticipated uncertainty and fear of their situation in the mines are full of symbolism and metaphors that describe how they perceived themselves as workers and blacks. Crossing the Caledon River becomes a symbol of cleansing and assumption of a new identity – "Another Blanket". Going down underground, they become "rats" and ceased to be "monkeys" who lived on the mountains of Lesotho. By becoming rats, they were reduced to something smaller. At home, they were bosses and had authority over their families. In the mines, they were dominated by whites. There is a movement from being the king of the mountain (monkey) to being a rat to the whites in the mines (AMI 1976:11-14). Ntsane's

(1962:61-63) poem encapsulates sentiments of anxiety and fear that seized a man as he thought about the mine. Here are some extracts of the poem:

Ra lala re phehile mefaho,/*We had cooked provisions for the journey,*  
Re phehile mefaho ka la maobane,/*We had cooked them the previous day,*  
Meroalo re e tlamme, ntja tsa batho,/*Baggages fastened, we poor dogs,*  
Ntja tsa moreneng, malala-a-laotsoe,/*Dogs of the chief, the always-ready-to act,*  
Laola morena, re lokile,/*Command oh chief, we are ready,*  
Re loketse ho kena mekoteng ea litali,/*We are ready to get into the holes of the rats;*  
Litali tsena li maoto-mane, lia bua,/*These rats are four-legged, they speak,*  
Li bua chomi, li bua Sekhooa,/*They speak chomi, they speak English.*

[...]

‘Mate a tela ‘m’ae, ka tela nkho,/*A mate renounced his mother, I renounced my grandmother,*  
Ra tela beng, ra sia balimo,/*We renounced our own, we abandoned ancestors;*  
Le pele li na le baji,/*Misery starts here and proceed ahead to consume its own,*  
Balimo ba ja ba mekoteng,/*Ancestors eat those in the holes.*  
Ba ja ngoana ‘m’ae a mo rata,/*They eat a so much loved child of its mother,*  
A mo rata e le ngoana’a ho fela,/*Loving it as her last born;*  
Ngoana’a ho fela ke sebatso, /*A last born child is a wonderful thing,*  
O hlatsoa sebae mokete o fele,/*it cleans up a dancing floor and a feast ends up.*

[...] Utloang mabalane o sehlōhō banna,/*oh understand men that mabalane (a high ranking mine official, a kind of personnel manager) is so cruel,*  
O re bo-‘m’a rona re ba siile morao,/*He says we have left our mothers behind.*  
O rohaka koata ka ‘m’a eona,/*He insults a koata (derogatory referent to a mine worker) by his mother,*  
‘M’a eona le ho etseba e sa e etsebe,/*Not even knowing his mother at all,*  
Ka pelo koata e nts’e re: “Le uena!”/*In the heart a koata is murmuring: “same applies to you!”*

[...]

[...] Likonteraka tsa Makhooa ha se ho phoqa,/*Oh the contracts of the Whites can’t be so deceiving,*  
Li phoqile ncheme a itšepile,/*They’ve deceived ncheme (a naïve inexperienced young lad) in his pride,*  
A ba a hakoa ke bitso e le la hae,/*And he forgot a name that was his.*

[...]

Ra tšela Mohokare Satane a tšeha,/*We crossed the Caledon and Satan laughed,*  
A phutha mahatla a rakalla,/*He tucked a tail and stood firm,*

A re puo tsa rona li ntle, lia khahleha,/*Saying our conversations were good and attractive,*  
 Li khahla Satane le mangeloi a hae./*They attract Satan and his angels.*  
 Ra ngolola bukeng ea lihele, ra amoheloa;/*We got registered in the books of hell, and we got admitted;*  
 Re tšetse Mohokare re siile bohlae morao,/*We crossed the Caledon and left intelligence/perceptiveness behind,*  
 Re siile naka la Moshoeshoe morao,/*We left a lustre of Moshoeshoe behind,*  
 Naka la botho le la khotso lichabeng./*A lustre of humanity and peace among foreigners.*

Tsatsi le chaba kae mafatšeng?/*Whence the sun rises in foreign lands?*  
 Gauteng mona eakare le chaba hosele./*Here in Gauteng it's like it rises from a wrong position.*  
 Tsatsi, u chaba-chaba u nchoesa methapo,/*Oh sun, you rise, you kill the veins in me,*  
 U nkhopotsa tsela e eang Lesotho!/*You make me think of a route to Lesotho!*  
 Ke siile tseso metebong,/*I have left mine at a cattle-post,*  
 Ka lata tse metsoele e thata,/*And I went for those with hard teats,*  
 Tse hangoang ka mali a motho,/*Those milked by human blood,*  
 Tse tlangoang maoto ka tšepe./*Those that have their feet tied by iron.*

Tetebela, koata, u itse u tla kopa;/*Sink, oh koata, you said you would manage;*  
 Tebe-tebe ha ea iketsa, e entsoe,/*The mire did not make itself, it was made,*  
 Ke mohohlomela, haha la malimo,/*That is an abyss, a cave of the cannibals,*  
 Khatampi botšo khohlong,/*oh hole, so dark in a deep narrow gorge,*  
 Khatampi e nkha khotolia tsa Makhooa,/*A hole stinks with cineraria of the Whites,*  
 Ke khatampi ea gauta, se-ja-batho;/*That's the hole of gold, the humans-eater; [...].*

The fear and anxiety that seized these men sometimes drove them to seek help from the diviners to be strengthened. Guy & Thabane (1991:245) say one of their informants told them he consulted a woman doctor. Ashton (1952:305) remarks that some of Basotho men who failed medical fitness test also checked with a diviner for help. And with the phenomenon of medicine murders in the 1940s some sort the magic of the human body parts.

A remark is in order here. It seems that Basotho men, even in their sense of being the strongest as we have seen in the case of the gun war, they have at some moments in their lives experienced themselves as inadequate and so in need of some enhancement of their masculinity. Fear and anxiety seem to tear apart a texture of the strength of manhood. The significance of Ntsane's poem lies in exposing the admittance of Basotho men to the experience of fear and anxiety in their lives. Turned towards a perspective that foregrounds gender, the admission of these feelings seems to subvert a construction of the public facet of manhood normatively associated with

unassailable strength and power in the face of life's tests, as Basotho men's essential identity. It transgresses what appears to be the Sesotho masculinist code of public discourse which excludes episodes of vulnerability in a man's life. The question is how this admission can help the current dominant Sesotho masculinities to face the challenges of transformation in the order of gender relations without giving in to suggestions of the notion of "unmaning". Unmanning means a disruption of gender performance required to sustain the stabilisation of masculine subjects (Taylor 2005:125). It depicts Basotho men as victims. And it is an exclusion of this aspect of being human that appears to be at play in resisting transformation in the order of gender relations in Lesotho. In my opinion, the admission of vulnerability by Basotho men is a key to an alternative consciousness, perhaps a more ethical way of being men. And this will be further explored later in this research in chapter six.

### **2.8.3 Basotho men as "Likoata"**

"Likoata" is a derogative designation with which Basotho men who worked in the mines were known by, by the population at home. According to the students who were involved in the AIM project (1976:7), this label depicts them as "illiterate", "primitive", "stupid" and "irresponsible", people who were "treated like slaves by the Boers". It is a term that points to their attitude and behaviour or sub-culture that distinguished them from those who remained at home. Ntsane (1962:63) poetically notes how immediately upon crossing the Caledon River, these men used indecent language. He says once they crossed, the devil made some entries in the hell's registration book. According to Maloka (2004:103-104), this behaviour, *bokoata*, was a coping strategy, but one which was judged as a disgrace, animal like, offensive and dehumanising by those who had not been subjected to the situation these men were in. They were known for their unruliness and rudeness on the train as they affronted people, women and train officials included. Maloka says, "[w]hat was initially a way of coping with going to the mines became an established form of behaviour which was also reinforced by certain stereotypes". In the light of this study, such behaviour, as a coping mechanism in a stressful situation, evokes concerns about how the Basotho men cope with stressful challenges of life, such as being retrenched from the mines, and how this affects women and children in the circle of their lives. Could there be some connection between this situation and male violence against others, women and children? The question is how best Basotho men can stare those challenges in the eyes as they did with

uncertainty in the mines, without compromising their own dignity as well as that of those within the circle of their lives, women and children.

#### **2.8.4 The Compound as a device of control: men under control**

Moroney (1977), Turrel (1982), Phimister (1988), Maloka (2004:17-119) argue that the institution of compounds in the mining industry was not only developed for housing but also for control of migrant workers as a means to guard the precious stone. They also reveal how easy it was to control a huge number of men by a few white managers. Jingoos (1975:63) remarks how a compound *induna* watched over other miners on their behalf. Maloka (2004:118-119) notes how the *indunas* were nominated by and enjoyed special treatment of white management. They were given separate rooms, extra meat and beer, and were paid more than other miners. *Sibonda* liaised with the management and settled disputes between dormitory mates and was elected by them. “Policeboys” armed with knobkerries and sjamboks were responsible for law and order in and around the compound premises. According to Coates (1966:85, 86) a *sibonda* represented his ethnic group. He was advised by a council and settled disputes according to ethnic laws. Coates remarks that only four white directors could control thousands of miners together through the *indunas* and *sibondas*. Those miners who proved to be efficient supervisors or mechanics were encouraged to recruit friends efficient like them at home to take their jobs when they went home. According to the student who participated in AIM project (1976:17), the *indunas* were considered puppets that lived by the principle of “the master says”. According to Jingoos (1975:65, 69-69, 70) the relationship between Basotho men and their white counterparts ran on racial trail and prejudice. Basotho men became “boss boys” and had to learn to get used to being called so.

Translated into a gender perspective which underlies this study in terms of an alternative, more ethical consciousness, one of the most pointed questions addressed to Basotho men, whose history contains experiences of control and subjugation, is how their mining experiences can best help them to appreciate and acknowledge the need for transformation in the order of gender relations. How can they positively embrace this change, conscious of the fact that sometimes the subjugated can easily, in turn, slip into the ways of the subjugator themselves? This question will be answered later in chapter six on the search for alternative ways of being a man.



### **2.8.5 Leisure as a contested political terrain in the mines**

The students who participated in the AIM Project (1976:19) and the Chamber of mines (1947:9) remark that recreation for the miners on the compound comprised films, sporting activities and beer drinking. Maloka (2004: 127-144) has explored how leisure became a contested terrain and efforts were made by the management to control it because it was believed it could easily recruit the miners into industrial and political agitation. Tracy (1958:11) remarks how some of pastime activities like “war dance” were perceived with suspicion by mine authorities. The leisure element as a site of contest is very significant in this study. We will see in the next chapter on *sekoele* how what may appear a simple pastime can be turned into a political activity and a form of resistance to change in the order of gender.

### **2.8.6 Lesotho as a holiday rest camp for Basotho men**

Working in the mines has affected the attitude of many Basotho men in how they actually related to what was supposed to be their home, as distinguished from a land referred to as *makhooeng* (the place of whites). Coates (1966:88) observes that returning home for Basotho men meant nothing but holidays so that they gave the impression to strangers that they regarded their country as a rest camp they went to when they needed a holiday. It had become a tradition that a man had to work outside the country and left Lesotho suffering in terms of skilled agriculture. This appears to have contributed to food shortages the country is suffering from. It is left to women to bear uneven agricultural weight while soil erosion devastates the land. In the same vein, The Christian Council of Lesotho (1983:24) notes the same phenomenon in its study on how South African mining industry affected Lesotho’s economy. They cease to do the works they did before they went to the mines: animal care, cultivation of land and involvement in village affairs. Instead, the council remarked how they amused themselves with alcohol and visiting friends. The work they used to do fell upon the shoulders of women and children. With the prevalent experience of retrenchments from the mines this attitude becomes a worrying factor. How does it affect these men who are culturally expected to be providers? How does it affect their relationship with women in their lives? And how do they react to it? These questions point to the challenges faced by most Basotho men who have been retrenched from the mines.

### 2.8.7 The Reflecting Team

In one of our meetings of the Reflecting Team, we were discussing the stuff, so to speak, that made a Mosotho man. One member, the oldest in the group (78), named endurance of pain and “thlokofatso” (rough treatment) as the stuff that made a Mosotho man. He referred to *lebollo* practice as a proof of it. It prepared men for harsh realities of war as they were expected to protect the country and families. Another member, in his mid forties, who is self employed in house construction agreed with him. He said he had observed how men who had not been exposed to endurance of some pain or rough treatment of some sort in their lives loose heart at construction work when they are told to work like men, mixing ducker and shoving it and bricks around. He shared his experience as a miner and said men who could not endure the “rough treatment” there, a kind of ragging, may have had their children starving. One member who also had a mining experience agreed that “weak men” could not endure the tough work there. In short men are expected to be tough, rough and to endure pain to prove that they are men. The mining experience, according to the team members, had provided them with the experience of what the *lebollo* rite does to men who go for it. Those men who do not have such experiences in their lives are said to be “soft” as women, as one member put it,

### 2.9 Summary

In this part we have seen how the mining experience has shaped the identity of Basotho men. We have seen how it sharpened their sense of distinction between a space they called home and the one they called *Makhooeng* (the place of Whites) and how shuttling between them has framed their sense of identity. Whereas *Makhooeng* symbolised their being dominated, home, Lesotho, has been a representation of a sense of dominating and sort of a rest resort. Translated into gender perspective, their experience of being dominated acquires a fundamental significance. It becomes a framework within which a case for an alternative more ethical gendered consciousness can be presented. It possesses a deconstructive edge of a hegemonic sense of experience of dominating, which has been associated with the space that has been identified as ‘home’. The point is: how can Basotho men’s experience of being dominated be used to help them understand women’s experience of being dominated by men?

## 2.10 General summary

In general, in this chapter, I have explored the history of the operations of masculinity in Lesotho. From the historical perspective, through the help of Foucault's methodologies of archaeology and genealogy, I have argued that masculinity in Lesotho is not a unified entity of the metaphysical order. We have seen how specific discourses emerged at specific periods and engaged in a battle for power. From this struggle for domination we saw how the different types of masculinities emerged. In the first part which dealt with the Basotho men and war, for instance, the meticulous historical analysis reveals that chieftaincy among the Basotho, as we know it today, emerged in the social climate of conquest in which being a man was measured by the wealth of cattle. By means of the practice of cattle raiding and what came to be known as *mafisa* system, Moshoeshe successfully emerged as a great chief who managed to subjugate not only other men, but also women. In this way, two categories of men emerged, chiefs – Moshoeshe and his sons, and general common men. Most Basotho people today do not think of chieftaincy as a form of masculinity but as a given in the social arrangement of the Basotho traditional society. With the Basotho becoming British subjects, first under the colony of the Cape in 1868 and then directly under the British throne after the gun war in 1884, we see a new struggle for power erupting between the colonialists and the Basotho. During this period new discourses dipped in racial differences emerged. The white supremacist masculinity, embodied in the male colonial administrators managed to subjugate chieftain masculinity. It used the latter to its own advantage in expanding their domination of the general common masculinity. This latter mode of being a man thus became doubly dominated. It is within these circumstances the political masculinity emerged challenging both the colonial imperial and chieftain masculinities. It is the political masculinity which saw Lesotho toward independence in 1964. With the labour migracy which came as a result of discovery of diamonds in South Africa, new manly discourses arose. Being a man was measured by mobility and physical fitness demanded by shaft sinking.

Of great importance and relevance to this study, I have explored how the shifts in the masculinity discourses affected women. It is this gendered consciousness that motivated me to search within this long history some traces of an alternative more ethical masculinities. I traced it in the person of Arboussert and an unidentified Mosotho man who actually took the side of the vulnerable women who wanted to have her baby boy when a powerful man, Moshoeshe, wanted to possess

it for his own benefit under the guise of ‘customary rights’. The unnamed Mosotho who put his life in danger in support the widow, represents many unrecorded stories of unknown men out there who continue to provide alternative more gender-ethical expressions of manhood. Such stories need to be investigated. I believe they can serve to deconstruct the present dominant expressions of masculinity which tend to dominate women rather than involve them as partners in the construction of a human society where the wellbeing of all is protected. I traced it in the person of the Batlokoa men who actually accepted chieftainness ‘Manthatisi as their leader during difficult times of the *lifaqane* wars. I traced it in the person of Matji who was committed to the cause of women when Mokhehle and Leabua were caught up in male power struggle over who would rule Lesotho at independence. With these vestiges of alternative more ethical masculinities, a possibility of a dialogue with the present dominant masculinity which resists transformation in the order of gender is established. In the next chapter on the *sekoele* philosophy I am paying attention to the tactics and strategies used by this practical philosophy of life to reinforce resistance to change in the order of gender relations among the Basotho men today. With these traces of ethical consciousness, the deconstruction of the *sekoele* outlook has already begun.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXPLORING *SEKOELE*

#### 3.1 Introduction

In chapter one, I indicated that Basotho men seem to resist change in the order of gender relations. How they do resist, seems to be taken for granted by those who even appear to genuinely seek transformation in this area. When the government amended the local government Act of 1968 in 1997 and 2004 (CIV/APN/135/2005; CIV/No.11/05), it took for granted how men would react to the modification of the Act to allow one third of the seats in each Council to be reserved for women. The issue of human rights for men was used as a means of resistance to the innovation. Other ways of resistance at a much wider social spectrum, appear to be channelled through recourse to the history of the Basotho as a nation, specific traditional cultural practices, customs and norms. Together with specific practices, customs and traditions, this history is interpreted in ways that evoke and justify attitudes and sentiments that fortify the resistance.

In the previous chapter, on Sesotho masculinity, it is demonstrated how operations of Sesotho masculinity are imbedded in the national history whose major recurrent theme is war and resistance. This theme of war and resistance, albeit with new interpretation, also seems to run through the present forms of resistance to changes in the traditional order of gender as a result of the present socio-cultural and economic practices. This resistance movement is technically known by the term *sekoele* (a return to ancestral practices, customs and traditions). Those practices, customs and traditions are simply referred to in popular parlance by the general name, *Sesotho* in Sesotho language. In the context of the present socio-economic changes, both notions function as an abracadabra to arouse in different ways, sentiments of resistance to what is perceived as a destruction or corruption of what is taken to represent the purity of Basotho practices, customs and traditions. In the order of gender relations in which, men's privileged position is enshrined, these notions are exploited to make present sentiments of a sense of danger, as in war, of emasculation of men and then encourage them to resist. In general, *sekoele* is a resistance movement which is very keen to what is perceived as deviation from proper and authentic ways of being a Mosotho, whether a boy or a girl, a man or a woman.

Now, in this chapter I am exploring the practice of *sekoele* and its effects on Basotho men. In line with the research questions and aims of this study, I want, first, to name and describe its characteristics and the tactics it uses to encourage Basotho men of today not to embrace change in the order of gender. I want to investigate how it operates in favour of men to reveal the power relations hidden therein. Secondly, I want to argue that there is within *sekoele* itself, as a practice, a possibility of change. I want to show that this possibility has not only shown itself in specific historical moments as I have explored in the previous chapter on the history of masculinity, but also in specific practices, customs and traditions. Thirdly, I want to challenge the assumption on which this practical philosophy of life is based. Its basic assumption is that there exists *Sesotho* or *Bosotho* (sothoiness) in its purity and original form. In the context of gender, it assumes that there exists a pure and real Mosotho man or woman. It treats men as a collective idea; a single grand perspective. On the basis of postmodern social theory (Ritzer 1997:8; Rosenau 1992:8), I have already argued against any treatment of masculinity as a grand narrative in the first chapter. I argue that what exist are men and women in context; that being a man and a woman is historically dependent and situation specific. This is the position held within the theoretical frame work of this study.

With this in mind, I want to throw in a word of clarification which I believe is quite necessary at this juncture before I proceed with the exploration. It concerns the religious, spiritual and theological significance of *sekoele*. *Sekoele* has many faces: religious, spiritual and even theological. These dimensions will be directly highlighted in chapter five on the contextual theologies of liberation and male domination in Lesotho. In this chapter these aspects are indirectly implied because traditionally, Basotho's religious forms and expressions are part of their cultural and customary life. That is, Basotho religion is not just a "segment" of their life. Among the traditional Basotho, as among most Africans, religion is "a public commodity" (Machobane 200: 7, 30, 32). Because traditional Basotho religion "embraces the whole of life" and is "communal" as Mangesa (1997:71) would put it, when exploring *sekoele* and its implication for the masculine gender, it is assumed that the religious/spiritual dimension of it is involved. The issues of gender relations that are discussed in this chapter should, therefore, be understood as part of a bigger picture which includes religious and spirituality aspects. In this

way the traditional Sesotho spirituality as well as Christianity is a very core issue regarding *sekoele*.

### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

One of the theoretical orientations of this research is social construction theory. One basic assumption of social construction theory is that the language, concepts and categories we use to understand ourselves and the world around us are culturally and historically specific; and that language provides the basis of our thought patterns (Burr 2004:3-9,46-62). Berger and Luckmann (1966:37-39) state that language is the repository of meanings we attach to our experiences and makes those meanings and experiences available to subsequent generations over time. Within a therapeutic context, White (1992:123) further argues that stories people tell, not only shape their lives and have real effects on them but also provide the structure of life itself. Freedman and Combs (1996:27-33) further argue that if the realities we inhabit are carried in the language we use, then we must pay attention to stories people tell and live. Language constitutes social practice and action (Gergen K.J. & McNamee 1999: x-xi; Burr 2003:46-61). Language itself is generated in social practice and action in our everyday life. It objectifies and epitomizes our experiences emerging from that daily social context (Berger & Luckmann 1966:49-61). In other words language constitutes and is itself constituted by social practice (Halliday 1978; Fairclough & Wodak 1997: 258-285). For these reasons, language has far reaching political and social implications with consequences in the construction of people's identity (Bird 2004:3-42).

The relevance of the theme of language in this chapter which explores the characteristics and tactics of *sekoele* lies in the way this practical philosophy of life uses and exploits Sesotho language to encourage resistance to change, especially in the order of gender. It uses and exploits the concept of *Bosotho* (sothoiness) to argue for the unchangeable truth of the social reality of manhood. From a theological/religious/spiritual perspective, such immutable truth is problematic because it is often equated with God's will in the creation of the masculine gender. In this chapter, this use of the concept is challenged together with its religious and spiritual underpinnings because of its oppressive nature in the order of gender relations.

In short, the social construction theory in which this study is positioned is a theory which helps us to understand Basotho men and their behaviour. It argues that there is a diversity of realities

and that they do not have fixed essences. And masculinity is one of them. Most importantly, it argues that there are no singular truths whether social or religious. In the perspective of this study, it means there are no singular masculine Sesotho truths. The social construction theory is based on the belief that we are a product of social processes and not a given determinate nature. Our experiences of ourselves and how we understand others and ourselves, do not originate from an unchangeable prepackaged foundational and metaphysical form inside us (Burr 3003:48).

This theory is adopted here as an analytical tool of Sesotho masculinity as it is defined by *sekoele*. As a practical philosophy of life, *sekoele* has a tendency to interpret the social realities of being a man or a woman in essential, foundational and metaphysical terms. This is what is contested by this study as it is positioned within the social construction theory. On the contrary it would argue that, first, there are different ways of being Basotho men or women. And second, there are no fixed and singular truths about being a Mosotho man or woman. In this way the social construction theory opens possibilities of dealing with *sekoele* in a different way in as far as these realities are concerned. To appreciate these possibilities there is a need to explore the notion of *sekoele* itself.

### **3.3 The Notion of *Sekoele*: A Memory of Danger and Resistance**

The term *sekoele* denotes a call to attack again after having retired from war (Mabille & Dieterlen 2000:405). The *Moafrika* news paper (2003, June, 13) argues that the notion of *sekoele* captures the spirit of resilience and the attitude that has effectively saved Lesotho from her enemies in the past. It draws parallels between the historical experience of war and struggle for survival, such as we have explored in the previous chapter, with the present struggle for preservation of Basotho's cultural ethnic identity. *Moafrika* argues that just as the Basotho warriors tricked and resisted the invading enemy that threatened to capture their land, so should the present Basotho resist the invasion of the present socio-economic and political situation on Basotho's ethnic and cultural identity. They believe that the encounter of the Basotho with the foreign ethnicities and cultures represents a new challenge which threatens Basotho's ethnic and cultural identity with extinction. Now, they call upon them to embrace that spirit of resilience and the attitude of *sekoele* to defend their *Bosotho* (sothoiness) by claiming back what has been destroyed as a result of the encounter. In this sense, the notion of *sekoele* acquires a new



meaning. It becomes a repository of the memory of danger and resistance; that is, a sharp sense of being surrounded by a threat of annihilation which should compel the Basotho people to be on the alert as they interact with foreign ethnicities, especially European and North American.

This memory of danger appears to be so pervasive and operates behind our daily social interactions more than most of the Basotho people are aware of. It can be sensed mostly in men's comments about how women should dress when they go into and move about in public spaces, in church services, funerals and work; how men should speak and relate not only to other men, but also to women; what to think and not to think about realities such as marriage, sex, work and so on. When I asked the opinion of the Reflecting Team about this observation, some of them positively confirmed it. One of them drew attention to the warning sign placed on the doors of one Catholic Church in Maseru which simply reads: "Basali Mese!" meaning women should wear dresses when they come into the church building. We remarked that the sign had not been there before a particular group of priests were assigned to the parish. For this reason, we concluded that this was part of the *sekoele* manifestations within the Church. In another parish, in Botha-bothe, the parish priest is reported to have refused to talk to a woman journalist about a church project because she was wearing a trouser (*Moeletsi oa Basotho* 2011, Hlakola, 06). Another member made a similar observation about a warning sign at the offices of some local chiefs. The members commented that such warnings are an attempt to rectify the perceived wayward behaviour of some women in the way they dress. This waywardness is particularly sensed by men as they take it upon themselves to protect the social and religious/spiritual dignity attached to these spaces and services. We exchanged opinions about the prohibitions made by priests, chiefs and men to women with uncovered heads to participate in church services and to go to the grave yard at funerals. Some members noticed how those Basotho "women of today" who go to the saloons to make up their hair may feel oppressed by such practices.

A story of one member of our reflecting team typifies the prevalence and the depth of the memory of danger among Basotho men. He shared his story during a session in which we were exchanging our experiences about the dominant men's consciousness of themselves. The school principal had called him to his office concerning his son's behaviour. He smoked and drank alcohol. What shocked this member the most was not so much the fact that his son did those things. It was the people he did them with, girls, not boys. "Khilik!" He exclaimed (a Sesotho

expression of deep surprise and bewilderment). Smoking and drinking were not so much of a problem because he knew boys would always be boys. He thought there was something deeply disturbing with his son. He told us that his neighbour suggested that a remedy of the situations like that was found in the *lebollo* rite. Traditionally *lebollo* rite is a rite of turning boys into “real” men. When his neighbour advised him to sign up the boy for the rite, he confirmed the team member’s fear of his son’s unmasculine behaviour which needed serious attention. I asked him what he thought about his neighbour’s suggestion. He replied that if he was not a Christian he would do it. On reflection on this member’s experience, I could understand how his life was enveloped by both gender and religious discourses which sometimes turned him into a battle field. I asked myself how he came to be soaked by those discourses. I suspected that, just as the priests of the church mentioned above and the chiefs, he too was still caught up in the web of meanings contained in the traditional language he grew up in, which prescribed how and what a man or boy should be.

### **3.4 *Sekoele* and Sesotho Language and Social Cultural Identity**

Language is crucial in making visible people’s identity and the versions of ‘truth’ they live within (Bird 2004: ix). Language is the primary means by which people create coherent social realities that frame their sense of who they prefer to be. In this light, it becomes apparent why Sesotho language is one flash site within the *sekoele* orientation. *Sekoele* believers seek to reverse a tide of shifts in Sesotho language they perceive as untenable and destructive of who and/or what the Basotho are and their language. They, therefore, call for a return to the authenticity, beauty and purity of Sesotho language, *as it should be* (my emphasis).

For example, Rakotsoane (2004:5-6, 10, 12), laments the corrosion of Sesotho language in the tendency to mixing it with English language. He calls it a “tlhakantsutsu” (a confused mixture), indicative of self hate and an inability to differentiate between the two languages. He poetically labels those Basotho who have the tendency, “matimetsa-puo” (the language exterminators), “Malakatsa-eka-ekaba-Makhooa” (the-they-wish-they-were-Whites) and “Maqitolo” (the untrustworthy or unreliable) who have to be looked at with contempt.

Monyako (2000) calls for respect of the Sesotho language by emphasising what he believes to be its basic and unchanging grammatical rules. On this basis, he rejects the current protest from

some quarters of the Lesotho public, demanding shifts in Sesotho language because of the belief that certain ways of reference to specific people or persons – people living with disability, people of different ethnicities, for example, are insensitive, demeaning and so unacceptable. For Monyako, this is untenable and a destruction of who the Basotho are as represented in their language.

Mphaololi (2001) argues that the privilege given to English language in Lesotho's educational and legal systems creates Basotho who do not speak and/or are not conversant with it, into "lithoto" (the intellectually incapable). She urges Basotho to desist from denigrating their "bochaba" (that which constitutes them as a distinct people) and be proud of their "bosotho" (sothoiness), which would otherwise die as they watch.

Khaketla and Elias in the preface of Matšela's (2001:7-8; 1990:i-ii) works respectively, link Sesotho language and Sesotho socio-cultural realities. They do not employ the term *sekoale*, but the content of their consideration about Sesotho language and culture endorses the concept. While Khaketla extols the traditional training of youth for adulthood life, the *lebollo* rite, and criticises linguistic expressions which disparage and sneer at the practice and other traditional customs of good conduct, she laments what she perceives as a misuse of Sesotho language in expressing such social realities. With this position, she gives the impression that Sesotho language is a body of fixed signs representing a necessary and essential social identity. She implies that being a Mosotho can exist in its purity; that a social identity can exist unaffected by history and social processes. In this perceived misuse of language, Khaketla sees the germ of destruction of the original texture of Sesotho cultural identity. She sees it especially in the adoption of what she calls 'bad' foreign cultural habits. Elias argues that what blood is to the veins, language is to the customs and practices of a people or ethnic group. It is a means by which customs and practices of a people are passed from generation to generation. However, he acknowledges that some of these customs are adulterated by encounters with other ethnic groups with the progress of time. Some are abandoned while others are copied from other groups or new ones altogether created because of the encounter. For Elias, the 'tlhakantsutsu' (the confused mixture) feared by Rakotsoane, is unavoidable.

Matšela (1990: iv-v) does not use the term *per se*, but he argues for the ancient Sesotho customs and traditions, something which is at the core of *sekoele*. As a philosophy of and a movement for preservation of Sesotho cultural practices and traditions, *sekoele* has a tendency to identify cultural identity with the remote past traditions and practices. He believes they have a capacity to penetrate the present and the future like threads in a blanket. He states that a society which forgets about them is like a tree without roots. They frame cultural identity and inject life into the society because they carry values that they have to purify regularly. According to Matšela, for the young to know how their ancestors lived, is a kind of fertilization of their affect and thinking. He therefore cautions his readers not to get caught up in the illusion of new things. He emphasises that if the identity of the Basotho is not unprotected, it will go extinct.

Mokhehle (1976: ix-xviii) does not use the term either. But the vision he had about effective political management of Lesotho's affairs carries the meaning of the notion of *sekoele* in Lesotho's political consciousness. Dissatisfied with the political arrangement of his time, the 1940s and beyond, Mokhehle turned to what he called "se-moshoeshoe" (moshoeshoe-ism) for an alternative political order. He believed that that alternative order was already well established for all generations in an "uspoilt Basotho Society" preserved by institutions and centres like "Mephato" (lodges where boys and girls are initiated into manhood and womanhood). Mokhehle confesses that this idea of an unspoilt Basotho Society was introduced to him as a young man by the *Lekhotla la Bafo* (the Commoners Movement) explored in the previous chapter. According to Mokhehle, the principal aim of the movement was to preserve and perpetuate Basotho culture "in its purer form, unadulterated by foreign culture". This foreign culture was introduced to the Basotho by means of Christian mission schools which taught them to "think of Basotho ways of life as an abomination and degradation – as barbarism and heathenism" while the white people were portrayed as heroes. This thinking was reversed in the Commoners Movement by extolling Basotho personalities of the likes of Moshoeshoe I and Mohlomi, while "White historical figures" like Bonaparte and Lord Wellington were portrayed as "cruel warmongers" who dispossessed the Basotho their land. This latter remark of Mokhehle about the Commoner's Movement reveals one characteristic of *sekoele* as an attitude. It tends to disregard historical facts to appeal to the sentiments of the people.

Like Mokhehle, Guma (1966) does not employ the term. However, his work *Likoma* (the plural of the singular, *koma*) exposes yet another aspect of *sekoele*, perhaps, more philosophical, religious, spiritual and even moral. *Koma* is another Sesotho name for 'truth'. In this perspective, *sekoele* has something to do with 'The Truth' in Sesotho ways of thinking, especially about men. According to Guma, a man who knows and possesses this truth is referred to as "Monna oa koma" (a man of the truth). Any Mosotho, who observes this truth, is called "Mosotho oa 'mannete-a-koma" (the most authentic Mosotho). According to Guma, this truth, which is a site of debate within *sekoele* orientation today, is enshrined in what is called "*lifela tsa Basotho*" (hymns of the Basotho). These hymns talk about "RaTlali" (the father of Tlali). RaTlali, in these hymns, is synonymous with God. "*Mophato*", which Mokhehle called a socio-cultural institution and centre of initiation into manhood, is called the place of RaTlali. The "Mesuoe", (the instructors of boys) and "likoesha" (the boys) themselves, go there for initiation into manhood, and together dedicate themselves to RaTlali (God).

The point all the above authors seem to assume is that there is a pure and real *Sesotho* that needs to be protected because it is endangered with extinction. They have a strong sense of a loss and destruction of what they believe constitutes *Bosotho* (sothoiness). Translated into gender perspective, it is not difficult to see the repercussions of this sentiment on the order of gender as we are going to see below. It reinforces an attitude of resistance to all efforts of social transformation despite some ethical demands for it. For them *Bosotho* is something unchangeable. And it is this perception which is challenged in this study. It makes Basotho men a collective idea and a homogeneous reality that silences the diverse ways of being a man as we are about to see. In the context of this study, *sekoele*, both as a practice and an attitude, it must be emphasised, is a product of history of struggle and survival mostly framed by fear of enforced and coerced change. How this fear impact on Basotho men is important and needs to be explored.

Before I proceed with the exploration of the impact of *sekoele* on Basotho men, there is a need to emphasise one point of great importance. When *sekoele* is referred to as a movement, it is not referred to in the sense of a particular group of people who happen to hold strong beliefs about being a Mosotho just as the Afrikaans people and the AWB in South Africa. *Sekoele* does not refer to a real minority with no real effect on larger society as the Afrikaans and AWB, isolated to

specific areas where they cluster together in that country. *Sekoele* in Lesotho is on a different scale. It is a movement on a larger scale with real effect on the larger Basotho society. It is a buzz word expressing a widespread thinking about *Bosotho* (sothoiness) adopted by different categories of people across the society. It is just that there are those people who are able to express it more eloquently than others and have enormous influence on a large number of Basotho people. For instance, Rakotsane's (2001) book of poems, *Sekoele!*, is currently taught in the high schools in Lesotho. Matšela's (1990; 2001) works, *Bochaba ba Basotho* (Basotho Culture) and *Lipapali tsa Sesotho*, have also been part of the curriculum taught in Lesotho's schools. For this reason *sekoele* is a movement of mass proportions. Along side these authors, is the *Moafrika* radio station and newspaper as it is demonstrated below.

### **3.5 *Sekoele* and Masculinity: Basotho Men and Diversion, a Threat to *Bosotho*.**

One aspect of Basotho's life which is mostly saturated by *sekoele* attitude is what is popularly referred to as "Lipapali tsa Sesotho" (Sesotho games/Sesotho sporting activities) or "Lipapali tsa Basotho" (Basotho games/sporting games of the Basotho). The games referred to here are games believed to have been observed by the Basotho before they came into encounter with "makhoaa" (the white people). Such diversionary activities are considered within *sekoele* orientation as essential part of the constitution of what is referred to as "*Bosotho*" (Sothoiness). They are believed to have a potential to instil and reinforce *Bosotho* among the Basotho (Ramainoane 2000; 2002; Matšela 2001).

Within *sekoele* circles, that which appears as a mere diversionary activity is taken for an expression of a psychological resistance to danger. It is used as a symbol of politics of resistance to foreign encroachment on Basotho's cultural ethnic identity. In praise of the annual Morija Arts and Cultural Festival, Sithetho (2009) describes the event as a "platform for Basotho to unleash their inherent talents [...] and depicts the original sothoism". It serves "to revive and rekindle the fast diminishing and explicitly extinct cultural heritage in the face of enculturation where we have imbibed other nation's practices". He laments how this process of enculturation has crashed norms, values and traditions that depict Basotho as a unique nation. He disenchants hegemony of western culture in particular, which he believes, has swamped the world. For this reason, Sithetho praises the historical traditions and the legacy of Moshoeshoe I as a strong national

pride in Lesotho's history of resistance. The role played by the legacy of Moshoeshoe I and how it reinforces the hegemony of masculinity in Lesotho, is often taken for granted. It deserves our attention in this study which speaks for a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho. This point will be explored in the next chapter on the interface of masculinity and nationalism.

Ramainoane (2000) discredits the hegemony of western culture in the adoption of "Lipapali tsa Makhooa" (the games of the Whites): football, netball, golf, tennis and cricket etc. For him these games do not have what he calls "boleng ba rona" (our being-ness) as a people. He perceives their adoption as an invasion and a weakening of *Bosotho* and a perpetuation of colonial subjugation as it is their owners who determine their rules. He argues that this undermines the independence of Lesotho; that this is done under the pretext of keeping up with the world, which as a matter of fact, means alignment with "makhooa" (the White people). He also laments the high regard given to "mino oa linoto" (music styled in tonic solfa or staff notation), while the Basotho musical dances such as '*mohobelo*' (the Basotho men's traditional dance) are discarded. For Ramainoane the adoption of music and games of the 'Whites' makes Basotho appear weird and a people that does not know itself. It makes them a people of parrots or carbon copy of other nations. As a counter move, Ramainoane calls for the revival of games like *mokallo* (stick fighting) and *seqata-majoana* (stone fighting) for Basotho men and boys. He argues that these games would give them confidence in their encounter with other peoples. In this outlook, Ramainoane expresses a psychological dimension of *sekoele*.

I think, thus far, the position of Ramainoane, and those others mentioned above, has to be credited for exposing the effects of the discourse of colonisation on the mind of the Basotho and their culture. Their position makes full sense within post colonial discourse with its critique of the colonisation tradition. It helps us to be critical of the present western hegemony concealed in the discourse of globalization. However, I think it is also very challenging, perhaps, even worrying when it comes to the discourse of gender relations in the context of the gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho. It raises a monumental challenge of how to raise issues of gender justice within this post colonial discourse. This point will be extensively explored in chapter five and in particular, in the final chapter, as part of concluding reflection of the study.

Just as Ramainoane, Matšela (2001) puts emphasis on the impact the traditional games should have on the person of Basotho men and boys. They should train them to develop the necessary manly qualities for the defence of the country: courage, bravery and intelligence. Thus, we see how *sekoele* believers tie what appears to be a simple diversion to an innermost character of the person of Basotho men and boys. In this way, diversion is more than just an amusement or a pastime. It is actually a means of creating required social identities. It is a political act that constructs Basotho men and boys for a social position and action. Of great concern in this study is how this construction of Basotho men and boys reinforces unhealthy attitudes toward women and girls. According to Matšela, women and girls have their games which should train them to assume different roles in society like the care of households. The concern of this study is how these games encourage an imbalance of power relations between men and women within Basotho social systems.

### **3.5.1 Sport and music as gendered political tools**

The link between music, sport, and leisure to gender and politics cannot be underestimated. Bryson (1990), Messner and Sabo (1990), Sabo and Panepinto (1990) McKay (1990), Rowe (1995; 1995), Tomlinson (1995) have extensively explored the link. They expose how politics of music and sport can be deployed to endorse and challenge social inequality; to support and undermine structures of power that are strongly imbedded in people's consciousness. The politics of these social activities are significant in the everyday construction of ideologies whereby, gender and racial politics are articulated in terms of inherent male or white sporting supremacy. In the context of this chapter which is investigating the tactics of *sekoele* and how it encourages Basotho men to resist change in the order of gender, their deployment of *Sesotho* games remains a challenge that cannot be taken for granted. They can see the splint in the eye of colonial imperialists, whilst the rafter in their own eye is not noticed. When race is the issue, men see it, but when gender is the issue, it goes unnoticed.

Music, sport and leisure are an essential means by which the dominant groups seek to symbolize and naturalize their power (Rowe 1995:122). South Africa typifies for us the relationship between sport and politics in which the formal barring of non-whites from involvement in representative sport was supported by material denial which ensured that resources were



unbelievably unequally distributed between whites and black and coloured populations (Jarvie 1993). In the aftermath of apartheid we see sport not only embroiled in racial lines but in masculine identities as well (Cock 2001; Hemson 2001; Swart 2001; Thompson 2001) as we have seen above in the case of *sekoele*. Within this perspective the emphasis of *sekoele* on manly diversionary activity cannot be underestimated. It constitutes a tactic by which the present masculinities are encouraged to resist change in the order of gender.

### **3.5.2 The Basotho games: *Mohobelo* and *Mokorotlo* as repositories of historical consciousness of the attitudes of traditional Sesotho masculinity**

The link between Basotho traditional sporting activities and a necessary social action underscores the historical dimension of those sporting activities. They are a part of a historical consciousness, of what it means not only to be a distinctive nation, but also a male person or a man, as well. It is this historical consciousness which acquires a monumental significance within *sekoele* circles. Ramainoane (2005a), a hard and staunch believer in *sekoele*, and a force behind its current propagation, highlights the historical meaning of the diversionary dance games of *Mohobelo* and *Mokorotlo*. They are an arsenal of what he calls authentic Sesotho manhood in its purity. He claims that they have empowered him to question the way he was raised by his devout Christian mother and the education he got from a catholic school. He says his mother and the school impressed on him that “ntho tsa sesotho” (Sesotho things) were equal to heathenism. He challenges the attitude of his age mates, which according to him, made them see those customary practices as “bokoata” (barbarism), while they thought of themselves as “litlelefa” (the sophisticated). He extols his experience of working in the mines, which he believes brought him closer to the “banna ba Basotho-sotho” (the purest of Basotho men), who inspired his deep love of some aspects of “*Bosotho*” (Sotho) such as “Lifela tsa Sesotho” (Sesotho hymns). Through the “banna ba Basotho-sotho” (the deeply Basotho men), Ramainoane claims to have discovered that, *Mohobelo* and *Mokorotlo* are not just primitive Sesotho men’s songs and dances used as pastime. They are repositories of the history of manhood among the Basotho. They enshrine the secrets of authentic Sesotho masculinity he wishes it were compulsory for all Basotho men to learn. He explains how the bodily movements of *Mohobelo* dance during war time kept warriors in the mood of war while *Mokorotlo* actually fermented required war sentiments in them. These musical dances make present to men who sing and dance to their tune,

attitudes of courage and bravery crucial for manhood. Dr Taylor (Hadley 1972:87) narrates an episode during the gun war in 1880, whereby warriors actually sang “war songs” around a dying man in the hospital.

Ramainoane (2005b) further describes the role of men’s traditional songs and dances in different contexts and draws a parallel between them and negro spirituals or blues during slavery in America. In the context of *lebollo* rite, a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, he notes that *Mokorotlo* and *Mohobelo* together with *Mangae* and *Makhele*, become an arsenal of masculine spirituality that raises men’s minds and hearts to God to solicit protection at entry, and gratitude and praise at its conclusion. In the context of performing duties to the chief, *Mokorotlo* serves to strengthen the bond between men and their chief as they extol his and their manly achievements.

It is important to note how Basotho men’s bodily movements in musical dances such as *Mokorotlo* and *Mohobelo*, are central in soliciting distinctive masculine social feelings, attitudes and patterns of behaviour which set them apart from anything that is not masculine. In this way Sesotho masculine discourses are experienced not from outside but in men’s bodies themselves. Men’s bodies are themselves a productive avenue of manly attitudes believed to be necessary for manhood. Manhood is, therefore, experienced within a man’s body. In one of our Reflecting Teams’ sessions, we exchanged thoughts about how Basotho men think of their bodies. One member shared his experience of working with male clients between the ages of 20 and 50 at his workplace. Many, he said, come there to seek “help” because they are not satisfied with the size of their “bonna” (manhood), meaning their penises. Another shared with us about his cousin who actually abused his wife to scare her away from other men. He did so because one of the men he socialised with had one day ashamed him by boasting about his big penis. He told the team member’s cousin that if he would catch his wife and make her taste his manhood she would desert him.

A comparative parallel can be drawn between Basotho men’s bodies as an avenue of the present dominant Sesotho masculine knowledge and Foucault’s (1977; 1978; 1980; 1985; 1986) analysis of the development of scientific knowledge in western culture. Foucault’s analysis underscores the centrality of human corporeality as the object of control and resistance which inspired modern scientific knowledge. He reveals how scientific discourses and power are linked together

in the process of the development of scientific knowledge. Of importance is Foucault's conception of power as productive and ubiquitous. It reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses, learning processes and everyday life. It is this ubiquity that makes power an open and indeterminate productive force which runs through the whole of the social body. A similar dynamic can be observed in the way Basotho men's bodies are interpreted to generate manly acumen. By closely getting in touch with their bodies in everyday experiences, including diversion, men have readily available, the knowledge they need to survive as men.

Now, this translated into a gender perspective, men's knowledge of their bodies appears to help them further ingrain and cements their resistance to transformations in the order of gender relations. In one of our meetings of the Reflecting Team, we discussed why most Basotho men would not readily do the jobs customarily associated with women: household chores and childcare, for instance. We realised that, perhaps, among other reasons, the way most of them perceive their bodies in contrast to those of women could be a factor. Childcare belongs to those who get pregnant and have breasts. They believe men's bodies are meant for tough works while those of women are meant for "easy" ones like cooking.

Casalis (1861:47) remarks how Basotho men who came from a hunting party used to ridicule and stigmatise their (missionaries) male cook who did his job in the open air. They called him a "woman". When these men came to the house of the missionaries, Casalis says he used to hit back at them by seizing "the first-comer by the collar, and installed him, *nolens volens*, at a hearth, which always excited loud shouts of laughter from the rest of the party". Engaging in those works identified as womanish or women's is perceived as not being tough enough and so, not manly enough as one team member put it. It is generally assumed that there is a fixed masculinity beneath the ebb and the flow of daily life.

Connell (1995:45-66) has explored the significance of the body in men's experiences in the context of sexuality. He (1995:52-53) argues that being manly is not just an abstract idea. It is "a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in the memory of our own lives and thus in our understanding of who and what we are." In this way the physical sense of

maleness and femaleness is crucial to the cultural interpretation of gender. Traditionally in Sesotho culture the interpretations of maleness and femaleness are passed on to men and women through games and most importantly the practice of *lebollo*. Before we proceed with the exploration of *lebollo* and the construction of men's masculine identity, I want to comment on the masculine discourses just explored. The interest is in how they construct men as powerful, perhaps, more powerful than women.

### **3.5.3 *Sekoele* and construction of men as powerful**

Foucault's approach to analysis of discourse sheds light on how *sekoale* operates. Foucault's (1970; 1972; 1977) archaeological method conceives discourses as rules for locating areas of knowledge. In his genealogical study of the prison, he links knowledge and power together. For Foucault (1972:49, 216), discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. In every society their production is simultaneously controlled, selected, and organised and redistributed according to certain procedures. Foucault is interested in how certain forms of knowledge are constituted as the truth while others are excluded from being considered as true. Truth is therefore the production of the society. Discourses have effects because they produce truth, knowledge and power. This becomes apparent in the way *sekoale* speaks about *Bosotho* which it claims to constitute the truth about Basotho men. This study considers the Basotho games as emphasised by *sekoale* as part of discourses by means of which specific expressions of masculinities and femininities are constructed. For this reason its concern is how these games, as discourses, distribute power among men and women in our society. This study does not take these games for granted especially when their products are made to believe their expressions of being men are evaluated as conforming to "authentic" *Bosotho*. Through the emphasis on the concept of *Bosotho*, *sekoale* appears to manage to exclude other possible ways of being a man and easily disqualifies them as "unesotho" so to speak. In the context of this study, which is in search of alternative more gender-ethical ways of being men, the concept of *Bosotho* leaves a lot to be desired though attractive it may appear at first glance. The forms of masculinity it blesses and their effects on other, especially women and children should not be taken lightly. As we shall see, they tend to reinforce superior attitude among men which sometimes undervalue women and children.

Foucault (1977:194) cautions that power is not repressive but productive: “it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production”. He (1980) says it is situated in strategies by which it incorporates its subjects and shapes them to fit in with its needs. In the light of Foucault’s notion of discourse we are able to see strategies *sekoele* uses to appeal to Basotho men. Games are one of them. It uses them to introduce the ideas deemed essential for the survival of men and their collective masculine identity.

### **3.6 Lebollo: A Traditional Rite of the Construction of Men**

Male *lebollo* is a rite of initiation that marks a change from boyhood to manhood (Casalis (1861:261-267; Guma 1965:241-249; Laydevant 1951:221-254; Ashton 1952:41-61; Thompson 1975:3-7; Sander 1975:10-11; Matsela 1990:52-72; Matsela & Motlomelo 2002;). It is believed to put an end to childish and adolescent ways and prepares boys for adult responsibilities as husbands, fathers, warriors and loyal citizens. In the process, the initiates are subjected to austere endurance of physical pain and suffering intended to bear some effects on their psyche. In this way their male bodies were made to feel and keep the memory of all the meanings of masculinity whether psychological, spiritual, emotional and social. It instructed them into the ways of *khotla* and their duties to their chief. Put differently, the *lebollo* rite moulded individual male members of an age group of a chief as his loyal subjects and formed a regiment under his control. Throughout their entire lives they sort of constituted a distinct group in society under his leadership as they underwent the rite with him. Casalis (1861:262) remarks that, from birth, chiefs’ sons were destined to command their age-mates. For the age-mate, I want to emphasise that they were constructed to be chief’s sons docile subjects. For this reason, it could be said that the rite gave a distinctive mark of the race to a Mosotho man. Those who did not embrace it were disavowed not only by their parents but also by their age mates who jeered at them (Casalis 1845:283). National survival depended on this rite (Thompson 1975: 5).

In short, the *lebollo* practice can be interpreted as a technology of loyal and obedient subjects whose entire being, including their bodies have to be at the service of the chief. Moshoeshoe I and his sons exploited it to deepen their roots in chieftain masculinity. For instance, Moshoeshoe I instructed the missionaries not to remunerate the men he had put to their service. He believed

remunerating them would incite them to demanding payment for the work they did for him (Germond 1967:511). Today Moshoeshe I is regarded as an embodiment of Sesotho culture and nationalism by a majority of Basotho people (Rosenberg 2008). Now, in the context of this chapter, when *sekoele* philosophy encourages the present Basotho to embrace the traditions of the ancestors, the question of ethics which should be part of the deal, seems to be sidelined. It becomes even more acute in the context of gender relations where women appear to serve the interest of men. This point will be further explored in the next chapter on the interface of Sesotho masculinity and nationalism. Of importance, now, is how the type of men the technology of *lebollo* produces, consider and relate to women. The practice of *Khotla* which is discussed later below will elucidate this point.

### **3.6.1 Lebollo practice under attack**

The practice of the rite of *lebollo* is purported to have been abolished by Moshoeshe (Duncan 1960:6; Commission on Native Laws and Customs (1873:54). Sir Wodehouse in the Proclamation no.14 of 12<sup>th</sup> March 1868 of annexation of the then Basutoland to the British Crown, includes it among practices to be suppressed or modified by laws of European and Christian standards (Basutoland High Commissioner' Proclamations and Notices). In 1873, the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society (PEMS) considered the practice for both males and females, as "one of the most debasing and demoralizing practices of heathenism [...] a bottomless pit of filth and deprivation, a diabolical school of vice and corruption" (Mabille 2001:43-44). In 1963, an anonymous publication by Catholic Printing, entitled "Lebollo" appeared with detailed graphic description of the rite and criticised the way it was conducted in modern times. The anonymous author sees the practice in the modern times as a substantial deviation from authentic traditional practice. The Publication aroused mixed reactions of approval and disapproval from both the public and the National Council. This publication was ultimately banned by the National Council on the grounds that it exposed the privacy of the Basotho; that it was an ignominy of Basotho custom; that it was obscene in its style (The Social Centre, 1963).

The attack on the practice of Lebollo will be extensively explored in the fifth chapter on the encounter of Basotho men with the Christian missionaries. What is important to note for now, is that this attack appears to reinforce the resistance movement of *sekoele*. And the repercussions

on the order of gender are enormous. It provides a frame within which the resistance of the dominant present traditional masculinity in the order of gender can be understood.

### **3.6.2 *Sekoele* and *Lebollo***

Despite the sustained disapproval of the practice of *lebollo* since the encounter with the Europeans, the practice never died out. It is becoming ever popular today and has captivated the imagination of *sekoele* believers who defend it. They interpret the disapproval as an indirect attack on Basotho men and the nationhood of the Basotho. Matšela and Motlomelo (2002) accuse the churches and modern government educational, health and legal institutions as well as western commercial practices for discrediting it. They believe that there still exist some valuable cultural skills, knowledges and attitudes which to-date remain unknown and unused, but which could unlock an as-yet untapped development potential for people and the nation. For this reason, Matšela and Motlomelo (2002:4, 5) identify Basotho men and boys as a disadvantaged sex-group, which, nevertheless, remains cultural leadership on whom there continues to be high socio-cultural demands. For them, the revival of the institution serves the purpose of stimulating a fractured male vigour, wisdom and motivation. They believe that its revival will restore gender balance and vitality for an effective national development.

This position of Motlomelo and Matšela demonstrates to what extent the *sekoele* thinking can go. It portrays Basotho men as victims of gender imbalance. I think this portrayal reinforces the attitude of resistance to a desirable transformation in the order of gender. When those whom patriarchal structures have privileged for ages and continue to, even today, are now seen as victims, you know resistance is a reality. Victimhood makes people remember the things that have worked for them in the past. It makes the desire of those things which helped them predict their future. But by its nature the future is unpredictable. If it is predictable, you know it is a repetition of the past. In this way the challenges of the present gender-ethical consciousness can easily be brushed aside. This consciousness laments the disregard of the dimension of ethics in gender relations. The position of Motlomelo and Matšela appears to be one of the strategies used by men to evade the challenge of a more gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho by portraying Basotho men as victims. It is a strategy which incites Basotho men of today to desire to become what their ancestors were in the modern Lesotho. A critical reflection

on that which they desire to become, reveals it as part of a social ordering which undervalues others, women and children. For this reason it becomes difficult to raise issues of gender justice in Lesotho today.

In another way, the position of Moafrika (2002) appears to evade the ethical demands as it argues that the effectiveness of the Sesotho traditional way of training and instructing the youth to become responsible citizens in *lebollo* is the equal to that of “Thuto ea Sekolong” or “ea Sekhooa” (the formal school education of western model). This position appears to be influenced by Western and Sesotho relations. In a sense, *Moafrika* questions the ethicality of the relationships of the two systems and therefore, proposes that *lebollo* should be a precondition to entry into formal schooling of a western model to strike the balance. The emphasis on the equality of the two systems appears to have blinded most *sekoale* believers to the consideration of ethics within their own ranks. While the *sekoale* position may be justified in its rejection of the western cultural hegemony, it appears to be blind to the male hegemony in the order of gender within the Sesotho culture it is defending from the western hegemony. This point will be looked at below as we explore the practices of *khotla* and *pitso* which are closely linked with that of *lebollo*. These practices uphold the male hegemony, which sidelines participation of women in the public affairs of the community.

Sithetho (2009) and Makara (2002) shed light to why the institution of *lebollo* is to be defended. It serves to perpetuate traditional values threatened by the gradual process of modernization which causes Basotho to lose touch with their cultural roots and originality. Makara refers to the practice as a school in which “banna le basali ba litaba” (men and women of substance) and leaders of the future receive instruction on culture and customs that have come to mould their people; things which constitute “*Bosotho*” (sothoiness). He mentions love and respect of and loyalty to the person of the chief as elements of the culture and customs into which young men should be trained. He argues that these virtues would necessarily lead to the reinforcement of loyalty to and love of the country as it is believed it was the case in Moshoeshe’s time. He believes that the *lebollo* practice during the time of Moshoeshe I produced loyal subjects of the chief and the nation as we have seen above. He argues that it instilled into the young members of the nation, fear of “bokakailane” (betrayal/treachery), “boteketoa” (disloyalty), “bongala” (desertion/apostasy), “bolahla-marungoana” (cowardice), “bofebe” (adultery) and “botekatse”



(prostitution). Through these virtues, Makara believes that the Basotho of the past resisted temptation to follow other peoples' ways. He solicits a similar attitude among Basotho men of today. Thus, changes in the area of gender relations are often perceived as a betrayal of *Bosotho* (sothoiness). And it makes it difficult for most Basotho men to adapt to change in this area.

This situation is rooted in the theoretical framework of *sekoete* which appears not to go beyond the memory of danger. This memory appears to override the ethical implications for gender relations in Basotho's traditional life. The fear of danger becomes so acute that sometimes *sekoete* believers do not even see the cracks in their own position. The cracks will be explored in the next chapter on nationalism and masculinity.

### **3.7 The Theoretical Framework of *Sekoete* and the Challenges it Faces**

The assumption that there exists *Bosotho* (sothoiness) in its originality and purity constitutes the theoretical framework of the *sekoete* orientation. All realities of life, as we saw above, are appraised and categorised either as Sesotho or un-sesotho. *Bosotho* is taken for a necessary indelible trademark of those realities categorised as *Sesotho*. It is regarded as the innermost truth of the realities that carry its stamp. Anything classified as un-sesotho becomes totally "the other", which is to be looked at with suspicion; and as potentially dangerous. What is categorised as original, pure and real *Sesotho* has to be protected from this other which might contaminate it. And here lies the challenge of *sekoete*. The concern in this study in general is the sidelining of the issues of ethics in the order of gender because of this categorisation. *Lebollo* practice appears to play a significant role in this categorisation.

#### **3.7.1 Men as an essential collective idea**

Another assumption closely associated with the idea of 'real' *Bosotho* is that of Basotho men as an essential collective entity. The notion of collective masculinity suggests that the individual Basotho men are mere representations of that collective idea. They carry within themselves the indelible truth of a Mosotho man. A *Moafrika* editorial (*Moafrika* 2002 Phuptjane/July 7), advocated for this perspective when they argued that even though we lived in Lesotho and spoke a language called Sesotho, in fact, we are not Basotho because, according to them, we have lost "sesotho sa 'nete" (authentic *Sesotho*) in the Lesotho of today. They substantiate their claim by

citing an incidence at the inauguration of the prime minister on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 2002 whereby a podium sheltering the VIP's collapsed. According to a traditional custom, they argued, all men who surrounded the king should have thrown themselves on the floor as the king and the prime minister fell. As for the person who built the podium, *Moafrika* insisted, he should have been made to pay dearly.

The social constructionist perspective in which this study is positioned, challenges this assumption. It challenges it because it brackets the historicity of masculinity and *Bosotho* itself; its cultural norms, and practices. It posits them as foundational realities of the metaphysical and ontological order. And this makes *Bosotho* and masculinity in Lesotho homogeneous entities of which individual Basotho men are bound to be their molecular representations and embodiments. This position limits the human agency of Basotho men to choose what they may prefer to be according to the vicissitudes of life and time.

The idea of Sesotho masculinity as essential, collective, general and sui generis idea as held by *sekoele* is contested in this study. As Connell (1995), Bhabha (1995), Morrell (2001) and the volume about men and masculinity (Beger, Walls, & Watson 1995) well demonstrate, there is no single masculinity. What is there is different masculinities emerging from different positions of power in everyday life interactions where the order of gender does not only favour men but also spawn a host of challenging issues for men themselves. Masculinity is not a coherent object about which we can generalise and capture into a whole. This position helps us to see what sort of organisational discourse *sekoele* is.

### **3.7.2 *Sekoele* as an organisational discourse in the interests of men**

We know that within the *sekoele* framework language is taken for a real representation of realities out there. What we have seen up to now is how through the concept of *Bosotho*, *sekoele* believers have tried to create a coherent social reality of men that frames their sense of who they should be. In the light of Fairclough's (1992; 1995) and Burr's (2003:170-171) understanding of critical discourse analysis, it becomes easier to see the relationship between the concept of *Bosotho* and the power that this concept gives to men in the order of gender. It becomes clear how *sekoele* and its related concept of *Bosotho* are not only organisational discourses of the

Basotho society but also discourses which serve the interests of men, in most cases, at the expense of women.

The institution of *lebollo* which has captivated the imagination of *sekoele* believers is, in this study, seen as part of the package of organisational discourse of masculinity in Lesotho. Critical discourse analysis distinguishes organisations not only as social collectives, where shared meaning is produced, but also as sites of struggle where specific social groups compete to construct social realities in ways that serve their interests (Mumby & Clair 1997:181-205). The use of the concept of organisations as cultures with an emphasis on the interconnectedness of power and discourse is relevant to the analysis of the institutional discourse of *lebollo*, where this interconnectedness is particularly evident. As we are going to see below, the institution of *lebollo* is the basic organisation on which other social organisations, *khotla* and *pitso*, rely. Traditionally, these institutions have served the interests of men over and above those of women, as we shall see below. A passionate call of *sekoele* to return to the practice of *lebollo* hides behind it a return to the preservation of these traditional social spaces which exclude women. In order to appeal to the masses of men, passionate *sekoele* believers sometimes deploy the concept of human rights for men.

### **3.7.3 *Sekoele* and the ‘Human Rights’ of men**

The issue of men as disadvantaged sex group and the need for gender balance in favour of them (Matsela and Motlomelo (2002:4, 5) is a very curious one in a country that still remains largely patriarchal in its social structures. This bold claim makes sense in the context of resistance to change in the order of gender among Basotho men. It is one of the tactics and strategies used by the *sekoele* believers to reinforce their resistance. The 2005 local elections have highlighted this resistance (Motaung 2005b) on an unprecedented scale. Of significance was the women’s response to it. They ignored it and seized the opportunity provided to them by the law (*Moafrika* 2005c). Those elections raised, in an unprecedented fashion, the issue of the ‘human rights of men’. Many Basotho men and opposition political parties challenged the constitutionality of the resolution by the government to earmark specific constituencies exclusively for women as a means to allow at least 30% of women in decision making forums. They perceived the resolution

as an infringement of their rights and discriminatory against men on the basis of their sex (*Moafrika* 2005a; *Moafrika*, 2005b; Motaung 2005a; Ramainoane 2005c).

A certain Mr Molefi Tšepe set the precedence when he took the matter to the courts of law and called to book Lesotho's Independent Electoral Commission, the Returning Officer in his electoral division, the Litjotjela NO.1405, The Minister for Justice, Human Rights and Constitutional Affairs, The Minister of Local Government and the Attorney General. He claimed he was discriminated against on the basis of his male sex by designating exclusively for women the constituency he wanted to contest elections in. He claimed his fundamental human rights and freedoms enshrined in the constitution were being violated (CIV/APN/135/2005; CIV/No.11/05).

The reasons for the dismissal of Tšepe's case by both the High and Appeal court judges (CIV/APN/135/2005; CIV/No.11/05) highlight the case for an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study. The courts challenged an absolutist interpretation of the notion of "rights" in the face of raw and long historical marginalization of women in political decision making structures of Lesotho. The Judges of the High Court challenged social and cultural stereotypes or taboos which prevent women from taking part in the conduct of public affairs at both national and local levels. They promoted a society based on equality and justice for all citizens regardless of their sex. They underlined the need for laws which must positively promote equality of opportunity where it does not exist or is inadequate, for the disadvantaged groups in society. They enabled them to participate fully in all spheres of public life. To support their position, the judges made reference to Lesotho as a signatory to international conventions which see women's rights as human rights: Convention on the Elimination of forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Women in Africa (2003), SADC Declaration on Gender and Development. The mention of these conventions in the text of the judgement is very significant. On a legal basis, it challenges *Sekoele* with its characteristic blame of the documents as corruptive of the "authentic *Bosotho*". It challenges the resistance movement to value these protocols not as an error or a fault. The judges saw in them a desirable version of a viable human alternative which men of the likes of Tšepe did not see or found it difficult to swallow. Another important issue the judges of both the High and Appeal courts have highlighted is that, even the so called supreme laws of

Lesotho's Constitution should be open to interpretation because they depend on democratic values and interests aspired to by all her citizens.

The cynicism with which some Basotho men received the verdict of the courts demonstrates how colossal the challenge is, facing those who grave transformation in the order of gender in Lesotho. The challenge should not be taken for granted. For example, Ramainoane (2005d), a staunch advocate of *sekoale*, both within societal and local Christian churches' circles, derisively questioned the capacity of those women elected in the capital, Maseru; whether they could rise above the challenges which faced them in their new mandate as decision makers and service deliverers: keeping the city clean, creating jobs, fighting against crime and creating sound economic policies in favour of the development of the city etc. It is quite revealing that a man who was once a mayor of the city held this position when women came into the scene. A curious mind would want to know how the city was when he was in office; how being male helped him to achieve what he achieved if he achieved anything at all. Anyway, this is not the purpose of this study.

Despite this wave of resistance, it is important to note that some Basotho men took a different position; a position which attracts the interest of this study, finding some traces of an alternative more ethical masculinity in the current history of Basotho men. These men represent a ray of hope that transformation is possible. Motaung (2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2005d; 2005e) saw women's involvement in local government as a golden opportunity to have men and women engaged in a meaningful dialogue in the interests of both sexes in our society. He challenged those Sesotho traditions and customs, language and practices which tend to belittle women, blame them for social ills, deprive them of their basic human rights and function as a means of excluding them from participation in public and social affairs: laws prohibiting girls to inherit family property and customary practices which force widows to consult with boy children in the use of the possessions they gathered with their husbands. He applauded the Court of Appeal's decision to uphold the judgement of the High court against Tšepe.

The position of Motaung provokes some crucial questions in favour of an alternative more ethical consciousness advocated in this study. How Basotho men can be encouraged to see the things raised by the judges of both the High and Appeal courts of Lesotho as true alternatives of

being a man? How can they be encouraged to embrace change in the order of gender as an alternative more gender-ethical consciousness seems to suggest in the present Lesotho? These questions will be further taken up in the sixth chapter dealing with the search for alternative ways of being men in Lesotho.

#### **3.7.4 *Sekoele* and the decolonisation of the mind**

The exploration of *sekoele* in the forgoing sections may have created the impression that this practical philosophy of life does not have another face which has to be acknowledged. I think it is important to balance the score before the possibility of an alternative more ethical masculinity within *sekoele* is explored.

It is impossible to read what the *sekoele* intelligentsia cited above have written about *Bosotho* without sensing the ‘inner’ pain which went with colonialism in Lesotho. In this optic, *sekoele* represents two things that this study acknowledges. First, a healing reaffirmation after the indignity caused by the British imperial colonialism as we have seen in the previous chapter on the history of masculinity in Lesotho and as we shall see in the first part of the fifth chapter on the encounter of the Christian missionaries. Second, the defence against the neo-colonisation process through globalisation discourse in the present. With *sekoele*, we see Basotho society evolving into a model of autonomy that its victimhood has defined for it. We see a defiance of the right state of mind in a hard, masculine hegemony of the West and North America. *Sekoele* represents the paragon of courage and cultural pride which decolonises the mind of the Basotho people by providing an axis for dissenting global consciousness which tends to tame non-western cultures for the benefit of the Euro-American cultures.

To appreciate this aspect of *sekoele*, the works of Nandy (1983: 64-113) and wa Thiog’o (1986) can be useful. Nandy explores how Indian people resisted the taming of Indian consciousness by the British colonialist discourse there. Wa Thiog’o explores the African realities as they are affected by the struggle between imperialist traditions on the one hand and resistance traditions on the other. He (1986:4) depicts the struggle in a compelling way. He says that the colonial and neo-colonial phases of imperialism are

continuously press-ganging the African hand to the plough to turn the soil over, and putting blinkers on him to make him view the path ahead only as determined for him by the master armed with the bible and the sword. In other words, imperialism continues to control the economy, politics, and culture of Africa. But on the other hand, and pitted against it, are the ceaseless struggles of African people to liberate their economy, politics, and culture from that Euro-American-based stranglehold.

I would include the China stranglehold.

From this angle, *sekoele* has a face that this study cannot ignore. However, what this study in this chapter argues is that when it comes to the issues of gender relations, the struggle against the hegemony of Europe and America reinforces male hegemony. The masculine gender becomes the stranglehold for men at the expense of women. That is why there is a need for a search for alternative, more ethical masculinities. The position of this study is that there is another face of *sekoele* which is worrying. *Sekoele*, on a different level reproduces the very thing it resists. It uses European and American cultural hegemony to evade issues of gender injustice within Basotho cultural practices. It tends to defend those injustices as part of *Bosotho* which has to be protected from European and American cultural domination. As long as this reality of *sekoele* is not named and challenged, a desired transformation in the order of gender in the modern Lesotho will always remain compromised. I have the impression that the present efforts of transformation of gender relations have not yet come to see this reality for what it is.

### **3.8 *Sekoele* and an Alternative More Ethical Masculinity**

As we have seen above, one characteristic of *sekoele* is its backward looking orientation which glorifies the past history in terms of tradition, customs and practices, which it identifies with “real” *Bosotho* (sothoiness). Within the theoretical orientation of this study which is social constructionism, this *Bosotho* itself is considered a product of specific cultural discourses and socio-historical processes such as colonialism. The previous chapter on the history of Sesotho masculinity substantiates this conclusion. *Bosotho* is not a foundational reality of metaphysical ontological order. Now, keeping in line with the research questions and aims of this study, I continue a search for the vestiges of alternative, more ethical masculinities within specific customs and practices of the Basotho which *sekoele* would readily identify as part of *Bosotho*. In this way *sekoele* is engaged in dialogue with itself. It is challenged to see within the framework

of its own that there already exists alternative ways of being a man especially in the order of gender. I have identified the practices of *Khotla* (court) and *Pitso* (convocation in which public social affairs are discussed) to facilitate the search. The two institutions are traditionally men's social spaces. I want to emphasize the historical and situational underpinnings of these institutions and practices to demonstrate how they served transformation in the order of gender if and when the need arose. I have chosen these practices because they have a long history which dates as far back as the time of the foundation of the Basotho as a nation. *Sekoele* tends to de-historicise this history by identifying it with purity and originality of the Basotho nation and so give to it a metaphysical and ontological value. I want to trace in this history ruptures of a gender-ethical consciousness to challenge the present dominant masculinities encouraged not to embrace change by *sekoele*.

### **3.8.1 A gender-ethical consciousness and Basotho men's social spaces: *khotla* and *pitso*.**

A traditional Basotho village had a physical space known as *khotla* where men gathered with their chief, among others, to deal with public affairs, lawsuits and criminal cases. The *lebollo* rite, among others, instructed boys on the ways of *khotla* after which their word carried weight in its proceedings. They enjoyed a right to criticise their chief in the *khotla*. The space of *khotla* was exclusively reserved for men. Grown-up men who seldom visited the place were scorned as womanish. (Casalis (1861:124-125, 222; Germond 1967:513; Sanders 1975: 9, 10, 13, 14). A *pitso*, traditionally, is supposed to be a consultative forum of deliberative character chiefs used to gauge the opinion of their subjects on important issues of public welfare. Like the *khotla*, a *pitso* was exclusively men's prerogative (Casalis 1861:233-2336; Thompson 1975:15-16, 63-64). Smith (1939:345) describes the freedom with which men expressed themselves in a *pitso*.

Looked at a close range *khotla* and *pitso* represent the practical dimension of the education received from *lebollo* as an institution. As it is demonstrated above in section 3.6, the *lebollo* rite among others, instructed them on the ways of *khotla*. It moulded individual members of an age group of a chief's son with whom they underwent the rite, as his loyal subjects. They formed a regiment under his control. Throughout their entire lives they constituted a distinct group in society. Now, with *khotla* and *pitso* as means for a chief to dispense with his duties, it follows



necessarily that those men, who were prepared for this life, could not be anything different after the rite.

The institution of *pitso* has been explored in passing in the previous chapter in connection with Basotho men's political struggles under the British colonial rule. Here it is again scrutinized further together with that of *khotla* from a gender perspective. The gender politics associated with these institutions should not be underestimated. Makoa (1997:6-10) mentions how they functioned as a form of political socialisation over time; how, mostly *khotla*, instilled attitudes that encouraged male folk to feel and think of themselves as different and superior to the female folk. Both institutions have served as a device by which Lesotho's male dominated scheme of law replicated and maintained itself, the breadth of which measures the extent of the marginalisation of women in public affairs and decision making forums. The institutions of *khotla* and *pitso* have generated patriarchal discourses which determine the nature of power relations between men and women and how such power is exercised by the former over the latter. Motebang (1997), Makoa (1997), Mapetla (2000), Matlosa (2003) and WLSA (2003), Letuka, Mapetla and Matashane-Marite (2004) highlight to which extent gender inequality concerning participation in public domain of politics is ingrained in the contemporary Basotho society.

In the light of the present situation of imbalance of power relations between men and women, a question arises. Is there anything, historically, in the practice of *pitso* and *khotla* which may have already subverted male domination as it has been traditionally sustained by them? This question underscores the aim of this study, which seeks to find within *sekoele* itself, a possibility of change in order to challenge the present Basotho men's resistance to change in the order of gender.

### **3.8.2 The *Khotla* open for women and children: a challenge to male power**

Casalis (Germond 1967: 512-513) gives a testimony of how Moshoeshe I, who is regarded as the embodiment of Sesotho culture today, opened *khotla*, a space reserved for men, to women and children in 1833. Before a place of Christian worship was erected at Thaba-Bosiu, Moshoeshe availed his *khotla* for worship and missionary instruction not only to men but to women and children all at the same time. He, personally and through his *phala* (village crier),

made sure they came. Casalis remarks how, at first, different categories of the society reacted to this novelty. Grown-up men mumbled as women and children were called to join them in *khotla*. For older men it was a humiliation of men to call women to an assembly with men while for the youth it was a great mirth to see how women responded to the call. Women were reluctant and would send children hoping it would be enough but Moshoehoe I would inexorably shout “*Basali!*” – women!, “*basali ba kae?*” – ‘Where are the women?’ until they came. To satisfy their curiosity, the children would occupy the front place, happy to be treated like men.

The act of opening the *khotla* to women and children by Moshoeshoe I is significant. It challenged the dominant symbolic representation of the physical space. The different reactions of the different categories of the community to the act reveal what the space represented in the consciousness of the people: the social power of the masculine gender. The physicality of the space appears to have reinforced a sense of being a man which defined itself through the difference with and the detachment from the feminine gender. The physical presence of women in that space acutely blurred and mitigated the social boundaries that set apart the two genders in the everyday public life. That which gave a deep sense of superiority to the male gender and the privileged sense of being a man, and at the same time lowered women and assigned to them a status of inferiority, made both of them experience a kind of an identity shock. Men interpreted women’s presence in that space as a kind of demotion which provoked a deep sense of humiliation and a loss of identity.

Women’s reaction reveals how change can overwhelm even those it may be in their favour. How were they to conduct themselves in that place? It appears this change constituted a challenge for them as much as it did for men. Both their bodies and their psyche had come to be saturated by the discourse of *khotla* as non-female space. Perhaps the apartheid discourse can help to understand the dynamics involved here. Just as apartheid physically separated races on the basis of skin colour and ethnicity, so the discourse of *khotla* separated men and women on the basis of their physical anatomy. This separation seems to have had an effect on their sense of self and how they lived their everyday life. It had an effect even on their spirituality. By spirituality I mean the values that guided their everyday life. Now, with this change, their spirituality was challenged too. They had to search for new values that would guide their lives as a result of the change introduced by Moshoeshoe I. How the oppressed experience moments of liberation in the

everyday life is often taken for granted. I want to believe this is the greatest challenge faced by those who work for transformation in the order of gender in Lesotho. People may prefer the status quo because of the fear that comes with change.

When Moshoeshoe I did what he did for the reasons he did them, introducing the new religion, he subverted the then accepted everyday spirituality which revolved around the institutional discourse of *khotla*, not only of men and women of his time but children as well. He wanted women to participate as equal subjects in an activity that had potential to affect their lives. They could hear for themselves what the missionaries had to say without waiting for men to tell them at a later stage at home, if they did at all, as was the practice then. What is not clear though is whether he would want them to actively participate or he only wanted them to be there physically without any active voice as men did according to the ways of *Khotla*. That is, only being there to hear what the missionaries had to say without actively interacting with them as men would. The murmuring of older men appears to suggest that he also expected them to. This seems to have been the thing which offended the sensitivities of older men the most. A gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study, precisely challenges Basotho men of today to be conscious of women as human subjects who have to participate in the affairs that would affect their lives in society. When *sekoale* emphasises Moshoeshoe I as an embodiment of Basotho culture and traditions, it often remains silent about such acts of Moshoeshoe I. They stress those acts which only support the superiority of men, and thereby undermine the ethical dimensions which should be taken into consideration today.

The summoning of both men and women together with children raises another issue of importance for men and women of today. How do they guide the young ones, in their “natural” curiosity, into the ethical ways of relating, especially in the order of gender? This point of child guidance, though important, is not within the scope of this study. It is mentioned here to express the need for education of children in issues of gender justice, especially boy children in Lesotho. By including children Moshoeshoe challenged the dominant childhood discourses of his time which regarded them as empty slates on which the will of the adults was impressed without their participation.

Among the Batlokoa, ‘Manthatisi subverted the discourse of *khotla* by officiating over the proceedings of the institution probably long time before Moshoeshoe did in 1833. She sat with men in that physical space associated with maleness, where important issues of public interest were dealt with: officiating on litigations and imposing fines on law transgressors. She commanded and led Batlokoa warriors in wars and her people respected her (Ellenberger 1988:45). We do not have a record of how the Batlokoa men reacted to the first appearance of ‘Manthatisi in *khotla*. We can only speculate in the light of the above record of Casalis about the reaction of the people of Moshoeshoe I. What is remarkable though is that the Batlokoa men ultimately came to accept her leadership. This acceptance tells a story of the exercise of the agency of men to act beyond the cultural stereotypes which portray them as unchangeable entities. If they acknowledged the leadership of a woman given the vicissitude of time, this challenges the *sekoele* idea of men as a collective idea of metaphysical and ontological proportions. The Basotho men of the present are challenged by an ever growing gender ethical-consciousness to acknowledge the human agency of women to give the needed leadership in the public affairs of the Basotho society. However, it should be remarked also that only ‘Manthatisi participated in the proceeding of the institution of *khotla* among the Batlokoa. It is not known whether she allowed the women folk into her *khotla*. If she did not, this would suggest some sort of chieftain femininity. It is unfortunate that there is no record of how she related to women of the commoner class. In the previous chapter under the discussion of political masculinity, I was shown how women, who, at a later stage, became chiefs, used their status to challenge male hegemony by using their status to speak on behalf of other women. These incidences acquire some significance in this study. They are interpreted as ruptures of a gender sensitive consciousness in the history and customs of the Basotho, which challenges the existence of the status quo in the present in as far as gender relations are concerned.

The story of Senate, the grand daughter of Moshoeshoe, represents another rupture of a gender sensitive consciousness *sekoele* cannot ignore. At a *pitso* in which women and girls participated, Senate was presented to the people by his grandfather, Moshoeshoe I. She was made to take an oath after which she was given a club of rhinoceros horn, a precious stone and a *sepetja* – bracelet (Machobane 1952:34-39). The rhinoceros horn was the symbol of power (Casalis 1861:220; Machobane 1990:7-8). She joined Basotho warriors in battle and developed equestrian

and military skills as part of leadership training (Machobane 1952: 40-48, 49-60). We may not know why Moshoeshoe wanted her to ascend the throne after the death of his son, Letsie. Whatever the reasons, the fact that Moshoeshoe thought of her as someone who could succeed her father already subverts the dominant belief among most Basotho men that women are a “weaker sex” or a “fragile vessel” who cannot provide reliable leadership as we discussed in our Reflecting Team. The story of Senate presents a challenge in the present status of gender issues in Lesotho. Her figure is particularly strong given the present situation of the royal family where the first born girl child who carries the same name cannot succeed her father to the throne because of her sex.

### **3.8.3 *Sekoele*: Basotho men and child care**

Another thing of significance which breaks through the stereotypes of the present dominant masculinities is the ability of specific men like Moshoeshoe I, to provide care to their children. Such stories are not often told because of the dominant masculinity discourses which associate childcare with femininity. Casalis (1861:81) observed how Moshoeshoe I had a great love for children. “We have often seen him, in the midst of the most important business, while warriors, or delegates from distant tribes, were haranguing him, take the youngest of his sons on his knee, and amuse himself by feeding him”. The missionaries who came to hold worship and instruction recall how at the end of the day they would take supper with him together with his children (Germond 1967:513). As we discussed in our Reflecting Team, most of the contemporary Basotho men believe that childcare is the thing for women for the reasons we saw above in section 3.5.2, when we explored men’s consideration of their bodies in the context of Basotho male games. The belief that men should dominate the public issues in contrast to women in the private sphere associated with the up-keeping of households and childcare seems to be subverted by Moshoeshoe who took his child and provided care for it along side the pressing social issues believed to be men’s prerogative. He portrays an alternative masculinity in terms of fatherhood and childcare in the midst of pressing public engagement associated with manhood.

### **3.8.4 *Sekoele* and the administration of justice for women**

Another issue of importance is the administration of justice for women by the male dominated structures of the Basotho society. Casalis (1861:230-231) observed an event in which village

court of justice administered justice in favour of a woman who was a “victim of an outrage on decency”. The village chief, after efforts to find the perpetrator had failed, summoned all the male population of the village to the woman. She diligently examined them one by one until she identified the perpetrator. “All at once she uttered a cry, stopped and threw her child upon the knees of a young man, saying ‘This is he who has committed an outrage upon the mother of this child, this infant.’ The delinquent, covered with confusion, confessed his fault and was condemned to exile, after having paid a heavy fine.” The position of the chief in favour of the woman, attest to the existence of an alternative more gender-ethical masculinity within the history of administration of justice for women among the Basotho. This story subverts the insensitiveness of the present dominant masculine discourses which put emphasis on the rights of men while those of women are sidelined in the name of *Bosotho* as *sekoele* appears to be inclined to do, as it challenges the western cultural hegemony. This story supports the contemporary efforts to bring about change in the order of gender and the social protection of children. It supports them from within the history of the Basotho itself not from outside as *sekoele* philosophy tends to argue. In this way *sekoele* thinking is challenged on its own terms. There are other incidences of both male and female chiefs in the Basotho colonial history supporting the cause of women in the context of their confrontation with the British colonial administrators (Epprecht 2000:98-120). If these stories were told, they could inspire the struggle for gender equality in the present Lesotho.

In short, Moshoeshoe and Batlokoa male folk challenged the stereotypes of their male contemporaries by opening male social public spaces to women and children on an unprecedented fashion. Their stories have already subverted male domination whose discourses have been generated and sustained by the traditional *khotla* and *pitso* institutions.

### **3.9 Summary**

In this chapter, characteristics and tactics of the dominant philosophy of life called *sekoele* and its effects on Basotho men were explored. I argued that *sekoele* basically thrives on the memory of danger and resistance. Inspired by the notion of “authentic *Sesotho*”, this philosophy seeks to re-orientate the Basotho people by conscientizing them about the danger of extinction of their culture which constitutes their *Bosotho* (sothoiness). I argued that the emphasis on *Bosotho* has

often sidelined issues of ethics in the order of gender; that Basotho men are encouraged to resist transformation in the name of the defence of sotho-ness which enshrines their “customary rights” in this order. It is in this context that Basotho men develop a keen sense of their “human rights” as men. This comes as a surprise, given that Lesotho is still, to a large extent, patriarchal, in its structures. Anything that threatens the privileged men’s position is perceived as an attack on their rights. However, the philosophy of *sekoale* was challenged by demonstrating that already, there exists an alternative more ethical masculinity in what it regards as authentic *Bosotho*. This was done with the aim of encouraging Basotho men to seek more ethical ways of being a man in the present socio-economic cultural climate which imposes changes in the traditional conception of the order of gender.

Given what I unpacked in this chapter, the concept of *Bosotho* appears to represent Sesotho nationalism at its best and I propose that it should not be taken for a given because of its complexity and impact on gender relations. The concept is concealing a diversity of realities of the life of the Basotho that I believe need to be explored comprehensively if the operations of masculinity in Lesotho are to be fully appreciated. It sometimes imposes limits on the lives of the individual Basotho in ways that make it hard for them to explore the possibilities offered by life in the modern world. The next chapter investigates other corners of this phenomenon and how it interconnects with the masculinity principle.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE INTERFACE OF NATIONALISM AND MASCULINITY IN LESOTHO

#### 4.1 Introduction

The two previous chapters, on the history of Sesotho masculinity and the exploration of *sekoele*, have shown how the operations of masculinity in Lesotho are framed by, and immersed in, a very strong nationalistic sentiment. A long history of Lesotho as part of the Cape colony and as a direct British dependent has spawned scenarios of struggles which can in essence be described as the struggles for an independent, national, political and cultural identity in the face of a supremacist, imperial, political and cultural order. Basotho men have emerged as protagonists and defenders of Basotho's identity, something which puts them right at the heart of what constitutes Sesotho nationalism. Within the present economic, political, social and cultural climate we have seen a wave of resistance to those processes which are perceived as a threat to the traditional Sesotho cultural and ethnic identity – traditions, customs and practices. And this is what the philosophy of life called *sekoele* advocates. With its emphasis on *Bosotho* (sothoiness), *sekoele* intersects with nationalism that has framed aspects of the life of Basotho in the post independence Lesotho and has supported and sustained Basotho men's resistance to change in the order of gender.

In this chapter, I want to explore the gender dimension of Sesotho nationalism; how it is framing Basotho men's consideration of women and their relationship with them. I have the impression that the emphasis of *sekoele* on the politics of cultural difference and the ethnic identity of the Basotho rather than their relatedness to other ethnic community identities, seems to have negative repercussions in the order of gender relations, in ways that most of the Basotho are not aware of. Basotho men have a tendency of interpreting their being men in closed and absolutist terms. This tendency appears to encourage men to see women as the other, about which men must always exercise caution when they come around, as they would with people of a different cultural and ethnic identity.

In line with the basic questions and aims of this study, this chapter argues that the wave of resistance of men to embrace change in the order of gender can be challenged by emphasising the politics of cultural heterogeneity and plurality, which is at the heart of Basotho culture. I



argue that *Bosotho* is not a homogeneous culture from which we can deduce a homogeneous masculinity. I want to demonstrate that the notion is a social construction which harbours power relations from which the privileged position of men over women is lying. From this angle I want to propose that any meaningful transformation in the order of gender can be engaged by emphasis on the pluralistic character of *Bosotho*, which underscores the politics of cultural relationality. By the politics of cultural relationality I mean an acknowledgement of the contribution of other cultural identities in the formation of Sesotho culture itself. The present situation of a rigid interpretation of *Bosotho* seems to be oblivious of this fact and it has some limiting effects on the wellbeing of not only Basotho men themselves, but also of women and how they relate.

Following the line of argument of Gergen (1995; 1994), I want to show the inadequacy of the politics of identity in terms of culture and ethnicity, and propose the politics of relationality, interrelatedness and interdependence as the ground from which a meaningful talk about relations between men and women can be engaged in Lesotho. Gergen has demonstrated the inadequacy of the identity politics and their limiting effects on people's lives and proposes how the politics of relationality can, instead, redeem people from the undesirable effects of the identity politics important though they are, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, section 3.7.4. The politics of relationality appear to reinforce a relational consciousness which pays diligent attention to even how we speak and communicate with others as we engage in dialogue with them.

To appreciate the challenge, we need to understand how nationalism, ethnicity and identity are fused together and how their fusion can impose limits to people as they live their lives.

#### **4.2 Nationalism, Ethnicity and Identity**

Before looking at the gender dimension of nationalism in Lesotho it is important, first, to understand how crucial nationalism has been and still is in the construction of ethnicity and identity of the Basotho. Attention must be paid to how this nationalism is fed by the interests of men at the expense of women. Hutchinson and Smith's (1994:3-13) descriptions of nationalism associate it with the need to find one's own identity through return to "authentic experience and recovery of one's pristine origins". And this is what constitutes Sesotho nationalism under

investigation in this chapter. They argue that nationalism is a force behind the growth of nations, national states, ethnic identities and communities. They have identified it as an anchor in a number of subjects: race, language, protection of interests and gender; as a force behind a people pressing to acquire a measure of effective control over the behaviour of its members. Duetsch (1994:27-29) states that it operates through informal social arrangements, pressure of group opinion, and the prestige of national symbols, such as Moshoeshe, among the Basotho. In the context of *sekoale* it is a force behind the growth of masculinism which appears to block transformation in the order of gender relations. It has become an effective control of both men's and women's patterns of behaviour. The focus of this study is on men's patterns of behaviour.

Mokhehle's (1967) vision of Lesotho as an independent nation state, and distinct ethnic community, underscores the political dimension of nationalism, which saw Lesotho toward independence in 1966. Mokhehle believed that the real and perfect Basotho society should be built on the principles and the acts of Moshoeshe I. We have seen this in section 3.4 in the previous chapter. For this reason, attention should be paid to the centrality of the figure of Moshoeshe I in Basotho culture and identity as their embodiment. It should not be taken for granted how his name and memory have been engaged in the definition of Basotho's politics and cultural identity by the subsequent generations across time in Basotho's national history.

Moshoeshe I whom Mokhehle and other *sekoale* believers identify as the source and promise of Basotho's political identity and culture, has been identified in this study, as a symbol and embodiment of masculinity that has successfully achieved control over all other men and women in his time. The name of this masculinity is chieftaincy, as we have argued in the first part of the second chapter. The way Moshoeshe I achieved it laid the first structures within which his sons and other Basotho thought, and continue to think about it even today. Within the nationalistic frame of *sekoale* his name is more exploited to secure the interests of men more than those of women.

In the third chapter, it has been demonstrated how general Basotho men's behaviour has been subject to control through technologies of *lebollo*, *khotla* and *pitso*. These social institutions have not only served as crucial tools through which traditionally chieftain masculinity exercised its power over both men and women, they have also strengthened male hegemony in important

spectres of Basotho's socio-political and cultural life in ways that most Basotho are not aware of. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see how masculinity and nationalism have enmeshed and connived in the history of Lesotho in favour of men. It becomes clear how the principle of masculinity has been an organising principle of men's power in Basotho society. In the third chapter we have seen how the *sekoele* philosophy insists that Basotho culture and identity should not only be acknowledged publicly, but should also be guiding principles in how individuals live their lives even in private spheres.

In the context of this chapter, any such acknowledgement without qualification implies acceptance of male hegemony as part of that identity. This is what this chapter wants to highlight and reject. This male hegemony is not only rejected in gender relations but in class and ethnic relations as well. I believe this is what a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study wants. For this reason, any unqualified use of Moshoeshe's name is questioned on the suspicion that it could sometimes be an easy way of brushing away the concerns for ethics. That is why we need to investigate with diligence current Sesotho nationalism as far as possible.

#### **4.2.1 Characteristics of Sesotho nationalism**

According to Geertz (1994 29-34), nationalism is sparked by two things: first, resistance to subordination of one's identity in favour of a generalised overarching order through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass. The second is the fear of domination by some other ethnic, racial, or linguistic community identities. Geertz's remark is very relevant to understanding the historical development of Sesotho nationalism. In the first part of the first chapter on the history of masculinity, it is demonstrated how nationalism operated behind the gun war, and other wars over land, and the political struggle for emancipation from the British colonial rule and how it generated manful assertions among Basotho men. The collection of praise-poems of Basotho chiefs (Magoaela 2008) which extols the manful acts in those wars serve as an example of the traditional Sesotho manful assertions.

In his study of the development of popular national consciousness in Lesotho, Rosenberg (2008:4-5, 66-104) observes how Sesotho nationalism has been associated with concrete historical processes. For instance, how the fear of the unification with South Africa in 1908 came out as a threat to the existence of Lesotho, not only as a territorial entity and a nation state, but

also as a distinct cultural and ethnic group. Because of that fear, Lesotho as a territorial entity is left as it is today, geographically, totally squashed into the mountains with no door through another country except South Africa or the open space off the sea. Today, this situation has left Lesotho economically and politically vulnerable and at the mercy of South Africa. For instance, in 1986 when the apartheid regime closed their border gates Lesotho could barely survive economically for a week. As a cultural and ethnic group the fear becomes clear in the petition to the king of England by the paramount chief, other chiefs and part of Basotho people (Lagden 1909:620-623), in which the idea of unification was resisted because of an “anxiety that our national existence would cease, our old native laws and customs [would] be cast out”. The acts or proceedings of the Basutoland National Council within the period from 1910 to 1954 (Proceedings of the Basutoland National Council, 1903-1960: 1910, 1914, 1919, 1920, 1921, 1929, 1931, 1943, 1948, 1954) reveal that the resistance to incorporation into South Africa was propelled by a fear of a generalised overarching order through absorption into a culturally undifferentiated mass and fear of domination by some other ethnic, racial, or linguistic group identities in the union, especially the Afrikaners.

A careful reading of these acts also reveals another dimension of the chiefs’ fear: loss of their chiefly powers, as Rosenberg (2008:67, 68, 69) has also observed. This resistance motivated by fear of loss of chiefly powers shows how the principle of masculinity has been partners with nationalism, which has come to create Basotho’s national, cultural and ethnic identity. Because of this partnership it is not far-fetched to assert that not only nationalism engenders national identities (Gellner 1994:64-65; Milner (1994:42), but also masculinity. Now, in the perspective of gender, a national identity such as Basotho’s, which Sesotho nationalism claims to defend by preserving its customs and laws, which support male hegemony, should not be taken for granted.

For this reason, it is very important to investigate how, backed by its partner, masculinity, nationalism actually creates national and ethnic identity of the Basotho which *sekoale* philosophy claims to defend. As Gellner (1994:64-65) and Milner (1994:42) remark, nationalism creates national ethnic identities by reviving dead traditions and inventing new others; or by a selective and radical modification of pre-existing historical cultural wealth. This appears to be true with the situation of Lesotho. Rosenberg (2008:71-73) has rightly observed that within the scheme of resistance to incorporation into the union of South African colonies, Moshoeshoe I was created

by chiefs, mostly his great-great-grand sons and other members of the National Council as “a synonym for the chieftainship” itself. He observes how such a creation served to legitimise the power of chiefs in relation to colonial rule, while at the same time it made Lesotho a belonging of Moshoeshoe’s children. And this was done under a very strong sense of protection of Basotho’s national identity.

This way of protecting Basotho’s national identity further demonstrates an intimate relationship between Sesotho nationalism and masculinity as an organising principle of Basotho’s nationhood, culture and ethnicity. It shows how masculinity has come to inhabit Basotho identity as a nation and an ethnic group. It is a classic example of the processes by which masculinity has created and normalised Basotho’s national identity and the things it approves of as elements of it, things to be reckoned with as part of a cultural heritage to be protected with such an identity when it is threatened. Chieftaincy is one such element. This study, among other things, investigates how the *sekoele* philosophy encourages Basotho men to resist change. For this reason, such creations should not be left unchallenged and unquestioned where issues of justice, especially gender justice are involved. The concerns of ethical consciousness, and not the traditional social models and their truths, should guide us to ask the relevant questions vis á vis such creations. The central question which the invocation of Moshoeshoe’s name by his great-great sons provokes is: who benefited from such invocation. In the context of *sekoele*, the same question can be asked. Who benefits when and if the so called Sesotho traditional social models are upheld even if they invoked the name of Moshoeshoe I? Who likes to speak for such models and why?

The legitimisation of Basotho’s identity through Moshoeshoe I as his great-great sons did, underscores one important thing: how chieftain masculinity constituted itself as an organising principle of social identities and structures which define Basotho’s identity as a nation down its history. The action evokes what their great-great grandfather himself did when he defended his position. Under the guise of defence of the so called “customary right” (Thompson 1975:97), which privileged him as a man who had always craved to become a great king, (Sekese 1892; Laydevant 1954: 21-23; Sander 1975:19; Mokhehle 1976:18-21; Leoatle 1986:2-3), he rejected Arbousset’s and the unnamed Mosotho man’s (1836: 147-153) plea on behalf of a woman who wanted to keep her baby boy whom he wanted to keep as his servant. He used the custom of

*bohali* (bride price) which he paid for her deceased husband. The widow's rights over her son were lost to a man who on the basis of the custom had grown too powerful to be challenged. The practice of *bohali* actually supported and sustained the development of chieftain masculinity which was later defended as part of Basotho's essential national and ethnic identity by his children in the National Council. Today when the passionate *sekoele* male believers defend their privileged position in gender relations, they use the practice as part of *Bosotho* that has to be defended as we shall see later in the chapter.

Just as Rosenberg (2008:77) has detected the class tension in Lesotho during the colonial period and its relationship to the anti-incorporation movement of the period leading to Lesotho's independence, there is a need to realise in the present Lesotho how specific categories of men can constitute themselves as guarantors and defenders of a national cause when they, aware or unaware, actually create themselves as the centre boat of the Basotho nation and their interests as interests of the nation. In the context of this study, which wants to reveal the things that encourage Basotho men not to embrace change, the use of Moshoeshoe I and his name in the legitimisation of specific forms of masculinity, which constitute themselves as more privileged than others, and are especially insensitive to those others, especially women and children, are affected by such legitimisations, is here challenged, questioned and rejected.

The tendency of nationalism to modify pre-existing cultural traditions, while it creates and invents new ones, and justifies their interpretations as part of cultural heritage it defends (Gellner 1994:64-65; Milner 1994:42) is not taken for granted in this study. The justifications of the interpretations of the concept of *Bosotho*, in which specific social categories of men, chiefs and the circumcised, have had their interests protected by being interpreted as part of *Bosotho*, appear to constitute a huge challenge in terms of ethics, especially in the order of gender. The criticism that Ki-zerbo (1978:468) levels against African nationalism, is the criticism that is relevant to Sesotho nationalism. Ki-zerbo argues that African nationalism is valid only in the context of colonial humiliation and exasperation. But when the people get freedom, it appears to be incapable of providing serious answers to concrete challenges people face except sterile excitements and indefinite contradictions. He says it becomes an alibi of privileges, which point to the myth of national singleness or totality to forget about real inequalities in the society.

The concept of *Bosotho* (sothoiness) appears to function more as a cover up of gender inequalities in Lesotho. The UN conventions and International Conferences as well as national legal instruments such as those mentioned in the government document on Gender and Development Policy (2003:2) which address this inequality are often rejected in the name of *Bosotho*. *Moafrika* (2005e) represents the voice of rejection of such efforts. It criticises and accuses their adoption as acting on the influence of the European and American cultures. Looked at close range, the position of *Moafrika* with regard to these documents, reveals another aspect of the contemporary Sesotho nationalism which appears to be more of a collective imagining than what obtains in reality.

#### **4.2.2 A nationalist search for identity as a collective imagining**

If nationalism can create national and cultural and ethnic identities as we have just seen, it follows, then, that Milner (1994:42) is correct in observing that this thing we call a nation, is just a matter of collective imagining based on the needs and aspirations of historically specific social groupings. Such identities are not natural as *sekoete* believers like *Moafrika* tend to think about Basotho and *Bosotho* (sothoiness). Ranger (1993:63) emphasises how the invented traditions construct identity and how it helps people to cope with the present while at the same time they want to make it appear to be in continuity with the past. Anderson's (1991:15) concept of 'imagined community' encapsulates the significance of invention of traditions which construct a community identity that oust different others. The relevance of Anderson's notion to this study consists in demonstrating how the position held by the intelligentsia of *sekoete*, as explored in the previous chapter, is not resting on reality on the ground but on the imagination of its believers, an imagination of *Bosotho* posited in essential, foundational, metaphysical and ontological terms. And this demonstrates further how hard it is for *sekoete* believers to escape their own subjective interpretation of what it means to be a Mosotho, which they postulate as an objective reality.

Hastings (1997:33) clarifies this point when he insists that the historical face of nationalism cannot be divorced from its political dimension. The two are fused in the person of a nationalist, who cannot exist without some beliefs of some sort whether they are aware of it or not, and how those beliefs affect the person's value judgement of historical processes because there is no

value-free, purely objective history. We read history with vested interests, meaning it is commitment to political beliefs, which provides insights and enhances our historical understanding though it may lead to prejudices and blindness. If this is true, it follows that *Bosotho* is a negotiated reality rather than the 'itself' entity as the *sekoele* philosophy gives the impression. This position gives opportunity to contest those interpretations of *Bosotho* which serve the interests of specific groups while they are silent on others. Reference here is made with regard to those groups of men and women who like to think of themselves as more Basotho than others, as we shall see in this chapter, or more Christian, as we shall see in the next chapter.

#### **4.2.3 'Bosotho' as a negotiated understanding**

Understood within the theoretical framework of this study, which is social constructionism and the narrative metaphor, the concept of *Bosotho* should be understood as a social construction; a historically negotiated understanding. The language and social symbols through which the so called *Sesotho* realities are constructed should not be understood as the representation of the reality out there and the truth about that reality because there is no correspondence between what we say and how the reality is (Burr 2003:6-9; Freedman & Combs 1996:27-35; Anderson & Goolishian 1988:378; Rorty 1989:5-6; Gergen, K. 1985:270; 1994:44-63).

Borrowing Rorty's (1981:328-329) argument in challenging scientific claims to objectivity, rationality and truth in the western world, the concept of *Bosotho* as we have seen in the previous chapter and up to this point in this chapter, is just a belief/knowledge justified to people who have come to identify themselves as such within a grid that happens to prevail at any given time and place which determines what counts as *Sesotho* or *Bosotho*. This becomes apparent, for instance, in how this thing referred to as *Bosotho* or *Sesotho* is interpreted differently in Lesotho and the Republic of South Africa, not only as distinct historical territories but also as historical memories and a sense of shared culture. Smith's (1991) thesis shows how historical territory, historical memory and a sense of shared culture are crucial but different characteristic aspects of national identity. This distinction assists us to further analyse the nationalism operative in Lesotho; how it is constructing Basotho's cultural and ethnic identity; and how this identity is developed under the terms of the masculinity principle. Lesotho as a historic territory, it should be acknowledged, has subsumed other existent ethnic groups which have always resisted



descriptions or interpretations of *Bosotho* (sothoiness) or Sesotho culture which are defined through the historical memory of Moshoeshe I (Rosenberg 2008:213-226).

Of relevance to this study which explores the dominant masculinity discourses in Lesotho, it is important to note how these groups, Baphuthi, Bathepu, Batlokoa, Bataung, Makoakhoa, and Bafokeng, all have maintained their identity which is based on their own founding fathers, instead of Moshoeshe I. Rosenberg's study reveals how these founding fathers, in the memory of these ethnic groups today, are still perceived as equals of Moshoeshe I and not the latter as their superior. The identity of Bataung, Makhoakhoa and Batlokoa, is linked to the political power their chieftaincies had in both the colonial and post independent Lesotho. With the Baphuthi and the Bathepu, their identity as distinct ethnic groups is based, strongly, not only on the memory of their founding fathers, Moorosi and Tjale, respectively, but also on their distinct languages, *Sephuthi* and *Sethepu (IsiXhosa)*. The existence of these ethnic groups within Lesotho as a territorial entity is often taken for granted by the passionate advocates of *Bosotho* within the framework of the *sekoele* philosophy. In this way *sekoele* appears to be based on the imagined homogeneous concept of *Bosotho* rather than the heterogeneity or the plurality of cultures that constitutes Lesotho as a territorial entity. This plurality is seen in this study as a basis on which any meaningful talk about the politics of relationality is possible.

Language is one mode of homogenisation of a population (Smith 1971:234-235). By sticking to their languages, Baphuthi and Bathepu resist the homogenisation that comes with the Sesotho language which is mostly assigned the status of *the* language within the *sekoele* orientation. By insisting on the memory of their founding fathers' languages, the Baphuthi and the Bathepu resist the homogenisation of masculinity into a collective idea that is defined through Moshoeshe I and designated as *Sesotho* in Sesotho language.

In the second chapter on the history of the operations of masculinity, it was demonstrated how Moorosi, for instance, asserted his authority against both the domination of the colonial rulers, Moshoeshe I and his son's. This resistance underscores how the masculinity principle has been able to determine ethnic identities in Lesotho. These groups, even though they are Basotho because they are part of a people territorially identified as Basotho, they do not have a shared sense of culture that the *sekoele* philosophy seeks to homogenise into an overarching,

undistinguished mass labelled as *Bosotho* or *Sesotho*. In the light of Anderson's concept of imagined community, *Bosotho* (sothoiness) and Basotho's cultural identity, as defined by the *sekoale* philosophy, appear more of an imagination than reality that obtains within Lesotho as a historic territory. For this reason, it must be emphasised that *Bosotho* is not a homogeneous entity of the essential and ontological order implanted naturally and necessarily within every person who is territorially a member of the Basotho nation. Rather, the concept should be understood in the context of the cultural heterogeneity and plurality that there is in Lesotho. And this cultural heterogeneity questions the rigidity with which the *sekoale* philosophy tends to interpret it as we have seen in the previous chapter. It must be stressed that, the self-designated identity or consciousness generated and labelled as *Sesotho* or *Bosotho* by *sekoale*, cannot be instantiated by the different ethnicities in Lesotho as a historic territory, let alone, even by the individual identities of its constituents. From this angle *Bosotho*, as purported by the *sekoale* philosophy, appears to be an instrument of power which is used to limit people to be what they prefer. An ethical consciousness protests against the limiting effect of this power and wants them to be exposed. Who benefits from its operations, is what an ethical consciousness is asking.

Hutchinson's (1994:122-131) analysis of nationalism which, differentiates between cultural and political nationalism, further helps to highlight the resistance of the above mentioned cultural groups, to being subsumed by a strong memory of Moshoeshoe I that has come to dominate the present Lesotho. Hutchinson remarks that cultural nationalism rejects the ideal of universal citizenship rights of political nationalism, but demands that the natural divisions within a nation – sexual, occupational, religious and regional, be respected because the glory of a 'nation' (ethnic group) comes not from its political power but from the culture of its people. This is particularly true of the Baphuthi and the Bathepu in the southern and mountain districts of Lesotho as we have seen above. Even though they do not enjoy a political power in Lesotho, they take pride in their culture and language, things that distinguish them from the so called *Sesotho* culture which tends to dominate them. In this perspective the concept of *Sesotho* or *Bosotho* thrives on the politics of identity which tends to generate domination rather than relationality. The problems and challenges that come with the politics of identity are enormous. They need to be paid attention to because of their potential to generate tensions among people.

#### 4.2.4 *Bosotho* and the politics of identity

*Moafrika* (2000a), taken here as a representative of a *sekoele* attitude, argues that, even though we live in Lesotho and speak a language called Sesotho, in fact, we are not Basotho. This claim should not be taken for granted given its ambiguity. Though it is made in relation to resistance to western cultures versus what *Moafrika* calls “sesotho sa ‘nete” (authentic/real Sesotho), it, by the same tint, provokes the attention of the ethnic groups which, although part of Lesotho as a historic territory, have not come to consider themselves Basotho in this *Moafrika* sense. This position of *Moafrika* has a potential to ferment tensions more than peaceful relations among these ethnic groups and the rest of the country. I should think the same applies to many individual persons, who regard themselves as Basotho even though they are not influenced by those things advocated as *Sesotho* by *Moafrika*. I do not believe that this claim of *Moafrika* makes these groups and the individual persons any less Basotho if we consider them as part of the plurality that makes Lesotho itself a territorial entity.

When Ramainoane, the chief editor of *Moafrika* (2002b) criticises the adoption of the “Papali tsa Sekhooa” (White/European games), because he believes it represents the perpetuation of cultural colonialism, something which according to him, undermines the cultural independence of Lesotho, the same criticism can be launched against the ‘sothoiness’ which he constituted himself as its intelligentsia by these other groups. This ‘sothoiness’ is sometimes disputed not only by individual Basotho, but also by the ethnic communities such as the Baphuthi and the Bathepu within Lesotho itself.

Looked at a close range, the claims of Ramainoane and *Moafrika*, crystallise the *sekoele* philosophy as a movement of social friction, not only between traditional cultural heritage and modernity generated by the impact of the external models on the established status order, but also between the social and ethnic groups existent in Lesotho. They try to promote the integration of Basotho as a national community by means of a return to the inspiration of its national past, which has dominated other communities which are supposed to be part of this national community. In this way, they discourage some possible social developments which would not fit their interpretations of *Bosotho*.

This cultural nationalism, which refuses to acknowledge the existence of the plurality and the diversity of cultures in Lesotho, has blinded and deafened some of the fundamentalist *sekoele* believers to the cracks and contradictions within their own positions. For instance, Makara (2002a), whose position regarding the practice of *lebollo*, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, (section 3.6.2), calls the people of other ethnicities who put themselves under Moshoeshoe, a *mokoteli* (Moshoeshoe I's clan) chief, *betrayers* (my emphasis) of their own national customs and traditions. Makara suggests that these people came to join Moshoeshoe's people because of the latter's *moral superior* (my emphasis) values compared to those of their own groups. Thus, he makes moral perfection the central theme of Basotho's nationhood. In this way he suspends the centrality of the history behind the formation of Basotho as a nation.

His emphasis on the moral superiority of Moshoeshoe I and his people, appears to blind him to the role played by the *lifaqane* wars (Sanders 1975:27-59; Casalis 1861:16-24) which engendered the emergence of the Basotho people as a historic nation as we know it today. Attracted by the security of the place of Moshoeshoe and his style of leadership, and not moral perfection, many displaced people of different ethnicities came to join him and his people. Besides the confusion and the misery engendered by those wars, already some social factors had made Basotho people, an assortment of different ethnicities (Laydevant 1952:1-6; Damane 1986:7-16; Ellenberger 1988), *Bafokeng*, *Bakoena*, *Bataung*, *Baphuthi*, *Matebele* etc. This demonstrates how the idea of the Basotho as a nation based on moral perfection should not be maintained, as Makara suggests.

There seems to exist a crack in Makara's position when he argues that once the process of integration and assimilation of these 'betrayers' had been achieved, it was difficult for them, to change again without becoming traitors once again. On the contrary, these groups have always kept their ethos. The position of Makara only reinforces the prevalence of the present prejudice against other ethnic groups. While Makara sings the moral superiority of the "Basotho", he portrays the other ethnic groups which are supposed to be part of the Basotho as morally inferior, and this should not be maintained.

Here lies the challenge of Sesotho cultural nationalism as preached by the dominant *sekoele* philosophy. It consists in acknowledging the existence and the value of the other ethnicities. This

philosophy tends to perceive the differentness in cultural identities as an error or a fault or a product of a lesser, underdeveloped version of what the “Basotho” are, not as a viable human alternative (Taylor 2002). Because of the blindness due to the present cultural nationalism, the fundamental *sekoele* believers often fall into the pit the British imperial colonial agents and the first Christians missionaries fell in when they first met with the Basotho. Today, just as their dominant colonial and Christian discourses blinded and deafened them to acknowledging the cultural difference of the Basotho, so are the dominant discourses of *sekoele* and *Bosotho* blinding the fundamentalist *sekoele* believers to see other cultures as viable human alternatives.

Further highlighting the complexity of nationalism, Hastings (1997:32-34) argues that nationalism often exists as a latent presence, something which flares up extremely quickly in times of war or some real or imagined threat. He remarks that while it can be under-girded by a profound passion to defend particular cultural treasures, something positive about it, on its worst, it often stresses the rights of this particularity to the extent that it is blinded to those of all others. What this suggests is that nationalism can be justified as an appropriate protest against a universalising uniformity, dominance by the other, but its consequence is too often imposition of uniformity, a deep intolerance of all particularities except one’s own. This is the challenge that faces the present dominant form of Sesotho nationalism supported by the dominant *sekoele* philosophy. The gender dimension of this cultural fundamentalism is explored below. It suffices to remark here that it is this cultural fundamentalism which appears to be an impediment to the transformation efforts in the order of gender in Lesotho. Until the present efforts in favour of change in this area pay a close attention to this phenomenon, those efforts may not bear the fruits they are intended to.

In a South African context, a similar tension between society and culture is observed. The formation of the AWB (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging /Afrikaner Resistance Movement), led by Terre Blanche at the time when apartheid crumbled, was influenced by and thrived on white Afrikaner nationalism. Though many so-called coloured people speak Afrikaans, they were not seen as Afrikaners – so the AWB only included white Afrikaners as a means of coping with the experience of crisis of identity (De Klerk 1984), that largely depended on apartheid. It is this Afrikaner nationalism which became a decisive reinforcer of and a platform on which white Afrikaner masculinity asserted itself (Swart 2001; Du Pisani 2001). The ethnic politics of the

IsiZulu nationalist Inkhatha movement, under the leadership of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi, framed and gave meaning to IsiZulu manhood of the 1970s -1990s (Waetjen & Maré (2001).

In terms of “heritage” and “enterprise”, Corner and Harvey (1991:1-15) have explored a similar tension in the 1980s Britain. Their analysis of the British experience also helps us understand the operations of the nationalist side of the *sekoale* philosophy in the order of gender in Lesotho. Corner and Harvey observe how the inherited values and practices from the British political, social, economic and cultural past referred to as “sterling qualities”, were affected by deliberate innovative projects. They note how those sterling qualities which had for centuries, been employed against British colonial subjects or rivals, fell out with many both in and outside Britain in post-imperial age. The old imperial identity which encouraged white supremacy and its expressions was in tension with values of a multiracial and multicultural society. Corner and Harvey note that there was a wave of resistance in favour of the status quo, which implicitly set a racist paradigm expressed in the fear of Conservatives that Britain might be “swamped with a different culture”. To preserve the distinctive cultural traditions of the British life, the conservatives embarked on a project of reconstituting a national identity for a multiracial and multicultural identity by rejecting a “minoritarian approach”. According to Corner and Harvey this was a way of maintaining “the sacred aura” of being born white and noble blood, something which was not spared from the challenges of the modern British society. The notion of “Great Britain” became more and more problematic just as the notion of *Bosotho* is in the present modern Lesotho. A national identity and unity founded on the “superiority of white, western Christendom, of England over Ireland, Scotland and Wales, of men over women, of the metropolis over the regions” became more and more indefensible.

In Lesotho the concept of *Bosotho* founded on the superiority of Bamokoteli (Moshoeshoe I’s clan), over Baphuthi and Bathepu etc, of the men who underwent *lebollo rite* over those who are not, the ‘educated’ over ‘uneducated’, of men over women is becoming more and more indefensible in the context of a new ethical consciousness gaining momentum in the present modern Lesotho.

In his exploration of the impact of globalization on Britain, Robins (1992:21-23, 40-44) remarks how British society and the culture of the 1980s was saturated with the power of tradition and the

fear that it was being endangered by foreign invasion. This obsessive concern with the past and the future of British tradition has led not only to the creation of a “new culture of enterprise and ethos, but also revival and re-enactment of British national heritage”. For Robins, this anxious concern, to protect the comfort and continuities of the historical tradition and identity, reflects an insular and narcissistic response to the broken down Britain.

From the perspective of this study which seeks to understand why Basotho men resist change in the order of gender, Robins’ remark about the British experience helps us understand a lot about the *sekoale* anxious and sometimes unqualified emphasis on the return to the traditions of the ancestors. It reflects a limited and self-absorbed reaction to the beleaguered *Bosotho* (sothoiness) in the face of the new culture of the modern world. The crucial challenge hidden in this concern is for the Basotho, to, without illusions, recognise and acknowledge other worlds, other cultures, other identities and ways of life. The relation of Lesotho to its “other” should be the context within which the new culture should be set in the post colonial times. This appears to be what constitutes the greatest challenge to the nationalist *sekoale* philosophy.

In the order of gender, the rights of the masculine gender are so emphasised that this emphasis, sometimes tends to blind Basotho men to the rights of women. It needs to be reiterated that any cultural heritage from the past, which sanctions any form of supremacy over others will always be interrogated and challenged by an ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

Foucault’s (1970; 1972; 1979; 1980; 1980:109-133) notion of discourse which ties power/knowledge and truth together, helps us to see through the discourses by which we live. It cautions us to pay diligent attention to strategies and tactics through which discourses create the dominant truths by which we live while they subjugate other truths. It helps us to see how the spoke-persons of such truths can hide themselves in them for their benefit. In this light, the so called ‘customary rights’, sealed with the stamp of the discourses of *Bosotho*, which privilege Basotho men over women, are becoming more and more indefensible in the modern Lesotho. A gender-ethical consciousness challenges such discourses and asks Basotho men who profit from them at the expense of women and children to seek alternative more ethical ways of being; alternative ways which contribute in the reconstruction of a more human society; a society in which women and children are seen as respectful subjects. It questions all the accepted cultural

discourses which favour men to the detriment of women and children. It challenges them because they make Basotho men more rigid and women's and children's oppression more compelling.

In short, as we argued above, Sesotho nationalism operates on the terms of the masculinity principle. It puts more emphasis on national identity rather than relatedness/ relationality and interrelatedness in common purpose. And its profound repercussions in the order of gender cannot be taken for granted. It brushes off the relational dimension of masculine and feminine genders in our humanity. It discourages the harmonious and respectful co-existence and collaboration which is ethical between men and women in the everyday social life. For this reason, the use of Moshoeshoe I and other cultural symbols and practices used by men to preserve the status quo and its repercussions in the order of gender is not be taken for granted in this study.

These observations are very important. They bring us closer to the heart of this chapter, which is the exploration of the gender dimension of cultural nationalism. I argue that the stiffness, with which Basotho men, in their diversified forms, appear to resist some shifts in the order of gender, should be understood as part of the struggle to preserve ethnic identities spawned by a search for what it means to be a Mosotho in the post colonial Lesotho. I suggest that this stiffness can be challenged by emphasising more the plurality which constitutes Basotho's nationhood rather than the assumed homogeneity stressed by the present dominant *sekoale* philosophy. This taken for granted reality of plurality of cultures provides us with some means to talk about the relationality and interrelatedness of men and women in the post colonial Lesotho.

### **4.3 Sesotho Nationalism and Gender**

Rosenberg (2008:210-213) explored the relationship between gender and national identity in Lesotho. He notes how Basotho men know more than their female counterparts about Moshoeshoe I, who is regarded an embodiment of Basotho's national identity. The latter, according to Rosenberg, though influenced by the Moshoeshoe I tradition, are less informed about the details of historical accounts of his life. Of most importance in this study, they do not know that he once beat a woman who challenged him as it was shown in section 2.1.2 of the second chapter. In the light of Hofmeyer's (1993) work, in which the difference between stories



about colonialism told by men and women is explored, and how those stories impact on the lives of men and women differently, Rosenberg's observation about the gender dimension of nationalism in Lesotho is significant. It provokes a fundamental question as to how Basotho men tell the story of Moshoeshe I and exploit his tradition and other dimensions of Basotho's history, practices and customs which are regarded as cultural heritage to their own advantage.

I have already demonstrated how chiefs, as symbols of chieftain masculinity, used the memory of Moshoeshe I to their own advantage in the context of the threat of incorporation into the union of South Africa. In 1928, in the context of a clash with Catholic missionaries, *Lekhotla la Bafo* led by Josiel Lefela (LNA S3/22/2/1), one of the symbols of Sesotho political masculinity, used the memory of Moshoeshe I to defend an institution of male *lebollo* against what they perceived as the missionaries' invasion of a custom which they regarded as a valuable source of preservation of Sesotho laws and customs. They complained about the Roman Catholic priests who had induced their circumcised Christians to teach them the old National songs of the Basotho taught to Basotho boys in circumcision, and how these missionaries taught those songs to uncircumcised teachers so that they may be able to teach them in their respective schools. In the previous chapter on *sekoale*, section 3.8 we have seen that the *lebollo* institution guaranteed, among others, exclusive circumcised men's privileges in society in terms of participation in public affairs as was customarily observed in the practice of *khotla* and *pitso*.

Today, in the context of the wave of resistance to the influence of other cultures, especially western, we see further not only the exploitation of the memory of Moshoeshe I. Specific practices and customs which reinforce the hierarchical classification of men, accepted gender roles in everyday life, are also exploited as well. In the previous chapter, we have already seen how Sithetho (2009) associated the memory of Moshoeshe I with resistance to the invasion of the foreign cultures. Makara (2002a) associated his memory with the practice of male *lebollo* as the matrix of *Bosotho* which produces obedient loyal subjects of chiefs and the nation when he advocated for the faithfulness and loyalty to *Bosotho* in the face of a possibility of yielding to a temptation of the foreign cultures. In the context of the criticism of those he calls "barutehi" (the educated/sophisticated), for maladministration of the country, Ramainoane (2002a) exalts the practice and the institution of *lebollo*. He says it has produced capable and competent men who ruled Lesotho for about 200 years. He stresses that it is these men who heroically defended the

country from the attacks which nearly annihilated it and its people. He believes that if the electorate turned its back on the ‘Barutehi’ (the educated), who despise *Sesotho* and rule the country according to the traditions and customs learned from the education system of the “Makhooa” (the whites), and chose leaders who honoured “mekhoa le meetlo ea Basotho” (the customs and traditions of the Basotho), things could be different.

Following the political riots of 1998, in which the South African and Botswana National Defence forces invaded Lesotho, Oa Mokhali (2000a) poetically appeals to the memory of Moshoeshe I to denounce those in government administration as “makhooa” (the whites) who have turned Basotho into slaves while they enriched themselves. He accuses them of selling Lesotho over to the land beyond Mohakare (the Caledon River) and urges Basotho to overcome cowardice and adopt the *sekoale* attitude and unite under the king. In another publication, Oa Mokhali (2000b) accuses those he calls the “Bahlalefi” (the educated/sophisticated) of inciting hatred against chiefs; of undoing and destroying the structures laid by God in the institution of chieftaincy for their own personal gains. In this latter charge, Oa Mokhali epitomizes the prevalent belief among the fundamental traditionalists that chieftaincy is divinely sanctioned. It must be remarked that in this way the fundamentalists suspend the historical emergence and development of this social status among the Basotho as we know it today. In the context of gender, a similar belief about men and their superiority is held and this overshadows the historical and social contours of masculinity as we have seen in the second chapter. In the next chapter, it will be demonstrated how some interpretations of specific biblical texts are used to support this belief. Within the social constructionist perspective in which this study is positioned, this belief does not represent the unchanging essential truth about both chiefs and men among the Basotho. It only underpins the historical processes which have moulded it: the struggle between tradition and change.

In the context of this study which speaks for a gender-ethical consciousness, this is not where the emphasis is. The emphasis is on the struggle between the unethical and the ethical. From this angle, change has not to do with tradition versus colonisation as *sekoale* believers tend to stress. It has to do with the questions: What makes life possible for all? When will all benefit? When will all have a good life?

With its exclusive focus on cultural and ethnic identity, typical of the identity politics, the *sekoele* outlook tends to give little attention to these questions, as a gender-ethical consciousness wants in the order of gender. Instead, the positioning of Basotho men as loyal subjects in the defence of Basotho's nationality and customs is emphasised. This emphasis appears to empower and sustain the hegemonic pattern of masculinity in the order of gender relations. It reinforces Basotho men's sense of entitlement in defining not only what it means to be a "real" Mosotho man but also a woman. With its emphasis on the discourse of *Bosotho* (sothoiness) versus the discourse of colonialism, the dominant *sekoele* philosophy has become an alibi for the privileges of the masculine gender, which points to the myth of national singleness or totality to forget (Kizerbo 1978:468) about the real inequalities in the Basotho society. The issue of inequalities in the Basotho society is overlooked and watered down as national cultural identity is emphasised. And Basotho men benefit more than women from this situation. In this study, which is investigating the factors that encourage Basotho men not to embrace change in the order of gender, the dominant Sesotho cultural nationalism should not be taken for granted. It appears to conspire with the masculinity principle to preserve the status quo in the order of gender.

#### **4.3.1 The conspiracy of Sesotho nationalism and masculinity against a meaningful talk about the issue of social inequalities in Lesotho**

The scheme of Sesotho nationalism and masculinity against any meaningful talk about social disparities in Lesotho is mostly attested in the reaction of men to women empowerment discourses. It is well demonstrated in the positions adopted by individual men and male dominated institutions against such discourses. As we have seen in the previous chapter, the scheme is well established in the practice of male *Lebollo* as an institution. The scheme can also be detected in the rejection of the Sexual Offences Act of 2003 by the so called cultural groups. These groups argued that the law was prejudiced against the traditional practices in favour of the western influenced way of life. They could not entertain a thought of a woman laying charges against her husband for "marital rape" because "there is no such a thing as rape in marriage according to our culture as Basotho people" (Public Eye August 21, 2009). They used the discourse of *bohali* (bride price) to reject the Act.

Duetsch's (1994:27-29) exploration of the relationship between nationalism and social communication sheds light on the significance of Moafrika and its role in the reinforcement of

the anti-women empowerment discourses in Lesotho. Duetsch remarks that within a nationalist struggle for identity, nationality is a people pressing to acquire a measure of effective control over the behaviour of its members. It does so through a technology of compulsion strong enough to make the enforcement of its commands sufficiently credible to serve the spread of habits of voluntary compliance with them. Such power is exercised through informal social arrangements, pressure group opinion and prestige of national symbols; even more strongly, through formal social or political organisations. Whatever the instrument of power, they are used to strengthen and elaborate those social channels of communication, the preferences of behaviour, the political alignments which, all together, make up the social fabric of the nationality.

Radio and newspaper appear to be the instruments of power by which *Moafrika* communicate its commands on Basotho men and women. The effects of its communication on them cannot be underestimated. *Moafrika* as a media house – the news paper and radio station, on its part has not only served as a platform on which the voices of resistance are heard on daily basis but also, as a matter of policy, it has itself taken a firm position in the defence and promotion of *Bosotho* on its own terms. In this section we are seeing how this *Bosotho* is used to resist change in the order of gender relations. The role played by *Moafrika* in this regard cannot be taken for granted.

Among what he calls the technologies of social saturation, Gergen (1991:48-80) has identified radio broadcasting and print media, newspapers. His analysis of the function of these technologies and their impact on people's lives further helps see how *Moafrika*'s use of them impacts on Basotho men and women, especially in the order of gender relations. According to Gergen, they are a means by which the process of "populating the self" with new knowledge happens; a process by which people can start to undermine the traditional commitments to traditional ways of being. They help the process by which people learn how to place the new knowledge into action, to shape it for social consumption, to act so that social life can proceed effectively. In this process people become what Gergen calls "pastiche" and "imitative assemblages". They "appear to each other as single identities, unified, of whole cloth".

*Moafrika*'s use of radio and newspaper appears to exploit the power of these technologies. It uses them to make Basotho men, just as *women* would, appear to each other as single identities, unified in a whole cloth called *Sesotho*. In this way, it thwarts the existence of alternatives which

a gender sensitive consciousness advocated in this study supports. It uses these technologies to reverse the tide of change in the traditional life of the Basotho as a result of exposure to modernisation. In the process, it sidelines the ethical questions that have to be asked such as the ones put forward above. It seeks, so to speak, to depopulate Basotho men and women of foreign saturation and ‘populate’ them with a traditional knowledge of being a Mosotho man and a Mosotho woman; a knowledge that would make them to undermine the knowledge that comes with a more gender sensitive consciousness. The transformations occurring in the order of gender relations are strongly disputed as either “unsesotho” or “unchristian” by *Moafrika*.

Baran (2004:1-35) further helps us to realize the role of *Moafrika* as an instrument of mass communication in the formation of the culture of resistance in the order of gender. He defines mass communication as the process of creating shared meaning between the mass media and their audiences; a process by which reality is produced, maintained, repaired and transformed. In this light, he emphasises that culture serves to help people to categorise and classify their experiences as well as to define their world and their place in it. In this way communication is the foundation of culture. The culture of resistance to transformation in the order of gender enforced by *Moafrika* through radio and the newspaper makes it worthwhile to pay attention to it in this study. The most significant thing about it is that it has taken upon itself the task of rediscovery and realization of the traditional Basotho community in the climate of social changes in today’s Lesotho. At the centre of its self-appointed task, gender issues have become the most recurrent theme. Despite its sometimes extreme positions, *Moafrika* represents a strong gender discourse in Lesotho that should not be taken for granted by the transformation efforts in gender relations in Lesotho.

When the chief editor of *Moafrika* (*Moafrika* 2001) questioned the manly prudence of Prime Minister Mosisili and criticised him for speaking publicly about issues pertaining to male *lebollo* practice, sex and condoms to a mixed public of men and women and children, he appealed to the customary code of *Bosotho* which does not allow speaking about such issues, first, in public and second, to a wrong audience – women and children and men who have not undergone the *lebollo* rite. The editorial of *Moafrika* interprets the Prime Minister’s conduct as demeaning of the Basotho tradition of *lebollo* and other customs. According to *Moafrika*, he had crossed a social line which sets boundaries, not only between sexes and adults and children but also between

circumcised and uncircumcised men. It is significant to note that the Prime Minister was addressing the issue of HIV and AIDS that has devastated Lesotho. In the position of *Moafrika* we see, first, how the discourses of *Bosotho* and *lebollo* support and maintain the separation of men and women, of adults and children, of men of *lebollo* and those who have not undergone the rite. Second, how they can blind people from seeing the moments of change demanded by the present situation where HIV and AIDS are devastating the nation. In the position we see, at play, the politics of identity and their limiting effects on Basotho men.

In another incidence, where the Government had organised a workshop on the role of the institution of *Lebollo* in relation to local government, education, development and prevention of HIV and AIDS etc, men and women who underwent and observe the *lebollo* rite and traditional healing practices, disrupted the presentation of one of the ‘experts’ who was talking about ‘Lebollo in the History of Basotho’. They dismissed him on the basis that he was “leqai” (an uncircumcised man). For them, he was talking about something he did not know but only read about in books (*Moafrika* 2003b). In one of their serial meetings country wide, men who underwent the *lebollo* rite discussed ways in which the institution could be protected from its enemies; how its juridical status could be secured by a parliamentary act (Maphephe 2005).

Okure (1999) has explored the issues behind the spread of HIV and AIDS. She notes that there are viruses more dangerous than HIV itself which enable this virus to spread fast among the most vulnerable in society. Among them she mentions a virus which affects people’s minds and their culture. She argues that this virus makes people look on women as inferior to men, and that it affects women as well as men.

If what Okure says is true, then the behaviour of Basotho men, who dodge the talk about HIV and AIDS in this way, raises serious ethical question about the dominant traditional Sesotho masculinity. Who has the power to determine what, where, when and how people should talk about pressing issues like HIV? Who is making choices and who is without choices about what people listen to about such issues, where, when and how they should listen to them? As Cimperman (2005:11-14) has rightly observed, gender inequality is one factor contributing to the spread of the pandemic. Now, if the cultural beliefs and practices which empower one category of people in the society and disempower others are defended as *Bosotho* (sothoiness), then

*Bosotho* is weakened and made to appear unethical. The point I want to make here is that when Sesotho culture is defined and interpreted by patriarchal values, women will count less; their bodies are made available and disposable. They are socialised into sustaining the very structures that will oppress them through their lives. There are rewards that come with compliance, and also punishment for rebellion.

It is the positions such as the ones held by Moafrika that call for a more critical stance toward the dominant discourses of *Bosotho*. A closer look at them reveals that Sesotho cultural nationalism, as conceptualised by the notion of *Bosotho*, is not only motivated by external forces, as Milner (1994:45) argues about nationalism in general. It also can be provoked by imagined or possible internal threats; internal forces threatening to subvert a seamless web of national imagining tallied on the basis of men's interests. The point I want to make here is that when Basotho men feel that their superior social status is undermined, they tend to appeal to those traditional life discourses which enshrine and protect their interests. In most cases those discourses tend to silence those who are on the lower end of the social ladder, women, children etc.

In the examples above, it is not difficult to see how these nationalistic positions actually defend men's unethical behaviours. In as far as this study is concerned they underscore the extent to which nationalism, regardless of what motivates it, can easily be used as an alibi for social inequalities and injustices. Those who benefit from such discourses, in this case, men, tend to defend them because their interests are secured in them. It is this dovetailing of the dominant Sesotho nationalism and masculinity which hampers efforts of transformation in the order of gender. Now, the most important question is how it has actually manifested itself against women.

#### **4.3.2 The manifestations of Sesotho cultural nationalism and the disempowerment and marginalisation of women**

In the forgoing section, I have alluded that the construction and the positioning of Basotho men as loyal subjects in the defence of Basotho's nationality, empowers and encourages hegemonic patterns of masculinity in defining Basotho's national identity; and that it reinforces Basotho men's sense of entitlement in defining what it means to be a "real" Mosotho man and woman. The way Basotho men consider women appears to be framed by this positioning in the history of Basotho as a nation. It becomes apparent in the complaint of *Moafrika* (*Moafrika* 2002a) that

women, youth, workers and people living with disability are represented in parliament while those they call “ba moeetlo” (those who follow Sesotho customary and traditional way), are not. In this complaint, the fear of loss of the privileged position and control is palpable. I suspect that it is this fear that has dominated debates about gender issues in Lesotho more than issues of ethics and is taken for granted even by those who work for change in the order of gender. Men use this fear to maintain the status quo.

The mention of the people living with disability in Moafrika’s complaint is even more revealing. It shows how being able bodied is used by men to get what they want, while hiding behind the discourse of *Bosotho*. Being able-bodied is insinuated without being explicitly mentioned to prove that men are the best suited to do the jobs people living with disability; women and children cannot.

The construction of men as loyal defenders of tradition is also crystallised when *Moafrika* (2005) criticises those whom they accuse of acting on the influence of European and American cultures, of dividing the nation by enforcing and speaking for policies of women empowerment, youth and children development while they exclude men. *Moafrika* sees the deterioration of land management, economy and governance in the endorsement and support of women, youth and children development in Lesotho. In *Moafrika*’s (2003a) outlook, “litokelo tsa basali” (women’s rights) and “tekatekano” (gender equity and equality) are non-existent in Sesotho customary practices as protected by the tradition of *lebollo*. Ramainoane (2004) emphasises that policies which support women’s equality with men are prone to incite conflicts between men and women in marriage. He strongly believes that women will be women, with womanish social roles and works essentially different from manliness with manly social roles and works. He argues that this is the natural order of creation as intended by the Creator; that Basotho women are not just any women. Being a Masotho woman distinguishes a Mosotho woman from women of other ethnicities or nationalities. They are *Basotho women* (my emphasis).

The position of Ramainoane clearly discourages Basotho women from succumbing to the influence of women of other ethnicities or nationalities. Most importantly, it discourages them from challenging the superior position of men in the fabric of Basotho society in the name of *Bosotho*. A similar position can also be detected in the rejection of the Sexual Offences Act 2003



by the so-called “cultural groups”. These groups argue that men’s cultural rights as enshrined in the traditional marriage practice which demands men to pay *bohali* (the bride price), were being violated, (*Public Eye*, August 21, 2009). In this position, it becomes clear how the practice of *bohali* is understood by some men to be a guarantee of men’s sexual interests. They believe it entitles them to have sex when and if they want regardless of how women might feel. This position is wanting in terms of ethics.

Petje (2003) reports about how men reacted to women of a village called Ha Rapetlonyane, who dug a grave while men had gone to the “mocketeng oa lijo tsa balimo” (the ritual feast of ancestral meal). Upon return, the village men cynically exclaimed: “ke tseo he litokelo tsa mantlha le litekatekano” (there they go, basic human rights and equalities and equities). They scorned the women for succumbing to the influence of the foreign western culture which destroys the traditional Basotho society. They interpreted the women’s behaviour as an expression of a fight for equality with men. They accused them for thinking that there were no men’s jobs; that they thought they were the “lihlooho” (heads).

If the observation made earlier about men’s consideration of their bodies was correct, it is not far-fetched to conclude that the men of Ha Rapetlonyane were ashamed by the act of the women. Their consideration of women’s bodies which saw them as incapable of doing specific jobs, threatened the men’s assumed physical strength. From the perspective of this study, which wants to find in the *sekoale* outlook alternative ways of being a Mosotho man or woman, the women’s act, can be interpreted as an act of resistance to the dominant discourse of *Bosotho* which glorifies men and their achievements more than women.

Another extreme but widespread attitude of most Basotho men toward women is found in Ramainoane (2004b). Ramainoane draws a parallel between the femininity implied in the noun, ‘Lesotho’, with a vagina, as it is called by the same name in Sesotho vernacular. He argues that, just as the vagina is the source of many sexual illnesses affecting female persons and the persons related to them, men and children: infanticide, murder among male persons and sorcery and wizardry, so is Lesotho as a sovereign and constitutional state. It is the source of social ills of its people. In this comparison, the degrading and disempowerment of women is well displayed. They are regarded as the source of social ills. This way of seeing women resonates with the

biblical story of the fall of Adam and Eve (Gen.3:1-12). The man blamed the woman for eating the forbidden fruit.

Now, when *sekoele* believers argue for the reinforcement of the traditional gender relations, they actually do so by appealing to this sense of masculinity that has come to inhabit most of the Basotho men; the sense which, they maintain, should never be confused with things associated with femininity; things which are embodied not only in their biology, but also in their psyche, rationality and spirituality. It is at this deepest level that the *sekoele* philosophy encourages Basotho men to resist any transformation in the order of gender relations, all in the name of “authentic” *Bosotho* (sothoiness). In this perspective, women’s bodies, psyche, rationality and spirituality are measured by the masculinity principle and are found wanting in social and moral standards. Their bodies are particularly identified as the primary source of moral and spiritual decadence, something which points to some imperfections in their rationality and psychological disposition.

In comparison, men’s bodies, psyche, rationality and spirituality are associated with soundness and perfection of high moral order. In short, women are regarded as different from men, but different in the sense of being incomplete and inferior forms of men’s complete and superior humanity. Because of this deep seated conception, women’s aptitude, not only to lead and manage public affairs, but also their own lives, are often doubted and watered down while men’s fitness is taken as a given. In this way men are constructed as moral custodians of women. Because of the dominant discourse of *Bosotho*, most Basotho men and women are not so keen to the ethical implications of this situation in our everyday life. In the perspective of this study, which advocates for the development of a gender-ethical consciousness, this reality has to be named and exposed.

Put differently, the position of the *sekoele* fundamentalists above, highlights how the social oppression of women has operated as a sociological projection of sexual or female-male dualism. It is on this dualism, that the psychic difference between men and women appears to be based. In this framework Basotho traditional social spirituality, so to speak, has viewed man as a superior spirit or rationality. The male alone is believed to possess the fullness of the perfection of

humanity in its essence while the female does not have it in herself. She can have it only when she submits under the male, who is her head.

These ideas of masculinity which thrive on the dominant Sesotho cultural nationalism are challenged in this study. It must be reiterated that they do not represent the essential “truths” about Basotho men’s and women’s nature. Rather, they refer to the dominant culture and politics of our society. They reveal more of how the masculinity principle has maintained its power in Lesotho. They are “a disguised ideology whose workings have been concealed by asserting the essential naturalness of gender differences and gender requirements” as Hare-Mustin (McLean, Carey & White 1996: x) would put it.

The essential distinction between masculinity and femininity, so palpable in the above positions of the *sekoele* fundamentalists, needs attention if any meaningful transformation in the present order of gender relations is to be managed. It is one of the factors underlying Basotho men’s resistance to change in this area in general. The framework of *sekoele*, with its nationalist identity project, appears to hold essentialist views on gender. It takes sex and gender as one thing. It fails to accept the cultural or constructionist view on gender. The distinctions and separate spheres assigned to men and women are believed to be predestined and natural. The assumption underlying this take is that since females and males are biologically determined, they must be innate opposites. It portrays femininity and masculinity as dichotomized, mutually exclusive sets of behavioural or personality traits.

The feminist and gender studies (Lopata & Thorne 1978; Gerson & Piess 1985; Hess & Ferree 1987; Stacey & Thorne 1985; Lorber 1997; Peterson & Runyan 1999; Kuumba 2001) however, contest such a view on gender, and argue for a constructionist view of femininity and masculinity. From the constructionist perspective, the essentialist approach is problematic in a number of ways. First, it is inclined to believing that gender categories are unavoidable and unchanging. Second, it cannot account for cross-cultural variations and changes over time in a society’s gender system. It ignores the impact of structures and institutions in moulding gender relations and the historical and political context within which gender processes operate. Third, it always privileges the so called masculine traits and activities over feminine ones and upholds power and resource differences between men and women. Fourth, it ignores those situations that

do not fit squarely within the boxes of normative sex and gender role behaviours. Fifth, and most significant in this study, it sidelines ethical questions such as what and whose interests are served by the established gender roles and patterns.

Because of its strong immersion in the nationalist identity politics, the *sekoele* framework tends to ignore these fundamental issues. It ignores the political and ideological biases inherent in the traditional practices of gender assignment. As I have hinted at in the first chapter, (1.2.1), on the research questions and aims, they tend to argue that the biologically based gender difference of men naturally, qualifies them into the existing structures of power which women, by being female, are not. Now, when this understanding of the category of gender is enmeshed with that of nationality in terms of culture, men's resistance to change becomes even more compound and complex. The relationality or interrelatedness of men and women as equal subjects in common purpose – building a more human and ethical society, becomes secondary if not insignificant. Instead, what appears to count more is who is most suited to do what in the society as a matter of necessity. The thesis of this chapter is that it is through the emphasis on the relationality and interrelatedness of men and women in common purpose, rather than their gender identity, that is the key to the desired transformation in the order of gender in Lesotho.

The issue of relationality and collaborative interdependence appears to be on the periphery of the present efforts of transformation in the order of gender. With the prevalence of the present discourses of *sekoele* and *Bosotho*, the dominant essentialist interpretations of masculinity and femininity appear to appeal more to the deepest emotions of its male constituency. I believe that any effort to persuade Basotho men to embrace change in the order of gender must pay attention to the nationalist and the essentialist beliefs upheld by the *sekoele* framework.

The feminist principles which state that the personal is political and that the personal and social identities are interdependent (Corey 2005:350), help us to understand the situation of Basotho men. The *sekoele* and *Bosotho* discourses appear to have more impact on their lives and the decisions they make on daily basis more than most of the Basotho are aware of. It provides them with structures of interpretation of not only their experiences as men, but also those of women. These interpretations set them apart as separate social identities by assigning to them distinct roles in both private and public spheres. In this way, gender functions as an organizing principle

in human life. It defines a structured set of relations, statutes, and norms of behaviour which, in most cases, have limiting effects on people's lives. It is precisely these limiting effects of the identity politics, important though they are, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, (section 3.7.4), that make the politics of relationality more desirable.

#### **4.4 The Challenge of Cultural Identity: A Need for Cultural Relational Turn**

In his exploration of the relationship between social construction and identity politics, Gergen (1995; 1994: 185-209, 254-274) demonstrates the necessity of moving away from identity politics to what he calls relational politics. He highlights the inadequacies of the identity politics such as the ones we have seen above. Identity politics tend to polarize and generate bitterness that creates a chasm between 'we' and 'they', of one's truth as beyond perspective. They provide a high moral platform from which others can be condemned. Relational politics, on the contrary, according to Gergen, promise bridging the rift between self and the other, 'we' and 'they' and engage them in relational practices of collaboration in community and interrelatedness.

Relational politics reinforce a relational consciousness which pays diligent attention to even how we speak and communicate with others as we engage in dialogue with them. It is by paying attention to how we speak and communicate that we are able to uncover the advantages and disadvantages of particular versions of life events that frame our lives (Bird 2004:8). The language we use internalises certain thoughts, feelings or experiences as part of our identity and through cultural discourses we determine the advantages and disadvantages of that identity. If this is true, I take it that the language Basotho men use to describe their experiences can reveal the advantages and disadvantages of the version of live events that frame their lives. In the sections above the dominant versions of life Basotho men live by, and how they influence them to think about and relate to women, have been explored. The purpose, in this section, is to encourage them to see the disadvantages inherent to the politics of identity even if they promise the fruits of the autonomous masculine selves. There is another flipside of this purpose: to encourage them to consider a possibility of reconstructing an alternative language that would cast them into an alternative relational consciousness. In relational consciousness the differences in identity are not perceived as a threat but as a revenue of collaboration and interdependence in

common purpose. I believe it is within the context of relatedness and interrelatedness than an ethical consciousness can be developed. Identity politics appear to be inadequate in this respect.

The ideas of Gergen and Bird challenge the prevalent Sesotho nationalism with its strong ethnocentric tendency as opposed to a polycentric one (Smith 1971:158-160). They challenge the ethnocentric face of Sesotho nationalism in that it inheres power and value in a group which it regards as a vessel of wisdom, beauty and holiness and culture while it sees others as lacking in these things. The ethnocentric nationalism is different from the polycentric trend. This latter, by contrast, acknowledges that there are many centres of power. It acknowledges that other groups do have valuable and genuinely noble ideas and institutions which can be borrowed from or adopted. In this respect Sesotho nationalism, with its ethnocentric orientation, is challenged to get out of its box to embrace other cultural possibilities; to engage in inter-relatedness (Gergen 1994:185-291). As it stands now, it is caught up in the politics of cultural identity and tends to partition the humanity of men and women in ways that destroys it. It does so by its essentialist project, described above, which separates men from women and then brands that separation as authentic *Bosotho* (sothoiness). It makes *Bosotho* a closed static system, something which betrays its heterogeneity as we have seen above.

When this happens, it easily falls into the pit of “cultural apartheid”, to use the expression of Nkéranihigo (1986:69). In the order of gender, this situation appears to have given Basotho men a platform on which to assert their masculinity. To demonstrate that Basotho are different from other ethnic groups, they tend to put emphasis on those cultural institutions and practices in which the interests of men are more protected than those of women. From the perspective of a gender-ethical consciousness, this situation is not acceptable even if it is justified within the present dominant discourse of *Bosotho* by the *sekoale* philosophy. The discourse appears to sustain not only inequalities between the ethnic groups that make up the Basotho nation as we know it today, but also inequalities between men and women. For this reason, any unqualified and uncritical embrace of cultural nationalism as proposed by the *sekoale* philosophy is rejected.

This rejection should not be interpreted as an easy way of succumbing to the encroachment of western influence on Basotho culture. It is not. On the contrary, it should be seen as a matter of ethics and being ethical. Being ethical, among others, challenges us to create an environment

which makes life possible for all in society; to be able to have a good life for all. The position of this study is that, any culture which deprives some of life, while it gives it to others, should be questioned. It is ethical to give it to those who are deprived of it. The concept of ethics and being ethical adopted in this study is explored in details in chapter six.

Milner's (1994:43-44) ideas about Welsh nationalism, and Williams's (1983:181) grappling with issues of cultural identity within a post-modern and post-structuralist perspective help us to scrutinise the present dominant Sesotho cultural nationalism. With its cultural emancipatory intent, Sesotho cultural nationalism is open to two basic charges. First, in a world increasingly becoming internationalized and culturally cosmopolitan, Sesotho nationalism as framed by a *sekoele* outlook which appears to refuse to face the challenges of the present in terms of ethics. Today, it is easier for people of different ethnicities to interact than ever before. Through this interaction the awareness of how much life can offer increases. It is in this context some Basotho women become aware of their limited and underprivileged position within the traditional ways. The *sekoele* cultural identity outlook dashes these opportunities by classifying them as "*ntho tsa sekhood*" (things of the Whites) and therefore, un-sesotho. In this way it glorifies the past of the Basotho and specific customary practices to the detriment of women. Secondly, by so doing it threatens to repress cultural identities other than its own.

In the perspective of this study, if there is any credit to modernity and post-modernity, it is that of reducing to redundancy of what is commonly called European or African or Sesotho or whatever to allow people to enjoy what life offers. Cultural internationalization, as Williams has emphasised, threatens to subvert false national and cultural totalities in their many forms. It subverts culture as competition of winners and losers. For instance, we already live in a world in which a large number of Basotho people will happily watch the so called "*papali tsa makhood*" (games of the whites) such as football as they did during the FIFA world cup in South Africa. They watch their movies on TV, wear their clothes and use their cellular phones, buy cars and eat rice and macaroni etc.

To uncritically and without qualification reject all these things as un-sesotho appears to be untenable for many Basotho. I want to believe that this does not make them any less Basotho. Already in 1878 Mr Spirgg, the prime minister of the Cape colony, and the missionaries, were

dumbfounded at the sight of Basotho men in their thousands wearing trousers, something which made them think of themselves as “superior to other Kaffir tribes” (Germond 1967:342). The formation of Basutoland Progressive Association known as “*Bahlalefi* or *Matsoelopele*” (The Educated or the Progressives) in 1907, is another example of cultural transformation among Basotho. The *Bahlalefi* believed that British assistance was necessary for them to become “modern” politically and culturally (Weisfelder 1969:117; 1974:398,399), something which did not mean they renounced their being Basotho (Machobane 1990:157; LNA S3/22/1/1). They continued to support traditional institutions of monarchy and chieftainship though they heavily criticised them when and where they thought they betrayed some aspects of Moshoeshoe tradition they believed important, like being consulted in administrative decisions of the country.

The ideas just highlighted underscore the openness of all cultures to the influence of others. They underline the tacit relatedness between cultures. It is this relationality or interrelatedness which makes ethical considerations possible. The thesis of this chapter is that already within the concept of *Bosotho*, exists this relationality of cultures. We have seen above that the dominant *sekoale* discourse ignores this historical fact. The argument of this chapter is that an emphasis on this aspect of *Bosotho*, rather than the emphasis on it as an identity, has transformative potential in the order of gender. I believe this cultural relational turn provokes the urgency for men and women to engage with each other in social practices. It promotes the taken-for-granted inter-relatedness of men and women in the construction of a society which values principles of plurality and diversity. The next section precisely explores this capacity.

#### **4.4.1 Cultural relational turn and gender**

In the context of this study which searches for a possibility of alternative, more ethical ways of being and thinking about men, the emphasis on a cultural relationality in terms of gender is very important. It constitutes a key to a collaborative and ethical engagement of men and women in common purpose. That is, building a society in which both of them would participate as equal subjects who can influence each other rather than one dominating the other. The relational turn challenges the present dominant masculinities which have constituted themselves as superior organising principle of the Basotho’s traditional life and thereby relegates femininity under its shadows.



In the present socio-cultural climate, a gender-ethical consciousness challenges the dominant Sesotho culture's sense of male superiority and self-righteousness of the proportions explored above. This consciousness resists this sense of superiority and seeks an honest acknowledgement of the basic humanness of women denied them in the dominant discourse of *Bosotho*, as preached by the *sekoale* philosophy. As we have seen above, when women do this they are often criticised for challenging men's naturalised social superiority based on their male sex. In relational terms the issue is not who is more perfect and superior as in the politics of identity, but as participants in common purpose. That is, building of a more human society through democratic means. In this way, the relational politics subverts the traditional binary of men and women, so enchanted by the dominant cultural nationalistic discourse of *sekoale*, and replaces them with an ethical collaboration between them.

Borrowing and paraphrasing the ideas of Gergen (1995:7-11), relational politics reject the myth of natural masculinity and femininity and emphasise that each of these is constituted by the other through communication and social interaction. They stress that gender identity is a relational achievement rather than the nature of men and women. They stress that "societal transformation is not a matter of changing minds and hearts, political values or the sense of the good. Rather, transformation [is] unleashing the positive potential inherent in relational processes". They encourage us "to locate a range of relational forms that enable collective transformation as opposed to alienated dissociation". In the process, the development of an alternative rhetoric and social practice is essential. This is what appears to be missing in the present efforts of transformation of gender relations in Lesotho.

As Gergen argues, rhetoric as a speech act and a form of action serves to form, sustain and possibly change patterns of relationship. In the context of the dominant gender relations in Lesotho, I believe if we emphasised less the rhetoric of gender identity and developed more that of gender relational responsibility, the present gender relations would be altered. By the rhetoric of relational responsibility I mean accountability of men and women towards each other and the articulation of visions of mutual collaboration and respect. This is a move from men versus women.

To illustrate, during several of our Reflecting Team meetings I had asked the members how our exchange of thoughts have affected their relations with their wives and children. Some responded that they have changed dramatically. They shared stories of how they could now take criticism from their wives and children. One member told us a story of how he had handled an issue of his son who had fathered a child with a girl. He had convened the male members of the extended family and gave a name to the child without consulting with his wife. The wife ignored the name and gave hers to the child, a name which became dominant. At first when he realised this, he felt his authority was being undermined but later he recognised how wrong he was to exclude his wife in the decision making. From then, he apologised and collaborated with the wife's decision. He says the tension that existed in the family subsided afterwards. The antagonism and separation that the politics of gender identity had generated was finally replaced by a collaborative attitude essential to the relational politics.

The story of the member of the Reflecting Team reveals another aspect of the relational politics. They make it easier to negotiate relations of power in relationships. As Bird (2004:159) remarks within a therapeutic context, "Whenever people are assigned to a socially sanctioned role which entitles them to assess, treat and act on behalf of others, or supervise and/or manage others a power relation is generated". A similar remark can be passed about the dominant traditional Sesotho masculinity which has claimed for itself the position of managing women's lives as we saw above. Within a relational model this situation raises ethical issues. How do men exercise power in relation to women? Who benefits? How do they negotiate the effects of the power relations as it is constituted by cultural customs and practices which have already prescribed how men and women relate?

These questions are important because often when people who belong to the dominant group, be it through ethnicity, gender, class, age, or sexual orientation etc, engage with others in a social setting the operation, consequence and effect of the taken-for-granted power relations become unavailable to them. It is the air they breathe. They tend to feel indignant and threatened whenever people they interact with highlight the taken-for-granted nature of certain behaviour patterns and assumptions. This appears to have been the case with the member of the Reflecting Team before he developed a relational consciousness. In this light the questions above express the need for the development of this consciousness, the rhetoric of collaboration and co-operative

ethic, which appear to be possible in the relational politics than the identity politics. The relational consciousness embody an intent to “collaborate with people in challenging oppressive discourses and ways of living in an ethical and ecological accountable way” (Kotzé & Kotzé 2001:8). It promises a possibility of Basotho men getting out of the dominant masculinity box that has come to historically shape them; a masculinity which has relegated femininity under its own shadows. This is what has been argued in this chapter.

#### **4.5 Summary**

This chapter has argued that the strong fusion of the masculinity principle and the dominant Sesotho nationalism has an enormous impact on how Basotho men respond to the transformation efforts in the order of gender. It has been shown how the nationalistic insistence on the distinct cultural and ethnic identity of the Basotho has empowered Basotho men to resist changes in this area. Shifts are often interpreted as destructive of Basotho’s cultural and ethnic identity. To this effect, the need to protect this identity has included, alongside it, the need to protect and justify specific practices which privilege men against women because they are interpreted and justified as essential part of the identity to be protected. This demonstrates how deep the masculinity principle is involved in the definition of *Basotho* (sothoiness). It operates as an organising force of people’s lives alongside nationalism. Those Basotho who dare challenge this situation are often criticised and labelled betrayers of an identity they were supposed to defend. In the order of gender relations the situation becomes even more complex. Behaviour patterns of men and women are assumed to follow necessarily from the naturalness of maleness and femaleness and so are natural also. They should not change just as maleness and femaleness. It is in this way the status quo is preserved. As a response to this situation, I have proposed that there is a need to move away from the essentialist interpretations of masculinity and femininity to the constructionist ones. I also proposed that there should be a shift from the present emphasis on the politics of cultural identity to the emphasis on the politics of cultural relationality. The politics of cultural relationality rather than cultural identity appear to promise an alternative rhetoric and social action in which the alternative, more ethical masculinities can emerge as proposed in this study. The notion of cultural relationality puts more emphasis on inter-relatedness and collaboration with the ‘other’ rather than assertion of one’s rights.

This is important in this study which is investigating the dominant ideas and practices of the present masculinities and their effects on Basotho men with the aim of finding a possibility of alternative more ethical ways of being a man. In the next chapter I explore the effects of Christian churches on Basotho men and how they also incite and reinforce the practices of resistance of Basotho men in the order of gender.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Contextual Theologies of Liberation and Male Domination in Lesotho

#### 5.1 Introduction

In the first chapter I indicated that there are four themes which provide historical structures within which the operations of masculinity in Lesotho can be understood. Those themes are war, politics, mine labour migrancy and Christian churches. The first three themes were explored in the second, third and fourth chapters on the history of masculinity, exploration of the *Sekoele* philosophy and the interface of nationalism and masculinity respectively. The fourth one, because of its immediate theological relevance, was reserved for this chapter. It refers to the encounter of Basotho men with the Christian missionaries since 1833. How this encounter has come to frame the operations of masculinity which, appears to resist change in the order of gender, is very important to this study, which is searching for alternative, more ethical masculinities.

As with the previous chapters, the history of the operations of masculinity in the context of the Christian churches needs to be explored. The need for the exploration lies in the fact that the attitude of the resistant movement called *sekeole*, challenged in this study, does not stop with a search for an “authentic” cultural identity of the Basotho people. Within the context of the Christian churches, the same phenomenon is manifested in the competing religious discourses about what constitutes “real” and “authentic” Christian life; where specific religious beliefs, traditions and practices are interpreted as representation of “real” Christian life as it should be. The impact this situation has on gender relations should not be taken for granted. Just as the dominant discourses about *Bosotho*, seen in the previous chapters, the dominant discourses about a “true” *Christian* life held by the Christian churches in Lesotho appear to sustain and perpetuate male domination. Though the two types of discourse have historically been engaged in a sustained struggle for domination over Basotho people, they are “*lia-thoteng-li-bapile*” (the most complementary intimate pair) in the sustenance of male power as one of the members of our Reflecting Team once put it.

Against this background, in this chapter, I want to, first, explore the history of the encounter between Basotho men and Christian churches. The investigation starts with the encounter with the Christian missionaries, which laid the founding structures within which the churches in Lesotho appear to be operating to date. In this study these first missionaries constitute a significant intelligentsia of the dominant founding Christian churches' discourses. I want to demonstrate how their Christian discourses induced Basotho men's resistance and how that resistance further deepened the roots of the traditional gender discourse which was maintained by male *lebollo* practice. As we have seen in chapter three and four, the *lebollo* institution enshrines the most enchanted social and religious values that hold together the traditional Basotho society.

The clash between the founding Christian missionaries and Basotho men represents a clash of competing religious discourses. These discourses merit our attention in this chapter. Secondly, I want to argue that both the dominant Christian churches and the traditional Basotho gender discourses equally serve the interests of men rather than women in Lesotho. Through the help of the contextual theologies of liberation, I want to show that both discourses complement and sustain each other in the maintenance of male domination in Lesotho. I argue that they should not be maintained and need to be replaced by new discourses which will help to give birth to new alternative, more ethical ways of being a man. Thirdly, in line with the research questions and aims of this study, I want to search for the traces of alternative more ethical masculinities in the churches' religious beliefs, traditions and practices which can challenge the present dominant masculinity to embrace change in the order of gender, as I have been doing in the previous chapters.

For clarity's sake, I found it useful to organise this chapter in two parts. The first part deals with the history of the encounter of Basotho men with the European Christian missionaries. For methodological purposes, Foucauldian historical methodologies of archaeology and genealogy, as adopted in the second chapter, form the framework of the first part. The second part is about a theological reflection about male domination which the historical part will highlight. The framework of this part is the theologies of liberation and social constructionism. The theological method of the contextual theologies of liberation has been introduced in the first chapter. The pastoral implications for the care of men as they struggle with changes are also explored.

## **Part one**

### **A History of the Encounter of Basotho Men with the European Christian Missionaries**

#### **5.2 A Competition of Discourses**

In order to appreciate how the encounter of Basotho men with European Christian missionaries impacted on the traditional Basotho men, it is necessary to situate it within a broader context of an encounter between two competing discourses – Sesotho and European. Machobane (2001a:7-63; 2001b:127-158) has captured this competition in his argument that behind the missionary zest of the nineteenth century, missionaries laid a European imperial consciousness which desired to subjugate and control that which it encountered because of the belief that it could be conquered. He argues that Christianity and Western civilization connived in the attack of the Basotho culture and religion. He remarks that the imperial consciousness took precedence over the Word of God – the Bible, so that the encounter was not merely a religious conquest but a civilising enterprise at best.

Sanders (1975:122-132) makes a similar argument. He demonstrates that the concern of the missionaries was the spread of European civilization, which in their minds was just civilization. They saw it as the inevitable concomitant of the preaching of Christianity. Casalis (1861:2), one of the first French missionaries to Lesotho, validates this conclusion. He writes that the task of the missionaries in the colony of the Cape of Good Hope was to provide the local peoples “with the advantages of an enlightened civilisation, while they imparted to them the blessings of the gospel”. It is not farfetched, therefore, to conclude with Machobane that Christianization and Westernization meant one and the same thing in the minds of the Christian missionaries. What is important is how Basotho men resisted the enterprise and the conquest.

Manyeli’s (2001:64-101) critical study of the nineteenth century missionary strategy in Lesotho names the Christian missionaries’ method of evangelisation the “Christian conquest”. He distinguishes this method from that of the “political conquest” which was adopted by the colonial imperialists. Manyeli’s distinction of the two methods merits our attention. While he totally rejects the latter, he criticises the former only for an indiscriminate rejection of Basotho’s customs because he actually believes in the supremacy of Christianity over all cultures. We will

see the theological implication of Manyeli's position, especially in the order of gender later. In the context of this study, which seeks an alternative, more ethical masculinity, Manyeli's position leaves much to be desired and should not be maintained. It is sympathetic to the evangelising method which was deeply steeped in the European supremacist imperialist consciousness, which saw other cultures and religions as naturally inferior. As we shall see later, an equivalent consciousness is sensed in the way most Basotho men within the churches think about themselves in relation to women.

Nevertheless, this does not make Manyeli's essay any less important. Its value lies in demonstrating how the missionary and imperial activities in Lesotho have been the star-crossed lovers who pitched their tent in the campaign of the destruction of Basotho cultural and social practices and traditions in the name of Christianization and civilization. The Christian conquest, supported by the British Cape Colony government (Rolland, E.S. Basutoland Records 1868), was aimed at a complete destruction of all that the missionaries painfully assumed to be in disagreement with European ideas and customs (Germond, Lesotho National Archives S 5/9; Manyeli 2001:192-197).

### **5.2.1 *Bohali* and *Lebollo* under the Missionary attack**

The most attacked practices were *bohali* (marriage by cattle or lobola), and *lebollo* (a rite of turning boys into men). The missionary press called *The Little Light of Basutoland*, of 1872 explains the reasons for the missionaries' attack (The Little light, 1872 May, June, July; 1873 January, November). *Bohali* was opposed to the spirit of Christianity; degraded the woman; rendered impossible all family life, and all proper bringing up of children; commercially unprofitable; insurmountable barrier to all progress, civilisation and good government; and the basis and substance of the system of heathenism. They saw *Lebollo* as a debasing custom; *mophato* (the circumcision lodge), as a place of filthy rites and a school of the grossest and most debasing immorality which can be imagined; bottomless pit of filth and deprivation, a diabolical school of vice and corruption; a taproot of heathenism. In short, they regarded these practices as totally incompatible with Christianity. They saw them as immoral and un-Christian.

What the missionaries were not aware of is that, that which they labelled immoral and unchristian constituted the religious and spiritual expression of the Basotho. Customary life and



religion are inseparable in Basotho society as with most African societies. Religion is a “public commodity”. The *Lebollo* institution guaranteed the communication of religious and spiritual values and tenets which impacted on people’s lives in the everyday interaction with their world. Some of these tenets were intentionally kept secret from those who had not undergone the *lebollo* induction (Machobane 2001a:7, 24, 25, 32; Manyeli 1992:65-66, 68-79; 2001:91). By attacking those practices the missionaries and the colonial government launched an attack on the Basotho religion itself.

Manyeli (2001:67-72) argues that their uncompromising attitude was rooted in their deep belief that any compromise would lower the “standard of the Gospel”. The notion of lowering the standards underscores the classification of the Basotho by the missionaries as “natives”, “kaffirs” and “heathens” in relation to the superior “West” peoples. This categorization identified Basotho with lack of civilization, barbarism and savagery, while Christianity was identified with European civilization (Ellenberger 1938: 35-38, 120-121,128,182,187,189,205, 247). In short, the missionaries believed that the nineteenth century European culture was infinitely superior to anything African/Sesotho, and so they found it difficult to respect customs that were radically different from their own – customs related to sex, marriage, polygamy and bride-price (Thompson 1975: 73-74). For this reason, Manyeli (2001:92) rightly describes the strategy of the Christian conquest as the war between Christianity and non-Christian traditions. He (2001:80) notes that some Basotho chiefs, who are considered representatives of chieftain masculinity in this study, resisted.

In the previous chapter, on nationalism and masculinity, section 4.2.1, I hinted that the chiefs’ resistance to colonial rule was motivated more by the defence of their chiefly power and the privileges that come with it. Here I want to stress the religious dimension of that power. In chapter three on *Sekoete*, section 3.1.6, it was argued how the practice of *lebollo* was defended by the traditionalists. The emphasis there was put on the political dimension of men’s resistance to neo colonialism. Here the emphasis is put on the religious dimension of resistance. I want to highlight that the *lebollo* practice in the traditional Basotho society is not only a social institution with political implications. It is a religious institution as well. Its connections with chieftain masculinity should not be taken for granted. I am interested in how this combined religious force resisted the missionary strategy and policy which is taken here to represent the Christian religion

in Lesotho. It provides some images of the operations of masculinity at the founding phase of the Christian churches in Lesotho. The focus is put on the implications of the religious resistance for the order of gender.

### **5.2.2 The *Lebollo* institution as a religious symbol of resistance to the Christian religion**

According to Machobane (2001a:23), the Christian missionaries admitted that Africans, in this case the Basotho people, were reluctant to reveal their religious beliefs to them. Casalis (1861:238) notes that they did not have a sound knowledge of Basotho religion and its ideas because it “remained unintelligible to all except initiated persons”; that even when they were revealed it was “presented under such a mean exterior that the spectator imagined them to be mere trifles without meaning”. Because of this reluctance, Willoughby (1928:6) concluded that Africans would rather choose humiliation of being taken for fools or completely ignorant of any sort of religion rather than reveal their religious beliefs to outsiders or those who had not won their confidence.

That which appeared like foolishness to Willoughby was actually a tactic of disarming a suspect in their curiosity. The institution of *lebollo* played a crucial role to this effect. Machobane (2001a:24, 25) remarks that *mephato* (initiation lodges), where the initiates traditionally spent between three to six months, were sacred centres of culture and religion. Because national survival depended on it (Thompson 1975: 5), the institution prohibited not only the uninitiated from knowing how it conducted its affairs, but also strangers such as the missionaries. In this way *lebollo* was a religious symbol of resistance to a foreign religion. The employment of “a strange language” (Laydevant 1952:59) during the induction into manhood was another tactic by which resistance to missionary invasion into the territory of traditional manhood was effected. It prevented missionaries from knowing the essentials of the initiation curriculum (Machobane 2001:25).

In the third chapter, 3.6 and 3.8.1, we saw that the institution of *lebollo* is closely linked to that of *khotla* (a social space for men where they gathered around the chief; where social and political issues were attended to). Even at *khotla* the presence of strangers was frowned upon (Manyeli (2001:91). These institutions enshrined social values such as marriage, Basotho men believed it was up to them to guarantee and ensure their protection as they themselves were their product. I

want to emphasise that this duty was more than a social duty. It was also a religious duty at the same time. Laydevant (1952:55) observes that a man who had not passed through the *mophato* was treated as an outcast in society. He could have neither animals nor fields. No girl would have him as a husband just as a man who underwent it could not marry a girl who had not.

In this way *lebollo* represented the institutionalisation of not only men's social and political interests, but also their religiosity and spirituality. The question is how this religious and spiritual institutionalisation impacted on men's relationship with women. As we shall see as this chapter unfolds, the interests of women within this institutionalisation were subjected to those of men. It appears to represent a spiritual ordering that cuts across the social order for which men take it to be upon themselves to defend. In the context of the encounter with western missionary activity which attacked it, the male *lebollo* as a religious institution helped and continues to support Basotho men's resistance against the idea of Christianity as a superior religion. In short the *lebollo* institution was the corner stone of Basotho traditions, customs and religious thought (Machobane 2001:139). It was a bastion of the social and religious system of the Basotho.

Even though Moshoshoe I was lenient and allowed the missionaries to bring back their converts from the initiation lodges, *lebollo* never lost its appeal and momentum (Machobane 2001:139). Dieterlen (*Leselinyana* April 1 1883) attests to the grip of the practice even on the converts. He reports about a male covert who unexpectedly announced to his converted father his readiness to undergo the rite together with his three boys. When his father tried to stop him on the basis that he was already a man who had even solemnised his marriage in the church, the man told him he was not asking his consent. He was just informing him. Dieterlen also reports about many other incidences where a number of newly wedded men and other young men of marriageable age were ready to contravene the prohibition to undergo the rite imposed by the missionaries' influence. They were consumed by the desire to acquire manhood and they knew where it could be attained.

With regard to *bohali* (marriage by cattle), Manyeli (2001:84), though he defends it, he nevertheless remarks that there are "secondary and deleterious elements" that emanate directly from the custom. It gave some economic advantages to the girl's family. It ensured the authority of the husband while by the same tint it relegated the wife to an inferior role and low position.

Machobane (2001b:133, 137) mentions the reasons why Basotho men and women rejected marriage without *bohali*, as was demanded by the missionaries. The young men were anxious and dreaded to lose their progeny to the extended families of the wives. The young women feared the societal disapproval which regards women married without *bohali* as *matekatse* (prostitutes). Another reason for women was the trepidation of bearing children with questionable legitimacy within their father's extended families.

### **5.2.3 Marriage by cattle (*bohali*) as a religious symbol of resistance to Christian religion**

Marriage represents another dimension of this religiosity, which the *lebollo* rite prepared boys and girls for. According to Laydevant (1952:59), one of its principal aims, among others, was to equip an initiate with the information about the mysteries of sexuality in view of marriage. The knowledge about marriage, acquired during this training, appears to be part of the knowledge that could not be disclosed to the uninitiated and strangers. Machobane (2001a:24) observes that the fact that the missionaries were not yet married, contributed in the blockage of communication between them and Basotho men. A man was not yet complete unless he was married. He was regarded unfit to share a serious conversation with married men then. Mackintosh (1907:85) mentions an incidence whereby chief Molapo, Moshoeshoe's son, excluded Coillard from any meaningful engagement in his affairs because he was a bachelor. He changed his attitude only on the eve of Coillard's marriage. According to Coillard, it was then he considered him a man and could confide his affairs in him and ask him for advice.

### **5.3 A Power Struggle in the Encounter between the Christian Missionaries and Basotho Men**

Besides the strong attack on the customs of *lebollo* and *bohali*, other practices were denounced by the missionaries as un-Christian and adversative to the teachings of Christ (sanders 1975:123, 125). One such practice was cattle raiding (Casalis 1889: 227). We saw how significant the practice of cattle raiding was, as part of the masculine discourse of the time in chapter two, 2.1 and 2.2. The attack on this practice reveals the struggle for power in which the missionaries and Basotho men were engaged in, all in the name of their religions.

In October 1848, the practice of cattle raiding sparked a display of resistance to the missionary activity on an unprecedented scale, while at the same time it re-energized and invigorated

traditionalism (Ellenberger 1938: 39-40; Thompson 1975:149-159). Moshoeshoe had ordered a cattle raid on Batlokoa. When the missionaries learned about it, they instructed their male converts not to participate in the activity and threatened to deny them communion if they did. The result was a wide spread renunciation of the Christian religion. The standard of Christian life deteriorated as many converts returned to their pre-Christian customs and habits (Manyeli 2001:76). Molapo, Moshoeshoe's second son about whom Machobane (2001b:143) remarks that he probably was the most powerful chief in the country then, and other members of Moshoeshoe's family, turned their backs on it. Mopeli, Moshoeshoe's brother who had studied in the Cape declared that he would rather surrender to the devil than to relinquish his rights.

Given the circumstance of the disputes over land between the Batlokoa and the Basotho at the time when Moshoeshoe ordered the raid, the disputes which had involved the colonial government, many Basotho men were convinced that the attack was justified and were angered by the missionaries' intrusion (Sanders 1975:150-151). We have already seen in the second chapter, 2.4.5, how the issue of land was a significant element of masculine discourse of the time. According to Sanders the missionaries' intervention even angered the great chief of the Basotho and believed that the missionaries were claiming too much power. Because of this experience Moshoeshoe advised Sechele, the chief of the Bakwena of Botswana not to believe in Christianity even if he allowed his people to. He was convinced that a chief should not place himself under the power of another.

Against this background it is not far-fetched to interpret the encounter between the missionaries and Basotho men as an encounter of two religious powers, one seeking control and domination of the other and the other resisting that control and domination. In this light, the resistance of Moshoeshoe to be proselytized by the missionaries makes a lot of sense. Casalis' (1889:232) assessment of his resistance says it all. "To be converted was in his eyes a dream which certain white men entertained". It appears that he had not been unaware of the cost of the missionaries' proselytism and its implications on the everyday life of a person. It meant relinquishing all those things being a Mosotho had given him – the privileged position of chieftaincy, which was a product of the masculine discourses of the time, as I have argued in the second chapter (2.4.1 and 2.4.2) on the history of masculinity. While it meant giving in to the power of the missionaries, who happened to be male, on the one hand, it also meant giving up the power he strategically

secured as a man on the other. The name of that power is great chieftaincy (Sanders 1975:19-25; Damane 1968: 17-19).

Thompson (1975:95-98) notes that despite Casalis' influence on Moshoeshoe to abandon certain practices, this latter could not abandon those practices which were central to the structure of the society and to the power, the wealth and prestige he enjoyed as the king. For Thompson such customs included the one he calls "clientship", which I suspect refers to the custom of having *bahlanka* (servants) by rich men, and polygamy. Moshoeshoe was not ready to relinquish the power these customs and others gave him until death. Mokhachane, Moshoeshoe's father, never trusted the missionaries until he died. He despised them. In his consideration the only good thing they brought to the country was sugar (Casalis 1889:82-83). According to Machobane (2001b:147), Mokhachane died in 1855 unconverted.

Another factor which backs the interpretation of the encounter between the Christian missionaries and Basotho men as an encounter between two religious powers is the missionaries' attack on the *lebollo* practice. When they instructed their male converts not to participate in the raid of the Batlokoa against Moshoeshoe's command, the missionaries, in the name of their Christian religion, provoked the wrath of *lebollo*. *Lebollo* was both a social and religious institution (Casalis 1861:261-268). In the third chapter, 3.6 and 3.6.2, we hinted that the institution, among others, inducted Basotho men to be loyal subjects of their chief. The figure of a chief in the consciousness of the custom was a national symbol with a religious dimension to it. He performed social religious functions of national interest (Casalis 1861: 124, 214, 225, 230-231, 256-258, 331).

Considering this background and the broader political climate of the time, it is not difficult to understand the reaction of Basotho men. Brown (1960:212) notes that the political climate within which the incidence of the raid of Batlokoa occurred, was dominated by a wide spread conviction of the imperial colonial power, that the abolition of the power of chiefs and the dismantling of the local social institutions and laws would benefit Basotho people. This belief can be sensed in the argument of the Chief Magistrate, Mr Griffith, in the Annual Meeting held at Maseru on the 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1873. Griffith argued with the chiefs about the opposition the latter had shown to the establishment of shops in the country. He accused them of injuring their

country by doing so. In the mind of Basotho chiefs it appears the issue was not about commerce. It was about land which they suspected the traders would take as theirs (The Little Light 1873 September). This belief can also be indirectly sensed during the National Gathering of 1874. Among the issues that were raised was the power of chiefs. Basotho men wanted the colonial government agent to speak to the commoners through the chiefs (The Little Light, November, 1874).

In the light of the above, Basotho men appear to have sensed in the position of the missionaries, Christian religion serving the interests of the imperialists in the name of civilization. And this was enough to stir their religious consciousness which enabled them to be critical of Christian religion in their context. In the encounter between Christianity and Basotho men, we, therefore, see in the concrete, religion functioning as a social force that resists the control of another religious consciousness which considered itself as morally superior. Casalis recalls a night during which he was kept awake by the “yelling and dancing” of “thousands of heathens” who had gathered at their chief’s residence, Letsie, at Morija. He says “It was a frightful anachronism” (Ellenberger 1938: 91, 93). Machobane (2001b:143) says the missionaries suffered as a result of their “cultural arrogance”.

Their instruction to the male converts against the command of Moshoeshoe had touched the centre nerve of the traditional Sesotho masculine spirituality, which bonded a chief with his male subjects. This spirituality was not abstract. It was expressed in the way men lived their everyday life, which among other things, framed them to be loyal to the chief, who was considered to be vested with social and religious functions of national interest. In the two previous chapters, among others, we have seen that what are often referred to as national interests are often the interests of men themselves. Here lies the significance of the *lebollo* institution. It protects the interests of men.

In this chapter, the emphasis is put on the interpretation of this institution as a religious institution, as Manyeli (1992:65-66, 68-79) does. Traditionally *lebollo* was not just about giving instruction on a body of moral, social and ethnic laws and traditions etc. It was “a ritual of regeneration”. It functioned to prepare the initiates for “a new birth” and introduced them to “a new kind of life”. To achieve this goal, symbolism played an important role in the *lebollo* rite.

Manyeli remarks that the *lebollo* rite, whether male or female was performed during the night, something which symbolised a passage between confusion and clarity. It was itself a symbol of psychological and spiritual transformation rather than a physical one. People who had not undergone the rite were believed to be incapable of performing rational acts; and psychologically and morally unfit. They were taken to be uninformed about mysteries of life such as human reproduction and its implications for married life and the mysteries of the sacred or the holy.

Ellenberger's (1938:174) remark about why Basotho were reluctant to have their girls receive lessons from the Catholic nuns makes sense in this light. Their social belief and custom upheld that all girls had to be married and bear children. It was the noble thing for them to do. The rootedness of the belief among the Basotho can be sensed in the National Gathering of 1874 in which about 4000 men had gathered. Among the laws and regulations that were objected to, was the law which allowed a girl of 16 years of age to refuse to be married against her will (The Little light, November, 1874). In a sense it could be said that Basotho's reluctance in these cases can be understood to have been a concrete sounding of the grip of the *lebollo* institution on its products as a social and religious force.

The effects of this institution on people's life were supposed to, traditionally, be felt in their everyday life. It is a religious institution whose sacred physical spaces are not monuments such as the churches and shrines in the Christian religion and other religions. It is human beings. This is demonstrated by the burning of the initiation lodges which symbolises a total break between boyish and manly ways; between girlish and womanly ways. A new man and a woman who was being created at the *mophato* (initiation lodge), was expected to become, himself/herself, a religious monument in which the everyday social and spiritual values were kept. The person, not a monument was supposed to attest to the social, religious and spiritual values of the people. I think that this is what the Western or European colonial and missionary Christian agents did not come to appreciate about Basotho religion. This symbolic act and value is very significant. It says a very lot of Basotho relational values vis á vis Western materialistic values. I think this is what Machobane (2001a:7) means when he argues that the very customs the missionaries were attacking were permeated by religion so that customary life and religion are inseparable. When Casalis (1861:237-240) and his colleagues jumped to the conclusion that because there were no recognisable religious monuments, objects and ostensible worship, Basotho people did not have



an idea of God, they missed something which the *lebollo* institution hid from them in the very persons they were trying to change.

As Manyeli (2001:91) argues, the psychological transformation of which *lebollo*, with its rites and rituals, is a symbol, includes spiritual values which, as it were, were the foundations of Basotho's social system. If this is true, then the *lebollo* institution represents religion and its spiritual values as a social force which not only the founding Christian missionaries but also most of Christian Basotho of today, appear to have taken for granted. They often saw it, as most of the Christian churches do today, as merely an impediment to 'true' religion and civilisation. And the *lebollo* institution appears to have always resisted this perception in the ways we have shown up to now. It continues to do so even today.

Without specifying which customs, I want to believe that the Catholic bishops of Lesotho (Lesotho Catholic Bishops' Conference 1988:52-54) came to realise this when, in their pastoral letter, asked their faithful to examine themselves in relation to Basotho traditional customs. They ask why those customs which have been discredited by the church, and continue to be discredited today still persist. They suggest that they cannot die out because they are kept alive by the faithful themselves. They ask what is it with them that the faithful would choose to temporarily suspend their Christian obligations to satisfy them. They suggest that there must be something precious with those customs which the faithful are not ready to lose, something which Christianity, at least as it is proposed by the church in Lesotho, cannot give.

I want to believe that among the customs the bishops refer to is *lebollo*. In the context of this study, the interest is how the practice as a religious spiritual social force and an expression of the traditional Sesotho masculine spirituality continues to operate as a force of resistance, not only to churches, but also to the present changes in the order of gender. Against this background and that of the third and the fourth chapters it is not difficult to see how masculinity is a decisive factor of Basotho religion and spirituality as a social force. In my opinion, the *lebollo* institution reveals this point more than most of the Basotho are aware of. It gives us some cues to the depths of the spirituality of the traditional Basotho men as a social force that cannot be taken for granted in the transformation of our society.

This masculine spirituality appears to have effectively operated in resisting of the Christian proselytism, which equated the embrace of Christian religion with a definite break with customary life (Sanders 1975:123). It appears that this spirituality framed how Basotho men reacted to the Christian proselytism. The missionaries appear to have underestimated this dimension. Perhaps they were blinded by their immersion into a consciousness that had already classified everything un-European as uncivilised and therefore inferior. They labelled traditional customs as “paganism” or “heathenism” which they saw as incompatible with the “authentic” Christian life (Ellenberger 1938:79, 90, 91, 93; Manyeli 2001:75-76).

I think it is this attitude, which I choose to call European christianism, which took Christianity and the European way of life as superior that invigorated Basotho men’s resistance to the missionary and the colonial imperialist attack on the local customs. That resistance further helped Basotho men to maintain the status quo in those customs from which they benefited as men in ways that will be clear as the participation of a woman figure in this resistance is explored.

### **5.3.1 A woman in a male resistance movement**

Of great importance in this study is the role played by a female figure in the expression of the resistant religious consciousness that was dominated by a masculine spirituality. Mackintosh (1907:137-138) makes reference to such a curious figure. Machobane (2001a:41-42; 2001b:144) mentions her as one of the representatives of a “syncretic religious movement” that emerged as a result of the encounter between Basotho religion and Christianity. Her name is ‘Mantsopa Makhetha. ‘Mantsopa was already a renowned prophetess before the display of traditionalism against the missionary activity. She had been a significant consultant to Moshoeshoe I in predicting incidences of war. During the period of the revival of traditionalism, she articulated a “theology” that was directly at odds with that of the missionaries. She claimed she had been in heaven and so was better knowledgeable about Christianity than the white men, whose authority was based on the reading of a book, meaning the bible. She proclaimed that the way to heaven was not narrow as the missionaries and their book claimed. She argued that it was broad, as God was the utmost supreme of sovereigns, to whom the multitudes moved back and forth in visits with God. She also declared the legitimacy of polygamy. According to Machobane, tradition has

it that God was believed to be the greatest practitioner of the custom. According to Smith (1939:120), ‘Mantopa’s influence grew to the extent that she was believed to have possessed powers to wheedle rain through prayer. In 1862, she, together with prophetess Katse and prophet `Nai, were dispatched throughout the country by Moshoeshoe to pray for rain.

In the context of this study, which speaks for a gender-ethical consciousness, the role of the prophetess is significantly remarkable in specific ways. First, it challenges a subtle tendency of most Basotho men to consider themselves as the most suited defenders of traditional values and makers of history. It “partly” deconstructs Basotho’s history as exclusively a men’s history. For instance, Damane (1963:100-111) who was considered an authority on Basotho history, in his inventory of the paramount chiefs of the Basotho, simply leaves out ‘Mants’ebo, a female paramount chief, even though she ruled Lesotho for twenty years. After the death of paramount chief Seeiso, in 1940, he creates a sort of a power vacuum and jumps to Bereng, who became Basotho monarch in 1960. He does not even attempt to explain what happened between 1940 and 1960 yet the title of his book is the *Histori ea Lesotho* (History of Lesotho). He only mentions that she was a caretaker acting for Prince Bereng, who was a minor at the time.

Damane’s silence about ‘Mants’ebo’s acts when she was at the helm of the country makes a great deal of noise in the context of this study which is in search of alternative, more ethical masculinities. It tells a story of male chauvinism at its best in Lesotho. It proclaims the protest of that male chauvinism that had temporarily been defeated when ‘Mants’ebo ascended to the highest office in 1940. Epprecht (2000:3-12) has challenged this gender bias in the historical literature on Lesotho. I have already explored the importance of ‘Mants’ebo in the second chapter (2.4.9.1 d). It evokes the memory of articles one and two of the Basotho’s customary laws, as codified in the *Melao ea Lerotholi* (The Laws of Lerotholi). The first article proclaims the power and the authority of the Paramount Chief over every Mosotho. The second stipulates the succession to chieftainship, which is identified as a form of masculinity in this study. Only the first born male child of the first married wife or the first male child of the next wife if the former did not have a male offspring qualified to fill the position of paramouncy (Melao ea Lerotholi article 1 and 2). I suspect there is history which still remains to be explored behind these articles. It is not the purpose of this study to explore it. My suspicion is based on the

circumstances in which Lerotholi, who proclaimed those laws, became the paramount chief against Motso'ene who also claimed the right (Damane 1968:101-105).

'Mantsopa conspicuously disrupts the common gendered silence in which women are erased from the face of history while the praises of men as leaders and makers of national histories, histories which often shape national identities are sung. How does 'Mantsopa do this? She does it by challenging a supremacist European consciousness that had come to absorb Christianity as its own in the consideration of the missionaries. By claiming to have been in heaven, she claimed for herself an authority that enabled her to challenge the missionaries' authoritative claims of the possession of a superior knowledge of the Christian God and what that God willed for the Basotho. She challenged this perspective with another from which God and God's will appeared to have been sanctioning the then accepted Basotho's social system by portraying God as the most supreme sovereign whom multitudes flooded the way to and from "him" and by endorsing polygamy. In this way she reveals how relative Christianity is.

As Manyeli (2001:81) rightly argues, "Christianity is *always* [my emphasis] affected by particular cultures" in which it exists. "[I]t does not exist in space and in time without being affected and influenced by a particular culture". In terms of a postmodern critique (Van Rensburg 2000:36-37), 'Mantsopa challenged the absolutist claims of the superiority of the European Christianity over all non-European religious forms and cultures. Such an absolutist European Christianity represents an ideology of the European supremacist consciousness which propelled the missionary zealous activity of the nineteenth century Christianity. A postmodern critique challenges us to vacate self assuring theological thrones and to speak about God and God's will in less arrogant fashion which the European and North American Christianisms are inclined to do even today.

From a gender perspective, 'Mantsopa challenges the present Basotho women in two ways. First: that they can participate in public affairs of the society. Second, that if and when they do, they should be careful not to sing the praises of an unethical masculinities but protest against them. They need to be careful about the language they use or else they risk playing into the hands of male chauvinism. I think this latter challenge forms the greatest hurdle for Basotho women and men. The way we are used to talking about God appears to sanction some practices which, in

most cases, fall short of the demands of social justice and ethics. The contemporary theologies of liberation, especially feminist theologies have engaged in significant and compelling critiques of dominant traditional God language on both theological and pastoral grounds (Neuger & Poling 1997:29-34). They challenge a masculinised God language which sanctions women's subjugation in the church and society. They insist that the concepts of God must be evaluated according to a functional criterion; we must ask whether they are liberating or oppressive as Soelle (1981:11) would argue. They are not interested in a metaphysical truth claim about God's being in itself typical of the traditional Western christianism is general.

Earlier, I have used the word "partly" to describe the significance of 'Mantsopa's prophetic position. It brings us to the second important point raised by her position. The word highlights the ambiguity of 'Mantsopa's role in the revival of traditionalism against the missionary activity. While she contributed meaningfully to the battle against the missionary European supremacist religious consciousness that sought to conquer and replace Basotho's religious consciousness, she, in the same tint, without being aware of it, sang the praises of the local male consciousness, which seems to have been, and continues to be, even today, at the heart of the Basotho religion and social system then. She endorsed and glorified male power and men's interests in the custom of polygamy and depiction of God as the king.

Moshoeshoe himself as a polygamist attests to the benefits of the custom for the man who had achieved the status of a great chief – a king. According to Thompson (1975:98), when Casalis persuaded him to abandon his junior wives Moshoeshoe is reported to have said "But in that case ... who will prepare food for me and for the strangers who come to visit me?" Thompson further mentions the other reason for the great chief to resist Casalis' persuasion. Those women, for whom he had paid *bohali* (brideprice) also served the sexual needs of the king's subordinate and allied chiefs and ambassadors from other local ethnic rulers who visited him. In this way, some of the women he married served to sustain his manly interests which were concealed by the mask of chieftaincy or kingship. From this angle, by proclaiming polygamy as legitimate and representing God as king, 'Mantsopa sang the praises of the customs that served the interests of men and male power even at the expense of women just as the missionaries were singing the praises of the supremacist European consciousness in the name of Christianity at the expense of the Basotho.

The ambiguity of 'Mantsopa's prophetic position raises theoretical questions which in the broader context of this study, advocating for an alternative, more gender-ethical consciousness acquires some degree of practicality. How could things have been, had 'Mantsopa's theological position not been saturated and held prisoner by the masculine social discourses of her time? What could have been the effects of her position on Basotho men's consciousness if she had risen above the masculinity discourses of her time as she had done with the missionaries' Christian life discourses? How would Moshoehoe and the chiefs and the men of her time have reacted to her? Although these questions are theoretical and somewhat hypothetical and speculative, I think in context of the current debates on gender equality in Lesotho can stimulate creative imagination which could encourage concrete and practical ways of challenging the status quo. They provoke the agency to develop alternative consciousness which would challenge the dominant masculinity discourses which have fed the male supremacist inclinations for centuries in Lesotho.

Notwithstanding the criticism of 'Mantsopa's ambiguous prophetic position in relation to gender relations in her time, this same ambiguity, however, helps us to further see the double standard entailed in the position of the missionaries against the custom of *bohali* (brideprice). 'Mantsopa indirectly pointed at it when she challenged the missionaries' authoritative claims based on their reading of the book, the bible. At the time when they were charging Basotho custom, that it was against the Christian spirit and degrading women, that it turned them into slaves, as we have seen earlier, the missionaries seem to have been blind to the position of women in the book which was supposed to be the source of their authoritative claims.

For instance, in specific Paul's letters, believed to be inspired by God, wives were supposed to be subject to their husbands and slaves had to obey their masters in everything (II Colossians 3:18, 22; I Timothy 6:1-2). In the first letter to Timothy, Paul prescribed how women should dress and adorn themselves; that they should learn in silence and with all submissiveness. He permitted no woman to teach or to have authority over men; a woman should keep silent. Paul's justification of his position is that Adam was formed first, then Eve; not Adam was deceived by the woman and so transgressed (I Timothy 2:9-14). In the book of Exodus (20:17) wives are part of their husbands' possessions. From the perspective of these biblical texts, one is tempted to be

curious about how the missionaries treated their own women. The hunch is that their women were no different from Basotho women. What the bible sanctions in these texts is what the custom of *bohali* permitted. Both of them give men advantage over women. Now, when the bible teaching in these texts is adopted by Basotho men in their different churches, male power is doubly reinforced while women become doubly disempowered.

Trible's (1984) study entitled the "*Texts of Terror*", put under the limelight the unspeakable acts of men in the bible committed against women. In the perspective of this study, Tribble's study underscores the deadly side of the patriarchal culture of the biblical times which appears to attract most Basotho men who read the bible and interpret it as the "will" of God. The stories of terror in which Basotho women are victims as a result of the reading of the bible by Basotho men still remain to be told. Though this would be an interesting thing to do, it is not the purpose of this study. Some of the stories a Mosotho woman, 'Matsepo Nthunya (1996:4-11, 86-94) tells in her narrative, and the study of WLSA (Women and Law in Southern Africa) (2000b) on sexual violence in Lesotho gives us a hint about the horrors women experience under the patriarchal culture in our Basotho society. Now, when the two cultures, biblical and *Sesotho*, combine, the situation of most Basotho women becomes doubly worrying to an alternative gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

Another point I want to make is that the clash over the custom of *bohali* (marriage by cattle) between the missionaries' western Christian discourse and the Basotho's discourse about marriage produced a double effect on Basotho men. While it encouraged them to resist the missionaries' discourse, it helped them to preserve the status quo in which they benefited and continue to, even today. "Paying" *Bohali* gave men, and continues to give them even today, special benefits which women on whose account it is paid did not get. It gave a man and his family children (Machobane (2001b:133, 137). It gave the father of the girl an economic advantage. It conferred to the husband, as it continues to, a superior position in the marriage relationship between a man and a woman and the household structure while it relegates the woman to a lower position, as Manyeli (2001:84) acknowledged.

This situation, motivated me to inquire about how Basotho men, regard women within the present dominant *Christian* and *Sesotho* discourses. The experience of the Reflecting Team members will guide us through.

### 5.3.2 The Reflecting Team

In one of our first Reflecting Team sessions, we were exchanging thoughts about the present position of women in our traditional Sesotho customs and in the Catholic Church in Lesotho. Members referred to biblical passages above and the like to demonstrate the superior position of men over women. One member argued that women cannot become priests and girls serve at altar because, as he put it: “*batho ba bats’ehali ba sitoa ho ba mots’eo ka kerekeng. Mono ke sebaka sa batho ba batona hobane ba tso’ana le Molimo, ‘me ke kamoo Molimo a entseng kateng. Batho ba batona ba ts’oanetse ho sireletsa tlotla ena eo ba e apesitsoeng ke eena Molimo ka sebele sa hae. Bibe le ha e ts’ehetse taba e joalo. Ho feta mona, le ka Sesotho ha se ntho e lumellehang hore motho e mots’ehali a ka etsa mosebetsi o etsoang aletareng. Re ts’oanetse ho ipotsa hore na ke hobaneng Jeso a sa ka a khetha batho ba bats’ehali hoba baapostola ba hae*” (female persons cannot occupy the sanctuary in the church. That is a place of male persons because they are like God, and that is the making of God. Male persons have to protect this glory which God put on them. The bible does not support it. Besides, even in Sesotho it is not permissible for a female person to perform functions performed at the altar. We must ask ourselves why Jesus did not choose female persons to be his apostles).

In the same vein, another played on the supposed morphology of the word “monna” (man) (“mo” prefix denoting mostly persons and “nna”, myself), to demonstrate that a male person is more than just a perfect image of God. He argued that when God named the man to distinguish him from the woman he had created from the man’s rib he used the word “monna” which means the very self of God. He argued that God saw *himself* in the male person so that maleness itself is the symbolic presence of God on earth. From this interpretation, God cannot be other than a male himself.

It is such interpretations which make it difficult for Basotho men to think of God as female. One member said it is difficult for men and people in general, including women, to think of a female God because that implies God has a vagina. A God with a vagina is the most ridiculous idea



people can ever think of. From this interpretation it becomes clear that even the language we use to speak about God is not metaphorical or analogical. It is believed that it represents God as God in God's self out there, wherever *he* may be. The opinions of the team members reflect this prevalent God-language which appears to sustain the dominant spirituality of most Basotho men.

Clanton (1990:66-106) has explored the effects of exclusive masculine language about God. She argues that men "find support for pride and control" in it while it inflicts low "self-esteem" in women. It reinforces "God-complexes" in men. This appears to be the situation with Basotho men as reflected in the position of the Reflecting Team members. It appears to have led them into a self-righteous lording over women. From this position, it is not difficult to conclude that most Basotho men and women in the churches worship a masculine archetype. The point is, the way we conceive and speak about God, has a profound impact on how we live our life on a daily basis. Our conceptions of God influence our conceptions of ourselves.

When I asked the team members how prevalent the ideas we were exchanging thoughts about were among men in the church, some members said they believed most of the men held them. It is just that it is one of the things taken as givens by most men and women. "People don't talk about obvious things, you know" as one member put it. As I listened to them speak, I got the impression that they themselves held such ideas with the exception of one. This other member argued that this position is based on the way the bible talks about men. He argued that in his observation, the bible often speaks in favour of men against women. He continued that this may be behind certain interpretations of specific biblical passages to affirm male superiority. As he argued his position, the interest in those popular interpretations of the bible and how they sustained male power in the name of the "authentic" Christianity at the grassroots level grew even more.

I sensed that those interpretations were soaked in a perception of Christianity as a superior religion (Manyeli 2001:95) whose dogmas and practices cannot be questioned. In the context of this study, I want to put under the limelight, the similarity between the European imperialist consciousness and the male supremacist consciousness in the church and Sesotho culture as displayed above. They are indeed the "*lia-thoteng-li-bapile*" (the most intimate partners) when it comes to gender issues as one member observed. They both sing the praises of male power. As I

listened to the team members passionately but reflectively exchange thoughts about this issue, a question kept on ringing in my mind. To what extent is Basotho men's consciousness of themselves as superior to women influencing the way they read and interpret the bible? I could not resist the temptation of thinking that there was a link. Against this background and that of 'Mantsopa's prophetic position, I think that if attention is not paid to how the bible is used in our Lesotho context, the present efforts of transformation will continue to be undermined. Many will continue to be suffocated by the present male religious hegemony as 'Mantsopa was in her time. If there is any political significance of 'Mantsopa's story, it is that of revealing the dynamics of male power of her time. It presents the challenge to be aware of them in our time.

### **5.3.3 'Mantsopa caught up in the dynamics of Male Power**

Foucault's historical genealogical method already described in the second chapter assists us to see at a much profound level the dynamics of power in which 'Mantsopa was entangled. Those dynamics are made bare in the history of the encounter between Christianity and Basotho customs and traditions we are investigating. The genealogical method reveals the structures of power that control people in the established traditions. With the metaphor of the prison, Foucault explains how power is implemented to control people's lives. He demonstrates that our notion of "truth" compels us to create laws and regulations that are sustained by power. Power operates in imposing certain ideas and theories on others. It subjects people to specific modes of living and thinking (Foucault 1981:93-96).

From this perspective both the missionaries' position and that of 'Mantsopa, which is evaluated here as, in substance, Basotho men's and women's position, appear to be embroiled in the subtle and concealed power of the religious knowledge they had of God; the knowledge that kept them bound to structures and traditions of their ethnic groups. The satisfaction and the encouragement brought by obedience to them made it difficult for them to see alternatives that were open to both of them in their encounter. Because 'Mantsopa could not see through the power struggle between these men, she kept on signing the praises of the religious structure which oppressed women. To day I get the impression that most Basotho women are signing the praises of the dominant masculine religiosity fed by specific biblical texts which serve the interests of men. I believe this

is the challenge facing men and women in the present fundamentalist approach which emphasises “the bible says so” and “*ke moetlo oa Sesotho*” (that’s Sesotho custom) discourses.

In this light the ambiguity of ‘Mantsopa’s position challenges Basotho men and women of today to ask critical questions which an alternative, gender-ethical consciousness wants them to answer. What are the benefits men reap when the bible is read and interpreted in specific ways? Which benefits make it difficult for them to accept change even when it is at the expense of women? What praises of men do women sing to the benefit of men but at the same time sing at their own expense? What would happen if they stopped singing those praises? How would men react? Is there a possibility of composing a new rhetoric that would give birth to an alternative social system in which the humanity of both men and women will be equally valued and affirmed? These questions constitute the core of the challenge faced by Basotho men and women of today as an alternative, more gender-ethical consciousness is gaining momentum in Lesotho. They compel us to critically look into the ambiguity of the religion we live by.

If this is not done, I believe a great deal of the present efforts of transformation would not be having a strong transformative effect. In the light of the history of the encounter between Christianity and Basotho religious culture, it becomes clear how religion, Christian and Sesotho, was used to subjugate women. However, it should be recognised that Sesotho religious culture was also a locus of resistance to imperial Christianity. With this aspect of religion, the present efforts of transformation are challenged to evaluate the present forms of religiosity in Lesotho and distinguish between oppressive function of religion from a liberating one. The liberating dimension of religion appears to be taken for granted by many Basotho men and women including those engaged in the efforts of transformation in the order of gender. This point needs our attention here.

#### **5.4 The Ambiguity of Religion: A force of Domination or Resistance?**

In his exploration of the role of religion in black Africa, Éla (1986:39-53) raises important point that merits attention in this study. Contrary to a belief that religion is, in itself, an alienating force, Éla maintains that it is in its historical verification in praxis within a society that it can be assessed. He argues that it is in the involvement of people in the daily social processes and history that the religion to which they hold on obtains its meaning.

This accepted, it becomes easier to see how the ideology of Christianization has served the interests of the imperial and capitalist expansionism of Europe in Lesotho and elsewhere. As we have seen above, the association between a civilizing mission and evangelization was out to reproduce European consciousness in which civilization and whiteness on the one hand, and barbarism and blackness on the other, were tied together. In this consciousness, Christianity was used as an effective tool for the Europeans to get what they wanted under the pretext of the “good” of the colonized peoples. Éla’s argument also helps us to see how Sesotho religion and masculine spirituality have served the interests of men both in Basotho’s traditional social system and the Church. It puts under the spotlight Basotho men’s claims of superiority in the social order in the name of the Basotho religion and the Judeo-Christian religion in the present Lesotho.

In short, Éla demonstrates that religion has been, and will always be the locus of the elaboration of a critical consciousness. And this is what appears to be taken for granted by many Basotho men and women in their religiosity today. With this I want to emphasise that religion should not be reduced to a relationship with the supernatural, as most of us like to think in the present Lesotho. It should be considered as a social force that provides the resources for a protest against an established order. It is in this respect that Basotho men’s resistance to the Christian conquest should be appreciated. It must be seen as the first form of struggle against the colonial imperialism and Christian conquest. Against the background of the previous chapters it can be appreciated how customs, traditions and practices represent Basotho men’s religion which reveals consciously but in disguise, Sesotho nationalism which resists Western hegemony. In this chapter it becomes clear how this religious nationalism has resisted the imperial European nationalism which was dressed up in a Christian blanket. In the perspective of this study, it is this imperial European nationalism on which the western christianism has thrived.

However, in the context of this study, which investigates factors that encourage Basotho men to resist change in the order of gender, we notice the alienating aspect of both religions. We notice how Christian religion and Sesotho religion have connived in the control of women in the Basotho men’s consciousness. This is revealed in the position of most of the members of the reflecting team above. In this situation, it becomes curious how things would be if those who are

engaged in the work of transformation tapped into the liberating dimension of both Christian and Basotho religions and confronted the present forms of women's subjugation. I have the impression that as long as this is not done, the status quo will continue to be sustained. Women will continue to be oppressed by the very religions to which they have subscribed while the same religions exonerated men from ethical responsibility and accountability demanded by a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho.

What is reflected in the liturgy of the church and the bible appears to strengthen Basotho men's consciousness of themselves as more important than women more than most of us are aware of. Thus combined with Sesotho masculine spirituality which frames the same men in the church, it is not difficult to see how Basotho men are doubly encouraged to resist change in the order of gender while women are doubly discouraged and oppressed. In this way both Christian (as upheld in the catholic church of Lesotho) and Sesotho gender discourses have become a social force that serves the interests of men in the everyday living. And I think this is what even those who genuinely seek transformation in the order of gender often take for granted.

Oduyoye (1994: 167-168, 173-174), further assists us to understand the point at stake here. She emphasises that religion is a double-edged sword, a weapon that can alienate as well as liberate. She argues that when women's spirituality is exploited by men and by agencies of the community, a process of general exploitation becomes inevitable. She says when "men make God [...] women worship them." She argues that most of the time women's spirituality has been largely shaped by the processes of women's socialization which has been dominated and controlled by men's spirituality. For this reason, it happens that when women express themselves about God, they often model themselves on a male understanding of God, or else would have to seek men's approval for what they want to be.

The argument of Oduyoye is relevant to the Lesotho situation. When Basotho men were resisting the imperial European Christian domination in favour of the custom of *bohali* (brideprice), women were caught up in the battle of power. Men from both camps simply talked about women. Only the voices of men were loud not women's. When 'Mantsopa raised her voice, it was subsumed by a male voice. From my experience with almost all the Basotho women in the Christian churches in Lesotho, I always get the impression that when they speak about God in

the context of our social life, there is not that much difference between them and ‘Mantsopa. For this reason, I want to emphasise that the history of the encounter between the Christian missionaries and Basotho men should not be taken for granted. It constitutes the historical framework within which the present women’s under-evaluation should be understood. The position of this study is that it should not be taken for granted in the present efforts of transformation in the order of gender.

### **5.5 The Encounter of the Christian Missionaries and the Basotho: A Historical Condition for Understanding Debates on Gender Relations in Lesotho**

The historical encounter between Christianity and Basotho customs and traditions is identified in this study as a historical structure within which the operations of the present masculinities and their implications for the order of gender can be understood. This study maintains that the steam with which the Christian agents attack Basotho customs and traditions is the steam by which the present resistance to changes in gender relations will be reinforced. We have seen in the chapters three (3.6.2) and (3.7.3) on *sekoete* and four (4.3.1) on the interface of masculinity and nationalism how traditional male *lebollo* discourses continue to support men’s resistance to the present shifts in the order of gender for their benefit. We saw it again in chapter four (4.3.1) when we discussed how the cultural groups opposed the 2003 Sexual Offences Act on the basis, among others, of the custom of *bohali*.

Among the reasons of this rejection of the move by the LCD (Lesotho Congress for Democracy) government to have 30 percent representation quota for women in parliament and within the political parties’ leadership as a way of promoting gender equality, the opposition leader of the ABC (All Basotho Convention), Tom Thabane (Public Eye December 11, 2009), is reported to have said that he did not approve of a situation in which women occupied positions of leadership simply because they were women. For him that has the “*potential to seriously impact on standards*” (my emphasis). Any empowerment should not be done at “the expense of capable men”. He holds that the initiative is based on “*impractical little theories that are out of step with realities of life on the ground as we live them from day to day*” (my emphasis). In the same publication, the BNP (Basotho National Party) leader, Metsing Lekhanya, believes that “the best woman or man” should get the job “without any reference to gender”. He holds that what should be done “is to empower our women with the skills to be able to compete with men on an equal

footing”. This done, Lekhanya believes “we will have levelled the playing field without *compromising standards*” (my emphasis).

The position of these opposition political party leaders is here taken to represent a consciousness that appears to be prevalent among Basotho men, including even those who support the ruling party, both in the society and in the churches regarding the issues of gender. I get the impression that most of the male membership of the LCD (Lesotho Congress Democracy), do not speak against the official position of the party on this issue, as the opposition leaders do, for purely political gains. Basotho men generally appear to be suspicious of the ideologies which challenge men’s power both in the churches and the broader society. They tend to perceive moves to transform gender relations as influenced by “theories that are out of step” with either the so called “authentic” Basotho customs or the “authentic” Christianity. Whenever the issue of increased women’s participation in decision making bodies is raised, the issue of standards is often raised by men. The question of “standards” gives us a cue to the prevalent politics of gender relations in the present Lesotho. The notion underscores the fear of loss of power that seizes men when the women empowerment discourse rears its head. In the context of this study, which seeks alternative, more ethical masculinities, the question is what kind and whose standards. While the issue of standards is significant in social systems, it should not be used as a tool of marginalisation of others in terms of gender, class and religion etc. This is what this study which advocates for a gender-ethical consciousness maintains. It does not condone any form of repression in the name of standards when those standards in fact mean standards of a particular individual or a group to discredit others.

In the light of the historical encounter of the Basotho with the Christian missionary and the British imperial agents, the issue of “standards” should not be taken for granted especially as it is used to maintain men’s resistance to transformation in the order of gender today. Just as the missionaries and the British imperial agents believed that the Basotho way of life then was below the standards of European civilisation and christianism, so are Basotho men of today when they think about women within Basotho customs and traditions, notwithstanding the churches’ practices. Just as Basotho men resisted the domination of the missionary and the imperial supremacist tendencies concealed in a talk about standards, the same attitude has to be resisted

when Basotho men use it to maintain their desire to dominate others, especially women and children.

Basotho history provides examples of such resistance led by women themselves within both the colonial and the customary structures of the Basotho. For instance, female chiefs spoke in favour of women's right to vote and run for public office when men resisted during the campaign for independence in the early 1960s. At a *pitso* (public gathering) 'Mamathe challenged the men's claim that women were "children" by custom and financially irresponsible and therefore should not be granted political rights – rights to vote and running for political office. She argued that "women should not be made slaves" (Basutoland Constitutional Commission Verbatim Records 1963, 660). Epprecht (2000) has explored many of such women resisting male domination in the everyday life of the Basotho, contrary to the prevalent customary assumption that they are incapable.

Even today, there are many untold stories which demonstrate women's agency that subverts male domination sustained by the prescriptions of some customary cultural practices and popular gendered beliefs and expectations. In one of the Reflecting Team's monthly meetings, we noted there are women who refuse to put on mourning dresses after their husbands' death. One member of the team told us of an incidence where when a woman was confronted by the family members for her decision, she told them that the mourning regulations symbolised by the dress clashed with the demands of the work she was doing. She told them now that her husband was gone she needed the job all the more to sustain the wellbeing of her children something which the family members were not ready to do. Among other things, traditionally when a woman is mourning the death of a husband, she must be at home before sunset. The woman saw this as one of the restrictions. It must be noted that according to the custom, men are exonerated from such prescriptions when their wives have passed away. Another member, who is a skilled bricklayer and fulltime engaged in building houses for people, told us a story that challenges male hegemony in this industry. One day his woman employer told him she had found a woman bricklayer and building stone cutter, whom she wanted to take care of the cutting of the stone pillars to be used to make the veranda. Not only that, she decided that the woman will take care of the building of the entire veranda part.



In short, with such stories of Basotho women challenging the status quo, the history of the clash between Christianity and Basotho customs and traditions which produced a history of the triumph of men's interests over women's is challenged. Such stories represent the ruptures of an alternative, more gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

## 5.6 Summary

In the forgoing part we saw that the history of the encounter between Basotho men and the European Christian missionaries can be interpreted as the encounter between two competing discourses. European discourse wrapped in a Christian garb, sought to dominate Basotho's social and religious discourse and this latter resisted that domination. The most attacked customs on which the traditional Basotho's social system is based were the *lebollo* rite (a custom of turning boys into men) and the *bohali* (marriage by cattle) practice. The European Christian missionaries fiercely attacked these practices. They believed they were the heart of all that was unchristian and fell short of civilised standards of Europe. Basotho men resisted that supremacist attitude. It is in the course of this resistance that the status quo in the order of gender was reinforced. We are still caught up in it even today. We saw how a female, 'Mantsopa, to be precise, has partly challenged the supremacist tendency of the missionaries but failed to challenge the same dynamic within Basotho's cultural, religious and social system. We saw how religion can be a social force that can resist control and domination as much as it can alienate people. By being grounded in their religion, Basotho men were able to resist the domination of the European Christian religion. In the same resistance Basotho men's male superiority was strengthened. From this angle Basotho's history of survival is at the same time a history of male domination. This domination is challenged and rejected in the theological reflection that follows in the next part.

## **Part two**

### **THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

#### **5.7 Introduction**

The following theological reflection is not only grounded in the history of the encounter between Christianity and Basotho religion as explored in the first part. It is also informed by all the previous chapters in as far as they reveal the contours of masculinity in Lesotho. They set the historical and cultural context for the theological reflection.

#### **5.8 Contextual Theologies of Liberation**

In chapter one (1.4.1) I introduced the contextual theologies of liberation as one of the theoretical frameworks of this study. Contextual theologies represent an epistemological break (Bevans 2002:3-15) with the traditional theologies. Whereas the classical theologies conceive theology as a reflection on the ever unchanging scripture and tradition, and these, as above culture and history, the contextual theologies recognise the validity of the present human experience – culture, history, contemporary thought forms etc as part of a theological discourse. Within this framework, theologies of liberation emphasise “the oppressor and the oppressed” as a model for theology (Ruether 1972:10-16). Whereas the traditional theologies consider the truth as the conformity of the mind to a given object, the contextual theologies consider it as an engagement in the process of transformation and construction of a new world where the wellbeing of all is protected. The conception of truth as a transformative engagement challenges all knowledges which claim to be neutral while, in fact, they sustain and legitimise domination. It rejects the idea of the world as a static object which can only be interpreted. It calls for commitment to the oppressed and the marginalised – doing of theology with those who suffer rather than surveying and evaluating their agony. It prefers the hermeneutics of the deed rather than just knowing and speaking (Frostin 1985; 1988; Bosch 1991:423-425).

These assumptions underlie the theological consideration of the present situation of gender relations explored in the first part and the previous chapters. The consideration starts with the hermeneutical suspicion (Segundo 1976:7-38) that specific Basotho traditional cultural artifacts and traditional Christian religious artifacts are maintaining the status quo in favour of men

against women. A gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study represents this suspicion and it wants change. In this situation, paraphrasing Berryman (1987:87), I want to emphasise that the theological consideration should underscore three basic and related tasks: to reinterpret the Christian faith in terms of women who are oppressed; to criticise our society and its ideologies which promote male domination; and to observe and comment on the practices of the church itself, and of Christians. This theological consideration makes, necessarily, a conscious use of social theory because it accepts human experience as a theological locus. For this reason, the social construction theory is adopted to engage the gender issues as they have been thus far revealed in the first part of this chapter and previous ones. I maintain that there is a relationship between the method of the contextual theologies of liberation and the social construction theory in as far as the analysis of social realities like gender is concerned.

### **5.8.1 Contextual theologies of liberating praxis and social constructionism**

Social construction theory is a theory within the social sciences. Hermans (2002: vii-xxiv) has explored its relationship with practical theology. He shows that the link between the two lies in the latter's practice orientation which hooks it to the former. The whole volume on *Social Constructionism and Theology* (Hermans, Immink, De Jong & Van Der Lans 2002) explores the possible areas in which theology can use the expertise of social construction theory. Gergen (2002: 12-14) believes theology can find the social construction theory useful in removing "the mantle of truth beyond perspective" and challenging the taken-for-granted principles or ontological certainties. This is precisely what the contextual theologies of liberation – feminist (Ruether 1972; 1975; Soelle 1981; Schüssler 1981; 1983; Oduyoye 1974; 1986; Schnieders 1986) and black (Cone 1979; Fowler 1981; Goba 1988) do as they grapple with issues of transformation in a society where certain voices are privileged as representative of the truth of the social fabric while others are silenced and disqualified. In the context of this study which speaks for an alternative gender sensitive consciousness, Gergen's remark underscores the importance of challenging the taken-for-granted masculinity principle, which is the organising principle of the Basotho's social systems as well as the Christian churches' systems in Lesotho.

Cochrane, De Grunchy and Petersen's (1991:2, 26-35, 36-54) define practical theology as a "reflective theological activity which seeks to relate the faith of the Christian community to its

life, mission and social praxis”. As they argue, a theological activity should be committed to social transformation. It should be a commitment to the dismantling of the edifices of unjust social structures which oppress people and the reconstruction of a society built upon wholly different principles from those of division and domination. The position of these authors, challenges the churches in Lesotho to always seek not only an understanding of the social context of their ministry but also to engage in a committed ecclesial analysis. This is important because ministry is conditioned by the social context and sometimes some of the issues we may speak against in the society may be a reality within the ranks of our church itself. In short, theology is a “critical social praxis” committed to the service of humanity within a concrete human situation as Goba (1988:45) argues. In this light, the theological reflection in this chapter attempts to challenge the dominant Church discourses that are a part of an oppressive discourse in Lesotho in terms of gender. For this reason, the churches are challenged to engage on a committed ecclesial analysis and see how they are zipped in the ways of the society they are supposed to be ministering to. Social constructionism provokes this agency to critically reflect on the established orders which contextual theologies are a result of. It qualifies as a valuable instrument of a truly theological exercise. The critical reflection in contextual theologies reveals that our constructions of social realities, which are based on the perceptions and experiences of powers that be, such as males in Sesotho culture, can be problematic for those who have not participated in them. It exposes their damaging effects on our humanity and God’s creation (Neuger & Poling 1997:26).

With their commitment to a liberating praxis, the contextual theologies of liberation are easily attracted to social theories like social constructionism with its tendency to pay attention to interaction and communication in terms of action. The interaction and communication in society involves power relations in which the construction of selves happens (Van Der Ven 2002:296). In terms of God talk (Van Der Ven 2002:306-307), social constructionism helps us to challenge the dominant representations of God, especially when these representations are part of our religious speech acts. The speech acts, their form and content are a social construction. Put differently, religious beliefs, from a constructionist perspective, are a discursive social action. Religion itself is a discursive artifact (Van Der Lans 2002:29-30, 34-35).

Popp-Bair (2002:41-61) and Day (2002:74-76) help us to see the connection between social constructionism and a narrative approach to conversion. The word conversion here is not meant in the evangelical sense but as a social process of change. Conversion as a social change of discourse underscores the intent of the contextual theologies to speak for the transforming acts of Christian faith in the everyday social processes. In the gender perspective, which is the immediate concern of this study, Popp-Bair and Day help us to see the possibility of conversion of Basotho men in terms of change of the masculine discourses which have damaging effects not only on women and children, but also on the men themselves. Conversion in this optic underscores a shift in how social realities such as masculinity are interpreted.

As Hermans 2002:121) emphasises, social constructionism, is not only about the creation of meaning. It is also about the change of meaning, something which highlights the transformative dialogue with what is different. In terms of postmodern theology, social constructionism challenges theology to change the meanings of our traditional theological tenets. To be specific, it challenges it to go beyond metaphysical foundationalism to embrace contextuality or the situation as it stands. The implication for practical theology is that there is no fixed theology. Practical theology will always be changing as our contexts change through social interactions. For this reason, a postmodern theology uses a variety of tools, such as a participatory action research method, borrowed from critical social theory for recovering models for human transformation in a broken and fragmented world. In a social constructionist framework, theology, as a situated discourse rather than a philosophical system, is liberated to enter fully the public arena of the competing ideologies (Wallace 2002: 93-102) in society.

In this study, our theological reflection is situated within the context of the ideology of masculinity as a social force of domination, and challenges it. The challenge consists in revealing that the metaphysical and ontological considerations of masculinity are part of the ideology of male power which has managed to infiltrate classical theological discourses and the pastoral discourses and approaches. Positioned within a social constructionist framework, this study stresses that all forms of masculinity, whether clothed in theological and religious garb, do not have a metaphysical or ontological foundation. Rather they are a construction that is historically and situationally dependent as I have argued in the previous chapters. If this is true, it means that no one form of masculinity can claim a normative value for all others. All of them will be judged

by their effects on others such as women and children both in the communities of faith – the church, or a broader civil society. This does not make our theological reflection on this situation any less theology or a-theological. It is not a matter of which takes precedence in theological discourse between revelation and human experience, as Van Rensburg (2000:76-98) tends to argue when he seeks to validate his theological epistemology he calls “diaconiology”. Diaconiology puts emphasis on the classical theological basis theories – scriptural references and church dogmas, and methods.

On the contrary, our theological reflection as situated within the method of the contextual theologies of liberation, seeks to engage in the re-reading and reinterpreting of the bible and the church dogmas, and theological methods in the light of the present experience of male domination that needs to be changed. The use of scripture and church dogmas in the traditional methods has been such that they were made to serve the interests of the controlling western ideologies rather than the non-western interests. In the perspective of gender, the suspicion is that the use of the bible and specific Basotho cultural artifacts within the Christian churches and the society at large continue to be used to serve the interests of the controlling masculine discourses even at the expense of others, especially women and children. This is what this study is challenging. It challenges the practical theologians and the churches to listen to the voices of the oppressed such as women rather than the dogmas which tend to proclaim disembodied truths, which tend to make it difficult for them to listen, to speak about their experience and make it difficult for women to speak out. Poling’s (1991; 1996; 1997) exploration of issues of abuse of power in terms of gender, race, class and culture from a theological perspective, demonstrates how the churches have become accessory to the silencing of women and violence against them. He maintains that the churches through the traditional theological tenets and dogmas have been incapacitated to challenge and respond ethically to the abuse of power both in the churches and the society at large.

I believe that the hermeneutical circle of Segundo (1987:8-10) which starts with the moment of suspicion that certain cultural forms and social systems have not been developed in a vacuum, is relevant to our theological reflection. It hooks well with the social construction theory whose expertise is valued in the analysis of the take-for-granted male domination in Lesotho. Both of them do not take for granted the social structures and realities within which human life is lived.

Both of them pay attention to the historical and cultural specificity of our practices. In this light, I want to emphasise that male domination is generated and sustained within specific modes of socio-cultural organisations and thought patterns, including the religious organisations and thought patterns. It is these specific modes of socio-cultural structures and thought patterns that need to be paid attention to even in a theological discourse.

There are many other critical questions which this position taken in this study brings to the surface which are not within its scope. One of them is the prevalent theological definition of the bible as the word of God. From the perspective of Segundo's hermeneutical suspicion and a constructionist point of view, the bible is also a human word. I believe Brown (1981:1-22) was aware of this reality when he argued that it is the "human word of the almighty God". From the position of this study, it is also the history's and people's word about God, and for that matter, mostly men's. That is, it is a theology of mostly men of their context and time. This contradicts Van Rensburg's position in his epistemology of "diaconiology". As long as we do not have a more humble understanding of what the bible is, the longer we will fall prey to the dominant male discourses represented in it.

## **5.9 Male Domination under Scrutiny**

The positioning of this study in the contextual theologies of liberation helps us to engage in a critical reflection on the present dominant Sesotho masculinities which resist transformation in the order of gender. The social constructionist theory which is a partner to the theological method of our reflection, helps us to challenge the mantle of male supremacist tendencies based on religious and social discourses whether *Sesotho* or *Christian* as taught by the churches, claiming to represent the truth about masculinity beyond perspective. The aim of our reflection is to reveal the erroneous theoretical assumptions upheld by the dominant church discourses. Its thesis is that these assumptions should not be maintained because they recruit Basotho men into the camp of domination and oppressorship, whether knowingly or not.

### **5.9.1 Male domination as a product of a theological error**

The position held by most of the members of the Reflecting Team referred to in the first part of this chapter (5.3.2) reflect the dominant masculinity discourses beyond perspective within the

Catholic Church. Their position is taken here to represent the position of a wider population of Basotho men in their different church traditions. Borrowing from Segundo's (1985:6) analysis of male domination in the church in the context of Latin America, it seems their position is based on "a theological error" that is supported by the constitution of the society in which Jesus lived and did his ministry. The society in which Jesus lived and did his ministry was a patriarchal society (Schüssler Fierenza 1976:39-61). The theological error consists in thinking that everything Jesus did in his time is normative without modification for all times; without taking into consideration the society in which Jesus lived. This way of thinking is characteristic of the *sekoele* philosophy as I have argued in chapters three and four.

As Segundo stresses, women in the society in which Jesus lived, for instance, had less say in the public affairs and in anything having to do with authority on a societal level. Jesus did not change anything because he did not face the challenge or he was not sensitive to it just as he was not sensitive to other challenges that would emerge later like weapons of mass destruction, global economic depression, black consciousness movement, women's liberation movements, gay and lesbian movements or associations of people living with HIV and AIDS, associations of people living with disability etc. To spread his message he used men, the apostles, and for other tasks he used women and their generosity. Stagg and Stagg (1978:9) have made this point clear when they argued that we need to see people in the community or the world of which they are a part, including the cultural and religious patterns around them. They insist, this holds for Jesus, Paul and all other biblical authors.

If Stagg and Stagg's argument is true, it makes sense to assume that Jesus and the biblical authors were influenced by their socio-cultural climate in the way they spoke and exercised their ministry, and, for the latter, the way they wrote what they wrote; and the way they wrote it. In this line of thought, I think Schüssler Fierenza's (1979a:86) argument should be taken seriously by the fundamentalist bible users and pastoralists. She argues:

the biblical authors did not intend to write a report of historical facticity of a history in the modern sense of 'what actually happened' but they, like all ancient writers, wanted to point out the meaning and importance of what had happened. They wrote, moreover, the Gospels, for Christians of their own time, and addressed their questions and problems. They selected from the rich flow of traditions about Jesus those stories and sayings that appeared to be significant for their own faith and



community. How they did this can be seen from the way Matthew and Luke incorporated into their own Gospel accounts the Gospel of Mark. Since the New Testament authors lived in a patriarchal culture, they attempted to make the Christian message acceptable to the Jews as well as the pagans of their time.

From the premises of this argument, Schüssler Fiorenza (1979:87) insists: “most of the genuine Christian ‘herstory’ is therefore probably lost”. The suspicion of this study is that, perhaps, it was lost in the “*history*” of the male biblical authors and their patriarchal culture.

If what Schüssler Fiorenza argues above is true, we should also agree with her (1981:96) that there will always be a tension between the bible as a historical book and its theological claims. However, what is important is how this tension is resolved. Among the different ways in which it has been resolved in the history of biblical interpretation, Schüssler Fiorenza mentions what she refers to as the “doctrinal paradigm”. In this paradigm “the bible is understood in terms of divine revelation and canonical authority.” And this appears to be how the “diaconology” of Van Rensburg functions. The “concern is directed to the truth-claims, authority, and meaning of the bible for Christian faith today.” It regards “biblical authority in ahistorical, dogmatic terms.” “It insists on the verbal inspiration and literary inerrancy of biblical writings.” In this perspective “the Bible does not just communicate the Word of God, but it *is* the Word of God. It is not simply a record of revelation, but revelation itself. As such, it functions as proof-text, ‘first principle’ or *norma normans normata*”, in latin.

I have the impression that this way of perceiving the bible is the most dominant in almost all the churches in Lesotho and it feeds the fundamentalist interpretations of the bible which are also given the stamp of the biblical truth that cannot be challenged. In the order of gender, when these fundamentalist interpretations combine with the dominant traditional social systems of the Basotho, which are regulated by the absolutist masculinity principle, men’s resistance to change becomes even hard to crack. It is commonplace to hear people, mostly men, argue that a woman was created out of a man and therefore... or as apostle Paul says “women should submit to their husbands” etc. Within the traditional Sesotho discourse, a corresponding attitude is frequent: “ke kamoo ho lokelang hoba kateng ka *Sesotho* ha kere!” (that is how it should be in *Sesotho* isn’t it!), as members of the Reflecting Team often observed in our exchanges.

As Schüssler Fiorenza (1981:96) further argues, the bible, functioning as a proof-text, is easily used to rationalise and validate positions already taken. “The general formula is: ‘Scripture says, therefore...’ or ‘This argument is also borne out by Scripture.’ The proof-texting method presupposes that the bible reveals eternal truth and timeless principles which can be separated from their historical expression.” In this way the bible is used to normalise the positions people have adopted and turn them into binding norms – *norma normans normata* principle. It is used “as a means of stifling opposition, enforcing set opinions and understandings, defining church membership stalling change and defending abuse” as Ringe (1976:23-24) has remarked. This way of using the bible should not be taken for granted if any meaningful transformation is to take place in Lesotho. The position of this study is that those who desire genuine transformation in the order of gender should be critical of the tendency of using the bible as a political weapon against women’s struggle for liberation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1981:103).

What the dogmatic tradition appears to be blind to, as Schüssler Fiorenza (1981:97-98) argues, is that biblical writings are theological responses to specific pastoral situations and problems. They are written with the aim of serving the needs of the community of faith, and not to reveal timeless principles, or to transmit historically accurate records. This means that Christian faith and revelation are always intertwined within cultural, political, and societal contexts. Norman (1969:74-79) articulates this reality in his exploration of the nature of a “Gospel”. He argues that the “form Gospel is the one unique literary product of the New Testament Christianity. ... Other people produced letters, chronicles of the acts of famous men, apocalyptic discourses, but only the early Christians produced ‘Gospels.’” If Norman’s argument is true, then we should conclude with him that “the content of a Gospel is as much a product of the present experience of the men who transmitted the tradition”. We should emphasise with him that the literary form “Gospel” “must be held to be characteristic of a distinctive element in early Christian faith.”

This accepted, the point that needs to be emphasised is, the bible is not a book with timeless, eternal values. Rather, it is a contextual book and its contextuality reminds us that our theology should be contextual too (König 1998:22-23). Its language, therefore, should not simply be “translated” into contemporary language of faith as though it were a simple act of changing a bed’s sheets. It is a complicated issue of hermeneutics (Schillebeeckx 1973:31-45) in which the preaching of the gospel needs to be “situationally determined” because the church and its

pastoral activity are conditioned by social and cultural circumstances (Hervieu-Léger 1973:19-30). The theological position of this study is, therefore, that we should not make the biblical expressions of Jesus' words and actions and biblical writers in their concrete circumstances ahistorical and absolute. It maintains that their words and actions should not be dissociated from the historically conditioned cultural and linguistic categories of the period in which they emerged. Nolan (1988:8) expresses this idea well when he argues that the gospel "has no fixed verbal content"; that the different historical circumstances give rise to different formulations of it; that the particular set of words or expressions that one may choose to use depends upon the language, culture, politics and needs of a particular time and place.

This accepted, in the Lesotho context, a reading of the bible must take stock of the demands of a gender-ethical consciousness. The set of words or expressions on which that reading will depend shall have to be informed by a living alternative language of a gender-ethical consciousness and its relational politics. A living language which this consciousness speaks is a reflection of a changing human experience and consciousness (Russell (1976:82-98) within our Lesotho context. For this reason, we must be concerned with whether the language we use is a true expression of this experience even as we read and interpret the bible. The language of a gender-ethical consciousness is a language of equality of all human beings. The interpretive approaches to the bible of feminist, black, and Latin American liberation theologians attest to this reality. West (1991) has demonstrated it in his South African context. These approaches demonstrate that there is a need to devise a hermeneutic which consciously adopts some fundamental commitment to the poor and the oppressed. The position of this study is that this kind of hermeneutic is important for Basotho Christian men and women who genuinely desire transformation not only in general but also in the order of gender. In other words, the favoured expression – "option for the poor", associated with liberation theologies, in the context of Lesotho, should become conscious that "the oppressed are women" to use Schüssler Fiorenza's (1981:92) expression. Generalisations are inappropriate. We need to be as specific and as concrete as possible.

Coming back to the issue of the bible as a contextual book, the issue that needs to be emphasised is that we need to see the biblical authors in the community or the world of which they were a part. They must be seen within the context of the patterns of their culture and religion. This holds

for Jesus, as Stagg and Stagg (1978: 9) have demonstrated. In as far as this study is concerned, a similar position should be held with regard to Basotho ancestors, cultural and religious practices and customs. They should be understood in their historical, social and linguistic contexts and should not simply be “translated” into the contemporary Basotho social and cultural contexts without question. They are not normative for the contemporary social context where a gender-ethical consciousness is demanding transformation in the way women are taken in those contexts. In the context of a gender-ethical consciousness, “the bible say so” and “*Sesotho se re*” (*Sesotho says so*) discourses are no longer satisfactory.

The suspicion of this study is that those people, who tend to insist on these discourses, are often doing that because of some self-serving motives. They hide behind these discourses to support their desire to exercise facile authority in the churches and society. They tend to insist that whatever Jesus or Moshoeshoe I or any other preferred ancestor did and what the bible and traditional customs say in general must be a direct norm. For this reason, they disregard any consideration of differences in contexts. They deduce dogmatic conclusions: women cannot be ordained priests and girls serve at the altar; women should not wear that and that in the churches or go to the grave yard wearing that and that. They insist that women should obey their husbands; a woman should believe that God directs her through the husband, making it unnecessary for God to deal with her directly etc. In this way, even the worship of God is controlled by men. These practices and many others regulate what women can and cannot do and how to do it in the church and society. They are sustained by dogmatic conclusions deduced from specific biblical and *Sesotho* discourses and have turned women into “second-class christians” (Gundry (1977:9) or “second-class citizens (Betto 1987:92, 93) in the church and second-class Basotho in the Basotho society. Given this dominant gender theology, the suspicion of this study is that no man would easily regret being a man. Being a woman under such circumstance is undesirable. And I want to believe, this is what recruits men to resist change in the order of gender.

From this tendency, it is not difficult to see how the reading of the bible or interpretation of *Sesotho* tradition is never a neutral enterprise. It is a political enterprise. In terms of the bible, West (1994:18) is correct to insist that our reading of it cannot be separated from our context. We read it as white, black, a member of a social class, race, Western, African, male, female,

chief, bishop, priest etc. For this reason, how men read and interpret it in Lesotho, as Basotho males, chiefs, male chiefs, male politicians, bishops, priests, pastors etc. should not be taken for granted. With Sandra Schnieders (1982:35) I maintain that some biblical texts on women, especially of the New Testament, like the Pauline, attract those who are convinced, for non biblical reasons, that women should be controlled in the church and the households and the society in general. They feel the urge to justify their discriminative control by appeal to the scripture and tradition.

This appears to be the case in the current popular interest in the bible and Basotho traditions in the present situation, where a gender-ethical consciousness is questioning male supremacist tendencies in their many forms in Lesotho. This situation appears to be taken for granted by the transformation efforts in the present debates about gender relations. As a result, women continue to be the underdogs in ways that most of the Basotho are not aware of. Because of this situation Basotho women tend to collaborate with their own marginalisation and oppression without being aware of it. This situation challenges practical theology's commitment to the dismantling of the edifices of unjust social discourses, including the religious ones, which oppress women. The basic premises of a contextual theology and liberation theology, as described earlier, provide practical theology with some means to do so. In terms of social constructionism, it is empowered to challenge the mantle of any masculinity truth beyond perspective and the taken-for-granted masculinity principles or ontological certainties which silence others, especially women. The masculinity "truths" by which most men live in Lesotho encourage them to desire facile authority over others, especially women.

The desire to exercise facile authority among Basotho men appears to be further reinforced by the present dominant social ordering based on a theoretical error that sees female persons as naturally inferior while men are superior. The popular Sesotho adage among the fundamentalist Basotho men which says "*mosali ke ngoana e moholo oa monna oa hae*" (a woman is the first child of her husband) captures this situation. And this is what patriarchy is all about. Chopp (1995:56) defines patriarchy as more than a social arrangement. It is a deep spiritual ordering that cuts through a social order, individual identities, social practices, authority in institutions, cultural images and symbols. I would include even biology. Neuger and Poling (1997:29) observe that when a culture exists within a conceptual error like that of patriarchy and prescribes

rules, roles and rituals around that error no one can truly thrive. Like the theological error, patriarchy is not only a conceptual error. It also is an ethical hermeneutical error.

The ethical hermeneutical error of patriarchy basically consists in sexist interpretation of male and female bodies. As it assigns work roles on the sex-based differentiations, it teaches men that their sense of self and identity, their reason of being, resides in their capacity to dominate others. It encourages them to be dependent on the privileges, however relative, that they simply receive for having been born male. As a result, men tend to feel that their lives are being threatened if and when these privileges are taken away (Watkins 2000:70). They tend to interpret this experience as a kind of emasculation that the conceptual hermeneutical error of patriarchy supports them in rejecting. In short, patriarchy is fundamentally a male power organization in which all relationships are understood in terms of superiority and inferiority. Within this structure, social cohesion is assured by the exercise of dominative power (Schneiders 1986:13). In this study which, among others, is investigating factors that support Basotho men's resistance to change in the order of gender, the distortions that have emerged from this ethical hermeneutical error in terms of religious symbolic systems, theological interpretations and the structuring of culture, merit attention. They should not be left unchallenged as they tend to suppress a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

### **5.9.2 Religious symbols, culture and male domination**

The relationship between religious symbols and their interpretation and human culture have been sustained by certain churches' practices. For instance, in the Catholic church of Lesotho, the translation of the western model of the church in which women have no ministerial right appears to have compounded Basotho men's resistance to transformations in the order of gender. Women in this model are always subjected to male ministerial bosses (Assmann 1987:33). The translation model of a contextual theology as described by Bevans (2002:37-53) helps us to further understand much of the situation in most Christian Churches in Lesotho in a general way. The translation model presupposes that the Christian message is above all cultures or contexts because of the belief in the existence of a "gospel core". The Churches which do not recognise the ministerial right for women seem to have found a fertile soil in the dominant Basotho culture which already has some qualms about women occupying leadership positions. In their turn,

Basotho men also appear to have found in these churches a vindication of male power within Basotho social systems. To put it differently, both the biblical and Church and Basotho patriarchal systems found each other, and have become star-crossed lovers in the camp of Basotho men against women.

In this way, specific biblical texts and the Christian churches and specific Basotho customary systems that serve men's interests have come to symbiotically form a front against transformation in the order of gender in Lesotho. For this reason, Basotho men's embrace of Christianity is very ambivalent when it comes to social justice, especially for women. While they generally tend to criticise the oppressive styles of Western Christianity/christianism on Basotho religion, they tend to endorse its oppressive position on women through the defence of church practices and fundamentalist reading of the bible which undervalue women. For this reason Basotho men's historical war against the imperial tendencies of Western christianism as explored in the first part of this chapter, continues with the present Basotho Christian men on another level as a disguised expression of women oppression. This aspect of the history of the encounter between Basotho and Christian religion has been taken for granted by most Basotho men and women, even those who claim to work for transformation in the order of gender.

Gutiérrez's (1985:42-43) criticism of the church in general is relevant to the Lesotho situation. He argues that the church is partly responsible for the deep disdain for women by justifying its position against them through biblical concepts which support its position. These arguments accepted, it is not difficult to see how Basotho men's negative position towards women is doubly reinforced. Gutiérrez also argues that men have received from society certain categories and ways of behaviour that help them evade the issue of women subjugation. He remarks that churches have a tendency of repeating much of what exists in society. Worsnip (1991:37) has observed a similar phenomenon in the churches in the South African context during the apartheid era. He states that "in various ways many of the contradictions in society are reproduced in the church. We observe, for instance, race, class and sexual contradictions in the Church in exactly the same way as we observe them in society at large." In the context of Lesotho, to be precise, men appropriate the socio-economic, cultural and political relationships and live them within the churches own ranks as much as women tend to repeat the prevailing ideological values of the

society which are formed by the male perspective, as Schwantes (1987:85-87) observed in his Brazilian context.

Dussel (1987: 59-61) observes how the silence of the great church councils or synods about the ministerial position of women reveals the depth of male chauvinism in the church. The silence reinforces present men's resistance to such a possibility. According to Boff (1987:97), women remain invisible even though they are present, because their presence does not count in a macho society. The question is how women are rendered invisible in the church in Lesotho. I do not want to generalise in answering this question. I am aware that there are other Christian denominations which ordain women as pastors and priests in Lesotho. I will rely on my experience in the Catholic Church, of which I am a member. How do women become invisible in the eyes of men who constitute the leadership of this church in Lesotho? This is the question I want to attempt.

### **5.9.3 The invisibility of women in the church**

Even though women constitute the majority of the church membership in Lesotho and largely contribute to its economic welfare, women still remain invisible in the hearts and minds of men in the Catholic Church of Lesotho just as they are in the broader society. Part of this invisibility rests in the dominant "translation" theological model as we have seen in the forgoing section. Another part appears to be borne by the use of Christological and ecclesiological metaphors drawn from a social system that adores male power to describe the significance of Jesus and the Church. Until the salvific significance of Jesus and the Church are liberated from this one-dimensional male experience and are understood anew from the experiences all people, in the case of this study, women, women will remain invisible in the church.

The metaphor of the chief is one of the Christological imageries which render women invisible in the church. And this is not unique to the Lesotho situation. Kabasélé (1991:103-115), for instance, draws from the concept of chief in his culture to explain the salvific work of Jesus. Sanon (1991:92-102) depicts Jesus as the master of initiation who communicates values that lead to perfection. In Sesotho language the title "Morena" (Chief/King/Headman), is used to invoke Jesus in liturgical and devotional prayers and hymns. In the context of Basotho socio-political context the title is used to refer to a male community leader. By custom, even when a woman



occupies the office of chief, it is seldom that she is addressed as “Morena” (chief). The title of “Mofumahali” (chieftess) is used instead. It should be noted that a woman becomes a “Mofumahali” by virtue of her husband or by virtue of her male son, who because of minority, is unable to exercise chiefly power.

The point driven home here is that the title of “Morena” essentially depicts masculinity in its superior form within a patriarchal society of the Basotho. Now, if the argument of Gutiérrez above is correct, that men tend to repeat what their society permits within the church, then, the invocation of Jesus as “Morena” in the Lesotho context should not be taken for granted. It can, aware or unaware, reinforce patriarchal masculinity in the church. As the same title is used to refer to bishops, it is curious how these men exercise power in their respective churches. This metaphor and many others used to talk about God “which have been patriarchalized in the image of human power structures” as Schnieders (1986:48) has argued, need to be “healed” and redeemed by being subjected to reinterpretation in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness.

Lapointe (1986:27-36, 53-54) has explored the Basotho traditional political system of chieftaincy and believes that a Christian community leader can take a lesson from it. He argues that the Basotho have a unique culture into which the Church may be inserted with confidence and daring. He further argues that this should not come as a surprise since the beginning of the nation the Spirit has been working in the person and the world of the Basotho preparing them to hear the proclamation of the Gospel. In the light of the foregoing paragraph, the proposition of Lapointe should not be taken lightly. Its implication for how authority is exercised by male leaders of the Church posits a huge challenge in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness. It baptises patriarchal sentiments and all too easily attributes them to the operation of the Holy Spirit. It is these simplistic inferences that render women further invisible in the church even though they are a majority in the church. The proposition of Lapointe just demonstrates how the presence of women does not count in a macho society (Boff 1987:97). It only counts in as far as it serves the interests of the males who hold the position of leadership in the church. For this reason, the position of Lapointe should be evaluated with caution before it is embraced.

There is another ecclesial metaphor which also merits the attention of this study trying to identify, among other things, factors that encourage Basotho men to resist change in the order of

gender. It is the metaphor of the Church as “the family” of God. In a macho society like that of Lesotho, this metaphor as defined by the Synod of African Bishops of 1994 and Pope John Paul II in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Africa Faith & Justice Network 1996:251-252), leaves much to be desired. Waliggo (1996:208, 209-210) and Orobator (1995:36-38, 41-42) have highlighted its limitations in most African contexts. And the Lesotho context is no different. In most African contexts, family, whether traditional or contemporary, is still hierarchical. First, the father figure who is on top of the hierarchy is still much feared by those on the lower ranks of it. I want to believe it is because of the way they exercise authority. It is mostly a controlling authority. Second, the wife does not enjoy full rights of equality, let alone the children. Most African communities are grappling with the idea of children’s rights and their respect. For these reasons, Sarpong (1996:224) argues that, if not carefully handled, the images such as that of the family borrowed from African culture risk negating what they are intended to affirm theologically.

The observation of Sarpong probes a critical consideration of the selection and the use of symbols and language taken from societal and cultural context in the church. Since culture and language provide structures of interpretation and understanding of realities, we must pay close attention to how those symbols and language reconstruct the church and cast it in different ways. We must pay attention to the effects of those reconstructions on people’s lives in the church. We must pay attention to their social function rather than the abstract truths they are made to express. If this is done it will be easy to raise ethical issues often suppressed by abstract truth claims implied in these metaphors.

This is what appears to have been taken for granted by Lapointe when he suggests that the church may be inserted with confidence and daring into the Basotho culture and a Christian community leader could take a lesson from the Basotho political system. Those who advocate the family image in Lesotho take for granted the fact that in Basotho cultural discourse of the family only “the father is major. All other members of the family, his wives, his children, and his minor sons and daughters are deemed to be below the age of majority” (Duncan (1960:3). Given this reality of the family as a hierarchical social unit, it is not difficult to see how gender determines a woman’s lower position in it. This position, as *Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA)* (2000:59) argues, defines a woman’s status which is tied to the recognition that she

receives and justice for women and girls in this context is mostly not secured. Most Basotho men assume they are entitled to the superior status in this hierarchy in their families and households by virtue of being male. They appear to see it as something not only normal, but also a norm and ultimately normative.

I have the impression that a similar attitude is rife among priests as their status puts them in leadership position in the hierarchical structure of the church. As we have seen above, within the circles of the church, this framework of thinking is supported by a theological error of an ahistorical interpretation of the significance of Jesus and the bible which appears to be influenced by the ethical and theoretical error of patriarchy. When these interpretations are staunchly defended as normative in the church, other alternatives of being church are suppressed. Now with the metaphor of the family taken from the dominant Sesotho cultural discourse of the family to describe the significance of the church, the apparently unassailable position of the male power in the church is further reinforced by the Church. For the fundamentalists, the normative value of these interpretations is so obvious that they tend to think that everyone in their “right” senses should understand and protect. Those who tend to challenge it are likely to be perceived as enemies of the system itself. They are likely to be accused of lacking the “love of the church”. For this reason, a suspicion is that the metaphor of the family can easily be exploited by males who are already privileged in the family structure in the societal context should not be taken lightly. The men who are given leadership in the church have not fallen from heaven. They are a product of their social system which has given men to lord it over others, especially women. If and when this happens, priesthood and bishopric turn into structures of controlling power and not of service to the community of the faithful. They are made to serve the interests of the hierarchically structured male priestly caste than the people they claim to have been called to serve.

The point driven home here is that in the context of Lesotho the metaphor of the Church as the family leaves much to be desired. It plays into the hands of a cultural attitude which considers a father as only a “major” in the family. It is likely to be exploited by men in the church just as it happens in the general society. It should be acknowledged that men who are placed to lead the church have not grown out stones. They are a product of the dominant family system that is being assessed here. Where everything revolves around the male head of the family, other

members, especially women, usually remain invisible. They are forced to seek approval of what they prefer to be from the “major” who can approve or disapprove. For example, a nun from one congregation of women working in one of the dioceses of Lesotho once told me that the local bishop there disapproved their move not to wear veils as a matter of obligation like the other nuns of the same congregation elsewhere. This situation raises ethical questions about relationships between the members of the church within the ranks of the church itself. Should everything revolve around those who are structurally positioned (presently men) at the helm of the church? Who benefits and does not, when things remain so? The point is: the church cannot just ignore the concrete ethical implications of its teachings and preaching within a social context that needs to be transformed. If it does, those teachings and preaching become a part of an alienating force partnering with an alienating system. Only those who benefit from those teachings and preaching, in and outside the church will applaud them. In the perspective of this study, this metaphor appears to be part of an alienating ideology in the present situation of imbalance of power relations between men and women within the traditional cultural family discourse in Lesotho. How it is appropriated and interpreted by both men and women in the church should, therefore, not be taken for granted if we want to avoid repeating the mistakes in our society in the church. The abstract and naïve translation and adoption of it may be a theological legitimisation of the attitude and acts of abusive control of other members, especially women in the church.

There are examples of behaviours which constitute attitude and acts of abusive control of women in the Catholic Church in Lesotho. Men who are involved are often not so keen on the effects of their attitude and actions on women just as is mostly the case in the general society. I recall the story a member of a religious order of women told me about what happened in the parish where she works. One Sunday their priest angrily lashed out “abusive” words to women because the church had not been cleaned up. He denied them communion that Sunday as a result. Only men received it. On another occasion he cautioned women to cover up their heads when they came to church services because he maintained only “loose women”, “matekate” (prostitutes), would come to church with uncovered heads. As this woman told me this story, I remembered the experience I had in one parish where I was temporarily giving a hand because of the ill health of the parish priest. I found that women and girls who did not cover their heads were turned back

from the church entrance by the male chair person of the Parish Council and the catechists. If they got in without being noticed, they would be pulled out from the communion file by those men. Later after the service, I asked them to stop the practice and the chairperson of the Parish Council accused me of allowing a *laiser faire* attitude in the church and the disrespect of the “*lits’ebeletso tsa kereke*” (the liturgy of the Church). I later learnt that this man physically abused his wife, who was a teacher in the mission school and a member of the church choir and almost all the people from his village knew about it.

This kind of treatment of women in the church raises pertinent questions: does the liturgical activity have anything to do with the cause of justice and being ethical? Is there any relationship between personal beliefs and social engagement and being ethical? Searle (1980:13-35) believes that while there is some relationship, it should not be confused with the justice of God celebrated in liturgy. According to him the justice of God celebrated in liturgy consists in people and things conforming to the purpose for which God has made them. Searle’s position raises practical ethical concerns whose answers cannot be found in a metaphysical and ontological framework of thinking in which he appears to be caught up. Who knows this purpose for others? How is it accounted for in the context of utter discrimination and domination: gender, class, racial, age and sexual orientation etc? How is it possible to celebrate a liturgical activity if it is not expressing the real oppressions of people, if it is not moulding a faith that liberates from all discriminations? These questions, highlight the need for consideration of struggle for justice as an indispensable facet of the Church’s mission, and the liturgy should express and mould this facet of human experience (Burghardt (1980:36-52).

In short, a liturgical celebration should not be a place where to affirm the great absolutes that are allied with male hegemony to paraphrase Brueggemann’s (1993:20) conception of liturgy in the postmodern context. It should not be a place for claims that are “so large and comprehensive that they ring hollow” in a context of general discriminations. It should rather be a place where people come to receive new materials that will nurture, legitimate and authorize a counter-imagination of the present discriminative church.

The position of Brueggemann represents an alternative to the dominant understanding of things, including liturgy, in abstract metaphysical terms. This dominant understanding appears to be a

contributing factor in making people, especially men, insensitive to the effects of their attitudes and acts on others in the church and society. The attitude and conduct of the priest, parish council chairperson and the catechists above appears to reflect this insensitiveness. As long as the argument about the purpose of things for which things were made is still maintained without some degree of critical reflection on the praxis, justifications of abusive attitude and acts of control of others in the church and society will always thrive and be condoned. This argument is pervasive in the dominant church discourses which undervalue certain groups of people such as women who are seen as subjects of men.

This argument which seems to constitute the core of the attitude and acts of control of others should not be taken for granted because the contradictions it breeds within the Church serve to reproduce the contradictions in other sites of our social life in society, as Worsnip (1991:38) observed in the South African context during the struggle to dismantle apartheid. He argues that “because the Church is what it is, and because it holds so crucial a place in the society, it gives them legitimacy.” For this reason, this study is emphasising the need that the metaphors taken from the society should be adopted with some degree of critical reflection on praxis and not on the abstract theories supporting truth claims even as they have damaging effects on people’s lives. That is, there is a need to engage in a careful analysis of the situation which needs to be addressed, and to discern which language and metaphors should be adopted here and now, because the situation commands it.

If meaning is related to the usage of language in a given communal social context (Gergen 1994: 44-48), it is important that the church in Lesotho examine its theological language and metaphors. It should not be the language of the privileged or metaphors which cover for them, in this case, the dominant male members of a Christian church. It must be a language and metaphors which negate all structures of oppression. For this reason, the choice of language and metaphors should never be a purely neutral, of mere formal decision. It has to concern itself with its relations of power, as Bonino (1975:79) argues and how that power is exercised. It should be “a language of social criticism grounded in faith – faith in the liberating Christ” (Goba 1988:101). If this is not done, then, the Church might find itself assisting in the reproduction and maintenance of unethical structures and practices which exploit and oppress others, especially women, in the larger society. This is what the metaphors of the family and “Morena” (The

chief/king/headman) in their attempt to describe the significance of the Church and Jesus appear to be encouraging in the present situation of imbalance of power relations in the order of gender in Lesotho.

If this is true, then, the pastoral activity of the Church in the present situation of the dominant gender discourse should be considered enormously challenged. It is challenged to respond to the “signs of the time” (Gerkin 1991:11-22) if it wants to be relevant. That is, if the Church does not revisit its pastoral policies, and their theological basis, it, by the same tint, deprives itself of an ever present opportunity to contribute in a meaningful construction of the lives of many Basotho women, who are disadvantaged, and it risks being socially on the side of the controlling forces. It will remain a private institution where individuals with private interests, which have potential to harm others, will find a safe haven. The position of this study is that the Church has a role to play in the construction of the Basotho society. To be effective in that role, it needs to start with engaging in a serious social analysis of itself and praxis. Once it embarks on it, it shall have to squarely face the challenges put forward by a gender-ethical consciousness in the modern Lesotho. The challenges are articulated in the next chapter.

It suffices here to state that those challenges point to a dire need for a development of a pastoral activity for the care of men and women in the context of the present dominant gender discourse in which women are the disadvantaged. For women that caring activity should reflect a commitment to their cause, while for men, it should demonstrate intent to engage them in a process of transformation. It must aim at making men aware of their participation in the oppression of others, especially women and invite them to critically reflect on it. The two belong together and imply each other. However, given the orientation of this study, the interest is in the latter, the care of men, because of their privileged position in the structures that appear to be part of the problem in the present situation. In this light, it must be acknowledged however, that the care of men will not be a smooth enterprise given their advantaged position in the society and the Church. For the churches which are male dominated this very idea of pastoral care of men represents a challenge of colossal proportions. There is a likelihood that men would react negatively to the activity because it is prone to make them aware of their participation in the present situation of the oppression of women. The awareness would itself ask them to criticise themselves, something which they may not be ready to do. For this reason most of them are

likely to be defensive because it would challenge them to admit blame and acknowledge their privileged position (Tamez 1987:134). This is where social constructionism and the narrative approach to therapy and other epistemologies such as those of the theologies of liberation are important and relevant as lenses that enable people to see what needs to be transformed and why. This is precisely what the next chapter attempts to do.

In short, if the Church in Lesotho wants to be part of the process of social transformation of the Basotho society and not part of the weight holding it back, it must get out of its cocoon and address issues of wellbeing of all its members, including, in this case, women. One way of doing this is by engaging in a process of education of its male members as part of its pastoral activity and helping them to develop an ethical consciousness in their relationships with others, especially women. To face the challenge, I think the Church has to understand and examine itself in relation to its immediate social and historical context. Presently, I have the impression that part of the problem is that the Church is still very much understanding and examining itself only in terms of either as part of a universal institution, or as an entity in itself. If it continues in this line, it will remain blind and deaf to the needs of the people it claims to have been called to serve here and now. The next chapter attempts to highlight a line of thought and practice which can support its pastoral activity of the care of men from which, I believe, women and children can benefit.

### **5.10. Summary**

The forgoing part has explored the relevance of the method of the theologies of liberating praxis to the study of masculinity in the context of Lesotho. It also explored the relationship between that method and the theory of social construction to demonstrate how masculinity does not represent men's metaphysical, ontological and foundational reality. On the basis of this, the crux of the theological reflection that ensued challenged the situation of male domination in Lesotho and elsewhere. It has argued that this domination is based on a theological error. The error consists in maintaining that whatever Jesus has done is interpreted as normative for all ages without taking the contextual basis of what he said and did into account. It was also argued that this theological error is itself, sustained by another error of a theoretical nature, male power, traditionally referred to as patriarchy. Against this backdrop, the exploration of the dominant



Christological and ecclesiological metaphors of Jesus as “Morena” and the Church as “the family” of God was done. I highlighted the inadequacy of these metaphors in the context of the present situation of the imbalance of power between men and women in the modern Lesotho. For this reason, it was argued that the Church in Lesotho is faced with the need to develop a pastoral activity for the care of men and women. Given the orientation of this study, the pastoral care of men has been the one stressed. However this should not be understood as a way of diminishing the importance of a pastoral care of women because the two belong together. This chapter has basically argued that the church cannot just be a part of the process holding back a necessary social transformation if it wants to remain a credible social force of transformation in Lesotho. This chapter, therefore, furnishes the backdrop of the next chapter which explores ways of encouraging Basotho men to search for alternative, more ethical ways of being men.

In relation to the whole chapter, the main argument has been that the history of the encounter between Basotho men and the European Christian missionaries can be interpreted as a history of two competing discourses – Sesotho and European. The European imperial supremacist consciousness sought to dominate and control Basotho by attacking their social system which they considered uncivilised and unchristian. The latter resisted. In that resistance Basotho men defended the status quo, in which their interests as men were secured while those of women were not. Women were just caught up in the struggle for power between the two masculinities – European and Sesotho. They were used by the European Christianity to get at Basotho men. When this latter resisted, they further reinforced their superior position over women within the social discourse of the time. From this perspective, the argument of this chapter, in the main, has been that both European Christian and Sesotho social discourses have formed a symbiotic front in favour of the domination of women by men. Both of these discourses have been rejected in this study because of their bias against women.

The theological reflection within the framework of the contextual theologies of the liberating praxis and social constructionism has criticised male domination and proposed that an alternative more ethical gendered consciousness be promoted. From that theological reflection, the implications for the need of the pastoral care of men in Lesotho has been highlighted. How can Basotho men be encouraged to seek alternative more ethical ways of being men in the present

socio-economic climate in which the present ways of being men are questioned? And this is what the next chapter attempts to address.

## CHAPTER SIX

### SEARCHING FOR ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF BEING MEN

#### 6.1 Introduction

In the first part of the previous chapter I argued that the dominant discourses of being a Mosotho and being a Christian have historically engaged in a sustained struggle to topple each other to gain control over the Basotho. I argued that, despite this competition, when it comes to gender relations, both discourses appear to form a complementary pair in the generation and sustenance of male power in Lesotho. They provide Basotho men with the know-how to preserve the status quo in which their interests are secured. Because being a man carries with it so large a heritage from the past of these discourses, there is a constant temptation for Basotho men to cling to the ways of their Basotho and Christian ancestors and to resist the call to change by a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho. Both traditions provide them with structures of interpretation of their manly experiences, sometimes contradicting those suggested by a gender-ethical consciousness.

Against this background, and in connection with the research questions and the aims of this study, this chapter first explains what a gender-ethical consciousness stands for and how it challenges Basotho men to seek more ethical ways of being men. Secondly, it explores how the social construction theory and the narrative approach to therapy can contribute to the process of the search for alternative gender-ethical ways of being men. The experience with the members of the Reflecting Team of this study will demonstrate how social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy can be valuable tools to this effect. It is in this context that I have suggested some principles for the pastoral care and counselling of men in Lesotho.

#### 6.2 A Gender-Ethical Consciousness

In order to appreciate the contribution of the social construction theory and the narrative approach to therapy in the search for alternative ways of being men, it is necessary to articulate what the concept of a gender-ethical consciousness means in this study. The concept has been mentioned in passing in the previous chapters to express the desire for alternative ways of being men, where the present dominant Sesotho masculinities were discussed. There is still a need to

provide a theoretical unpacking of the concept in order to appreciate what it represents in the concrete.

The concept underscores a critical consciousness which arises out of the present situation of the imbalance of power relations between men and women in the Basotho society. In the previous chapters, it was established that the present order of gender relations seems to work more in favour of men and at the detriment of women. The ideas of White (1995:12-13) on the impact of social theory and critical theory on the therapist in therapeutic practice are relevant to our understanding of a gender-ethical consciousness. As critical, the consciousness challenges Basotho men to consider the different ways in which they reproduce the dominant masculinity culture within Sesotho and church religious practices and traditions. It makes discernible some of the everyday taken for granted practices of life and of relationships. It challenges Basotho men to develop more awareness of the real effects these ways of thinking and acting have on them and the people they interact with. It wants them to take responsibility for their ways of being and thinking on the lives of the people they interact with, especially women.

For this reason, a gender-ethical consciousness represents a form of resistance to the domination of the absolutisation of particular Basotho cultural and religious ways of thinking about and being men which relegate women to the shadows of men and who see them as their subjects. It resists what Falzon (1998:96), in his exploration of what social dialogue means in postmodernity, calls “the ossification of culture, the fall into a sterile repetition of cultural patterns, as manifested in the closed systems of domination”. In the perspective of what Foucault (1984a:47-48; 1998b:248) calls the “intensification of power relations”, the task of a gender-ethical consciousness is to find ways of cutting off the escalation of capacities which dominate from intensifying. In other words, this consciousness seeks the production of new forms of being and thinking about men which challenge states of domination.

Within this framework, a gender-ethical consciousness challenges Basotho men to redefine their being structurally positioned (Pease 1997: 110-111) in a privileged status in social relations in the Basotho society and the Christian churches in Lesotho. It wants them to acknowledge both the negative and the positive effects of that position on women and children as well as on themselves. It asks individual Basotho men to overcome their being centred on the interests of

their social group at the expense of the women and children in their lives in the name of the Sesotho culture and Church religious practices. It asks them to initiate a process of searching for the alternative ways of relating with them. Put differently, it challenges men to be ethical in their relations, especially with women. By ethical, it is meant adopting those ways of being and thinking which are opposed to considering women as men's subjects in the everyday social relations. It means those ways of thinking and being which are open towards women as the other, which have to be engaged in the decisions that affect their lives. This way of perceiving ethics seems to stand in sharp contrast with a foundational ethics and it challenges it.

### **6.2.1 A gender-ethical consciousness, masculinity and a foundational ethics**

Falzon's (1998:59) notion of what it means to be ethical in the context of social dialogue is relevant to the understanding of the concept of a gender sensitive consciousness as ethical, in this study. He argues that being ethical requires that one adopts a different attitude "of openness to the other, the refusal to reduce the other to a mere function of prevailing categories, to bend it to our purposes, and the willingness to respect the other, to listen to it, to take its claims seriously". Here lies the challenge of a gender-ethical consciousness to most Basotho men in the present sociocultural context, where women are considered to be the subjects of men. Falzon (1998:58) argues that this concept of ethics "is not only possible without a foundationalist standpoint, but also an ethics can only be formulated adequately if we abandon foundationalism".

Foundationalism, in terms of ethics, presupposes that there exist normative principles for behaviour which are universal, abstract, formal and capable of being grasped by a rational mind. It presupposes that our behaviour originates in a unified mind or subject and hence that the proper kind of behaviour is that which is in accordance with the mind's universal principles. This metaphysical conception of ethics has led to a totalising thinking about realities such as being men and women etc. It has led to cultural and religious dogmatism that have subordinated other voices to standpoints that claim to be universal and absolute but which are in fact historically specific such as being white, male, Western, African, Mosotho etc. It has played a role in forms of social, political and religious oppression.

I think Morell's (1998) study challenges foundational ethics in terms of masculinity as a collective gender identity and not as a natural characteristic by emphasising its social

construction and fluidity in particular situations in a changing structure of relationships. In the same vein Segal (1990; 1993), despite their many points of concurrence with radical feminist tradition (MacKinnon 1979; 1982; 1983; 1987) on the analyses of male sexuality, challenges those aspects which ignore the differences between men. It is not the purpose of this study to explore the issue of male sexuality though crucial it is in the understanding of men and masculinity. However, the position of radical feminism toward male sexuality is relevant to understanding the perception of masculinity as a collective gender identity challenged in this study.

The radical feminist tradition suggests that men, consciously or unconsciously, use their sexuality in the service of their general social interests. That is, it sees male sexuality as the main weapon by which men attempt to control women and maintain male power. Segal (1990; 1993) argues for a perspective of masculinity which does not totalise men into a homogeneous whole, which this study agrees to, given one of its aims – finding alternative, more ethical ways of thinking and being a man in Lesotho. She disputes that if men are seen as all the same, and if history of relations between men and women is seen as invariant, structured around an intrinsically controlling male sexuality, it is difficult to see how change and the differences between men might be possible. In this regard Segal's approach resonates with that of Connell (1987) and Carrigan, Connell and Lee (1985). They oppose views of men and women as two distinct homogenous groups as it is held by the *sekoete* outlook as we have seen in the third chapter. They similarly aspire to explore the ways in which certain groups of men manage to control the concept of masculinity and the meaning of sexuality. They seek to investigate how hegemonic masculinity is used to subordinate both women and other groups of men.

Aligning with Morell's (2001:9) argument, the position of this study is that, though "a majority of men mostly perpetuate and reproduce dominant gender relations and forms of masculinity, there are some men who either consciously or unconsciously oppose the hegemonic prescriptions of 'exemplary' masculinity. This position, however, does not mean to trivialize a long standing feminist tradition which persistently insists that, in a very complex way, gender relations are power relations in which power is distributed unequally between men and women. Walby's (1990) study which addresses the issues of power, and in particular patriarchal power, makes this

point clear through the identification of social locations where such power is produced and reproduced.

The ideas of Morell, Segal, Connell and his colleagues and Walby help us to understand the gendered power relations in the Basotho society; how male power oppresses, silences and subjugates not only women and children but also other men who could otherwise be counted as ethical, accountable and responsible, in the perspective of a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study. They also help us to challenge a foundational ethics based on a foundational understanding of masculinity as upheld by the *sekoele* outlook. One of the aims of this study is to identify factors which encourage Basotho men not to embrace change in the order of gender relations. A foundational understanding of masculinity and manhood appears to be one of the factors standing in the way of transformation in the order of gender relations in Lesotho and it merits a special attention.

A story one member of the Reflecting Team told us in one of our sessions where we were discussing factors which recruit Basotho men into violent ways, especially against women, demonstrates how issues of ethics can be sidelined and obscured by a perception of masculinity as a collective gender identity based on a foundationalist, and essentialist project. According to this member, who is the principal of a school of the rural community, whose men he was talking about, “an unpleasant incident which reveals the ugly face of the dominant traditional masculinity took place”. A man had assisted his wife who had unexpectedly fallen into labour pains. He was charged with transgressing the traditional cultural manly moral code of being, and conduct, by other men of the village. Women alone, by virtue of their femininity are qualified to assist other women in labour, not men. He should have called women of the village. He was subjected to a severe physical punishment by the village community men. According to the team member, “no man would dare repeat the *error* (my emphasis) after witnessing the pain the man was made to endure”. According to the team member, when the woman went on labour, not only the women of the village were not close by but also the nearest health centre was tens of kilometres away. Even with a car, if there was one, and the bad conditions of the road there, they would not make it in time to the health centre without risking the life of the mother and the child.

The story demonstrates how the perception of masculinity as a collective gender identity from which follows a “necessary” and “exemplary” masculine behaviour can be used to encourage men not to be responsible and accountable, especially in specific times and situations of need. When men are seen as a “coherent gender class”, to use Edley and Wetherell’s (1995:196) expression, which has to uphold a culturally uniform and essentialist masculine moral code, the men’s alternative ethical choices get limited. Their life is subjected to a constant policing by other men, whose methods of policing include intimidation. In this way, to paraphrase Foucault’s (1994a:351) argument, a project to create a system of regulation of the general conduct of individual men, whereby all aspects of their lives would be controlled to the point of self-sustenance, without the need for intervention, is achieved. The intimidation of men who transgress the moral code that separates men from women by other men in the everyday life interactions, gives us an idea about the ways in which women are usually policed by men (Radford 1987) to have them keep a women’s prescriptive moral code. Among these ways battering and rape were identified by the team members.

The members acknowledged that, as men, they do not live under the fear that if they wronged their wives they could get beaten by them as women are with regard to their husbands. As the team members noted, most Basotho men believe that, by virtue of being male, they have a right to chastise women if and when the need arises and the right includes battering and raping. From my experience as a priest, I have had conversations with men and boys who had physically assaulted their wives and girl friends. One young man who had beaten his fiancé and had at one occasion attempted to shoot her dead, told me he was sending her a message that in the future, when they are married, “she should think twice before she did any thing nasty”. The team members also acknowledged that they can move around, especially at night, without a fear of being raped as women and girls are. A shocking number of thirty-nine (39) reported cases of teenage girls raped only in eight days, between December 24, 2010 and January 1, 2011 in the Maseru district alone (*Public Eye*, 2011 January 07) attests to the pervasiveness of this deplorable trend in Lesotho. Fifteen (15) of these cases occurred in Roma alone. In a separate incidence, a fifty year old man was jailed for five years for sexually assaulting her sixteen years old daughter. He inserted his ginger into her daughter’s private parts because, as he put it, she and her mother, his wife, were “flirting with boys and coming home late” (*Sunday Express* 2011



January 23-29). In another incidence, a forty one year father, was thrown into prison for fifteen years for raping his sixteen years old daughter. In defence of his act, the man said it was because “his wife had threatened to leave him and he was afraid of marrying another woman”; he was protecting “her [the daughter] from being pregnant and being infected with HIV” (*Lesotho Times* January 2011, 20-26); he was pre-empting “other men from taking advantage of her” (*Public Eye* 2011, Januar, 21).

The comments of the team members demonstrate how men and boys benefit from the violation of women and girls by other men even if they themselves have not violated one. They can roam around and enjoy themselves while women and girls are confined to the household premises because it is believed it is where they belong. They cannot “march into” the male public spaces (Bars/Taverns/Shebeens), activities and the night without being punished. Rape is often that punishment. In this way rape is a form of control of women and girls from which even men and boys who have not actually raped benefit.

Now, when Falzon proposes that we abandon a foundationalist ethics, he actually challenges us to free ourselves from the illusion that there is some absolute standpoint against which we can measure the behaviour of men as men or women as women, as it is argued in this study. He challenges us to recognise that all our concepts of ourselves as men, the truths by which we conduct our lives, what we label as right action and ways of being and thinking are historically and culturally specific. In this way he challenges us to acknowledge and open up to a possibility of developing other concepts of ourselves, other truths by which we can manage our lives, other actions and ways of being which would be right in specific situations in terms of time and place. Clearly this possibility is stifled by what Slattery (2003:171) would call “the dominant blueprints in society for men, women and relationships... shaped by narratives promoting hierarchy, patriarchy and the assignment of roles and self-worth to individuals, based on gender, class, race, sexuality, economic status and control of self and others”.

Because of the gendered ideas and practices which objectify women as the “generalised other”, as Kotzé (2002:16) would put it, around which men should exercise caution, the life of the woman and her baby came second on the scale of the manly values and moral code of conduct of the men the team member told us about. The story of this woman and her husband demonstrates

the extent to which gender organises our everyday life including the forms of relationship between men and women even as crucial moments of life and death catch upon us; moments which challenge people to think and act outside the box of the gendered prescriptive normative norms. The man who assisted his wife to give birth clearly made a huge stride and thought outside the dominant masculinity box of his village community men. In the perspective of this study which, among others, is searching for alternative, more accountable and responsible masculinities, this man embodies the ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

Whereas he was more concerned about the safety of the life of his wife and child, what mattered the most to the men of his village, was the dominant traditional cultural ideology of masculinity and femininity which neatly regulated the “right” and “wrong” relationships of men and women, regardless of the concrete situation the couple was in. The daring and caring action of the husband to his wife and the baby was found wanting and disqualified as unmanly on the normative scale of the prescriptive knowledge or truths of the prevailing masculine discourses. The men of the village community acted as people who are privileged custodians and guarantors of the masculinity truth, just as most religious leaders and the clergy are perceived to have access to “‘truth’ voicing God, Allah, or the Deity’s will” as Kotzé (2002:14) would put it. They only had to apply the moral norms of that truth which was not open to interpretation in as far as they were concerned. In the perspective of this study, searching for, among others, gender-ethical masculinities among Basotho men, it should be asked who would have benefited from the knowledge and the truths of the dominant traditional masculinity had the husband of the wife not acted the way he had – assisting his wife in pains of labour and their child, making its first entry into the world. Certainly not women and expectant mothers, children and husbands and fathers who get caught up in the midst of the situations like that of the woman and the child and the man the team member told us about.

It is on the basis of the experiences such as this that a gender-ethical consciousness is challenging Basotho men to reconsider some of their ways of thinking about being a man. It is in the context of gender relations, where the dominant ways of being and thinking about men, certain truths which support their lives appear to have become problematic as they are experienced as oppressive by others, men, women and children alike, that a gender-ethical consciousness is criticising and inviting men to change. The consciousness opens the way to an

understanding of men as existing inescapably in the midst of social interactions with others, other men, women and children in society, and that is where being ethical, accountable and responsible can be measured. It cannot be measured by some prescriptive standards deduced from pre-existing abstract principles as upheld by a foundationalist ethics on which the values of the dominant Sesotho traditional masculinities are thriving. It is in the midst of social interaction that Basotho men are challenged not to reduce women and children to a mere function of prevailing cultural categories of womanhood and childhood. They should not bend them to men's purposes. It is in the context of the daily social life interactions that a gender-ethical consciousness challenges Basotho men to be willing to respect women, listen to them and take their interests and claims seriously.

I wonder what the woman the team member told us about would say to those men if she was allowed space and time to speak about her husband being there for her when their child was born. Because of the dominant traditional femininity discourse, she did not even qualify to be a witness in the proceedings of the hearing, which found her husband guilty of transgressing the manly moral code. She could not witness to the effects of her husband's action had on her and the child. I wonder how the child would interpret the experience in the future, when it had grown up, when it would learn about the circumstances under which it was born and how its father was charged and punished for being there to ensure the safety of its life. From the way the man was treated under the prescriptive Sesotho masculinity ethics, we may never know because a foundational prescriptive moral code tends to punish and silence those on the receiving end of its systems.

For this reason, foundationalist ethics, which is essentially prescriptive, should not be taken for granted in the context of power relations which appear to be at the heart of social interactions; where there is a tendency of one party to want to domesticate and dominate the other through systems of "truths". Foucault (1994b:347-348) was aware of this reality when he argued that "domination is, in fact, a general structure of power whose ramifications and consequences can sometimes be found reaching down into the fine fabric of society". In the perspective of this study, a prescriptive ethics is part of this structure of power. As Kotzé (2002:13, 16, 17) has defined it, prescriptive ethics is a result of "a process of deductive reasoning grounded in systems of 'truth' that are embedded in scientific and/or religious discourse". It leaves "people who are

on the receiving end marginalised and alienated, unable to have a say in the ‘truths’ that are supposed to shape their lives”. Now, because prescriptive ethics, whether based on cultural nationalisms, transcendental religious/theological and scientific models, tends to endorse unethical practices which exploit, marginalise and oppress the under-privileged in those models, deserves to be resisted.

In the perspective of this study, which seeks to uncover what encourages Basotho men not to embrace change in the order of gender relations, the prescriptive ethics deduced from the dominant cultural masculinity discourses, branded as constitutive part of the “real” *Bosotho* (sothoiness) and/or “authentic” Christian life discourses, appears to be a contributing factor. In the light of the previous chapters, especially chapters three, on the *sekoale* philosophy, four on Sesotho masculinity and nationalism, and five on the theologies of liberation and male domination, it is not difficult to see how the assumptions of prescriptive ethics impact on how Basotho men and women interact and negotiate in the everyday life. It is not difficult to see how a masculinity principle pushes its agenda through a prescriptive ethics to maintain and sustain male power in Lesotho. As the feminist perspective (Spender 1980; Segal 1987; 1990; Wetherell & Griffin 1991; Edley & Wetherell 1995) of masculinity has consistently noted, everyday interactions and negotiations between men and women take place in the context where masculinity is defined as normal and normative and femininity as otherness; where men define their masculinity in opposition to, or in distance from, what is seen as a base femininity – the devalued contrast. This is the situation feminist voices have always sought to protest against and prescriptive ethics which function to silence them in society. The alternative to prescriptive ethics is participatory ethics whose principles are rooted in a participatory consciousness.

### **6. 3 A Gender-Ethical Consciousnesses as a Participatory Consciousness**

In the light of the previous chapters, the idea of abandoning a prescriptive ethics may frighten some Basotho men. They may equate it with succumbing to “anything goes” because of the pervasive belief in the ultimate foundations of social realities or some basic constraints of some sort of behaviour patterns of men and women as advocated by the *sekoale* outlook. They may argue that the idea opens a hole for moral chaos; that we will end up with a relativistic view of thought about ways of being and acting as fragmented into so many incommensurable forms of

life or cultural practices in which we can only speak relativistically of “our” standards and “their” standards. To view standards as merely specific and relative to particular culture or specific groups of people within that culture, or time in this way, is to deny ourselves the capacity to evaluate or criticise forms of life, to choose between them, or to give coherence to our cultural practices. This is not theoretically insufficient but also politically unsafe. This position makes sense only in the framework of a foundational prescriptive ethics which appears to be at the heart of the dominant traditional cultural ways of the Basotho.

It should be reiterated that abandoning prescriptive ethics does not mean opting for a situation where there are no normative frameworks in terms of which we judge and act. It simply means that there are many possible ways of being and thinking and stories about self. In this way we are motivated to examine our constructions and stories, how they have come to be and what their effects are on ourselves and others as Freedman and Combs (1996:35-37) have argued. If this is true, we may ask why there are people who tend to associate relativism with “anything goes” and a recipe for chaos and anarchy.

Looked at a close range, the fear of relativism conceals the fear of losing control. According to Kotzé (2002:18), control is often “a primary, unspoken value” in social interactions. If this is true, then the charge of those who fear the idea that there are many ways of being and stories about self “masks the frustration that arguments fail to support the inquisitor’s own preferences and simultaneously protects the inquisitor from revealing the vulnerability of his or her own valuational standpoint”, as Gergen (1994:81) would argue. They cannot accept the fact that “when we make a moral judgement, we appeal to a moral norm we take to have a particular authority – an authority that excludes others from having the same authority” (Lukes 2008:16). The issue of moral relativism and the debates it has engendered is sufficiently explored by Lukes (2008) and Gergen (1994:79-82, 93-114). It is not the aim of this study to engage in those debates though interesting they are. The concern here is to reveal the inadequacy of a foundationalist ethics which appears to dominate debates about gender relations in Lesotho.

In the light of the ideas of Kotzé and Gergen, Falzon’s (1998:58) argument that an ethics can only be formulated adequately if we abandon foundationalism makes a huge sense. His observation is relevant to the present situation in Lesotho, where the dominant interpretations of

being a man tend to be essentialist, totalising and foundationalist as we have seen in chapters three and four. This situation makes it difficult to speak of anything that goes beyond the categories and principles deduced from these interpretations. Everything that is encountered is reduced to a function of these categories. In this way Basotho men are condemned to a sterile repetition or affirmation of basic categories of men's traditional ways of being and thinking, categories which themselves remain entirely unquestionable within this system of thinking which appears to have stopped to think.

Obviously, this closed system of thought provides a sense of stability to most Basotho men. It provides a defence against that which is other, that which is new, unexpected and beyond control, which can introduce uncertainty and instability, and which can bring about transformations in the way they view themselves and others. On the basis of the experience I had with the members of the Reflecting Team of this study when we first met, I have the impression that many Basotho men are locked up into this way of thinking which appears to have stopped to think more than most of them are aware of. It is a thinking which survives through unquestioning dogmatism expressed by the "*Sesotho* says so" or the "bible says so" or the "Church says so" discourses. In the second part of the previous chapter, I have argued that these discourses have encouraged Basotho men to support the status quo in the order of gender because they benefit from them. The question a gender-ethical consciousness poses for these discourses is the question of power, which means basically to ask whom does a particular discourse serve.

Now, as part of being ethical as demanded by a gender-ethical consciousness, Basotho men are challenged to decisively break from the foundationalist interpretations of manhood and turn to a dialogical framework in which human beings are understood as embodied and active beings in the midst of dialogue with others (Falzon 1998: 25-30). What this means is that, moral and ethical life is an issue of "communal participation" (Gergen 1994:103) from which communal practices follow. This notion of ethics thrives on the idea that "there are no pre-existing, transcendental set of principles which form the basis for a proper organisation of our practices" as Falzon (1998:58) would argue. Kotzé's (2002: 13-20) concept of "participatory ethics" as opposed to "prescriptive ethics" clarifies even further what being ethical means in terms of the gender-ethical consciousness as understood in this study.

According to Kotzé (2002:18), contrary to prescriptive ethics which thrives on totalising discourses of what is right and wrong, participatory ethics “is ethics located in discourses and praxis with the disempowered and marginalised – those who seldom benefit from the ethics of discourses created and entertained by the powerful or knowledgeable”. Kotzé insists that “participation of all is a primary commitment if in any way we aspire to being ethical”. A gender-ethical consciousness, as understood in this study, is committed to the cause of Basotho women as they appear to be marginalised by the dominant Sesotho cultural and churches discourses which give advantage to men over women.

In short, the dialogical and participatory dimension of a gender-ethical consciousness just highlighted underscores its historicity. It denotes the inadequacy of ethics based on transcendental experience. As historical, this consciousness is attentive to how issues of masculinity and femininity are produced by historical processes rather than transcendental principles. It insists that masculinity and femininity are socially constructed within the historical context of gender relations (Pease 1997:49). It is from the history of these relations that women have, in the main, emerged as subjects of men. Here lies the significance of the notion of a participatory ethics. It challenges us to ask how women have become subjects of men. Even more importantly, it challenges us to ask what do women experience and say. I believe it is only when we are aware of how they become men’s subjects and how they experience the subjugation and talk about it, that we can address the imbalances sufficiently and with confidence.

#### **6. 4 A Gender-Ethical Consciousness and Basotho Women as Men’s Subjects**

The concept of Basotho women as subjects of men is significant. It underscores their struggles against male power which has historically tended to subjugate them (Epprecht 2000). Foucault’s (1982:208-226) ideas of how human beings become subjects within the western culture are very relevant to the understanding of the point of the gender-ethical consciousness under the discussion. They help us to see how Basotho women are still the underdogs in gender relations. First and foremost, Foucault argues that, while the human subject is placed in relations of production and signification, it is equally placed in power relations which are very complex. For this reason, he suggests that we need a historical awareness of our present situation. The previous chapters, especially two and five, have explored the historical conditions under which the present

situation of women's subjugation in Lesotho can be understood. In the light of this history, we are able to see how Basotho women are not only subject to male power, but also how they are tied to their own identity by a social cultural consciousness which leaves them under that control. Now, a gender-ethical consciousness does not only represent this historical awareness, it also refuses to accept what subjects women have been made into. It wants them to imagine and construct an alternative history which will be a history of women as creative and active subjects of what they become in social relations with men. It wants Basotho men to participate in the making of this new history by redefining what it means to be a man in relation to women.

It is in this sense that a gender-ethical consciousness is perceived as a watershed of Sesotho masculinity in this study. It questions the present accepted dominant masculinity discourses and challenges men to consider what Foucault (1980b:81-82) characterises as the "subjugated knowledges" as possible options. By subjugated knowledges, Foucault means the

historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systematisation ... a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition.

From the perspective of a gender-ethical consciousness, Foucault's concept of subjugated knowledges underscores the need for Basotho men to reconsider, perhaps, those ways of being and thinking about manhood which have been disqualified by the dominant discourses such as "*phehla mokobolo*" (a concoction that softens a man to act upon the suggestions of a woman), and "*bolehe*" (a buzz word for depicting the state of being not manly enough, mostly used to discredit men or boys by being compared to women or girls). These discourses have encouraged Basotho men to dominate, not only women, but also other men in ways more than most Basotho are aware of. They frame the stories men tell about themselves and others as strong, tough, rough and aggressive. They frame the stories of gender based violence. Put differently, they frame a sense of a masculine self whose reason of being is to dominate everything that can be dominated.

Looked at a close range, contrary to this sense of a masculine self, the husband who assisted his wife during birth the team member told us about, reveals a subjugated knowledge in the foucauldian sense. The knowledge he had acted upon was beneath the level of recognition of the



knowledge of his village community men. It was a knowledge recognised by him as the ethical way given their situation with his wife.

In our monthly meetings of the reflecting team, we often exchanged ideas about the impact of the discourses of *phehla mokobolo* and *bolehe* on Basotho men and explored how very limiting they could be in men's relationships with others, both men and women alike. We explored how they prohibit men to develop caring and respectful relationships with others, especially women and children. In the light of the story of the man who helped his wife to give birth the team member told us about, I challenged the team members to think about our own births, each one of us his. I asked them to imagine, each, his own father being there to welcome him at his first entry into the world; how that would have influenced their relationship with them. I asked them to reflect, as fathers themselves, about their not having been there to welcome their children when they made their first entry into the world; how has this influenced the way they have related to them and their children's mothers; whether if they had not been prohibited by the prescriptive ethic of men, they would have wanted to be there; whether this would have made them relate to them and their wives differently. Almost all the team members admitted that they believe the way they think about women and children would be different. They said they believe the way they have evaluated and bonded with their fathers would have been different. From those deliberations I came to believe that over and above considering those disqualified ways of being men, perhaps, a gender-ethical consciousness challenges men to develop new forms of thinking and being as required by the present socio-cultural climate.

I believe that the social construction theory, the narrative approach to therapy and participatory ethic can help to this effect. With its radical doubt in the taken for granted world, whether in the sciences or daily life, social constructionism acts as a form of social criticism (Gergen, 1985:267) of the commonly accepted Sesotho masculine categories or understandings. It encourages us to suspend the belief in them and scrutinise them as we search for alternative ways of being men.

Both the constructionist and the narrative approach to therapy share a common perspective on realities. They hold that knowledge of things arises within communities of knowers and that the realities we inhabit are those we negotiate with one another (Freedman & Combs 1996:20). This

is what the discourses of *phehla mokobolo* and *bolehe* are within the Sesotho culture. They are a negotiated knowledge of manhood and it is in the every interaction of the daily life they are re-evaluated. In our evaluation of the effects of these discourses on men and boys, in one of the meetings of the Reflecting Team, we realised that some of the acts they do under the spell of these discourses leave many of them regretting their actions. We realised how these regrets concealed an awareness of alternative ways of being men, ways difficult to consider when one is under their spell.

In the light of these regrets, we concluded that at times these discourses which may sound negative and ridiculing to most Basotho men can be experienced as complements by those who manage to resist their spell on them at specific times and situations. A story one member of the Reflecting Team shared with us demonstrates this point very well. He was in a minibus taxi. A man who appeared to have been in his late forties or early fifties got in at a stop and sat next to him. He had a terrible smell of alcohol and tobacco. Realising how uncomfortable the member of the team and other passengers were, he spoke in a loud voice and said he hated men who “behaved like women”. They like to behave like women and side with them. He said he believed that even in their households they were controlled by their wives. He then said he thanked God he had not yet eaten *phehla*. The member of the team responded that if *phehla* made a man a better person he liked it.

In short, a gender-ethical consciousness represents a deep yearning for alternative, more ethical ways of being men and challenges Basotho men to acknowledge that there are specific ways of being and thinking which have damaging effects not only on women and children but also on men themselves. In this way a gender-ethical consciousness invites Basotho men to accountability and responsibility, which the discourses of *phehla* and *bolehe* prevent them to embrace.

#### **6.4.1 Basotho men called to accountability and responsibility: an awareness raising project**

Jenkins (1990:60-114; 1996:117-133), Hall (1996:211-237) White (1995: 155-171; 1997:203-20), Pease (1997:103-104) and Wirtz and Schweitzer (2003:187-201) have worked with abusive men in a therapeutic context and social work. Their notions of accountability and responsibility from these contexts are relevant to what the concept of gender-ethical consciousness stands for in

a broader context of gender relations in society. The notions underscore the idea that men should develop a sense of listening to those in subjugated positions, such as women, and take what they have to say about the effects of men's ways of being and thinking on them seriously. Obviously, the discourses of *phehla* and *bolehe* which frame most Basotho men's ways of being and thinking discourage them from being accountable and responsible because they make men see women as objects of male domination. Subordinating others, especially women, is the measurement of a man's masculinity. For this reason, a gender-ethical consciousness challenges men, both as a privileged social group and individuals, in the civil and church communities, to develop the awareness of their oppressor roles. It wants them to connect with some form of reconstructed view of their own self interest in order for them to see how they are recruited into the camp of oppressorship (Pease 1997:115-116) and take responsibility. It asks them to reject access to the privileged and elevated status and power which is denied to other social groups such as women. In this way accountability and responsibility are ethical issues and touch upon the issue of how and when power is exercised (Foucault 1994b:336-348) in social relations. According to Foucault, power, basically exist only when it is exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action. In this perspective, in terms of ethics, then, accountability and responsibility are not just abstract ideas as foundational moral prescriptive ethics tends to view them. They are concrete actions in which the wellbeing of the other should be ever present when and if power is exercised.

If this is true, ethically, a gender-ethical consciousness challenges men to listen to those, the women, who are affected by their ways of being and doing. The kind of listening this consciousness asks from men is a listening which underscores what Kotzé (2001:4) calls "connective understanding [which] is more than a matter of empathy, and very different from the 'insights' resulting from being informed by the theories or counselling models therapists or counsellors believe in". It is a listening made possible by a "participatory consciousness" which challenges us to "reorder our understanding of the relation between self and other" (Heshusius 1994:15). It is a listening which puts more emphasis on what one member of the reflecting team called a consciousness of "*temohano*" (a mutual awareness of the other in relationship with the other) as opposed to that of *teka-tekano* (basic equality between men and women) in the dominant Sesotho gender discursive language. As the team member described in details what he

meant with the concept, I got the impression he was speaking of a situation in which the relationship between men and women moved beyond a mere liberal idea of gender relations based on rights, equality and citizenship in a society. According to the team member, the *temohano* consciousness urges men and women in relationships to take stock of the needs and interests of the other at heart, and not one party seeking to have their interests served at the expense of the other. It is a consciousness which is reflected in the concrete actions of the other on the other's actions in a way that the other's life is affirmed and not taken advantage of. It basically request that men listen to the voices of women's experiences. This is a simple act, complicated by the internalised *sekoete* attitude which silences their voices. For this reason, it is significant to articulate how the *temohano* consciousness challenges the dominant Sesotho masculinities

#### **6.4.2 Accountability and responsibility and the 'temohano' consciousness and sesotho masculinities**

Now, for Basotho men, a participatory consciousness in terms of *temohano* also requires the awareness of their own maleness within the context of a culture which tends to encourage male hegemony while it devalues women. Because of their subjugation, women who are so silenced by this culture, for men to listen, need to be allowed space to speak. To paraphrase Bird (1994:52), because power and masculine politics often act to disguise and silence cultural tragedies such as women and child abuse, men are challenged to truly listen to women and children. Because there are many Sesotho cultural practices that maintain beliefs that perpetuate this abuse, it is the responsibility of Basotho men to avail themselves of self and other, women, scrutiny in relationship to their participation in these practices. Put differently, they need to comprehensively address their relationship with masculinity and, in particular, their relationship with oppressive ideas or attitudes that underlay a construction of masculinities that promote abusive behaviour (Slattery 2003:174). In doing so, they would be establishing a willingness to create a dialogue that challenges the silencing of women in our Basotho culture.

Challenged by Bird's and Slattery's ideas, in one of the meetings of the Reflecting Team, we engaged in a personal reflection on our participation in the cultural practices that maintain beliefs that perpetuate women and children abuse in the Basotho society. We used, with some modifications, the following questions Bird (1994:52) proposes to this effect.

- What questions would you ask the other people [*women and children*] in your life in order to discover your own abusive behaviour?
- How would you reassure the people [*women and children*] in your life that they are safe to answer your questions honestly?
- How would you reassure people [*women and children*] that you would take their responses seriously?
- What steps would you take to challenge the abusive actions, words, or thoughts?
- How would you know that you had been successful in your challenge?

In terms of a participatory consciousness in terms of the *temohano* consciousness, which a critical gender-ethical consciousness promotes, these questions challenged the team members to rethink and reorganize their understanding of the relation between them and women and children in all social settings, public and private. The underlying assumption of these questions is that patterns of relating and structure within families and society at large do not take place in a political vacuum, as Jenkins (1994:11-12, 13-14) argues. According to Jenkins, abuse often happens in the context of “imbalance of status or power and where one person with greater privilege experiences a sense of entitlement that outweighs his or her sense of responsibility for the welfare of the other”. He insists that, “the imbalance in privilege is matched with an imbalance in responsibility. The abuse victim is expected to tolerate and accept responsibility for the abuser’s abusive behaviour. The abuse perpetrator relies on the abuse victim’s deference and acceptance of responsibility for his actions”. So the above questions challenged the team members to address issues which are intimately related to power and hierarchy, such as violence and abuse within families and society. They challenged them to develop an attitude of openness and respect, which does not reduce women and children to being objects of men’s self-serving purposes. The discourses of *phehla mokobolo* and *bolehe* we saw above are generated where, if and when participatory/*temohano* practices have not been developed.

#### **6.4.3 The team members and the participatory/*temohano* consciousness**

The responses of the team members to the questions revealed importance of the participatory/*temohano* consciousness, and the pervasiveness of the participation of most Basotho men in controlling abusive practices. What is significant is that such practices are often not recognised as such because of the complex dominant masculinity and femininity discourses which encourage male domination and most women’s dependence on men as normal. For instance, one member said, among others, he would ask his partner how she felt about her being

the only one to clean up the house, cook and serve the food, do the laundry, childcare etc. Traditionally a man who does these things is either said to have “eaten” a *phehla mokobolo* or a *selehe* (a wimp). On reflection, this question also put under the spotlight the discourse of men as providers who have to go out to work for the family while women remain at home and do these things. In the case of the team member, whose wife was also working, it becomes clear how he was personally benefitting from these discourses, which he acknowledged silenced and exploited his wife. In this light, it could be wondered how many men, if they could have chosen, would have preferred to have been born a woman; and the same regarding women being born as men. I have a hunch we would probably have had a population of 99% men and 1% women.

I also found the question meaningful in the light of the discourses of marriage and *bohali* (brideprice). The practice of *bohali*, as we saw in the first part of the previous chapter, gives advantages to a man and his family over and above a woman. Traditionally both discourses play a significant role in determining men’s and women’s relationships and their roles for the survival of marriage as an institution. In this respect a family as an institution appears to survive on the imbalance of power between men and women. In the case of child care, to paraphrase Lewis (1991:169), since caring and nurturing are believed to be women’s work, which men cannot undertake without demeaning themselves, women in marriage and family as institutions serve the interest of men. In this perspective, the survival of these institutions appears to depend more on male domination rather than on the collaborative relationships between men and women, as desired by a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

Another member, among others, said he would ask his wife whether she felt their sexual relations were being regulated by the dominant discourses of men’s and women’s sexual relationships which entitle a man to have sex when, if and how he wants. In the consideration of the members of the team, the dominant discourses of sexual relations between men and women do not allow women to explicitly tell men when, if and how they want sex without being suspected of being *loose* (my emphasis), meaning promiscuous. For this reason, it is not difficult to see how the dominant sexual relation discourses between men and women give men power to police and control women’s sexual desires in our Basotho culture. As the team members once noted in an another meeting, the very language men use to describe sexual relations between men and women, assign men an active role and women a passive one. For instance, men say they

“eat” women and not vice versa. It is demeaning of a sense of being man for a man to be said to have been “eaten” by a woman. Men eat and are not eaten. This symbolic language depicts sex as what men do to women and not vice versa.

This kind of language demonstrates how masculinity gains its symbolic force and familiar status from a series of hierarchical relations to what it can subordinate, as Segal (1993:635) would put it. Segal argues that “masculinity is valued through the various forms of power men can unthinkingly take for granted: the power to exert control over women”, among others. Sex is one of these multiple forms of women’s subordination. This sense of superiority in sexual relations may be lived out, and reinforced, within a social system where relations of authority and sexual life are typically structured along hierarchical gender lines.

Foucault (1972) has investigated the interplay and crossing points connecting knowledge and power; how people become objects of knowledge and how through the internalisation process they become a gaze conquering their lives. According to Foucault (1980c:142),

power is co-extensive with social body ... that relations of power are interwoven with other kinds of relations (production, kinship, family, sexuality) ... that their interconnections delineate general conditions of domination, and this domination is organised into a more-or-less coherent and unitary strategic form.

Influenced by Foucault’s (1972) ideas on power/knowledge discourse in society, White and Epston (1990:22) argue that since “we are all caught up in the net or web of power/knowledge, it is not possible to act apart from this domain and we are simultaneously undergoing the effects of power and exercising this power in relation to others”. In this perspective, the ethical challenge of accountability is “to establish conditions that encourage us to critique our practices ... [to] identify the context of ideas in which our practices are situated and explore the history of these ideas” (White 1990:29).

In the light of Foucault as well as White and Epston, a gender-ethical consciousness, in terms of the *temohano* consciousness, Basotho men are challenged to seriously critique their ways of being and thinking within the framework of Basotho’s traditional social practices and church teachings and practices. It wants them to reflect on their participation both in the Basotho’s traditional knowledge of manhood that shapes their lives. It wants them to do the same in the

context of their churches. It wants them to see how they benefit from it and how women suffer as a result. This is what a gender-ethical consciousness, in terms of the *temohano* consciousness wants Basotho men to be aware of, in view of reordering their understanding of their relation to women.

Perhaps the situation of the white Afrikaner community Meiring and Kotzé (2002:239-243) write about, in the context of apartheid South Africa can help us to see the point of a gender-ethical consciousness with regard to Basotho men. Just as the white Afrikaner community was challenged to name and accept responsibility of the injustices of the apartheid discourse, so are Basotho men challenged to name and accept responsibility of being positioned within unjust gender discourses. Just as the white South Africans are challenged to accept that they benefited from the apartheid discourse, so are the Basotho men to spell out how they benefit from the dominant masculinity gender discourses sanctioned by patriarchy in the Basotho society and the Christian churches' dogmatic preaching and teaching. Naming an injustice is an essential early step in the process of overcoming it (Tamasese & Waldegrave 1994:56). To realise this project, those who are committed to the transformation of the Basotho society would need to be strategic. One of the strategies which may be effective could be the establishment of groups of men both in the churches and in the broader society, to engage in narrative conversations (White & Epston 1990; Freedman & Combs 1996) on gender discourses and the effect of sexism as well as the effects of male hegemony on us as men in the churches and the general society. This is what this study has attempted to do through the formation of the Reflecting Team. It has proved effective. From the experience with the team members, I think that the way Basotho men would respond to the call of accountability and responsibility should not be taken for granted.

#### **6.4.4 Basotho men's response to the call to accountability and responsibility: The challenges they face**

From the experience of interacting with the members of the Reflecting Team and Basotho men in general, I get the impression that a gender-ethical consciousness can be very unsettling to most of them. It puts its finger right on what most of them have come to accept as how it should be for a man. For this reason, how Basotho men respond to the invitation should not be taken for granted. Their first reaction to the consciousness could be one of defending the male privilege based on assumed "natural" male superiority.



For example, one member of the Teflecting Team who works for an NGO in the country shared with us his experience with Basotho men who were affected by the water project called Metolong Authority. It was required that they could not withdraw the compensation money from the bank alone, without their spouses. The men, on the basis of the customary practice which enthrones male persons as heads of their households complained that their position was being compromised. According to the team member, the complaint appeared to have been motivated by their awareness of the benefits they were going to forfeit when their women were involved. They would not be as free as they used to, to use the money without the consent of their spouses.

Exchanging thoughts on this issue, the team members attested to a wide spread practice among most Basotho men to keep their financial status secret from their wives because they believe women can be careless with money if left unmonitored. As we unpacked the issue further, we first noticed the prejudice against women behind that belief and how it concealed the issue of power men exercise over them. Some team members also remarked that, in most cases, when men keep their financial status secret from their spouses, it is often when infidelity is involved. One member drew our attention to a commonplace saying among Basotho men which supported what the other members had just said. He said, “*Ha u bolella ngoetsi makunutu a lelapa, u se ke ua lebala ho e joetsa hore ka nako tse ling monna ha na ho robala le eena ka tlung, o tla lokela ho ea robala sakeng*” (When you reveal the family secrets to a *ngoetsi* (a newly wedded woman), never forget to tell her that at other times the man will not sleep with her in the house; he will sleep at the cattle kraal).

There is one thing that this statement underlines: a married woman should know that she cannot complain when her husband is not there at night. Such behaviour should not be exposed because it has to be kept as a family secret. The metaphor of *sakeng* (cattle kraal) in this statement captures the freedom a man enjoys which a woman should not dare to challenge. Traditionally, *sakeng* is a man’s place. A woman cannot just venture into it without a risk of some sort. This belief about men is also expressed by another metaphor which depicts a man as a *moloi* (a witch). There is a Sesotho adage which says: *monna ke moloi; ha a botsoe moo a tsoang* (A man is a witch; he is never asked about his movements). According to this saying, men are not supposed to be asked, especially by women, about their movements and secretive activities. Just

as a witch, who does not entertain the questioning of his/her movements, so it is with a man. Anyone who dares ask, does so at their own risk. From the perspective of this study, these are some examples of how Basotho men can benefit from the social and cultural ordering which sanctions the authority of men. This authority sometimes covers for individual men and their interests.

Coming back to the reaction of men to the Metolong Authority project, even though some members of the Reflecting Team agreed that it was a good thing to involve women in the issue of compensation, they still did not believe that those men who were reluctant to have their wives have a say in this issue were “oppressors”. One member consistently argued that it simply ensured that men should consult with their women just as women were forced to consult with their men when they were forced to have the consent of their husbands when they sought to secure a bank loan or sell cattle. He insisted that it forced both a husband and a wife to engage in dialogue. He believed that this practice, which was legally sanctioned had nothing to do with the structural privileged position of men in the households/ families, which he took for a given and believed should not be changed.

Even though this position may sound sensible, it still does not acknowledge that Basotho women are experiencing a structural subjugation in our society. It is based on a sexist assumption which maintains that men and women are on an equal par within the Basotho’s cultural social system in different ways as according to gender so that they can equally abuse the system. It does not acknowledge that men are structurally more privileged by this system even at the expense of women, something which a gender-ethical consciousness is contesting. As he argued, I wondered as to whether his position was not being influenced by the benefits he, as a man, would reap when the status quo was preserved. The position of this team member is taken here to represent the position of most Basotho men in general. It represents their prevalent tendency to defend their personal and individual interests when they are challenged by a gender-ethical consciousness. They just take it to be a mere caution of how they should exercise the authority which is theirs “naturally” by virtue of having been born male in the system.

From this position, it becomes clear how the issues of gender can generate very difficult questions of not only a theoretical nature but also a practical one in terms of what it means to be

a man in the context of social change; questions which can be very sticky for those who desire change if they are not paid attention to. For instance: Can men engage meaningfully in transformation in the order of gender while they continue to cling to the structural status and privileges which the dominant traditional culture provide them with? The question is important because, while some of the Reflecting Team members acknowledged that change was inevitable, they, nevertheless, found it very difficult to resist some of the benefits of male privilege in social relations on the one hand. Like most of the Basotho men, they have so conflated their being men with these privileges that when they are taken away they tend to think that their manhood is also taken away. How do you engage them to see themselves as separate from these privileges is a crucial question that should not be taken lightly.

There are those who strongly believe that that is how God has ordained it to be in creation. Because of this belief, some men cannot even see how the situation could have a negative impact on women. Now, how do you make them aware of the damaging effects of their belief and encourage them to seek alternative, more ethical ways of being and thinking about themselves? This is another question which is equally important. I believe these questions should not be taken for granted, as it appears to be by those who desire and work for change. I think they challenge them to be strategic in their work and interactions with men. If serious attention is not paid to them the efforts of transformation may be substantially compromised.

#### **6.4.5 Learning from the team member's lived experience and acknowledging men's struggles with change**

Our deliberation over the reaction of men to the decision of Metolong Authority provided us with the opportunity to explore the individual team members' experience with the culture that endorsed men's authority in their households and its effects on them. Their experiences provide us with a glimmer of hope that men could change provided they are respectfully engaged. They expressed how the fact that they were male and had paid *bohali* (the bride-price) had given them the status to exercise power in their households. The greatest challenge they faced was how they exercised that power.

One of the team members said "it can put the family together or destroy it depending on how you exercise it." All the other members agreed to his statement with emphatic yeses while he was

speaking. Another said there was a time when he assumed that it was the man who had the ultimate responsibility to give the rules by which the entire household should abide; that it was for the woman to execute them “for the good of the family” as he put it. He said it took him a long time to realise that most of the tensions between him and his wife were fed by that belief. His wife often ignored some of the decisions he took and he would feel challenged as a result. His wife’s reaction gradually made him to see the importance of consulting with her before he pushed on her decisions already taken. For the sake of “family peace I had to compromise”, he said. Another said that that which he accepted as normal (male power) had not only silenced his wife and children, but had also imposed limits on him in the broader social relationships. He said this new perspective did not come without struggles against the feeling of the fear that if he behaved differently, he would not appear “manly enough”, according to the societal expectations.

What these members said about their experiences as men in a culture that endorses and sanctions male authority contradicts the commonplace insistence of most Basotho men on the preservation of the status quo. Their stories represent an opening to the alternative ways of being men which can be described as “unique outcomes” (White & Epston 1990:55-63; Morgan 2000:51-72) in narrative therapeutic language. White (2004:197) summarises the notion. It refers to

- a) expressions of a degree of acceptance of aspects of the state of affairs of one’s life that do not fit with [the societal] expectations, norms and standards;
- b) responses that don’t fit with these expectations, norms and standards, but over which people are not giving themselves the hard time they could be giving themselves, and in
- c) actions that might constitute some form of refusal of, or that might convey a sense of not being wholly available to, or that might be questioning of, these expectations, norms and standards.

The above stories of the members of the Reflecting Team and, perhaps many untold others of Basotho men out there, such as the one of the man who assisted his wife to give birth, who experience similar challenges of being men in the modern Lesotho, need special attention if the process of transformation is to be sustained. They need to be “richly described” (Morgan 2000:15) as they do not support or sustain the present situation of male domination. A rich description involves the articulation in fine detail of such stories; interweaving them with the stories of other men and events. In this way alternative, more ethical ways of being men, as

demanding by a gender-sensitive consciousness would be encouraged. I believe as Basotho men begin to inhabit and live out these alternative stories, they could live out new self-images, new possibilities for relationships, and new the futures as well. When this happens the transformation of our society will be ensured. This is what we struggled to achieve with ourselves in our meetings as the Reflecting Team.

However, when put on a continuum, the various positions of the team members may provoke the reaction of the dominant ways of being men. If the alternative story is too different from the dominant one, it may meet more with resistance than when it is different but not too different; or the same but not too much the same. With this I want to underline how the reality of change is always fraught with challenges. It does not just happen without struggles of some sort, struggles which, as a matter of fact, reveal the dynamics of power relations in our everyday life. Power tends to face out of existence anything that puts a limit to it or exposes it.

A great lesson, therefore, that can be learned from the experience of the team members, even in these circumstances, is that a gender-ethical consciousness already exists among Basotho men though silent and unspoken about because of the dominant masculinity discourses in circulation in our Basotho society. This is well demonstrated by the reaction of the team members when the other member excused himself from attending the meeting that particular Sunday after the early morning service. He said his wife was sick and bed ridden. She needed him to be there to give care to her. The reason for his excuse dominated our exchange that day. The other team members applauded his decision as bold, accountable and responsible. One member said “this is one story I wish could be known by men who still believe that *caring is the thing of women* (my emphasis)”. He observed that this other team member’s decision “challenges other men whose lives are regulated by the belief in *phehla mokobolo*”. As we saw above the discourse of *phehla* often discourages men from caring for their wives and children. The other team member said he felt “encouraged and supported to continue making a bed and polishing my own shoes and cooking for my family” by the decision of this other team member. “The fear that other men would ridicule me has always discouraged me from acknowledging before other men that I often do these things in my home”. He emphasised.

Such stories, which represent ruptures of a gender-ethical consciousness, have a potential of enticing Basotho men to think outside their dominant cultural masculinity boxes. It must be acknowledged, however, that the process will not be an easy one. The present dominant masculinity discourses appear to hold promises of men's interests, which some individual Basotho men may not be ready to relinquish. For this reason, efforts of transformation need to pay close attention to ways in which men can be made aware of their oppressor roles. This is what we struggled to achieve with ourselves in our monthly meetings of the Reflecting Team. We used the principles of social construction theory and the narrative approach to therapy, discussed below, to this effect. What is relevant at this juncture is to understand the complexity of the situation most men are in with regard to their participation in oppressorship.

#### **6.4.6 Developing the awareness of oppressor roles**

Earlier I posed two questions. First, whether men can engage meaningfully in transformation in the order of gender while they occupied a structurally privileged status in that order. Second, how do you engage them to see themselves as separate from the privileges that come with that status? I think taking into consideration these questions and the ideas of Pease (1997:110-123) on how to challenge the internalised domination can help in the handling of the issue of change in the order of gender. They kept me focused as I interacted with the team members. Pease has explored the challenges faced by people who believe in the need for social transformation but who, because of their structural location, gender and race etc., represent part of the social problem that requires transformation. Pease's ideas are relevant to the situation of most Basotho men in the face of a gender-ethical consciousness. The consciousness stands for the liberation of women from all forms of domination. Even if they may desire to change, as was the case with the members of the Reflecting Team, their gender and their privileged structural positioning in social relations poses a big challenge for them.

Pease notes that liberation struggles commence with the oppressed getting in touch with their own oppression and that such struggles can only be led by the oppressed themselves. Nevertheless, he argues that this would be problematic if those who occupy the "oppressor roles" were left off the hook. He argues that it requires the development of a consciousness of our oppressor roles, privilege and an understanding of how different forms of oppression are related

if any meaningful change would occur. I think this is what a gender-ethical consciousness wants from Basotho men even if it may invariably generate a series of significant personal dilemmas in the process. To understand this situation, it is necessary to define what oppression means.

#### **6.4.6.1 Defining oppression**

In sociological terms of the relationship between the so-called the first and the third worlds, Bucher (1976:77, 79-81.) defines what it means to be an oppressor. His understanding of what makes an oppressor is relevant to the notion of oppressorship in the order of gender relations which is the primary concern of this study. Among others, Bucher says that being an oppressor is taking oneself as the social norm and an indicator against which every depiction of abnormality is judged. It is to exploit labour and profit from it; to control the political processes at the expense of others. It is to degrade and classify impersonally the other. It is when the privileged refuse to see that they are part of the problem because they enjoy to a large extent the benefits of oppressive structures; when they deny that they are responsible for carrying out the circumstances that oppress the other.

Bucher's definition highlights the situation of the present dominant masculinities in Lesotho. For instance, in chapter four, we saw how masculinity has been, and continues to be an organising principle of the social system of the Basotho people. This masculinity principle appears to relegate women to a lower status within the social relations and structures which are defended as part of Basotho's cultural heritage. In chapter five we have seen how Basotho men's interests over those of women are protected in those traditional customs which they defended against the fierce attack from the European christianism and British colonial imperialists. The dominant philosophy of *sekoele* explored in chapter three, defends those interests as the essential part of the ontological and unchanging being of a Mosotho, as expressed in the notion of *Bosotho* (sothoiness).

In the light of Bucher's definition of what it means to be an oppressor, and the previous chapters, Basotho men appear to participate in the oppression of others, women, more than most of them may be aware. It is this not being aware which poses the biggest challenge for the transformation efforts. Most Basotho men, as we have seen in the case of some members of the Reflecting Team, object that men are oppressors when they live out their lives according to Basotho cultural

framework. Because of this situation, I want to emphasise that we do not need to be open and purposeful to oppress (Bucher 1976:89-97). We can be oppressors by default (Pease 1997:115) as we live by specific expectations, norms and standards of our society. Our monthly meetings of the Reflecting Team revealed this fact to us.

It was often after an intense exchange that we became aware of our own internalisation of the dominant culture of male hegemony sustained by our Basotho and church cultural discourses. We became aware of the various ways through which we tried to preserve the status quo. The common among us was a sustained scepticism about, and the fear of the deterioration of “standards” in families, society at large and the church if women were to be allowed to provide ultimate leadership. We admitted that, perhaps our scepticism and fear were being fed by our awareness of the loss of the privileges we enjoyed as men within the present dominant discourses whether *Sesotho* and/or *Christian* according to our churches.

For example, we acknowledged with “remorse”, so to speak, that if a man happens to fall sick, it is a woman in his life, who is expected to nurse him. When women in men’s lives fall sick men often call female relatives to do the job for them. It would be a rarity to most Basotho if a man would happen to nurse his wife at all. It is in this light that we applauded the conduct of the team member who cancelled the attendance of our monthly meeting to give care to his wife. We saw him as the embodiment of the gender-ethical consciousness we were trying to understand what it represents in our meetings. We acknowledged that when announcements are made in the church concerning the “cleaning” of the church interior, it is, without being overt about it, women and girls who are expected to do the work, not men and boys. We admitted that we were happy when women and girls were publicly rebuked in the church for it. We acknowledged that even though girls were not allowed to serve at the altar, the altar boys and men of the parish from which the team members came were using girls to raise funds for their exclusively male group. For two consecutive years the boys organised a beauty pageant where parish girls were “paraded” for the benefit of the boys and the men who did not want to stand side by side with around the altar. These examples and many others we mentioned, demonstrate how men and boys are caught up in the web of exploitation of the feminine gender, sometimes, without being aware of it. When they are, some of them tend to evade the awareness.



#### **6.4.6.2 The evasion of awareness of oppressorship**

One of the strategies adopted by Basotho men whenever their oppressor roles are revealed and challenged is that, they tend to claim to be the oppressed themselves. The issue of men as the “disadvantaged sex group” and the need for “gender balance” in their favour, raised by Matšela and Motlomelo (2002:4, 5), in their study of male *lebollo* practice, typifies one of the Basotho men’s tactics of evasion of the challenge of a gender-ethical consciousness. It denies and undermines the fact that Basotho men are structurally privileged in social relations. In as far as this study is concerned this position makes sense only in the context of the resistance that comes as a result of the awareness of the link between men’s power and privileges and women’s structural inferiority, something which a gender-ethical consciousness challenges. This position of Matšela and Motlomelo should not be maintained because it tends to prop up male domination by strengthening men’s sexist consciousness.

This tendency is not unique to Basotho men. Pease (1997:20, 21-22) observed it in the phenomenon of men’s liberation movements in the western countries. Of some books on men’s liberation Pease remarks: “One gets the impression from these books that men’s liberation is just that – that it has little to do with the freeing of women and much to do with increasing the wellbeing and furthering the self-interests of men. What we see here is the idea of liberation within self-prescribed limits”. Given their emphasis on the individual male person, Pease further argues that “[e]nriching the individual male personality can easily exist with the institutionalised oppression of women”.

If this is true, Matsela and Motlomelo’s suggestion that Basotho men are oppressed appears to distort the meaning of oppression and should not be maintained. The premise on which it is based appears to be flawed because the exercise of power does not oppress the person who holds it over others. Oppression, as Pease (1997:116) puts it, “involves the violation of personal integrity and the obstruction of people’s ability to develop their full potential.” It should be emphasised, therefore, that in no way sexism can oppress men just as a white person cannot be oppressed by racism (Wineman 1984:184-185). If this is true, then, the claims of Basotho men that they are disadvantaged or oppressed when women are empowered, is untenable. It only reveals the extent to which they can go to preserve the status quo. It should be seen as a tactic of

evasion of responsibility and accountability for the underprivileged position of women in the Basotho society.

If Basotho men do not find ways to move beyond this way of thinking, they will continue to be afflicted with numerous physical and psychological problems. It is not the purpose of this study to explore those problems, but I think this can be a good reason for them to reconstruct their ways of being and thinking to save their lives, as Pease (1997:41, 42) would suggest. Jackins (1985:14) argues that the weighty responsibilities saddled and loaded upon men by the culture can be challenging for the majority of men. His argument helps us to see how sometimes the privileges men may enjoy in Basotho culture may damage them in the long term. Even though they are enjoying being masters, this in reality, appears to be working against them in other aspects of their lives.

According to Clatterbaugh (1990:16) men may be damaged by sex roles more than women are. Without denying that men may be disadvantaged, constrained, alienated, dehumanised and hurt in the context of masculinities that inhabit their lives, neither this should not be interpreted as the same as being oppressed (Flood 1991:4). Oppression is not a concept that refers to people's feelings. It is rather based on a political analysis of institutional power imbalances in society (Brod 1981:12). To argue that men are oppressed by sexism is, therefore, to obscure the analysis of power imbalance in society. As Pease (1997:43) argues, the disadvantages men may be suffering as a result of their position of power in society should be understood as part of the struggle against institutionalised men's power which destroys men themselves even though they may temporarily benefit from it. And this adds to the weight of a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study.

To sum up, the above exploration of the notion of a gender-ethical consciousness and what it stands for in the order of gender, has highlighted the need for change in Basotho men's ways of being and thinking. In the next section the principles of social construction theory and the narrative metaphor, as adopted in narrative therapy are explored. The aim is to highlight how those principles can contribute in facilitating Basotho men's awareness of the damaging effects of their ways of being and thinking on women, and to help them to seek alternative, more ethical ways. This is one of the aims of this study.

## **6.5 Social Construction Theory and A Narrative Approach to Therapy and Masculinity**

Freeman and Lobovits (1993:188) argue that

[o]ur sense of self is inextricably imbedded in and defined by the social, cultural, political and economic ecologies within which we humans live. We tell stories in our thoughts and conversations about who we and others are. These narratives not only constitute our descriptions of self and others but shape how we behave, interact, and experience life.

The present dominant ways of being and thinking of most Basotho men appear to thrive on the claims of the natural and the divine entitlement. Within this ideological framework, most of them tend to interpret their being male in ways that give it a superior social value in relation to being female. These interpretations are in turn sustained and validated by Basotho's social systems into which men are born; systems which privilege male persons more than the females, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapter. I have the impression that the damaging effects of this situation on women are taken for granted by most Basotho, men and women alike. I believe that the social constructionist and narrative metaphors can expose this situation and support the process of searching for alternative, more ethical ways being and thinking about men.

The ideas expressed in the argument of Freeman and Lobovits encapsulates the assumptions of social construction and narrative metaphors. In the context of this chapter, these ideas are useful in challenging the naturalistic framework within which Basotho men tend to interpret their experience of manhood. What a gender-ethical consciousness challenges the most in this framework, is the naturalising of male power by men. It reveals that the power men exercise is not natural nor God's doing in the creation of male persons, but a creation of men themselves.

### **6.5.1 The 'natural', history and culture**

The social construction theory (Burr 2003:2-7; 46-62) and the narrative approach to therapy (White 1997:ix-x; 220-230; 2004: 98-106) by their basic orientation, take us out of the realm of the "natural" and pitch us into the realm of history and culture, where realities are open to multiple interpretations. In this light, even the naturalistic interpretation of masculinity, which is common among Basotho men, appears as a historical construction which can be challenged by other interpretations. They emphasise that the multiple alternative versions of realities, such as

masculinity, are potentially available to us through language and the stories people tell about themselves and others, and not natural determinism. What this means is that human beings are basically interpreting being. They actively engage in the process of interpretation of their experiences. They live by the stories they have about their lives, and that these stories actually shape, constitute and embrace their lives, as White (1995:13-15; 1997:217-119; 1998:225-227) argues. Put differently, “[p]eople breathe in the framework through which they interpret their world and their experience” (Pease 1997:121). That is, the “knowledges of life and practices of living” are not just “inputs that are directly reproduced as outputs in people’s act of life”. People do not passively reproduce the cultural knowledges and practices they live by. On the contrary, they actively ascribe meaning to them. The narrative structures provide a principal frame of intelligibility through which people engage in the activity of making sense of their experiences of life, as White (2004:101-104) would put it.

Basotho men are no exception to this observation of White. They are humans and humans are interpreting beings (Morgan 2000:5). In the context of a gender-ethical consciousness, the question is what interpretations Basotho men give to their experiences as male persons and how these interpretations impact on others, especially women and children. Those interpretations which give them a privileged status in social relations and are justified on the basis of natural and divine entitlement are rejected as unethical by a gender-ethical consciousness. The consciousness wants Basotho men to acknowledge and take the responsibility of their own doing and its damaging effects on others, women and children. But it, as critical, a gender-ethical consciousness does not stop here.

It also challenges the foundationalist and representationalist assumptions behind the naturalistic interpretation attached to being men, as has been demonstrated in the previous chapters. It rejects the idea that there is a single foundation of being and thinking about men of, which the multiple ways of being and thinking would be representations. On the contrary, a gender-ethical consciousness stresses that men are a product of historical and cultural processes and challenges them on that basis. If this is the case, it suggests that men can be recreated into more ethical ways of being and thinking. Here lies the challenge with representationalism. Representationalism is based on the foundationalist, objective, timeless assumptions, things which a gender-ethical consciousness rejects.

Standing on the shoulders of Foucault (1988a; 1988b), White (1997:220-235) also draws attention to yet another feature of representationalism within modern psychology. This feature is found in what is known as repressive hypothesis and psychologies of emancipation associated with this hypothesis. Foucault (1994:282) succinctly describes the repressive hypothesis as

the idea that there exists a human nature or a base that, as a consequence of certain historical, economic, and social processes, has been concealed, alienated, or imprisoned in and by mechanisms of repression. According to this hypothesis, all that is required is to break these repressive deadlocks and man will be reconciled with himself, rediscover his nature or regain contact with his origin, and re-establish a full and positive relationship with himself.

In the case of this study, a similar tendency has been identified within the Sesotho popular culture and postcolonial discourse called *sekoele*, explored in chapter three. In this discourse Basotho men are encouraged to recover their essential and characteristic ways of being and thinking that were lost with the arrival of the Europeans in Lesotho since 1833. The social constructionist outlook on which the narrative metaphor rests does not only reject the idea of repressive hypothesis in psychologies of liberation. It also rejects it in postcolonial discourses such as *sekoele* even if it is appealing to those who have suffered the damaging effects of the colonial discourse. As was demonstrated in chapters three and four, *sekoele* thrives on the assumption that there exists the so called “ntho tsa Sesotho” (*Sesotho* realities), including ways of being and thinking about men, in their pristine condition and that these can be recovered. It is important to remark that *sekoele* is itself a social construction.

In the perspective of social constructionism and the narrative metaphor (White 1997: ix-x; 220-230; 2004:98-106) the belief in pristine nature is challenged on the basis of the changing nature of human life as lived across time. All the taken-for-granted and enchanted notions about life and identity are evaluated on this basis. Any pursuit of uncovering the truth about our identity which is sustained by the belief in the grand narratives of essential human nature should also not be maintained on the same basis. The point is that life is a social phenomenon in which constructions of life and identity are socially negotiated in communities of people. It is an outcome of people’s engagements with a specific mode of thought and life that are cultural and historical. In short, life and identity are not achieved in an historical and cultural vacuum. For

this reason, the social constructionist and the narrative metaphors do not seek to connect behaviour to its determinants but action to its sense (White 1995: 214-221). Connecting action to its sense underscores a process of interpretation; how people make sense of their experience. This process has the potential to challenge people to break away from what has been received and the unitary accounts of life and engage them in the politics of relationship.

These ideas of White are relevant to this study, which seeks alternative, more ethical ways of being men in the modern Lesotho. In terms of a gender-ethical consciousness, they challenge Basotho men to think out of the box of the dominant traditional Sesotho culture and the traditional Christian religious culture in Lesotho, where being a man is defined in terms of unchanging truths of manhood and the purpose of God in the creation of a man. They probe us to reflect on what is routinely thought as “facts” and “truths” of men’s and women’s human natures in Sesotho culture and Christian tradition in Lesotho, when it comes to matters of gender relations and human action. That is, that which is taken for granted in gender relations in Sesotho culture and the biblical tradition and its interpretations in Lesotho, within the constructionist and narrative perspective as embodied in the experience of a gender-ethical consciousness, provides us with options for the deconstruction of the accepted and venerated ways of being and thinking about men’s and women’s human nature and action. In this way a gender-ethical consciousness engages us in the politics of relationships, which the belief in the existence of essential human nature and specific supernatural religious truths restricts us from exploring.

The politics of relationships reveal that our everyday life is conditioned by contestation that is sustained by hierarchies of knowledge: politics of inequality and marginalisation, oppression and subjugation, dominance and submission, exploitation and resistance. In other words, the relational politics reveal the practices of power as they operate in gender, class, race, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation divides in our everyday life (White 1995: 216-221; 1998:228-229), and these practices as maintained by a religious outlook. The main interest of this study has been how these politics operate in gender relations. In this chapter the emphasis is on challenging this situation by arguing that there are alternatives, as suggested by a constructionist and narrative perspectives. These perspectives highlight the importance of language in the construction of identities such as men’s identity.

### 6.5.2 Sesotho Language and the construction of men's and women's identities

The Reflecting Team of this study will help us to appreciate the role of Sesotho language in the construction of men's identity in Lesotho. Sesotho Language has been one of the challenges which kept on recurring during our deliberations in our meetings. For instance, in one meeting, describing a relationship between a man and a woman, one member said, "*Mosali ke thokolosi eo monna ha a se na eona u tsebang hore ha a fella; ha phethahala*" (a woman is a *thokolosi* which, if a man does not have, you know he is incomplete and imperfect). In popular discourse, *thokolosi* is a mysterious creature believed to be possessed and used by women associated with witchcraft to achieve their purposes. The metaphor of women as *lithokolosi* (plural) provided us with the opportunity to reflect on the dominant masculine and feminine discourses which regulate how men and women relate in the institution of marriage. As depicted in the metaphor, a woman is just a pawn of the man just as the *thokolosi* is a pawn of its owner, the witch. A woman is there to serve the interests of the man who marries her. Put differently a man is a controller of his woman.

Using the same metaphor one member challenged the team members to reflect further on it. He pointed out that in the popular culture, *thokolosi* as a "women's thing", sometimes it is said that it turns against the owner when and if they do not do what it wants from them in return for the services. He asked us what that implied for a man as the "owner" of the wife and this latter as the creature. One member responded, "*Ke hona moo bothata bo leng teng; mohlomong ke eona ntho ena e bakang ho hloka botsitso ka hara malapa a mangata*" (That's where the problem lies. Perhaps this is the thing (a woman's resistance) that causes so much instability in most of the families). Another member said, "*Haele hantle mosali ke eena ea nang le matla qetellong ea 'maqetello. Haeba a rata a ka bont'sa monna hore na ke mang. Empa fela ba re hlompha; ba hlompha moetlo oa Sesotho le bebele tse behileng monna e le hlooho ea mosali*" (As a matter of fact it is the woman who ultimately has power. If she wanted, she would show a man what she is made of. It's just that they respect us; that they respect Sesotho tradition/culture and the bible, which have enthroned a man as the head of a woman). When this member said this I threw a question as to how we men exploit this "respect" of women to have them do what we want. One member responded: "*Ka ho nts'a bohali le ho sebetsa ka thata hore lijo li be teng ka lapeng. Ha u sa fepe mosali'ao u monts'a ka liatleng tsa hau*" (Through the brideprice and hard work to

ensure that there is food in the family. If you don't feed your woman, you release her from your hands).

At that moment another member, challenged us to reverse the relationships implied in the metaphor on the basis that there are women who work while their husbands stay at home. He asked us what we thought about a situation where a man was the *thokolosi* which if a woman did not have she would be incomplete and imperfect. One member responded that in Sesotho culture that is unimaginable. It is the man who has the reins of control. From there we identified other metaphors and practices which give men power that is denied to women. We identified, for instance, women as "*batsoetse*" (those who have given birth), "*matekatse*" (prostitutes) etc. In Sesotho language, these linguistic referents are never used to refer to men even though their human actions constitute those realities. We also discussed the practice of name change expected of women after they are wedded. As a result we also acknowledged that it is not a man who has to change his identity through name change but a woman.

On the issue of name change, almost all the members of the Reflecting Team admitted that they did not approve of the practice by which educated and professional women kept their birth surnames or just added that of their husbands to their birth one. We acknowledged how Sesotho language is very clear on who marries and is married between a man and a woman. It gives the active marrying role to a man and denies it to the woman. There is no mutuality of partners in the sense of the European cultures. We acknowledged, as it were, that this way of interpreting marriage in itself confers to a man an active role in what ultimately happens in the family and a passive one to a woman. It creates a woman's identity as a dependent identity while that of a man is created as autonomous.

For this reason, a woman has to live under the shadow of her husband: "She has no life of her own" as one member of the team commented about the popular song called "*Ipoleleng Basali*" (Identify yourselves, Women), sang mostly by traditional women. In this song each of the women singing it are invited to identify themselves. In response, each would first respond by proclaiming that she is married by mentioning the name of her husband. She would then proceed to mention the number of her children and mention them by their names. According to the team member, the identity of a woman is defined through her husband and the children she bore for



the husband and his family. Another member remarked that the song “as a matter of fact sings the praises of the practice of *bohali* (bride price) as it is understood by most Basotho men”.

There is an important issue revealed about Sesotho language in the above deliberations of the team members which merit attention. The issue is that there is a connection between Sesotho language or discourse and the practice of power in social interactions. Through specific concepts, Sesotho language can empower or disempower people depending on how these concepts are used to talk about and describe them. For instance, in traditional Sesotho marriage discourse, it is men who “marry” women and women are “married” by men and not vice versa. The practical implication of this emphasis is that, it is a woman who has to leave her family to join the family of the man and take his family names. One member argued that this practice is behind the resistance of men to live at their wife’s place: “*Ho ka thoe ke ngoetsi; e leng ntho e lihlong le sesomo ho motho e motona ha ho ka chuo joalo ka eena*” (He could be said to be a *ngoetsi*, something which is a shameful disgrace and mockery to a male person if such a thing is said about him).

As we explored the metaphors which depicted relationships between men and women and practices of manhood and womanhood in our sessions, I sensed how the discourses that sustain those practices served the purposes of control of not only women but also children. On rational grounds, I asked the members whether, in their thinking, if people really understood that they were being controlled they would not stand for it. They all responded in the affirmative. In his description of power, Foucault (1976:86) observes that an essential aspect of the operation of power is that it is “tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms”. This is what Sesotho language is doing. It is hiding male power which has succeeded to domesticate women.

I think this is what is mostly taken for granted in the present efforts towards transformation in the order of gender in Lesotho more than most Basotho are aware of. I have the impression that more energy is put on the generation of laws than raising consciousness about how gender politics actually operate and why those laws were needed. I think that there is a need to systematically engage in the issues of gender with Sesotho language if a meaningful change would occur on the ground where ordinary men and women are guided by the prescriptions of Sesotho language,

culture and traditions. This appears to be taken for granted even by the members of the parliament in Lesotho.

In 2003, during the parliamentary debates on the law that would regulate local elections, Mr Malebo for example, felt that there was no need to amend clause 3 of the local government act 1997 which was based on the Interpretation Act 1977 section 4, clause 2 as amended in the Interpretation Act 1993. The clause describes male gender as including the female. He maintained that that was the problem of English language and not Sesotho language. Mr Masemene who was the minister for Justice then emphasised that Sesotho language was “more developed” and gender sensitive than the former because it does not make distinction between “he” and “she” (The Kingdom of Lesotho Parliamentary Debates, Official Report of Wednesday, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 2003).

The arguments of the two parliamentarians seem to be based only on the difference between the two languages as merely two different descriptive modes of the reality of the biological differences between men and women. They fail to grasp a bigger picture of Sesotho language as part of a broader sociocultural discourse which in other respects is as problematic as the English language in distinguishing clearly between “he” and “she”. They trivialise the connection of Sesotho language and experience within a broader context of Sesotho sociocultural practices where the gender based differentiation cuts through the fabric of Basotho society. For this reason, I do not think that Sesotho language is more developed in gender sensitiveness for merely using the same pronoun to refer to both genders unlike English language which makes a clear distinction. The conclusion is out of touch with what obtains in everyday life, where deeply sexist arrangements of the Basotho society regulate the relationships between men and women. Unless this bigger picture is seen for what it is, the efforts of transformation in the order of gender will remain superficial in Lesotho. We must see language and experience together. By not seeing language and experience together, the parliamentarians subverted the very law they were creating. I believe the parliamentarians should take the reality seriously as they formulate the laws on whose basis social justice is defined in the society. From a gender perspective, formulations of laws in which men’s will and interests are secured help to sustain and perpetuate the unequal distribution of power between men and women in daily social interactions in daily life.

### 6.5.3 Language and experience

If language provides us with ways of structuring our experience of the world and of ourselves and that the concepts we use do not pre-date language but are made possible by it (Burr 2003:48-62), it must be emphasised that language and experience are inseparable. It means the world we inhabit is accessed through language. Language is the only thing we have to deal with the world and ourselves. In this perspective, as we have seen above, there is no men's essential nature which is revealed by things like personality traits, attitudes as it is purported by the *sekoele* outlook. There is no men's coherent, unified self with which individual Basotho men can measure their masculinity within the everyday social interaction. Instead, the masculine self is a product of language and social interactions, and so is in flux and unstable. The productive force of language in social interactions with other people guarantees a fragmented, shifting and temporary identity for all of us. If language is indeed the place where identities are constructed, maintained and challenged, then this also means that language is the crucible of change, both personal and social. It means language and social action go together. For this reason, attention should be paid to how Sesotho language is constructing Basotho men's and women's identities. What a gender-ethical consciousness does is to criticise and resist those masculine identities which spawn unethical ways of being and thinking around which women's and children's wellbeing is jeopardised.

I think this is what Foucault (1972:49) draws attention to in his definition of discourses. He defines discourses as practices which form the objects of which they speak. What this suggests is that discourses are not simply abstract ideas or ways of speaking about and representing things. On the contrary, they have ramifications for what we can do and what we should do. They closely connect with institutional and social practices which have profound effects on how people live their lives, on what they can do and what can be done to them, as Burr (2003:75-80) argues. They sustain the "techniques of self", which provide people with the "practical know-how" (White 2004:100-101). This is what appears to have been missed by the parliamentarians cited above about Sesotho language.

It is also what the Christian churches in Lesotho mostly appear to take for granted in their reading and interpretation of the bible as it is highlighted in part two of the previous chapter. In

the context of male domination as explored in this study, the churches' reading and interpretation of the bible and their impact on their pastoral approaches should not be taken for granted. In the perspective of this study, these interpretations and pastoral approaches appear to be part of the discourses which sustain practices of the abuse of women and children. It is for this reason, in the second part of the previous chapter, I argued for a need for the development of pastoral care of men, in which the dominant ways of reading and interpreting the bible and church dogmas have to be assessed in the light of the issues of gender power relations and gender based violence in all its forms in the families and churches' contexts and the society at large. In the light of the exploration of the meaning of a gender-ethical consciousness in this chapter, the need further makes itself felt. I want to outline what I consider to be the crucial principles of such pastoral care of men before this chapter is concluded.

#### **6.6. The Principles of Pastoral Care of Men in the Context of Male Domination and Gender-Based Violence**

Poling's (1991; 1996; 1997) exploration of issues of abuse of power in terms of gender, race, class and culture from a theological perspective, demonstrates how the churches have become accessory to violence against women and children. He (1997: 155-162) argues that churches have not identified male violence as a pressing ethical and religious issue. They do not see it as a major threat to the health of women, children and families. Instead, they tend to talk more about "family values" as a solution to society's ills, but at the expense of women and children who are abused by men within the very structures of the family and the theological principles which regulate the institution of marriage. He argues that their positions and pastoral approaches appear to be framed by a patriarchal theology which gives precedence to the rights of men over women and children. On this basis, he challenges the churches to be more sensitive to the cultural, class, and racial context in which male violence against women and children takes place. He challenges the churches to reassess and reconsider their traditional doctrines which he believes have a bearing on the issues of male violence against women and children. He particularly singles out the doctrines on salvation, confession, repentance, sanctification, restitution, forgiveness, sin and evil, theology of power and sexuality and the authority of Jesus. From the perspective of social construction theory, as I argued in the second part of the previous chapter, these doctrines are

considered to be religious discourses which sustain the mantle of male power and violence against women and children.

The ideas of Poling are relevant to the situation of the Christian churches in the Lesotho context as highlighted in the previous chapter. The pastoral principles of the care of men he (1997:147-155) proposes are adopted in this study as they sound to be sensitive to the demands of the gender-ethical consciousness as it is understood in this study. The first principle: any care of men should aim at the safety of women and children around men. As Wirtz and Schweitzer (2003:189-191) have also emphasised in their work with men who engage in violence and abuse at home, the primary aim of pastoral care of men should be to maximize the safety of women and children. As Poling argues, it would be unethical to engage in pastoral care or counselling with men, especially who are violent without paying attention to the safety of and pastoral care needs of their victims.

The second principle: Since most of the pastors and pastoral counsellors are ill equipped to deal with situations of domestic violence, and often work within structures of secrecy and deception that fosters violence, pastoral care of men should be open to using wider community structures of accountability. Since some of these structures are male dominated, it is significant that mechanisms be devised to organise female persons who can articulate women's experience and voices to participate and assist in the process of helping abusive and violent men to be accountable and responsible. This is important in the light of the next principle.

The third principle: pastoral care of men should aim at combating secrecy and men's defensive rationalisations of abuse and violence. From their experience of working with men who engage in violence and abusive actions, Wirtz and Schweitzer (2003:194-195) have identified what they call "enemies of responsibility". These are defensiveness, self-righteousness, self-centredness and entitlement notions, blaming practices and denial/minimising/trivialising. In the context of the Lesotho society, which is characteristically patriarchal, and where most men believe they have a right to chastise women, as the team members have noted, the enemies of responsibility and accountability are abounding. Now, a pastoral care of men should not tolerate these enemies especially when they involve physical, emotional and sexual abuse against women and children. Combating secrecy is also pivotal in the context of the traditional discourse of womanhood,

which encourages women to tolerate their husbands' abusive behaviours: "*ho ngalla mots'eo*" (to sulkily seek refuge within the household where abuse is happening and not to go public about it).

The fourth principle: A pastoral care of men should challenge the principle of confidentiality so emphasised by the traditional pastoral care and counselling methods. Within the churches confidentiality has provided safety for confession of sin to be addressed by the rituals of the church. It has not addressed the safety of the victims of the confessed "sins". Women and children have not been helped by such confessions within church structures. Such methods appear to reinforce Basotho discourses and practices which discourage people from speaking out against acts of abuse committed within a family circle under the pretense of the "family secrets". There is a Sesotho axiom to this effect: "*pinyane ha e senye motse*" (secrecy does not corrupt/destroy a family/village).

The above principles have emphasised a pastoral care with men who engage in abusive behaviour patterns. But as Bird (1994:51-52) has argued, in as far as the notions of power and politics are concerned, all of us are the disguised abusers. She remarks that unless these terms are placed within a societal and personal context, they are meaningless. She insists that abusers in disguise are not the others; they reflect all of us even if we have not actually abused any one. If what Bird says is true, pastoral care of men must also aim at the disguised abusers because they are part of the community which nurtures and maintains the myths that are maintained and perpetuated by the community. As Bird argues, it is power and politics that maintains such myths. The following principle puts emphasis on the "disguised male abusers" who have not actually committed acts of abuse but live with the possibility in as far as they are part of the community where power and politics are a reality. The principle is adopted from Slattery's (2003) experience of working with young men "taking a stand against sexual abuse and sexual harassment".

Principle five: pastoral care of men should be informed and guided by specific assumptions about masculinity. It should acknowledge that masculinity has multiple and contradictory meanings and significance in different social contexts. For this reason, pastoral care of men should help men to explore their individual relationship with the notions of masculinity

circulating in the community. This is important because, the dominant constructions of masculinity are informed by patriarchal ideas and values which may have negative outcomes in relationships with women and children. For young men, masculinity is also informed by the political and social context of the contemporary society, which may have a negative impact on how they see women and children. Pastoral care of men should therefore, take note that masculinity for young men is informed by competing sets of ideas and discourses rather than a single set of values promoted by patriarchy. For this reason, pastoral care of men should be committed to exploring the interests of men and address the aspects of their relationship with masculinity that impact negatively on themselves and others such as women and children. It should help them to seek ethical ways of being and thinking in relation to their relationship with different forms of masculinity.

Poling develops the above principles in the context of pastoral care and therapy within a larger church context. In this study, these same principles are seen as relevant to a larger societal context of Lesotho, where the religious, cultural, social and political processes often interpenetrate each other. For this reason, they can also be adopted by structures of accountability in our society. They are meant to challenge the present ways in which issues of masculinity in our everyday life are handled by various societal structures set for the purpose of ensuring the social wellbeing of all, especially women and children in the Basotho society. The people working within these structures are challenged to explore other possibilities to increase their capacity in their efforts in handling the complex politics of masculinity in Lesotho for the benefit of women and children. In short, all those people whose work gets them involved with the often sticky issues of gender politics will find these principles useful.

### **6.6.1 Increasing capacity in working with men**

To increase the capacity, the position of this study is that if the social constructionist perspective and the narrative metaphor, as it is conceptualised in the narrative approach to therapy, as explored above, are incorporated in the transformation efforts, the present debates around gender politics in Lesotho would take a different direction. And the direction envisaged in this study is one which, being ethical, counts more in our loyalty to the traditional ways of being and thinking rather than the politics of identity. The ways in which the issues of gender based violence are

mostly handled in some structures of accountability in Lesotho appear to be influenced more by the politics of identity than by a gender-ethical consciousness. One factor contributing to this situation is the lack of proper training of the people working under those structures. For instance, I have heard so many stories of the people who have been there, of how the police officers assigned to work in the Child and Gender Protection Unit (CGPU) handled some cases of domestic violence. The impression I got from those stories is that, perhaps, the officers are not adequately prepared for such a complex task, just as priests and pastors in their churches often are, yet people tend to turn to them to seek help. Because of the lack of proper training, these people, who are otherwise well-intentioned-people, often have recourse to the resources of the framework of the dominant cultural and religious discourses and practices which may not respond to the needs of the people who come to seek their help.

In the final analysis, I have the impression that the debates around the politics of gender and ways of handling cases of abuse and violence are more influenced by a naturalistic framework of thinking which reinforces the politics of identity rather than relational politics as has been explored in chapters three, four and the first part of chapter five. If this is not paid attention to, the issues of ethics raised by a gender-ethical consciousness would continue to be suppressed. This is important in the light of the research questions of this study, which have sought to explore, first the dominant ideas and practices of the masculinity and their effects on Basotho men. Second, exploring the factors which discouraged Basotho men from embracing change and third, how the principle of social constructionism and a narrative approach to therapy can help Basotho men to seek alternative, more ethical ways of being and thinking about themselves. This study believes that the social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy are useful tools in handling the complex and often sensitive issues of gender in an atmosphere of respect, while we challenge each other's positions on it.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter has explored the concept of a gender-ethical consciousness and its implications for Basotho men in the order of gender relations. I argued that it is a critical consciousness which arises out of the present situation of the imbalance of power between men and women in the Basotho society. I argued that it represents a form of resistance to the domination of the



absolutisation of particular cultural ways of thinking about and being men, which relegate women to the shadows of men and make them their subjects. To overcome this situation, I argued for the need of developing the consciousness of oppressor roles on the part of men. In short, we have seen how a gender-ethical consciousness represents a deep yearning for alternative, more ethical ways of being men, and challenges Basotho men to acknowledge that there are specific ways of being and thinking which have negative effects not only on women and children but also on men themselves. In this way, a gender-ethical consciousness invites Basotho men to accountability and responsibility.

The other important thing that this chapter sought to explore was how the social constructionist and narrative metaphors in therapy could serve as valuable tools in the process of transformation in the order of gender, by challenging the cherished and the taken-for-granted naturalist concepts of being men. Drawing from the knowledge of the members of the Reflecting Team of this study, it was demonstrated how language is important in the construction of the dominant masculinity discourses which recruit men into the camp of domination of women. It was argued that if Sesotho language is paid attention to, some of the taken for granted notions of identity of men and women could be seen for what they are and be challenged therein. It is in the light of the position taken in this chapter and the previous ones that I proposed some principles of a pastoral care of men in Lesotho.

In terms of the research questions and the aims of this study in general, this chapter has attempted to articulate and suggest ways in which Basotho men could be encouraged to seek alternative, more ethical ways of being men. This study throughout has sought to explore the things which encouraged Basotho men not to accept change in the order of gender, with the purpose of encouraging them to seek alternative ways of being. Through the help of the social constructionist and narrative metaphors, this chapter has attempted to challenge the underlying naturalistic framework, in which the present dominant operations of masculinity in Lesotho have been based. In the next and final chapter, I offer some reflections on the study as a whole and the conclusions I reached as a result.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

#### **7.1 Introduction**

In this last chapter I offer not only personal reflections on the study, but also make some final arguments of its thesis as a whole: gendered consciousness as watershed of masculinity in Lesotho. First, I will focus on the challenges posed by the politics of cultural identity in the search for gender justice in terms of the research questions and aims of this study. I want to propose how these challenges can be responded to or handled. That is, I will make some propositions concerning how issues of gender, especially masculinity issues, could be handled in Lesotho, in the search for a more just society in terms of a gender-ethical consciousness. As part of the propositions, I will point a way forward in terms of further research. Secondly, my reflections will touch upon the journey with the Reflecting Team of this study. Thirdly, I will reflect on the implications for practical theology in the context of Lesotho in terms of the methodology of this study. And finally, I will offer some reflections on how I have been affected or changed by this study.

#### **7.2 The challenges posed by the politics of cultural identity in the search for gender justice**

In the introductory part of chapter one, I suggested that the operations of the present dominant masculinities in the modern Lesotho cannot be separated from the history of the Basotho as a people. In chapter two I demonstrated that this history is a history of the struggle to survive in the face of powerful local ethnic groups and those from Europe: the Dutch farmers, and the British imperial colonialists and labour migrancy in the mines of South Africa. In the first part of chapter five, I explored how the Christian missionary discourse of the Europeans sought to subjugate Basotho culture, because they believed it was “uncivilised” and “unchristian”, while they sublimated their own as “civilised” and “Christian”. I argued that in the process of Basotho men’s resistance to this European supremacist consciousness, cultural practices which reinforced male power within the Basotho culture were also defended as part of Basotho’s cultural identity and heritage. Now, we are at the point in the history of the Basotho, where these cultural practices which give advantage to men, are being interrogated by a gender-ethical consciousness

gaining momentum in the present modern Lesotho. Throughout the study I demonstrated how Basotho men have tried to resist this consciousness.

Against this background, when I embarked on this study I had always thought that, history, cultural issues, and gender issues, were inseparable. I still do. However, as the study unfolded and I got immersed in it, exploring the operations of masculinity in the history of the Basotho people, and their cultural practices, I was faced with a double-dimensional challenge, whose depth I did not anticipate. First, how to engage in issues of gender justice without trivialising or disparaging Basotho men's historical struggles against the British colonial and the missionary Christian discourses which sought to marginalise and subjugate Basotho's cultural ways because they believed they were uncivilised and unchristian? Secondly, how do we address issues of gender justice within the Sesotho cultural practices in the context of a postcolonial discourse of *sekoele* (a return to ancestral traditions, norms and practices), which tries to assert the cultural identity of the Basotho, threatened by the western cultural hegemony, disguised by the globalisation processes in the modern Lesotho?

As was explored in chapter three, I demonstrated how the *sekoele* philosophy identifies the "true" or "authentic" Basotho culture with pre-colonisation. Now, how does one address the issue of the imbalance of power in the order of gender, in the context of this framework of the thinking that defends some of these imbalances as part of the authentic culture of the Basotho, as the *sekoele* outlook tends to? This question is very important because *sekoele*, as an attitude, tends to interpret the questioning of such socio-cultural arrangements as part of an agenda that serves to perpetuate a Western cultural hegemony in Lesotho.

This is the dilemma I want to reflect on in this final chapter as part of the reflections on the study as a whole.

### **7.2.1 Sesotho culture as a fixed identity**

As I argued in chapter three, the way the *sekoele* philosophy speaks about "Sesotho culture", makes it sound as if it is a fixed entity that exists in its purity, and that it can be recovered by all the generations of the Basotho. Within this construction of Sesotho culture, the masculine and feminine identities of men and women are also made to sound as if they were fixed. They are

spoken of as if they are an unchanging nature of men and women. In this way, the individual Basotho men and women appear to be taken for essential representations of a fixed nature that constitutes the cultural identity of the Basotho. They are understood as though they were bearers of this identity without which, they themselves, would not be. It is thought of as their essential "nature". Within this framework, the stories men and women tell about themselves and others, are accorded a naturalistic status very similar to the status attributed to the identity categories of the internal state psychologies (White 2004:89). The concept that encapsulates these assumptions is *Bosotho* (sothoiness). *Bosotho* is assumed to be a constitutive element of their innermost personhood, as I demonstrated in chapter three.

According to the *sekoale* philosophy, as a postcolonial discourse, when Sesotho culture was marginalised by the British imperialists, and is allowed to be further marginalised by the present Western cultural hegemony, it is not just Basotho culture that was, and is destroyed, but also the very nature of the individual Basotho men's and women's personhood. It is this interpretation that has been disputed in this study. This construction of the Sesotho culture, and Basotho men and women as subjects of this culture, is problematic, particularly when issues of power relations, especially in the order of gender are raised and addressed.

First, most individual Basotho men and women are likely to think that if they changed, it would not just be a change of a social arrangement, but in the very act of changing the arrangement, they destroyed their very "true" self. It is as though there is a direct causal relationship between culture with its practices, on the one hand, and people's expressions of life, on the other. With White (2004:101), I want to emphasise that "the constitutive role of cultural knowledges and cultural practices in the formation of life and identity *is not* [my emphasis] necessarily associated with an assumption that life and identity are strictly determined by cultural modes of life and thought". As White would argue, "people do not passively reproduce these cultural knowledges and practices ... these knowledges of life and practices of living [are not] 'inputs' that are directly reproduced as 'outputs' in people's acts of life".

This, inter alia, is what the philosophy of *sekoale* appears to be missing in its beliefs about Sesotho culture as an entity in itself and Basotho men's and women's identities, as fixed identities following from that culture. For this reason, it does not attach the greater importance to

the questions which this study proposes, that should be taken seriously when issues of gender and culture are engaged. How do Basotho men and women engage with the Basotho cultural modes of life and thought? How do Basotho cultural knowledges of life and practices find their way into their minds and into their expressions of life? How is it that men and women pull the materials of culture together to form their identities, to make life? If expressions of life are versions of these knowledges and practices, how are these versions achieved? These questions underscore the activity of meaning making in life, and the *sekoele* philosophy appears to take for granted this process.

The *sekoele* philosophy manages to persuade most Basotho people, especially men, to resist change in the order of gender, by making them believe that a “true” Mosotho man or woman is the one who reproduces cultural knowledge and practices in their acts of life alone. For this reason, those who have accepted this position, find it difficult to change some of the social arrangements in the order of gender. I sensed this fear when I first met with the members of the Reflecting Team, and it was not only unique to them. I sensed it also as I interacted with the students of catholic priesthood at the seminary, and mostly male students at the university of Lesotho. I think this situation is taken for granted by the present transformation efforts. And it needs attention if any meaningful change would occur. I will come back to this point when I come to the journey with the members of the Reflecting Team.

### **7.2.2 The *sekoele* outlook and the innovative efforts**

The second thing which is problematic within the postcolonial discourse of *sekoele* when issues of power imbalance are raised within Sesotho culture itself is that, those who do so and attempt to take action and redress these imbalances, their identity is called into question. They are sort of, forced to choose between Basotho culture, on the one hand, and other cultures, especially Western and North American, on the other. It is a matter of either or. You are either a “true” Mosotho man or woman, or you are not. They must take great care to ensure that they are not perceived as advocates of the further marginalisation and oppression of the Basotho. They must be very cautious to ensure that they are not perceived as “betrayers” of their own traditions. This appears to be what is holding back most Basotho men and women from transforming. In this

way, *sekoele*, as a postcolonial discourse, has a tendency of functioning as a social silencer of a gender-ethical consciousness in Lesotho.

Within the context of the churches, those who raise the issue of the imbalance of power in the order of gender are silenced by being forced to choose between being “true/authentic” Christian man or women, and being “untrue/inauthentic”. There is no middle way. It is a matter of either or, just as is the case with the *sekoele* outlook, with regard to the Basotho culture. As was explored in the second part of the fifth chapter, similar assumptions are based on the existence of a “gospel core” and church dogmas which determine the “right” and “wrong” behaviour of the Christian men and women. If they fail to measure up to the absolute principles deduced from that core and dogmas, they are categorised in a hierarchical binary of “true/authentic or false” Christians, or members of the church, depending on their preferred way of living. Any pattern of behaviour which appears to challenge the assumed gospel core and the dogmas, is classified as unauthentic/ or false/ or unbiblical/ or unchristian, and therefore to be committed to the devil.

It is this meaning of “trueness or authenticity” that has been disputed in this study. This study, which is positioned within the social constructionist/narrative metaphors, holds a different perspective. It has maintained that rather than understanding authenticity as an outcome of some individual achievement in which the “truth” of men’s and women’s identity is revealed, or an identification of their “true” selves within the context of the tradition of thought associated with *Sesotho* or a church, authenticity is regarded as a public and social achievement in which men’s and women’s preferred identity claims, are acknowledged. As White (2004:90) argues, “people are dependent upon social processes of acknowledgement for the ‘authentification’ of their preferred identity claims; that, as an outcome of this social acknowledgement, people experience being ‘at one’ with these preferred claims”. On the contrary, the *sekoele* perspective and the churches’ discourses of the “authentic/true/real” on Basotho men’s and women’s identities are deeply coloured by a cultural determinism and naturalistic ideas.

This view is problematic because it suffocates the potential alternatives human life offers. When Basotho men and women become aware of these alternatives, I believe, as a result, they also become aware of the limits imposed on their lives by the dominant social arrangements. They start to see the imbalance of power relations within the dominant socio-cultural and religious

practices in which men are more privileged than women, which the *sekoele* outlook mostly tends to defend and advocate as Basotho's essential cultural identity. In this way, a gender-ethical consciousness advocated in this study, makes them to question these socio-cultural and religious practices.

This gender-ethical consciousness challenges Basotho men to stare in the eyes, the effects of the dominant gender practices, from which they benefit on the lives of women. It raises issues of ethics which call them to accountability and responsibility, as I have demonstrated in the previous chapter. It challenges them to seek alternative, more ethical ways of being men and thinking about them; ways which would allow the emergence of a more humane society in which the daily interactions between men and women are grounded and framed by, in Sesotho language, a *temohano* (a mutual awareness of the other in relation with the other) consciousness, as I have argued in the previous chapter, 6.4.1 and 6.4.2.

A *temohano* consciousness goes beyond a mere liberal consciousness, popularly referred to by the term *teka-tekano* (equality and equity of all in a society) in Sesotho language, in the present dominant discourse of gender equality. The *teka-tekano* consciousness is based on rights, equality and citizenship. As I have argued, the *temohano* consciousness, inter alia, challenges Basotho men on a much profound level to allow space and time for women to speak about their experience of the effects of men's ways of being and thinking on them, and to develop the awareness of their own maleness, in a culture and societal structures which give men advantage over women.

This is where the *sekoele* consciousness, as a postcolonial discourse and the churches' discourses of the "authentic" Christian life, appear to collide with a gender-ethical consciousness in terms of the *temohano* consciousness. The friction consists in that, some of the ways of being men questioned by a gender-ethical consciousness, are interpreted by the *sekoele* philosophy as part of the essential cultural identity to be protected. In the context of the churches, it consists in the latter's emphasis on specific biblical sources and Christian traditions, without taking into consideration the differences of contexts. The pre-colonial Sesotho culture and the specific biblical texts, Christian traditions and church dogmas, are romanticised and taken for a "true" representation of the "real" *Bosotho* (sothoiness) and *Christianity* respectively. But situated in

their historical and cultural contexts, these discourses, as I have argued in this study, represent the domination of women contested by a gender-ethical consciousness in the modern Lesotho, as is the case elsewhere in the world.

While a gender-ethical consciousness claims that there are alternative ways of being men and women, the *sekoale* consciousness, both in terms of the Sesotho cultural and Christian tradition, as perceived by the churches in Lesotho, in their different confessional traditions, discourage Basotho men from embracing those alternatives offered by life, and in this way, Basotho women are tied to an identity that serves the interests of men. They discourage them on the basis of naturalistic ideas, cultural and biblical and dogmatic determinisms. On these bases, they classify them into “true/authentic” Basotho men and women and/or Christian men and women, depending on how much they reproduce or not reproduce these discourses in their acts of life. This classification frames the way most Basotho people, men and women alike, interact with each other on a daily basis, than most of them are aware of, and has spawned social prejudices and arrogant attitudes toward those who are perceived not to measure up to the prescriptive moral norms of the discourses. For this reason, the notion of the “authentic/true/ real” should not be taken for granted as most of the Basotho people tend to.

### **7.2.3 At the back of the notion of the “authentic/true/real”**

Behind the notion of the “authentic/true/real” lies the assumption of the existence of the “natural”, the “essential” and the “foundational”. It is on these ideas of the “natural”, “essential” and “foundational”, that the gendered dichotomies such as “true” nature of Basotho men and women, as distinguished from that of men and women of other ethnicities, especially those of the Western world, are flourishing. Within the Sesotho culture itself, the identities of men and women are also constructed as two separate identities on the basis of a social ordering which keeps them separate through gender roles assumed to be natural, essential and foundational. Within this ordering, the masculine gender is constructed as “naturally”, “essentially” and “foundationally” strong, and superior to the feminine gender which is constructed as “naturally”, “essentially” and “foundationally” weak. Thus, the masculine gender is constituted as a social norm and reference point against which the weakness of the feminine is always assessed and judged. That is, being female is constructed as a devalued contrast of the male caste. This is the



factor which appears to reinforce Basotho men's resistance to transformation in the order of gender, more than most Basotho people are aware of.

There is a commonplace saying, which is mostly heard from the mouths of men, that underlines a masculine assessment of the assumed naturalness of the weakness of the feminine gender. We extensively exchanged ideas on it in one of the meetings of the Reflecting Team. The saying goes: *Basali ha ba na kelello* (women do not have the intellect), meaning women are naturally incapable of rational thinking and acts. For this reason, most Basotho men have internalised a belief that women need the guidance of men to lead an effective and productive life. In this perspective, they tend to interpret a gender-ethical consciousness as against the will of God, and their God-given responsibility to maintain social and moral standards in society and the church. This belief appears to influence how most Basotho men and boys relate and interact with women and girls on the everyday life, than most of the Basotho people are aware of. Until this reality is named and addressed by the present transformation efforts, those efforts will remain compromised. We often grappled with this reality in our meetings of the Reflecting Team.

In short, because our ways of being, as men and women, cannot be separated from the issues of culture, it is often difficult to speak of issues of justice within a culture without some misunderstanding of some sort. Our ways of living, as men and as women, are always influenced and maintained by the symbols, rituals, language, and relationship structures of our culture. For this reason, when some of the relationship structures are questioned, it sounds as though relationship structures of other cultures are privileged over the *Sesotho* ones. This is the impression I had from the exploration of the *sekoele* philosophy in chapter three, and the interface of Sesotho nationalism and masculinity in chapter four. Whenever these structures are criticised, it is often thought, it is Sesotho culture itself that is being criticised or undervalued, while a superior value is given to other cultures, which tend to dominate Sesotho culture. As I have demonstrated in chapter two and the first part of chapter five, this tendency to resist change in this way, is framed by historical resistance against cultural oppression which is part and parcel of Lesotho's history under the imperial British rule and the encounter of the Basotho with the European Christian missionaries. As I have specifically argued in chapter five, this resistance against cultural oppression has framed Basotho men's resistance to change in the order of gender

relations taken for Basotho's cultural identity. Change in the order of gender relations is often interpreted by Basotho men as giving in to the pressures from outside, from the West.

A corresponding attitude appears to prevail in most of the Christian churches in Lesotho. When gendered relationship structures within the church are criticised for privileging men, such a criticism is often interpreted, not only as an attack on the Church itself, but also as a disguised way of advocating for "unbiblical" and "unchristian" practices in the churches. Any suggestion of change in the order of gender relations, which speaks for the equality of partners, for instance in marital relationship, is interpreted as giving in to the influence of the Western modern secular culture, which is generally aggressive and hostile to the practice of religion and church teachings protecting such relationship structures. In this way, both the Sesotho and church cultures are employed not only as technologies of the construction of men and women who are loyal subjects to the systems, but also as principles which determine their belonging and remaining in those systems.

Given what I have learned during this study, I have come to believe that those who have a tendency of interpreting the questioning of the specific Basotho cultural and church practices in this way, are those, mostly men, who benefit from the preservation of the status quo. For this reason, it is not far-fetched to conclude that Sesotho culture, understood as an entity in itself, and the churches as entities in themselves, are easily manipulated to hold back a tide of transformation which a gender-ethical consciousness is demanding in the modern Lesotho. This is what appears to be happening in the contemporary modern Lesotho.

Now, one of the challenges that I see, facing those who genuinely desire and work for transformation especially in the order of gender, is how to strengthen and keep the influence of a gender-ethical consciousness on Basotho men and women. The challenge is very real, because this consciousness can be very scary to those, mostly men, who are privileged by the socio-cultural arrangements of the traditional Basotho society and the dominant theological and ecclesiological discourses, held by the churches. For this reason, approaches in addressing issues of gender justice, should not be taken for granted. I have some propositions to this effect.

## **7.2.4 Propositions**

From the above reflections, I propose the following with regard to gender issues raised in this study as a whole.

### **7.2.4.1 Masculinity and femininity are not natural**

The first proposition I want to make regards the natural status accorded to masculinity and femininity in the consciousness of most of the Basotho people. The proposition is that, all the notions of masculinity and femininity, which make them natural, should not be maintained, because ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are constructs specific to historical time and place, as I have argued throughout this study. They are categories continually forged, contested, reworked and reaffirmed in social institutions and practices as well as a range of ideologies” (Davidoff & Hall 1987:29). For this reason, all theories which tend to strengthen the notion that divisions between men and women are natural, should also not be maintained, because they direct attention away from structural power differences between men and women in the Basotho society, and in the church. The essentialist notions of human nature (White 1996; 1997:220-235; 2004:128-137) are actually tactics that disguise what is going on and obscure acts of meaning and whose meanings they are. This observation equally challenges biological scientists. Their descriptions of what they discover about the natural world, which are accorded the status of scientific language, are often than not, shaped by culture (Martin 2003:27-32), which sometimes maintains structural power differences between men and women.

Within the traditional religious/theological tradition, the essentialist notions of human nature are expressed through the notions of the “will” and/or “purpose” of God in creation, as I have, among others, argued in chapter five. In this perspective, specific ways of being men and women and the imbalance of power in favour of men between them, are baptised in the name of the will of God. They are branded as the ultimate purpose of God in the creation of men and women. From this metaphysical religious perspective, is deduced totalising and abstract prescriptive moral principles which ensure the compliance with the supposed purpose of God in the creation of a man and a woman. In this way, the operations of power between men and women, and between men themselves, are obscured. This situation raises issues of ethics within the traditional religious/traditions which most people who subscribe to them tend not to raise.

Challenging the essentialist project has, therefore, a potential of revealing a possibility of alternative ways of being, and how men and women can resist the pursuit of “authentic” masculinity and femininity, both within the Basotho cultural and the Christian traditions. It has the potential of putting under the spotlight, the myths that support and glorify patriarchal cultures, and theologies that give advantage to men at the detriment of women. It challenges the idea of essential masculinity, which, when put under the scrutiny of a critical eye, reveals that it “condenses, above all, the cultural reality of women’s subordination” (Segal 1993:629). It challenges women to resist the naturalised inferiority of women. The present efforts that attempt to engage men to change in Lesotho appear to be caught up in the essentialist project, and for this reason, sabotage the very transformation efforts they initiate. Until this reality is paid attention to, the situation of the imbalance of power between men and women in Lesotho, will continue to subsist unabated.

The point I want to emphasise in this proposition, in fact, in all of the other two below, is that, challenging the supposed naturalness of masculinity and femininity, is the starting point of the process of their transformation in the everyday interactions between men and women. It is the point at which the supposed naturalness of the superior status of men and the inferiority of women can be challenged. It opens very many avenues of their reconsideration in terms of how male power is exercised in relation to the other, women, on the everyday life interactions in Basotho communities, both civil and ecclesial. In the perspective of a gender-ethical consciousness, advocated in this study, as argued in the previous chapter, it is in the context of the everyday life interactions in community, that being ethical, accountable and responsible, can be measured, not in the abstract, through prescriptive moral principles deduced from the transcendental and universalising metaphysical principles.

#### **7.2.4.2 The essentialist/foundationalist project: A mask of power**

The second proposition regards the essentialist/foundationalist interpretations of masculinity and femininity within the *sekoete* outlook, and the churches’ interpretation of the bible and their dogmas in Lesotho, as we have seen in the previous chapters. Contrary to these essentialist/foundationalist claims of the *sekoete* perspective and the Churches’ discourses of the “true/authentic” *Bosotho* and *Christian* life, in which being a man is accorded a superior status, it

should be emphasised that people's lives, as individuals and as groups, can be understood in the context of the structured power relations that operate both within and between cultures. If this is true, Basotho men's ways of being and thinking about themselves should be assessed in the context of the structures of power relations within the Basotho's societal and cultural arrangements, and the churches as structured organisations.

The notions of the "authentic/true/real" and "essential/ foundational" often obscure the operations of power within the societal cultural arrangements and structured organisation of the churches. Whatever is acknowledged as authentic/true/real, essential/foundational, is too easily accorded the status of the "natural" and the "truth". And those who are privileged within these structures, are often believed to have a superior knowledge that enables them to judge the authenticity/truthfulness/realness of the actions of others, according to the prescriptive or predefined moral systems of these structures. In the context of the Basotho's cultural systems, "authentic" Basotho men are those who do not act upon the suggestions of women. Authentic women are those who completely submit to the ultimate control of men. In this light, any meaningful transformation of the present dominant masculinities in Lesotho, cannot be deconstructed if attention is not paid to how these notions of the "authentic/true/real and essential/foundational, are employed on the everyday interactions between men and women, in the Basotho society, and the churches in Lesotho. These notions give us a hint as to how male power operates, and is sustained in the Basotho's and churches' structured power relations.

The position of this study is that, it is through the analysis of the history of these structured power relations in Lesotho, and the cultural practices that have supported them, that the mechanisms of the operations of the male power in this country can be exposed. It is through such analysis, that the historically achieved superior status of men, and the inferiority of women, accorded the status of the natural in the consciousness of the people, is in fact, one of the mechanisms of the operations of male power itself, normalising the unequal distribution of power between men and women.

#### **7.2.4.3 The assumed "naturalness" of masculinity and femininity: an ethical issue.**

The third proposition regards the ethical implication of the assumed "naturalness" of masculinity and femininity. In the judgement of this study, it is when people entertain the supposed

naturalness of masculinity and femininity that they tend to evade issues of ethics in the everyday life interactions between men and women. They tend to justify oppressive practices of masculinity which leave the underprivileged other: women and children, mostly silenced and unable to speak about their experiences of being oppressed by these practices, because it is believed, it is natural and the ultimate purpose of God for men to dominate what can be dominated, especially women.

For this reason, the position of this study is that, all those considerations and approaches to the issues of gender relations and roles, as natural, whether *Sesotho* or *Christian*, often disguised by the notions of the “authentic/true/real” and “essential/foundational”, deserve to be interrogated. Who determines the authenticity or essentialness of a man’s masculinity and the natural superior position of men? For whose purpose? To whose benefit? Who is silenced or marginalised by these notions? Who suffers as a result of these notions? These are ethical questions difficult to ask where the discourses of the authentic and essential masculinity and femininity abound. In the context of Lesotho, it is even harder to raise these questions because of the taken-for-granted discourses of the “authentic” *Bosotho* (sothoiness) and *Christianity*, as I have argued in chapters three, four and five. Most of the Basotho people, whose lives are shaped by these discourses, often fail to ask questions about these discourses themselves. They are like fish which do not know that they are wet. They take for granted whose knowledge of the assumed “real” *Bosotho* and *Christianity* they live by, and they all too easily interpret them as the will of God. In the perspective of this study, there is no singular/identical *Bosotho*, just as there is no singular/identical *Christianity*. There are multiple versions of *Bosotho*, just as there are multiple versions of *Christianity*, and at the centre of these different versions, there are further different “sothoinesses” and “Christianities”. If this is true, it is important to ask, which and whose *Bosotho*; which and whose *Christianity*.

For this reason, I concur with McLean (1996:12-13) when he argues that those approaches which argue that human beings are social products should be maintained because they make it easy to address issues of power relations and their ethical implications in society. If this is true, we have to look at the dominant and competing stories the Basotho society and church organisations in Lesotho tell themselves about men and women, the meanings and the values that are given to

these concepts. Not only this, but also how these meanings are embedded in the network of power relations within the Basotho society and church organisations.

The approaches, such as the one this study has adopted in the exploration of the operations of masculinity in Lesotho, emphasise that human possibilities are far more open-ended than our culture and churches accept, and that we cannot justify our prejudices against the other, especially women and children, by hiding behind the biological, psychological, cultural, biblical and religious dogmatic determinisms, as the *sekoale* philosophy and the churches' discourses of the "authentic/true/real" *Bosotho* and *Christianity* tend to. We must always ask each other: whose *Bosotho* and *Christianity* we live by? And how they deafen and blind us not to profoundly listen to the other's experiences of being silenced by them. With this in mind I want to make another proposition regarding how to deconstruct the essentialist and foundationalist project which sideline the issue of gender justice.

#### **7.2.4.4 Focussing on the liberative stories, traditions and practices**

The fourth proposition regards the way gender issues can be approached especially within the context of Lesotho, where, for historical reasons, the struggle for cultural identity, and nationhood, is an issue. Rather than being confrontational, a focus can be put on the "liberative stories, traditions and practices" (Tamasese 2001:16-17) and ruptures of discontinuity within our culture and history. These are what I have been calling the traces of alternative, more ethical ways of being men in this study. Those alternative stories of the operations of masculinity in Basotho history and traditions explored in this study, can serve as the starting point of a social dialogue with Basotho men of today, in the efforts of transformation, in the order of gender.

The present efforts seem to take a different approach, which, in the light of chapters two, three, four and five, appear to be unproductive. If not too modest, some of the present efforts shy away from naming the reality of gender injustice. Some tend to be more confrontational. They tend to take an oppositional view of the traditional Basotho cultural practices. This study proposes an alternative approach. Instead of being too modest or shying away from naming the imbalance of power between men and women in the order of gender, or being confrontational, this study proposes a deconstructive approach in which, strategically, more attention is paid to stories, historical events and practices which contradict the dominant stories, historical events, and

practices, which sustain the unethical ways of being and thinking about men within the Basotho history and culture itself. From this perspective, a gender-ethical consciousness is not totally a thing of the modern processes of globalisation of the Western culture, as the *sekoale* philosophy tends to interpret, when issues of gender injustice are raised about the Basotho's customary and cultural practices.

The deconstructive approach does not only concern itself with past history and traditional culture. It also takes stock of the current Basotho history and modern cultural practices. It emphasises that, even in the Lesotho modern cultural practices, there exist alternative, more gender-ethical consciousness which subverts the dominant modern ways of being and thinking about men, especially young Basotho men. The presence of an ethical consciousness in the modern Lesotho challenges behaviour and thinking patterns which sabotage not only these young men's wellbeing, but also that of women in their lives and women in general. This is very important, in the light of the growing and worrying trends, among others, of sexual violence against women and children in the modern Lesotho, which glorify sex and men's sexuality as a standard of measurement of a man's masculinity. In this trend, "[w]omen are violently reduced to bodies that are for-men", to use Burstow's (1992: xv) expression. This study strongly holds that a gender-ethical consciousness is, as a matter of fact, part of Basotho's cultural consciousness, including the modern culture, which comes in ruptures within specific historical moments. In this way, even Basotho men of today, especially the young, are challenged to engage in the consciousness in the modern Lesotho. The position of this study is that, every time incidences of a gender-ethical consciousness occur, Basotho men are beckoned to redefine and reorganise their relationship with the dominant masculinity discourses, because in a culture which gives advantage to men, as in Lesotho, all men are "abusers in disguise", to use Bird's (1994:52) expression. That is why it is of utmost importance, to pay attention to the ruptures of ethical consciousness and capitalise on them to promote social dialogue, not only with men who have actually violated women and children, but also with all the abusers in disguise.

This perspective is grounded in the archaeological and genealogical historical methods of Foucault explored in chapter two. These methods, among others, pay attention to how social discourses topple each other across time. Because of their high consideration of history and how modes of thinking about social realities come into being and disappear, these methods have



dovetailed well with the theoretical positioning of this study in social constructionist and narrative metaphors. Through their employment in this study, the dominant social constructions of the “authentic/true/real *Bosotho* and/or *Christianity*, and their biases in the order of gender in Lesotho, have been exposed and questioned.

In the context of this study, these discourses have been identified as part of the strategies of the exercise of male power that seeks to maintain and sustain itself in existence in the Basotho society and history. The history of the operations of Sesotho masculinity in chapters two, three, four and five, bears witness to this reality. I will come back to this point later when I reflect on the issue of methodology of this study and its implications for practical theology. At this juncture I want to point a way forward.

### **7.2.5 The Way Forward**

The gendered dichotomies the naturalist, essentialist and foundationalist assumptions have engendered, and the power relations embedded in them, can be overcome by considering the assumptions of the constructionist and narrative metaphors. These metaphors hold that human beings are products of their society and history, and that they actively engage in meaning making in that society as I have argued in this study. These assumptions suggest that these gendered dichotomies can be changed. The question is how. Smith (1996:45-48) suggests that they can be changed by changing the way we speak – “speaking in terms of ‘both-and’, not ‘either-or’”, as these dichotomies channel us. It is not the purpose of this study to explore here this alternative way of speaking proposed by Smith, even though it would have made much sense. I raise it because I think it touches on the possibilities for further research in terms of the question how. In the light of the position I have argued for, I believe there is a need for these changes to be generated in the context of Lesotho. The Reflecting Team of this study was not primarily focussed on this question. Perhaps, that is why the attention it deserves was not given to it.

However, I want to believe that such a way of speaking about men and women, for instance, would have to underscore relational ways of speaking. By the relational ways of speaking, I mean ways of speaking which do not emphasise the ways of speaking, typical of the identity politics that inhabit the *sekoete* thinking, and the churchy ways of speaking about Christianity. A language like finding an “authentic/true/real” Sesotho masculine nature, or exemplary

masculinity, is an example of the language of identity politics that this study has challenged throughout. On the contrary, the idea of relational language, I have in mind, is the one which will make masculinity and femininity dependent constructs in a dialectic relationship (Johnson 1997). Because our practices are shaped by the way we use language, the language envisaged in this study, is the one which can generate and sustain participatory and/or *temohano* practices in organisations (Roux & Kotzé 2002) both in the society and the church and the everyday live interaction between men and women.

The *Sekoele* philosophy holds that the “authentic/true/real” Sesotho masculinity and femininity are recoverable. In the perspective of this study, even if it was possible to find them, they are certainly not recoverable in the ongoing context of the modern Lesotho, where women are subjugated and a gender-ethical consciousness is resisting that subjugation. The idea of a “true/authentic/real” Mosotho man or woman, only leads back to having the dichotomies which separate men and women, and which continue to oppress women and other men who would otherwise count as accountable, responsible and ethical in their ways of being and thinking in relation to the other, especially women and children. With these propositions in mind, I turn to the reflections on the journey with the members of the Reflecting Team.

### **7.3 A Journey with the Members of the Reflecting Team**

When I first met with the members of the Reflecting Team, I did not know with the depth that I now know, about how complex the issues of masculinity were. Before I met them, I took at face value the concept of masculinity as a key dimension of gender. I was hardly aware of the complexity of its politics until I engaged in a reflection on them with the members of the Reflecting Team, within the limits of this study. The wisdom that I now have is a result of our interactions with each other during the course of this study. They have influenced the expression of the ideas and the study as a whole, including the propositions put forward above. I now want to highlight some important aspects of this journey with the team members, and the lessons that can be learned from it.

The first important issue I want to highlight is the very concept of masculinity. As explored in chapter three, the *sekoete* philosophy gives the impression that Basotho men are a collective idea or a gender identity; that they have a fixed essential biological and sociological identity which all

of them have in common across generations. The members of the Reflecting Team were holding on this perception when we first met. This belief was not only contradicted by the history of masculinity in Lesotho as explored in chapter two, but also by the experience with the members of the Reflecting Team itself, as we engaged in our exchanges. The exchanges revealed that not only Basotho men differ, but also that they can and do change, according to the social changes taking place in society.

We acknowledged that there are men according the ethnic groups existing in Lesotho, the *Bakuena* of the *Mokoteli* clan, *Batlokoa*, *Bataung*, *Makhoakhoa*, *Bafokeng*, *Bathapu*, *Baphuthi* etc. There are men who have undergone the *lebollo* rite and observe its ways and those who do not. There are men, who, because of Basotho's history, are regarded as chiefs and others as commoners. There are those who have embraced Christianity in its different confessional traditions, and others who have not; there are those who hold positions of authority in the churches, and those who are not. There are those who have been educated in the western model of formal education, and others who have not; those whose life is framed by the urban environment and others who are not; there are those who belong to the working class and others are not; there are those who, by the standard of Lesotho, belong to the middle class and others not; there are those who, because of their age, are either classified as old or young; there are those who because of their bodily and mental states, are classified as able or "abled", so to speak, and others as "disabled"; there are those whose sexual orientation is heterosexual and others homosexual etc. These classifications which are often a hierarchical binary, have encouraged the tendency of some men in a privileged class to see their class as a standard of measurement of the abnormality of the other, not only in terms of the societal arrangements of the Basotho society, but also in terms of the manhood of other men who belong to the other class. The only common denominator, to most of them, is their tendency to holding onto the supremacy of the male folk over the women folk.

In this light, Morell (2001:7) is correct when he argues, in the context of South Africa, that because masculinities are fluid, they "*should not* [my emphasis] be considered as belonging in a fixed way to any group of men. They are socially and historically constructed in a process which involves contestation between rival understandings of what being a man should be". His argument is relevant to the Lesotho situation.

However, the concern of this study has not just been the differences and change of masculinities or their styles, but also what kind of change in terms of power relations of gender. This is an important issue because, as Segal (1993: 635) argues, “masculinity gains its symbolic force and familiar status, not from fixed meanings, but rather from a series of hierarchical relations to what it can subordinate”. Our concern during the meetings of the Reflecting Team has been the taken-for-granted or “naturalized” assumptions of male superiority, to use Segal’s term, within the Basotho social systems structured along gender lines. We took serious Connell’s (1987) argument that gender was a concept of power; that being a man conferred power.

Our interest during our meetings was therefore, among others, how, as men, we related to this situation in our lives. That is where I discovered that though we were all Basotho men, we held different views about being a man, depending on the lived reality of each one of us. What was common to all of us though was that our lives and ideas about life were still very much conditioned, to varying degrees, by the social systems of the Basotho. The dominant constructions of masculinity we held were informed, to varying degrees, by the patriarchal ideas and values held in the Basotho society even though we were not aware of it. We took it to be how it was supposed to be for a Mosotho man. The way we were talking, either about ourselves and others – men or women reflected that. We used phrases like “naturally Basotho men/women do this and that ...”; “I did that because, you know, being a Mosotho man naturally I would...” to rationalise the views of our positions. The younger members of the team were fluctuating between constructions informed by the traditional patriarchal ideas and values, and those informed by the competing sets of ideas and discourses of the modern contemporary Lesotho. They would say things like: “naturally I would/ wouldn't do that because ...”; “I did it because I didn't want to be seen as old fashioned ...” “Women shouldn't to do that... because that's male stuff”.

In the light of the propositions above, I was often inclined to engaging the team members to reflect on the implications of their ways of speaking about and languaging masculinities they had relationship with; how they framed and sustained practices of masculinities which could be experienced as oppressive and exploitative by others, women and children, as well as men whose preferred ways of being were different. When I did so, I was always cautious not to be

confrontational for the reasons mentioned in the fourth proposition. It is from those interactions that the sensibility of avoiding stark confrontation developed. It can be unproductive. I realised it from the times I have been too direct. Some members tended to participate less in our exchanges or became defensive. For this reason, I employed the principle suggested by Slattery (2003:181-182) in the context of working with young men taking a stand against sexual abuse and sexual harassment. I found her principle relevant to our interactions in the meetings of the Reflecting Team members. According to Slattery, once the meaning and experience of the man's relationship with masculinity is explored, it is important to explicitly invite the man to make a commitment to address the aspects of this relationship that are having problematic effects. In the fourth proposition I suggested that a productive way to do this is by paying attention to liberative stories, traditions and practices that can deconstruct the dominant masculinity that inhabits the man.

In the light of the first three propositions, I persuaded the team members to relate the dominant masculinities that inhabited them to the broader context of power relations in our Basotho society, and challenged them to be accountable and take responsibility of their own participation in a culture that sustains the tragedy of women's and children's abuse, as well as of other men whose preferred ways of being were different from ours. I challenged the team members to see themselves as products of this culture and not the essential nature of which they were supposed to be representations or the ultimate purpose of God in the creation of a man.

Coming back to the ways of speaking captured above, in the perspective of this study, these ways of speaking of the team members, reflect the dominant ways of speaking of most Basotho men. In the light of the ideas of Roux and Kotzé (2002), about participatory practices, these ways of speaking and the use of language are not neutral and innocent. Roux and Kotzé basically argue that the language people use shapes the realities they live in and the realities they create. Aware or unaware, the way we use language, shapes our practices; creates and restricts the possibilities of life. If this is true, in the light of the propositions above, these ways of "linguaging" being men, to use Roux and Kotzé's expression, it is not difficult to see the limits the team members were imposing on themselves. They justified some of the ideas and practices of masculinity they had relationship with. Through their ways of speaking and languaging, they sort of naturalised or "essentialised" these practices and so created some senses of masculine selves which could not

be changed. In this way, they stealthily undermined the possibilities life always offer men. They undermined the alternative ways of being and the practices which contradicted the ones they preferred because they benefited from them.

Every time I sensed these ways of speaking about being men during our meetings, I often raised the issue of the effects of such ways of speaking about being men on the men themselves and in particular women in the circle of their lives; how they shaped and sustained the dominant practices of masculinity, especially those practices which they knew women often repudiate. In this way, I shoved in the agenda of a gender-ethical consciousness in our exchange on the accepted and normalised ways of being men we ourselves had some relationship with in one form or another. I did not come to them with the alternative ethical consciousness in a prescriptive manner, but rather in a participatory manner; asking questions and not telling them prescriptively.

### **7.3.1 The team members and sexism**

As a result, we came face to face with our sexist attitudes and ways of speaking which most of us were often not aware of. By sexist attitudes and ways of speaking, I mean those attitudes and ways of speaking which mostly depicted men as superior to women while at the same time they portrayed women as mere subjects of men. During the first stages of our meetings, I was very cautious to challenge these attitudes and ways of speaking because, at that stage, we were challenged to build trust amongst ourselves as a team. I guardedly challenged these attitudes and the ways of speaking by problematising them, sometimes in very abstract and general terms. I would suggest that, perhaps, that and that way of speaking could be part of the issues women were objecting to about “us” men; something which it would be worthwhile to reflect on as a team. Some members could not see the point then. On reflection, I think I understood why. To borrow Pease’s (1997:7) argument, “when we’re born into a society that yields us certain privileges, we have a tendency to not recognise those privileges as privileges”. We tend to see them as how it should be for *persons* more than men. We do not see “how the nature of our privileges [as men] has yielded us a whole range of opportunities unavailable to [women]”.

Pease’s argument evokes the profundity of Foucault’s (1976:86) perceptive observation about the essential aspect of the operations of power in our everyday social interactions in society. He

says it is “tolerable on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms”. Foucault’s shrewd and discerning remark opens the eyes of the people who truly desire the transformation of gender relations in Lesotho society, as the team members were willing. It opens the eyes to see the role the privileges our Basotho patriarchal society play in the sustenance of the male power in the society and how, without being aware of it, all of us get caught up in the mechanisms of the operations of power in our relationships with others. Most Basotho men, because of having been born male do not see these privileges as privileges as Pease has noted. They blind them to seeing themselves as men but as *persons* who have to be at the centre of the Basotho’s societal arrangements and so reduce women to the status of servitude.

As I have argued in chapters three and four, this imbalance of power has been branded as “authentic” *Bosotho* which has to be defended from being destroyed by the hegemony of foreign cultures, especially Western, as the *sekoele* outlook insists. Within the churches the status quo is preserved through the discourses of “authentic” *Christianity*. In most of these discourses, women are left tied to a feminine identity which is always dependent on, and subjected to a male identity. And this is equated with the will of God in the creation of the two sexes. Within the church circles, the passionate bible users refer to specific biblical texts, as I argued in the previous chapter, and use them as a proof text to this effect.

In the perspective of this study which speaks for a gender-ethical consciousness, this religious perspective, which uses the bible in this way, needs to be reminded of one thing. The bible is not “the word of God”, but the word of humans about God, men, to be precise, as I have argued in chapter five. In this way the silencing of women and the other underprivileged groups of people through the use of the bible is challenged. In the perspective of this study, most Basotho women have accepted these male interpretations of the bible as “the word of God” for them. For this reason, they participate and contribute in their own marginalisation and exploitation without being aware of it. This is an important challenge to theology and the churches in Lesotho. They are challenged to revisit their theology and the assumptions of the bible, and deconstruct such views in the light of the realities they shape, among others, gender, power and the effects of these on women and men etc.

As I have highlighted in the propositions above, alongside the discourses of the “authentic” *Bosotho* (sothoiness) and *Christianity*, there is also a discourse of the “natural”, based on the physiological/biological differences of the male and female sexes. The ascription of gender roles according to the sexes is interpreted as “natural”. It is these three discourses which have formed a symbiotic front against a gender-ethical consciousness in Lesotho in the ways this study has demonstrated. They are major mechanisms of the controlling male power which has masked itself within the modern Lesotho.

For this reason, in the perspective of this study, the popular and almost phenomenal religious turn to the bible and the traditions of the ancestors in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness in the modern Lesotho, should not be taken for granted. The use of the Bible and Basotho traditions and cultural heritage like Moshoeshe I, are often used to condone the male controlling and abusive practices than most of the Basotho people are aware of, as I have argued in the previous chapters. Thus, the position of this study is that, when the scriptures and traditions, both *Sesotho* and *Christian*, are interpreted, even by those who have authority in the churches and social systems of the Basotho, in a way that others, especially women, are silenced and/or afraid to show the limitations of those interpretations, those interpretations should be regarded as unethical, and so deserve to be resisted. They deserve to be resisted because women, thus, are doubly oppressed and marginalised by these two systems in conjunction.

The point I want to emphasise here is the need for the basic inclusion of women when the issues of gender are discussed. There is this tendency in churches, especially those male dominated, in which men would talk about gender issues and make conclusions without listening to what women have to say about their experience, particularly as women. For this reason, it should be stressed that, the less women are not accorded space and time to have a voice to speak about their experience of being oppressed by the *Sesotho* and *Christian* systems, the more the group discourse, especially that of men will abound. In the context of a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho, there is a need to start talking about issues, both in the broader society and the churches, including women, and creating space for their voices to be heard. This need is particularly acute in those churches which are male dominated and hierarchically structured, where, for instance, pastoral policies which affect women, are just decided upon by men without women being included.



In the light of Foucault's discerning remark about the masking mechanism of the operations of power, most of the time, in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness in the modern Lesotho, when men and women like 'Mantsopa, as I argued in the previous chapter, interpret specific biblical texts and Basotho's traditional practices, it could often be for non-biblical and traditional reasons. It could be because of the decision already taken, that the other, especially women, should be restricted in some way in the church and society. For this reason, those who want to marginalise women, tend to justify their sexist discriminations by an appeal to the bible and Basotho and Christian traditions.

In the light of this, the rewards and privileges specific Basotho and Christian traditions give to Basotho men should not be separated from specific biblical interpretations of some men who have enormous influence on others because of their superior social location both in society and the churches. Through this study, I have observed that such men are often not willing to listen to the accounts of those silenced and oppressed by these traditions. Through the privileges and rewards specific interpretations confer to men, most Basotho men have become the loyal vassals of the patriarchal masculinity embedded in the bible and specific Basotho/Christian traditions and church dogmas. I think it is for this reason, most of the time, the team members could become so insightful at an intellectual level, in our discussions, without any commitment to changing their underlying attitudes and patterns of behaviour as we exchanged thoughts on power relations of gender. And I thought this needed to be challenged too whenever it happened in our discussions. It was not easy. It was a long and arduous journey as we challenged each other's defensiveness, when our participation in a culture that endorses and sanctions male power, was revealed in our interactions. In the light of this, I would like to pose the following challenge to all the transformation efforts and the academia in Lesotho.

### **7.3.2 Joining forces: a challenge to the transformation efforts and the academia in Lesotho**

If this study, with its journey with the members of the Reflecting Team reflects the situation, as it stands, of most of the Basotho men out there, something which this study believes, the challenge of those who work for the transformation of gender relations in one form or another, or those whose work, directly or indirectly, often draws them into the complex, and often sticky issues of masculinity, is huge. They need to revisit and revamp their methods and approaches in their

dealings with Basotho men. They are challenged to join forces rather than compete with each other, as it appears to be a tendency in handling issues of social change in the present. The same thing goes with the academia. No one academic department can afford to claim for itself the possession of all the wisdom and resources to address the complex, and often sticky issues of gender and their vast implications in all the different sectors of our society. They are challenged to think beyond the traditional boxes of their academic departments and professional expertise which make them, sort of autonomous and closed communities or fellowships, which have nothing to do with each other.

In the face of the social challenges, such as gender justice, believing that one's department is the most qualified to respond to and adequately address these challenges, may sound like an academic arrogance, challenged by postmodern social theory, if not a disguised fear of change of those who benefit from the status quo in those departments. There is this tendency of disciplines to stick to their own rules that serve to control what and how is said in them. And in this way, they silence those outside them from speaking with the authority enjoyed by those to whom the disciplines give the credentials. This study challenges this tendency in Lesotho. It seriously holds that there is a need for the development of a collaborative methodological approach in the context of social change in this country.

### **7.3.3 Handling issues of gender with men through narrative means: the externalising conversations**

From the experience of working with the team members, I came to believe that the patriarchal masculinity that has come to inhabit most of the Basotho men, including those in academic fellowships and departments, makes it difficult for many of them to acknowledge, and address men's social power for the reasons explored in this study and many others which were outside its scope. The willingness of the team members to reflect on the effects of this masculinity on their lives deserves to be acknowledged and applauded. Working with them, gave me the opportunity to witness a gradual process of transformation which those who have concluded that "men will always be men and will never change", are indeed missing something about the reality of change in society. It is through working with them, using the assumptions of the contextual theologies of liberation, social construction theory, and a narrative approach to therapy, I discovered the potential of these approaches in changing people's lives. I will turn to this point below, where I

reflect on the methodological implications of these approaches to practical theology. For now I want to highlight the potential a narrative approach to therapy has, in handling complex and challenging issues such as masculinity, as it happened during our interactions in the monthly meetings of the members of the Reflecting Team for a period of four years.

In assisting people who try to redefine their lives, a narrative approach to therapy, among others, uses what the narrative therapists call “externalising conversations” (White & Epston 1990:38-76; White 1998: 219-228; Payne 2000; Morgan 2000). I used these ways of speaking most of the time as I interacted with the team members. Externalising conversations are ways of speaking that encourage people to objectify or personify problems they experience as problematic in their lives. They separate a person’s identity from the problem that upsets their life. They are based on the assumption that the problem is the problem, as opposed to the person being seen as the problem. The problem is thought of as having an effect on the person rather than existing within or being intrinsic to them. The effect of these ways of speaking on people is that it makes it easier for them to change their relationship with what they experience as problematic in their lives.

Earlier in section 7.3, basing myself on Roux and Kotzé (2002), I highlighted the importance of language in our daily social interchange. I underlined that the people’s ways of speaking and use of language are not neutral. The language people use shapes the realities they live in and the realities they create. Aware or unaware, the way they use language shapes their practices, creates and restricts the possibilities of life. With this I want to further underscore the usefulness of externalising conversations. Basically externalising conversations are essentially ways of languaging realities. We used these ways of speaking about patriarchal masculinity.

When we used the externalising conversations to explore the effects of the patriarchal masculinity on them, the members of the team found it easier to see patriarchy as problematic, not they. In this way, they easily talked about it in ways that most Basotho men would not be willing to, including those in academic fellowships and departments, as well as in the churches. For this reason, it made it easier, again, to explore our relationship with patriarchal masculinity and the things it makes us do to others, women, children and other men, and the effects of these acts on them. Following are the things the team members identified. They were not identified in

one meeting but at different meetings and different moments during those meetings, and they were expressed differently by the individual members during the discussions. For this reason, I am simply editing what the team members said, even as I too, was deeply involved. This editing therefore may have my “smell”, but the one which, I believe, the team members will accept.

Among other things, the team members said that the patriarchal masculinity which inhabits them mostly “encourages us, as it does with most of the Basotho men, not to listen to, not only women, but also to other men, who transgress its prescriptive moral standards and norms”. The story of a man who helped his wife to give birth explored in the previous chapter one member of the team told us about, captures the heart of the effect of the Sesotho patriarchal masculinity the team members acknowledged in their lives. It “encourages men to devalue women’s and children’s insights of the world”. It “encourages us [as it does with the other Basotho men out there] to believe that we have a monopoly of the truth, and that as men, our views and values are always more important than those of women and children”. It “makes us to believe that women do not have the intellect and do not know what they want”. For this reason “we often do not hear what they have to say. When they say “no”, we hear “yes” and, we would discover later that they were hurting”. “Even when we come to know about it, we often rationalise it and simply get passed it just like that”. “When we want something from them and they resist, we often intimidate them in various ways” – for example, “adopting an angry attitude”, etc.

Upon this awareness, we challenged each other to redefine our relationships with the patriarchal masculinity. We emphasised that the way we behave is not the result of a fixed identity/personhood of men or an unfolding of a “true nature” of a “Mosotho man”. It was a result of our active participation in the patriarchal interpretations of manhood which recruits us, men, into the camp of oppressorship through the advantages it gives us. This acknowledgement enabled us to explore alternative stories and events which contradicted the impact of the patriarchal masculinity and explored them; how they challenged us to reconstruct our ways of being and thinking in relation to others, especially women and children. We explored how women and children around us would benefit if we reconstructed ourselves and how we too would benefit from it.

As we became aware of the ways we have been languaging patriarchal masculinity and our relationship with it, we also became aware that we needed to change our ways of languaging women in our lives, and for that matter, all women, if our relationship with them would also change. We became aware that when we used the patriarchal metaphors to language us, as men and women, we imposed some limits on our relationships and the possibilities life offered us. It was in this context that one member of the team, came up with the notion of the *temohano* consciousness. The *temohano* consciousness, among others, as we explored it, we discovered that it challenged us to do what the patriarchal masculinity commands men not to do. It wanted us to engage in a basic act of allowing women to tell the stories of their lives and the effects of the dominant gender beliefs on their lives and listen to them. We realised that it is only through listening to their stories that men can come closer to the realities constituted by their gender beliefs and practices.

With this point, I want to emphasise that, the more we can talk and listen to the voices/stories of those who suffer due to our dominant discourse, from which others benefit, the more understanding can happen and the more the dominant discourses can be deconstructed and new, more ethical ones constructed. In a sense, it is not a complex and difficult process. All it asks for is to start listening to the stories of women who want us to ask ourselves to question, as men: who benefits? Who suffers?

In this way, the externalising conversations enabled us, the team members, to face and explore our participation in the ideas and practices of the patriarchal masculinity without really feeling cornered. However, from the experiences I have had with men who engage in acts of violence against women, I have the impression that the externalising conversations may not be as effective as it may be with men who do not abuse, as it was the case with the team members. From the interactions with men who engage in the acts of violence against women, I found that they tend to rationalise and belittle their violent acts. They use language in ways that conceal the gravity of their actions, and to externalise such a language, in my opinion, would amount to playing into their own tactics, of avoiding being accountable and responsible for their violent acts and practices. In the context of a culture such as ours in Lesotho, which gives men advantage over women in ways that this study has exposed, I believe alternative complementary approaches are necessary. It is for this reason, I have argued, above, for a collaborative

endeavour of the present transformation efforts, and the academic fellowships and departments with their expertise.

With this, I now turn to a reflection on the methodological implications of this study for practical theology and pastoral care and counselling/therapy. So far the reflections have focussed more on the research questions and aims of the study.

#### **7.4 Methodological Implications for Practical Theology and Pastoral Care and Counseling/Therapy**

This chapter would be incomplete without a reflection on the methodological implications of this study for practical theology and pastoral care and counselling/therapy, in the context of Lesotho, as it is undertaken in the department of practical theology with specialisation in pastoral therapy. The study has been epistemologically positioned within the methodologies of the contextual theologies of liberation, social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy. This positioning may startle those who are not familiar with the history and basic assumptions of practical theology.

Basically practical theology is a practice oriented (Hermas 2002: vii-xii) discipline or as Heitink (1993:101-240) argues, a theological theory of action. As practice oriented, methodologically, practical theology starts with the understanding of the practices in which people are involved and aims at transforming these practices. It is this practice or action orientation of practical theology that hooks it to the methodology of the contextual theologies of liberation as demonstrated in chapters one and five. Contextual theologies of a liberating praxis are committed to the concrete involvement in the process of social change. Contextual theologies of liberation challenge the traditional methods of theologising in general and pastoral care profoundly. The classical methods tend to mostly ignore social and political aspects of the human wellbeing. They have arguably, sidelined issues of social justice and inequality both in the church and society (Pattison 1994:1-7).

This is the type of approach to theology and pastoral activity that is still dominant in Lesotho. This study has attempted to challenge this situation in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in the modern Lesotho. For too long, the Christian churches in

Lesotho, as institutions, appear to have upheld the rhetoric of socio-political neutrality. And this rhetoric has put the churches in the palms of the hands of the privileged and influential of Lesotho. In the perspective of this study, it is this situation which has rendered the churches to be insensitive to the socio-political wellbeing of the underprivileged of Lesotho. It argues, therefore, that it is appropriate for the churches to try to see their place and position from the perspective of those who have, hitherto, been alienated by their rhetoric. And if practical theology should be of service to the churches and civil communities in Lesotho, in this sense, it must pay attention to its method.

Now, the practice orientation closely attracts practical theology to social sciences. There is a kind of a conceptual relationship between theological and social methodological theory within the conceptual framework of the research. In this model the practical theologian conducts practical-theological research with the help of empirical methodology. It is for this reason, in this study that I have employed the methodological principles of the contextual theologies of a liberating praxis, social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy, to probe gender issues in the context of Lesotho. In this orientation, this study has challenged the dominant gender theology and pastoral activity which relies on the traditional model of theologising and pastoral care, which have sustained male domination of women, as I argued in chapter five. For this reason, in the context of this study, practical theology is a contextual theology of a liberating praxis.

#### **7.4.1 Practical theology as a contextual theology of the liberating ethical practices**

As contextual, practical theology focuses on the ways of being and thinking of Christians within a context, particularly as that context is understood in social change. In the case of this study, the context is that of a gender-ethical consciousness gaining momentum in Lesotho. Within this framework, local cultural religious symbols and practices as well as the practices of Christian religion and its symbols are subjected under the scrutiny of the critical eye of the practical theologian. The praxis model of practical theology, therefore, is very keen to how both the national and church traditional, cultural, religious practices and symbols, the bible, and both the church and local cultural dogmas and their history in society operate, and manage to sustain the status quo in the context of a situation of marginalisation and exploitation of others, that needs to

be changed. It pays a close attention to how these national and church traditional, cultural and religious practices are interpreted to reinforce resistance to change and so leave others under the domination of the privileged in society. At the heart of practical theology, as a contextual theology of a liberating praxis, is, therefore, the issue of ethics.

As this study has demonstrated, being ethical is not measured by abstract, universalising, totalising, and transcendental moral principles deduced from disembodied philosophical and theological systems. In this respect, this study has found the cooperation of social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy useful in ways that this study has demonstrated, in the analysis of gender issues in Lesotho. For this reason, practical theology should not simply be understood as a process of “faith seeking understanding”, but a “faith seeking intelligent action”, to use Bevan’s (1992:73) expression. And not only that, even more so, in the perspective of this study, advocating for a gender-ethical consciousness, practical theology is “faith seeking ethical practices” in a situation of marginalisation and exploitation of the other, such as women and children by men. This is what this study attempted to do in the context of the modern Lesotho. I believe it will challenge the Christian churches in Lesotho to rethink their dominant ways of being a church and their pastoral practices.

At the centre of this theological model, is the issue of participation. Standing on the shoulders of contextual and liberation theologies, the model of theology envisaged in this study challenges all theological engagements to develop new methodologies that will speak to the challenges that we are confronted with, following political liberation and democratisation process in Lesotho. In the perspective of this study, this lies in the possibilities of a participatory theology in terms of the *temohano* consciousness – one which now listens to the voices of all, especially those who were silenced and were oppressed. It is not about prescribing, in the case of this study, our male theological truths. It is not about pushing the liberation of the oppressed in a political sense. It is about listening to the silenced; participating with them, and they with us. It is a theology that is born out of the act of non-prescriptive participation which focuses on hearing the voices of the silenced; asking ethical questions on who benefits and who suffers. The theological model proposed by this study holds that, it is when this is done, that a new consciousness can grow and new possibilities can come about in a collaborative way. This is quite different from the way political liberation processes often work, as has been witnessed in Lesotho in 1970, 1986, 1994



and 1998, and what we are also currently witnessing in some other African countries, especially those in the north of Africa and the Middle East, at the time of the writing of this chapter. As it is understood in this study, practical theology as participatory, works with rough stuff, and power operates differently in such a theology. It also works differently from the traditional theological approaches which tend to be prescriptive and dogmatic. The method of this study sought to avoid this way through the formation of a Reflecting Team to engage in the sticky politics of gender in the context of social change in the modern Lesotho.

With these reflections on the methodology of this study, I want to now offer some reflections on how this study has affected me.

### **7.5 What happened to me?: a reflection on the “me”**

There are many people who have known me before I embarked on this study. What I do not know, however, is in what shape and size they have known me and how they came to know me in that shape and size. I have met many of them during the course of this study. One of them, toward the end of our conversation as we stood in a long queue in front of an ATM, in Maseru, said: “you are not the real Tlali I used to know. What happened? Listen to the way you talk about women.” In another occasion, another one said: “You know, you are still the real Tlali I have always known”.

These two people represent two different experiences of me. The first senses some changes about me, but what changes, I do not know, because I do not even know in what shape and size he knew me by as that which he called the “real” me before that conversation. The second sounded certain about his knowledge of me and appeared to be happy that I was still that which he knew as the “real” me and praised me for it. Even today, I still do not know what things he associated with that which he said it was the “real” me that made him to think that I was the same person he has always known. Nevertheless, one thing I know is that this study has affected me in ways that, sometimes people who claim they have a “certain/true” knowledge of the “real” me, may not appreciate or appreciate what I have become as a result of it, depending on what they think is to be the “real” me, as they have always known it. This study has produced the “me” that is not the same in shape and size as the people who have known me by before. The challenge is whether they will accept it as the “real” me too.

As I pondered how I would respond if I were to be asked how I am affected by this study, the title of a book in my bookshelf, “Will the Real Me Please Stand Up?”, came to mind. The authors of the book are Powell and Brady (1985). And as a result, a question flooded my mind. What could be a “real me” that the people who claim to know me would objectively pin down in a fixed way as the two gentlemen referred to above did, because of this study? I do not think there is a fixed real me as most people may claim to know. Through this study, I have come to think of myself as a person in relations with others and it is these relations that define me. The relationship I developed with the members of the Reflecting Team, for instance, during this study, within its limits, has produced a different “me” in shape and size from the one the people who have known me before, may think it is no longer the “real” me. This is the “me” I want to reflect on in this last chapter by way of conclusion.

### **7.5.1 Conclusion: my spirituality enhanced**

The study has invigorated my spirituality as a human who happens to be a Mosotho Christian male in the context of a gender-ethical consciousness in the modern Lesotho. By means of conclusion, I want to single four ways in which my *Sesotho* and *Christian* perspective has been broadened by this study in as far as my being a man in concerned. Firstly, I have become more aware of the pervasiveness, dispersion and complexity of the operations of power in our human relations on the everyday life interactions in the Basotho society, and the church in Lesotho, than I was before this study. Because of this awareness, I most of the time feel compelled to name and speak to power imbalances in our Basotho society and the church, and in personal relationships, but I also remain highly conscious of my own complicity in different forms of domination and oppression, especially as a Mosotho male and a Christian who happens to be a priest in the Catholic Church. I now feel challenged to stand for the pursuit and advancement of gender justice in Lesotho. I am more prepared to describe and analyse power relations and their dynamics in Lesotho as a result of this study.

Secondly, I deeply believe that the sensibility of the praxis model of practical theology, as a liberating ethical praxis, social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy, have enabled me to celebrate the differences that there are in Lesotho. For this reason, I believe that it challenges me and other Christians in their churches, to engage with the social groups in

Lesotho, whose aim is to disrupt, so to speak, the dominant identities which make-believe “normality”, such as masculinity does, in relation to femininity. It makes me to desire that the churches in Lesotho would one day, get out of their cocoon, and go into the unfamiliar edge and expose the churches’ complicity with the dominant ideologies of the patriarchal masculinity and begin the difficult process of conversion and reconstruction. By conversion I mean changing the accepted dominant masculinity and femininity discourses which give advantage to men over women and children. The sensibility makes me desire a construction of a more ethical society and church.

Thirdly, this study has empowered me, as part of a community of believers, to be less fearful of the internal differences and inconsistencies because I can now contextualise them in the framework of a praxis model of practical theology, social construction theory and a narrative approach to therapy. For example, in the Catholic Church where I come from, we can be less anxious and fearful about the agonizing difficulty of forging a relational sense between groups that hold different views, prejudices against each other when it comes to issues of gender, both in the church and the Basotho society.

Finally, the study enables me to be critical of my own theological position on gender issues. It challenges me to be more open to other positions which may differ from mine, in a world where the imbalance of power is so rife; where cultural relationship structures give advantage to men, sometimes to the detriment of women and children. The study challenges me to always seek to be ethical in my position. How do I do this? By asking myself how the other would be affected by my position; by asking others how they are actually affected by my position and allow them a space to voice out their own experiences of that position without being disadvantaged.

We are at the point in Lesotho’s history, where a gender-ethical consciousness is interrogating those cultural practices, which are mostly interpreted as part of the essential *Bosotho* (sothoiness) and *Christianity*, because of their negative impact on women and children. This situation is surely delicate. And I believe it needs people who are less dogmatic and absolute in their positions. It challenges us to vacate self-assuring and arrogant positions from which we often judge the abnormality of those who hold different views, in the name of “authentic/true/real” *Bosotho* and *Christianity*, as though our versions of these realities, were a standard that could not

be challenged. What is more important, in the perspective of this study, is being ethical in those positions of ours. That is, allowing others to say how they are affected by our positions and be accountable and responsible. In short, this study has challenged me to vacate self assuring theological and socio-cultural thrones and speak about God and God's will, and being a Mosotho, a Christian and a man in a less arrogant fashion.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### **BASOTHO MEN'S JOURNEY WITH MASCULINITY INFORMATION LETTER FOR PARTICIPATING MEN**

The project is about men's journey with masculinity in Lesotho. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether or not to participate. Your choice to participate is highly appreciated. If you decide not to, be assured, your choice will not disadvantage you in any way.

#### AIMS OF THE PROJECT

This project is for the requirements for a Doctoral degree in Practical Theology with specialisation in Pastoral Therapy at Unisa and the Institute for Therapeutic Development. The aims of the project are:

- a) To explore the dominant ideas and practices of Sesotho masculinity and its effects on Basotho men.
- b) To describe and reveal the characteristics and tactics of the *sekoele* philosophy, which encourage the present dominant Sesotho masculinities not to change.
- c) To explore the possibility of the alternative more ethical masculinity within *sekoele* outlook.

#### NEEDED PARTICIPANTS

Ten men who are fathers, husbands and general members of society, ready to form a team that will reflect on the member's experiences, ideas, beliefs and practices with masculinity.

#### WHAT IS REQUIRED OF PARTICIPANT

Should you agree to take part in the project:

- 1) You will be asked to give consent for the information obtained during team sessions to be used in the research project.
- 2) You will be expected to attend meeting as agreed by the team. After each session, you will receive a summary of the session. You will be asked to make comments, corrections and/or give feedback regarding the summary and feel free to change anything related to you. All sessions are conducted in Sesotho. With your consent sessions will be tape recorded, if not, notes on sessions will be taken. The reports will be written in Sesotho



and later translated into English as the research project will be written in English. Members of the team who are conversant in English will be asked to check the translations and provide comments, corrections and/or provide feedback and make suggestions about translations.

FREE PARTICIPATION

You are free to pull out from the research project any time you wish without any consequence to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information obtained during team sessions will be discussed with my promoter, Dr D.J. Kotzé and co-promoter, Prof. A.P. Phillips and will be used in the project. With your prior consent, the team sessions will be tape-recorded. Should you choose not to have the sessions on tape, I shall make notes during the sessions. A summary of the sessions will be available at the conclusion of the sessions for your review. Your comments, corrections and/or feedback will be included in the final report. The information collected during the project will be kept in a secure place and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Results of this project may be published. At your request, details of your identification will be distorted to ensure your anonymity.

QUESTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the project either now or in future, please feel free to contact me: Tlali Phohlo tel. 58860749; D.J. Kotzé tel.....; A.P. Phillips tel.....

**APPENDIX B**

**BASOTHO MEN’S JOURNEY WITH MASCULITY**

**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION**

I have read the information Sheet concerning the project and understand what the project is all about. All my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I am free to request further information at any stage.

**I know that:**

1. My participation in the project is entirely voluntary
2. I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without disadvantage
3. I am aware of what will happen to my personal information (including the tape recordings) at the conclusion of the project, that the data will be destroyed at the conclusion of the project.
4. I will receive no payment or compensation for participating in the study.
5. All personal information supplied by me will remain confidential throughout the project.
6. I am aware that Tlali’s Promoters, Dr. D.J. Kotzé and Prof. A.P. Phillips will read the material

I am willing to participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of participants

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of participant in block letters

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of witness.