

**WOMEN IN TRANSITION: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY
OF THE CHANGING ROLE OF RURAL HLUBI WOMEN**

by

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DECLARATION

"I declare that **WOMEN IN TRANSITION: A SOCIO-RELIGIOUS STUDY OF THE CHANGING ROLE OF RURAL HLUBI WOMEN** is my own work and the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references".

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ABSTRACT

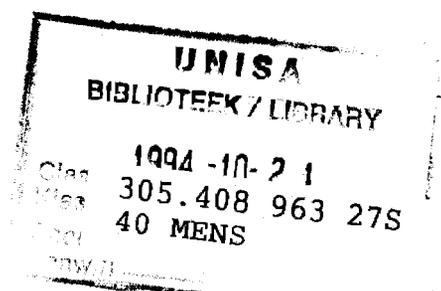
The study examines the socio-religious role of women in traditional African societies using the Hlubi of Qumbu, Transkei as a case study.

Qualitative methodology was used to look at Hlubi women holistically in their past and the situations in which they find themselves today.

Primary sources of African traditional religion such as myths, proverbs and taboos were also used in assessing the socio-religious role of Hlubi women.

The following observations were made about Hlubi women:

- 1 They do not constitute an homogenous group.
- 2 Sexual division of labour allocates to women the responsibility of sustaining the household.
- 3 They have multiple workloads: namely, survival, household and income generating tasks.
- 4 They experience ambivalence regarding their roles - responsibility without proper authority.
- 5 Hlubi women share with their male counterparts the role of traditional healers.
- 6 In spite of increased involvement of women in church activities they are still denied leadership positions.



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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In recent years, social scientists have acknowledged not only that women provide roughly half of a society's human resources, or, more precisely, "half of the labour force, one hundred per cent of the reproducing force and one hundred per cent of the food preparation force" (Leitinger 1981:5), but also that their experiences do not duplicate those of men. Thus, if we want a truly societal analysis, studying men is not enough. We must also study women, separately from men, but neither in isolation nor on the basis of male-derived criteria.

Reiter, Rosaldo and Lamphere (in Obbo 1980:1) have claimed that the main problem for women has been their invisibility in any serious study of history and society. This has meant that nearly half the people of most societies have not been given the opportunity or space to articulate their thoughts, fears, and hopes on the subjects of labour, reproduction, child bearing and sexuality (Obbo 1980:1). It has also been argued that by trivialising the roles of women and the questions feminists are asking, mainstream anthropology and the study of religions have not provided answers to such questions as the origin and development of sexism (Reiter 1975:12), for example.

Now that the wind of feminist studies is blowing in Africa, one cannot but heave a sigh of relief. Women's studies is a relatively new field that has emerged over the last few years as part of the revival of feminism not only in southern Africa but throughout the world.

It is rather difficult to give a precise definition of women's studies. Arguably, the only defining characteristic of women's studies is that it is concerned with women - with their history, with the determinants of women's position in different societies, with how women have been culturally represented and written about in literature, with how femininity is constructed and with how women's experiences are formed (Whitelegg 1982:vii).

To this day, the African world is still, to a greater or lesser extent, a man's world in the sense that a woman's position in society is still subservient; at least so African men think. Generally in Africa, a woman's status is basically determined as a mother or wife. Her social status depends on these determinants and not on any qualities or achievements of her own.

Oppong (1983) observed that young university women still see themselves and are seen by their male counterparts as somehow being owned by those men who support them. Women are economic attachments to men; their wage is seen as supplementary. Thus the traditional norm within which women are expected to earn an income and to provide for at least part of their own as well as their children's needs is perpetuated. So is the norm that makes housework the exclusive responsibility of women. From the above, it can be said that generally and globally, the superiority of men over women has always been taken for granted. Women themselves seem to have internalized this image of female inferiority and have therefore, somehow taken male domination as the natural order of things. The plight of women, it seems to me, has never been easy, and it has become increasingly difficult with the passage of time. Something, therefore, needs to be done to address this critical situation.

It would seem that discrimination against women, in matters of religion, is however not as pronounced in African traditional religion as in other religions such as Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. To prove the validity of the above statement a brief discussion of the status of women in some world religions and in the Graeco-Roman world is necessary. Evidence indicates that throughout the ages women have been relegated to the background. Aristotle taught women are not fully human because they are deficient in reason. It is not surprising, therefore, to hear the church father Tertullian regard women as the devil's gateway; neither can we ignore the unkind view of Chrysostom that among all the wild beasts there is none more harmful than woman (Omoyajowo, 1988:77-90).

In the Christian world, prejudice against women can thus be traced through the ages. More recently Karl Barth believed a woman's function is to actualise fellowship in which man precedes her, and as late as 1972, Pope Paul VI is reported to have restricted the vocation of a woman to becoming a mother.

According to Awolawu (in Omoyajowo 1988:77) the oriental world is to a large extent male dominated. Women live mostly behind the veil and continue to be denied the right to think for themselves. Awolawu argues that a woman surrenders to the standard of the man-made world in which she finds herself and her husband becomes her keeper in every sense. In this way, she hardly decides anything on her own; even the smallest details of her daily life are settled by her husband.

The situation was even worse in the Greek world where courtesans were kept for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the sake of daily co-habitations and wives for the

purposes of having children. In the Roman world women were married to be divorced, and divorced to be married. They practically had no status as they could be married and thrown out at will.

The Jews also had a view of women as inferior. The creation story portrays woman not as a primary necessity, but as a helper to man. This low view of women is confirmed by the fact that the Bible talks of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but not of the God of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel even though these women played a prominent role in the faith. In the Jewish form of morning prayer, a Jewish man gave thanks to God for not having made him 'a Gentile' 'a slave' or 'a woman'. Paul was simply behaving like a typical Jew when in 1 Corinthians 14:34ff he ruled women should not be permitted to speak in the church but should remain quiet (subordinate). Paul emphatically stressed that if there were anything a woman desired to know, she should ask her husband at home, because it was a shame for a woman to speak in the Church. Again, Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (5:24), exhorted women to be subject to their husbands in everything, because the husband is the head of the family. To show how seriously he held this view on the status of women, he said in 1 Timothy 2 : 11-15: 'Let a woman learn in silence, with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent. Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.' However, he believed that a woman would be ultimately saved through child bearing if she continued in faith, love, and holiness with modesty. Interestingly enough, that same Paul greatly valued the assistance of Priscilla and her husband Aquilla in preaching the Gospel.

Likewise in Islam, women are allowed to lead prayers only for a congregation of women. In Sura 4 :34 known as the Sura Annisa (or chapter on women) it is categorically stated that men are superior to women on account of the qualities with which God has gifted the one above the other. Women are therefore, not permitted to offer prayers in the open; they can only do so in seclusion, or at best, pray at a particular section of the mosque. In the mosque they are not allowed to stand in the same row with men; they are to stand separately behind the rows of men. The practice of keeping women in purdah, not only hinders both their contribution to economic and political development but also cuts them off from the influence of education and other cultural contacts and thus perpetually keeps them at the bottom of the social ladder.

These remarks are just a brief commentary on the role of women in some of the world religions. Now I want to indicate the role which women play in African Traditional Religions.

In certain parts of Africa, God is perceived as male, while in other places God is conceived as female. Thus African traditional religion is less sexist from the perspective of the images of God (Omoyajowo 1988:73-79).

Generally, women are responsible for the care of the shrines. They sweep and decorate the shrines, and keep the surroundings clean and tidy. In their houses they prepare meals for the shrines, and during festivals they gather in front of the shrines to sing and dance. In some cases, they engage in ritual dances and lead processions to the shrine.

In many parts of Africa, certain 'gods or goddesses' manifest themselves in women and speak through them to the community.

Similarly some cultic functionaries who are set apart for the services of certain divinities, are women. They are priestesses, diviners, mediums and herbalists who are consulted for various things, depending on the individual supplicant's needs.

Due to the unique role played by women in traditional religion, some of them have been deified. For example, the queen of Lovedu, a south Bantu ethnic group is regarded as divine. She has tremendous influence over nature and is even believed to establish the seas properly. Thus in Africa, religion more than anything else, plays a major role in determining the status of women (Ezeanya, 1976:112). It follows that there is a relationship between a woman's role in her religion and her status in society.

Among the Hlubi of the Transkei, a woman is exposed to the same religious influence as the man. She cannot possibly remain passive in such a society in which she must come to terms with the tutelary spirits in order to live a successful and peaceful life. At the same time, there are many Hlubi rituals which women are not allowed to witness. This exclusion from certain rituals has been supported by males with menstruation taboos. It may be that blood is perceived as a symbol of power, on the one hand, or of weakness on the other.

Among the Hlubi of Qumbu, even though women use cow dung to smear rooms, they cannot go into the cattle kraal to collect the cow dung. The belief is that stock which provides the livelihood for the Hlubi will not grow well should women who have not

reached menopause enter the kraal. The implication is that women are regarded as sources of danger as expressed in notions about the blood of child birth of the Hlubi woman. Such notions of pollution underlie rituals intended to separate unclean women from contact with others or to neutralise the sources of pollution. Women, therefore, are anomalous creatures, intimately associated with the well being of society through their polluting qualities.

Hlubi women are also closer to many of the divinities than men, because of the prerogatives they have in looking after the shrines of the divinities. African women, therefore, do not experience in a relative sense any discrimination (Omoyajowo 1988:74).

Before attaining independence, African states had passed through two radically different developmental stages: viz traditional society and colonialism. There is no doubt that contemporary African society is at once traditional, colonial and post-colonial. Women's disabilities have authentic roots in African indigenous structures.

Africa's traditional society was by and large not as fair to women as we would like to think. Sometimes women were regarded as second-rate citizens, often they were used and handled like the personal property of men, exploited, oppressed and degraded. Under colonial rule women fared no better, for all the disabilities of Western Christian culture were added to the already burdensome African situation. This does not mean that the African does not appreciate the influence of Western education, Christianity and Western liberation movements. The impact of these factors on women in Africa has led to a remarkable improvement in the social status of the average African

woman. But this kind of improvement to a larger extent refers to the educated woman in modern African towns and cities who can say 'what men can do, women can also do' - at least in the areas of political, educational and scientific achievements.

Edet and Ekeya (1989:4-5) argue that when analyzing women's contemporary roles, we cannot ignore the fact that in the realm of religion, Africa has Christians, Muslims, and traditionalists living side by side influencing and validating one another's concepts - mostly in ways that are unfavourable to women. The Hlubi society of Qumbu is no exception.

It is worth noting that in this kind of religious pluralism, African women and men practise one or the other of these religions, but no one escapes the African traditional religion of one's own people. It is woven so tightly into the culture that none can claim to have moved completely out of the spirituality of Africa's own religion as distinguished from the 'new religions' that have arrived in Africa, be that religion Christianity or Islam.

It has been pointed out that traditionally, African women played vital roles in religion and contributed their quota to the community worship life. It is a bit confusing to talk about the progress or regression of women's role in religion, be it traditional or Christian, without some knowledge of what women did in the traditional society. Suffice it to say that in African traditional religion, the salvific ministry associated with acts of healing, driving away evil spirits, promoting fertility and encouraging success in life's ventures was performed by priestesses and priests alike (Oduyoye 1979:112).

With the understanding of the general pattern of the role of women in Africa, and looking at the past, one can ask, to what extent do Hlubi women take part in ritual and

religious practices, choose to follow the religious life, or hold positions of authority in African traditional religion? Secondly, and the most important question is, what is the socio-religious experience of women in Hlubi society? Thirdly, how far are Hlubi women still hindered, or, on the contrary, encouraged in giving full expression to their religious experience?

1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

The study seeks

- (a) to investigate women's socio-religious role through a descriptive analysis of contemporary Hlubi traditional society in Transkei.
- (b) to ascertain whether or not, to what extent, and in what way these roles are changing over time and the underlying factors of the changes.

1.3 JUSTIFICATION FOR RESEARCH

The subject of this dissertation is an important one, for an analysis of the role of Hlubi women, particularly in the socio-religious dimension, is long overdue.

Adequate factual information on the role of women in African traditional religion is currently still sketchy. It is an understatement to say that researchers face the problem of scarce and fragmentary information about women in African traditional religion. With few exceptions African societies have been described from masculine perspectives which is understandable insofar as anthropologists and students of religions have been primarily concerned with charting the public structures of social authority. Invariably such structures involve relations between men. Nevertheless, even in societies where women play important roles such as queen mothers in several Akan and Bantu-

speaking societies, these roles usually have been studied not on their own merits but only in relation to male roles. A study eliciting responses of women about their own experiences is absolutely necessary. Women's perspectives must be sought out and presented. This to me, will go a long way towards solving the 'problem of women' created by their position in religions and will result in more balanced monographs.

The study is a reaction to the clarion call to African scholars to further investigate women in African religions. The present effort (together with studies by other scholars) hopefully, will make a contribution to women's issues at a global level. It is one of the contributions to a type of social change (eg women, religion, a just society and human rights) which will benefit, first of all the immediate subject of enquiry, women, and then by extension, society at large.

Of late, women, particularly black women have been asked whether they want change. This challenge is a clear manifestation that at least, some members of the public have realised that it was time all social structures which discriminate against women were overhauled to enable women to assume their proper role alongside men in the society. The extent to which such a notion is validated and embraced by women will need to be examined.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The successful completion of this dissertation will necessitate the use of phenomenological method. However, it must be pointed out that certain aspects of the study will be undertaken from the perspective of other disciplines such as history, theology, anthropology and social sciences.

In order to obtain the information on the topic, I intend to use

- (a) Primary Sources of Data: Interviews with women as well as headmen of the Hlubi tribe. I have used one of them as an interpreter.
- (b) Secondary Sources e.g I used Journal articles, books and unpublished documentation in the form of theses and other material and archive material from the chief and headmen of the Hlubi.

1.5 RESEARCH LOCATION AND REASONS FOR SITE SELECTION

The research was conducted among Hlubi women of three administrative areas in the Qumbu Magisterial district. Qumbu district has played a leading role in teacher education as far as empowerment of women is concerned. The only teacher training college is situated in Shawbury and it admits only women. Until quite recently the secondary school attached to the college was a girls' school. The district also helped in preparing students for the standard ten programme before the school certificate curriculum was extended to all schools in the Republic of Transkei. One of the reasons for this research was to ascertain the extent secondary and teacher education of women have had an impact on women in the light of modern socio-economic and technological changes. My experience in teaching Biblical Studies in this district was one of the reasons for the choice of Qumbu district.

1.6 THE PHENOMENOLOGICAL METHOD

It has been pointed out that there has been paucity of research and inadequate data about the role of black women in general and the Hlubi women in particular. The little information available has been written and interpreted by men. It is against this background that the study was conducted to ascertain the experiences of women. It

is my firm belief that the phenomenological method as used in Religious Studies is one of the best tools which can be used to gauge the experiences and socio-religious role of women. The merits and demerits of the phenomenological method is therefore discussed in this section.

The phenomenological method to a large extent accommodates criticisms levelled against the psychological and sociological approaches to the study of religion. The last two approaches tend to reduce religion to something other than itself. The phenomenologist, on the other hand, is convinced that religion is observable and that it is something which is apparent. The phenomenologist also believes that, not only is a phenomenon not illusive but that it can be studied and understood.

The phenomenological method is a method to approach one's work. The researcher is not required to negate his own religious convictions nor practices although one's prior assumptions regarding another's religious orietation must be held in abeyance during the investigation. Researchers try to enter into the worldview of another as far as possible, but not to the abandonment of their perspective. Rather researchers try to hold the different perspective in tension.

Kruger (1982:18ff) opines that phenomenology attempts to understand the phenomenon of religion as a specific phenomenon. The phenomenological approach is characterised by the use of two basic principles as propounded by Husserl, namely 'epoche' and 'eidetic vision'. Kruger (1982:18ff) succinctly states that 'it is the effort to re-discover and re-experience life itself directly undernerath the layer of secondary scientific constructions.' The challenge is how to see clearly and how to describe

accurately what we see, before we make any attempt to explain the phenomena.

Much of society's current image of women has come about because male writers have either not utilised or been unaware of the tools of phenomenological method. To put it bluntly, they have not made any attempt to rediscover and re-experience life as women see it. I believe that by using the phenomenological method an opportunity can be afforded to ascertain the socio-religious role of women as Hlubi women see themselves and as they experience their roles in religion and society. The method, it is hoped, can assist me as a researcher to bring out Hlubi women's experiences, beliefs and feelings. It is clear then that the method used is descriptive, non-normative and not in any strong sense typological (Smart, 1973:21ff).

Nevertheless, various criticisms have been levelled against the phenomenological method. The method has been criticized as being 'intuitionistic', without method and misusing the name phenomenology. It is also generally asked whether any objective study of phenomena is possible. Some critics also argue that phenomenology assumes that the nature of religious experiences as well as the essence of phenomena are the same in all people and all places. Others also feel that there is an inherent contradiction in the two basic ingredients of phenomenological method. This is because whereas epoche emphasizes the suspension of criticism, value judgement, pre-suppositions and prior assumptions; eidetic vision emphasizes suspension of objectivity (King 1983:103-8,217-20).

If one interprets the phenomenological method too rigidly these criticisms may be well-founded. Of course, academics bring their own cultural spectacles with them. This

should help, not necessarily hinder, our understanding of others ultimately, by enabling us to realise our own shortcomings. Obviously, there are many differences in the way in which people within a given system interpret their own experiences (thus the core or essence is sought, not just by way of one in-depth look at one individual's interpretation at one point in time).

The concepts of epoche and the eidetic vision could be viewed, in a way, as goals towards which one strives rather than essential absolutes before one begins. They are after all, just tools to aid research.

Turning specifically to this study, I have chosen to do qualitative research rather than quantitative research. Qualitative methodology in the broadest sense refers to the research that produces descriptive data: people's own written or spoken words and observable behaviour (Taylor and Bodgan, 1984:5). In other words qualitative method places the emphasis on knowing the internal dynamics of the situation as experienced by the participants. Since this research aims at investigating the experiences of women, this method seems to be the best.

As a researcher who has come from a different environment with a different cultural background (I am from West Africa) and who has stayed among the Hlubi in the district for almost a decade, I have been particularly impressed by the Hlubi women for their diligence, hard work and dedication to their daily duties. I have seen a marked contrast between Hlubi women and the Amansie women of Ghana. Although Akan women are not lazy, it seems clear to me that Hlubi women, like other black women in South Africa, are forced to work under severe economic and social restrictions.

I used participant observation as a means for doing my research because I feel this method has the advantage of allowing researchers to share in some of the participants' experiences and blend them into their own lives to a limited extent. I did not think it wise to use quantitative research using a particular questionnaire because a majority of the respondents were illiterates. Some of the questions asked centred on issues such as the image of women portrayed by proverbs and myths, women as a social category, women's taboos, sex-role ideology and socio-religious role of women in pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary times (See Appendix A for a sample of the questions asked, the interviews and discussion).

1.7 INTERVIEW

In order to obtain a wide range of detailed information as well as clarification of some issues, personal interviews were also used at some stages. The entirely 'structured' type of questionnaire which would demand either the interviewee or the interviewer to fill in the selected answer from a set of predetermined options was rejected in view of the predominantly illiterate background of the respondents. It was felt that because the study was aimed at ascertaining socio-religious conditions and the status and roles of women, a structured questionnaire would limit the ability of interviewees to discuss problems freely. Issues and formulated questions were given to interpreters who were asked to work with the researcher to obtain comments and input from the tribal authorities. This proved to be valuable.

1.8 SAMPLING

Since the areas surveyed were not exclusively Hlubi locations, it was felt that it was not necessary to use sampling technique to select a sample. An attempt was therefore

made to contact specifically Hlubi homesteads.

1.9 INTERPRETERS

My two interpreters were a male and a female who had a good command of English. The male was an "old" Fort Hare history graduate, a retired principal of the oldest secondary school in the Qumbu district and a de facto Hlubi headman. The other interpreter, a lady, was a retired principal of a junior primary school. As both lived among the Hlubi in the district surveyed, it was hoped rapport and trust with the interviewees could be established and this proved to be the case. Moreover, being locals and highly respected, this meant that the interpreters were greatly interested in the research as the information which was being gathered would be affecting their own communities.

1.10 ENTRY INTO THE LOCATION AND THE HOUSEHOLD

Before starting the research, it was necessary to obtain "official" permission to be in the area. It was for this reason that the Hlubi headman was selected. He usually approached other headmen before paying a visit to a household in a location.

1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Generally research in rural areas ostensibly to gather data are very brief. This has been described as 'Rural Development Tourism' by Chambers (1980:1). Chambers has identified six biases which he contends occur most often in rural research. These are spatial bias, project bias, person bias, dry season bias, politeness and timidity and professional bias. Four of these are equally applicable to this study.

(i) Spatial Bias

This means that research is generally done in more accessible areas such as near tar road and on the roadside. This means that women who live in remoter areas remain 'unseen'. They may not be interviewed nor given the opportunity to discuss their perceptions of the problems they experience.

Owing to financial and time constraints this study was limited to three administrative areas. The results then as being applicable to the entire district, let alone the overall region could be questioned.

Nevertheless, the above-mentioned bias was, to a large extent, avoided as the three villages visited were well away from tarred roads. The administrative areas selected were large and representative of the Hlubi society in Qumbu.

(ii) Person Bias

This occurs when those who are selected for interviewing are also those who are more educated and therefore more prepared to answer questions. The poor may not wish to talk with a stranger and indeed may not even be available because they will be working. Besides, men are often interviewed as the 'traditional' leaders of the rural community. The mere presence of the headman and particularly, a black person who could not chat with fellow blacks is likely to influence respondents' attitudes.

In order to minimize this problem, an attempt was made to include old and young, poor as well as affluent women in the interviews. Since the study concerns women only, women were interviewed. My status as a foreigner did not influence the

discussion in that occasionally I tried to speak my 'passable' Xhosa. My long stay and involvement with the community in the district also served a useful purpose.

(iii) Politeness and Timidity

Researchers, especially those who come from urban centres are prevented by officials from meeting and listening to villagers because the officials are afraid it could cause embarrassment or shame. Again, respondents may not give a true picture of their conditions for the same reasons. It was observed that some of the women misconstrued the discussions as being an invasion of their privacy for they didn't like the idea of 'washing their dirty linen in public'.

An attempt was made to reduce this obstacle in the sense that I was always introduced as a 'student' (ifundisi) and so was seen to have little or no connections with a governmental department. Besides, the interpreters were locals who were not at all timid in their approach. The respondents were also assured of their privacy, that whatever information they volunteered would not be used against them or disclosed against their wishes to the public and that their anonymity would also be kept.

(iv) Professional Bias

This bias refers to a situation when a specialist is studying a community from a particular point of view that affects both the type of information which is gathered and the people from whom it is gathered. For example religionists may meet better educated people, especially if they have a short time available and are looking for those who are the most articulate. It could happen that interpreters who were not favourably disposed to a particular homestead would deliberately prevent the team

from visiting that household.

Whilst it is probable that the information bias cannot be absolutely avoided, it is hoped that the phenomenological method used in the study has minimised this bias. The 'specific people bias' was avoided through visiting Hlubi homesteads. Further, the discussion method adopted for the interview allowed interviewees to have the time to state their own opinions.

1.12 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The study consists of seven chapters.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This Chapter reviews the background to the study and also outlines the problem which is investigated. It highlights the socio-religious role of Hlubi women. This chapter also describes the methods of data collection and analysis to be used.

Chapter 2 : Literature Review

The Chapter focuses on previous studies in other areas on the topic. A theoretical model for the study is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 3 :The Study Region

The chapter concentrates on the Hlubi Locations particularly the historical and socio-economic background.

Chapter 4 Hlubi Women Before Western Contact

The object of the chapter is to discuss the role of Hlubi women before the Western contact.

Chapter 5 Hlubi Women During the Colonial Era

Chapter five evaluates the role of women during the colonial period.

Chapter 6 Hlubi Women: The Post Colonial Era

This chapter assesses the role of women in post-colonial
i.e contemporary times.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Chapter seven synthesizes the information gathered. This facilitates the drawing of
conclusions and the making of recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Having outlined the objectives of the study in the previous chapter, this chapter seeks to focus on the previous studies related to the socio-religious role of women. This review attempts to answer five basic questions:

- 1 Is there any evidence to show that women constitute a social category?
- 2 What definition of 'role' is appropriate to use in this study?
- 3 To what extent is the sex-role ideology a phenomenon in African societies in general?
- 4 What are some of the explanations usually offered for gender activity?
- 5 What roles were played by African women before Western contact, during colonial and post colonial 'eras; to what extent are these roles changing over time, and what are the underlying factors?

2.1 WOMEN AS A SOCIAL CATEGORY

Sex role orientation taking place within social structures reflects the attitudes prevailing within a broader society. In particular, the status and institutionalised social roles of women are largely derived from cultural and religious conceptions of woman's nature (Lemmer 1987:13). One pertinent question which comes to mind is to what extent women (in traditional African societies and Hlubi women in particular) constitute a homogeneous grouping which, in terms of power, status, and privilege make up an analysis shows that in society worldwide, women as a class of people are those with least rights, particularly those in the Third World. On the other hand, Lupri (1983:3) cautions that even if women, although a numerical majority, do comprise an under-privileged group, it must be recognised that not all women share the same interests,

needs, and desires, neither do they experience the same degree of oppression. This is especially true of African women where there are further variations in the ranks of different ethnic groups (Lemmer, 1987:31).

Onwurah (1988:66-69) confirms this observation and argues that there are definite illustrations to show how religion could act as a determinant of status or position of authority held by a woman in a family. He uses the example of the Omu, queen of the town among the Bendel Igbos of Nigeria, who wields a politico-religious power obtained through religion and which turns her into the head of a family even above her father or brothers. Linked to the ethnic variations of the concept 'woman' is the fact that researchers have also emphasised the need to acknowledge the effect of cultural affiliation when considering sex-role ideology in South Africa (Smith, 1986:66). This is applicable to the whole of Africa.

In light of the above, it can be argued that although women in the Third World seem homogeneous and marginalised, yet they do not fully constitute a social category. This is because, apart from the fact that not all women share the same interests, needs and desires, they do not experience the same degree of oppression. Furthermore, there are variations in the interpretation of the female role prevailing within the ranks of different ethnic groups.

2.2 SEX-ROLE IDEOLOGY

Generally southern African societies have been described as patriarchal by numerous studies¹. According to Lemmer (1989:31), a patriarchal society is defined strictly in terms of relationships between the sexes. Labour is divided into a male sphere of economic production while the female domain is anchored in the area of reproduction and the preservation of domestic felicity. Men occupy more powerful and prestigious positions from which they exercise authority over women. Women derive their status from such a subservient position. Status has been defined as 'a position of an individual within a particular system, according to a normatively determined hierarchical order' (Presvelou, 1973:7). Women's position in the societal hierarchy is therefore determined, not simply by the extent of her productive roles, but also by the expectations and recognition which are attached to these roles.

It appears sex-role ideology is rooted in some traditional African structures. According to Banda (1985:17) marriage in traditional African societies had an overriding social aspect characterised by a complementary balance of power between the sexes. Men and women had complementary roles and on this basis rendered each other mutual respect. Society catered primarily for its members and stringently regulated all forms of relationships. Banda argues that though there was complementarity and respect, there was no true equality within the framework of the traditional African marriage because definite sex roles were established and under no circumstances could sex lines be crossed².

¹. This opinion is shared by numerous other authors, see for example Garbett, 1982:95; Bozzoli, 1983:139, Martin & Rogerson, 1984:34; Smith, 1986:3).

². For a comprehensive discussion on this issue see: Benezeri Kisembo, Laurent Magesa and Aylward Shorter, 1977. African Christian Marriage. London and Dublin:

Prekel (1980:62-8) identifies barriers to the achievement of gender equality to external or structural barriers related to the environment; and internal barriers related to attitudes toward women ascribed to by society in general. Turning to the latter, Gibbins, Ponting and Symons (1981:162) succinctly state:

the responsibility for the condition of women lies deep within us all; within beliefs, values and expectations that have been well entrenched through multitudinous forms of socialisation and through cultural patterns that we often unquestionably accept as our own values, norms and ideals. The enemy is not merely external....

Lupri (1983:13) maintains that value systems which militate against gender equality are encountered by women throughout the world, even in countries where gender equity has been legislated. However, Lemmer (1989:31) argues that the attitudes towards women embraced by a particular society shape the way the female role is interpreted, thereby either extending or limiting female aspirations in a manner peculiar to that society.

To recap, southern African societies are described as patriarchal. There is a sexual division of labour along gender lines. Whilst men are in charge of economic production, women are anchored in the area of reproduction and the preservation of domestic activities (See figure 1). Not only do men occupy prestigious positions but also exercise authority over women. Barriers to the achievement of gender equality can be attributed to environmental or external structures and internal attitudinal factors ascribed to by society in general. These seem to be a universal phenomenon. To enable us to understand the basis of these barriers, it will be necessary to discuss

briefly some of the explanations given by some academics with regard to this issue.

2.3 THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO GENDER

There are some who will argue that sex and gender are inseparable; that for individuals, biology is destiny. Such theorists argue that individuals are naturally inclined to certain types of activity; that men and women have tendencies and abilities (or lack of abilities) which suit them for various roles and occupations (Haralambos, 1984:371). This text assesses the validity of such claims but examines other variables which may contribute to gender activity.

One way of doing this is to look at other cultures, for if a phenomenon is universal there is a strong possibility that it is natural. After all, whatever the culture, the physiological differences between men and women are the same. However, not all cultures interpret these differences in the same way. Female and male roles vary from culture to culture, and there is no universal definition of 'masculinity' or 'femininity'.

Some sociologists offer a more sophisticated analysis because it allows for cultural variations in gender roles and argue that in whatever way a society 'shapes' its men and women into two different spheres, these differences can nevertheless be seen as functional to the maintenance of social stability and harmony (Haralambos, 1984:521). It is, after all, quite 'functional' to divide work roles along sex lines, so that women perform domestic tasks and child care while men provide economic support. However, this theory raises as many problems as the 'biology is destiny' argument. The question is, first and foremost, who decides what is best for society and for the men and women within it? Whose vision of society is being accepted and in whose best interest is this

method of organisation? How does prestige and status come to be attached to one sphere of activity and not another? For example, if the biological mother is seen as best suited to caring for young children, why does she perform these tasks unpaid? If sociologists are to understand gender differences and sex stratification these areas must be opened up for research, explanation and understanding.

Perhaps it is a matter of power. Some theorists suggest that all human relationships are based upon the ability of one group to dominate and control the lives of others. Contemporary Marxist theory attributes the role of women to capitalism and argues that capitalist economies trap men in wage labour (Haralambos, 1984:388ff). More recently, feminist theory has suggested that patriarchy - a system of male power and control - colluded with capitalism and pushed women to the margins of an industrial economy, thereby ensuring that males acquire profit and prestige.

In summary, various approaches to gender have been formulated. One school of thought contends that sex and gender are inseparable, and that biology is destiny. The problem with such an argument is that not all cultures interpret such 'universal differences' in the same way since female and male roles vary from culture to culture.

The sociological argument that men and women are categorised into two different spheres and that such differences are functional for the maintenance of social stability and harmony is also not convincing. After all, no one is ordained to decide what is best for society. This also does not explain why prestige and status are attached to one sphere of activity at the expense of the other.

Marxist theory suggests that class struggle explains all human relationships. Of late, feminist theory also suggests that the plight of women is the direct result of collusion between patriarchy and capitalism.

2.4 THE CONCEPT OF 'ROLE'

The term 'role' is frequently used in the social sciences, although the term does not have a single, commonly accepted definition. It is generally agreed, however, that the term refers to the expressed and predictable behaviour of an individual who acts according to his/her own perception of an ego-alter interaction (Westein & Westein, 1972:4ff) and that this behaviour deserves the name role only if it is predictable for different individual occupants of the same social position. Role is thus, says Popitz (1972:16), of a collective nature, a ready-to-wear social garment.' From the above it can be seen that any analysis of role can emphasize either the predisposition (socialization) for, the recruitment into, or the actual performance of the role in question (Leitinger, 1981;31-330).

In this study, it is impossible to deal with the socialization of actual performance. In order to put the discussion in the correct perspective, a brief discussion of 'recruitment' is in order.

Recruitment into roles, according to Leitinger (1981:32), is determined by socialisation into the role, and by certain characteristics of the individual, some of which are biological, and nearly unalterable while others are social or personal, and intrinsically capable of change. Leitinger contrasts recruitment by ascription due to unalterable characteristics, for example sex, age, race, or due to difficult-to-change characteristics

such as religion or status within the family or another collectivity, with recruitment by achievement, for example, income, or occupational status.

Turning specifically to the study, what then is a 'social role?' As indicated above, some sociologists view society as a system that survives on the successful performance of its parts. All parts, that is individuals, in society have specific functional roles, which if performed or not well performed, result in an ultimate malfunctioning of the whole system - the social system. Our societies comprise numerous structures, namely, individuals, families, community women groups, church groups and many others. The extent to which women enable these structures to achieve these goals constitutes their role.

In the area of religion, various roles are open to women. They may be ritual specialists for activities that pertain to women's affairs or concern fertility. Kilson (1972:171-77) contends that communal and personal ritual merit consideration in analyzing women's roles in African traditional religion. Women have important roles in personal rituals of status transformation associated with birth, puberty and death.

'Traditional' refers to the characteristics of the native society or state that existed before modernising influences began to transform it. Because the process of modernization has become discernible in most areas only in recent decades, traditional usually means what many living persons remember or were told of a former way of life. In some cases, the traditional culture still survives with great strength. Traditional should not be confused with aboriginal or pre-colonial. While colonialism was introduced only in the nineteenth century, some traditional societies were aboriginal, tribal groups and others

were segments of older state structures. Traditional therefore, refers specifically to socio-cultural systems prior to modernising trends (Julian, 1970:13).

In the religious context of this study, the definition given by Mbon (1987:9-10) will be very helpful. For Mbon, the traditional religion of a given ethnic group refers to the religion of that group before the intervention of colonialism and non-African religions such as Christianity and Islam. Mbon contends that it further refers to a way of life of that ethnic group, characterised by the presence of a central religious focus known in the language of that people as the supreme being, whom the people recognise as the supreme creator of the world and everything that exists in it, including men and women, and to whom all worship ultimately is directed.

To summarise, the concept 'role,' usually used by social scientists, has not been adequately defined for our purposes. Generally, an analysis of role emphasizes either the pre-disposition for recruitment into or the actual performance of the role in question. The operational definition of the social role in this study is the extent to which women help all social structures to achieve their goals. What constitutes women's religious role may be found in their activities in areas such as rituals - communal or personal, status transformation rites and activities as traditional healers.

Having given the operational definitions for such key words such as 'role' and 'traditional', an attempt will now be made to review related literature to show the socio-religious role of African women in traditional, colonial and post colonial eras. This analysis also attempts to show whether or not there has been any significant changes in women's roles in contemporary times.

Through their contribution to the reproduction of human life, women play an essential role in the continuity of human society. Yet in many African systems of thought, women's sexuality is regarded ambivalently. Women are regarded not only as producers of life but also as sources of danger as expressed in notions concerning the blood of childbirth.

According to White (1979:54-55) women were necessarily deliverers of men into the world and were sometimes the custodians of the property destined for their sons, but systems of marriage (how to choose a mate), of residence (where to live and work) and of descent and inheritance (how to establish heirs and transmit property) never provided for autonomous links between women of different generations.

In both patrilineal and matrilineal societies, there was a constant need for women's agricultural labour and an annual need for men's farm work (Boserup, 1970: 16-19; Meillassoux, 1981:26-7). Due to the fact that in these societies women monopolised the skills necessary to feed their families, descent was organised around and through women. These societies could import men to marry women - outsiders, who might not have the requisite farming skills.

In traditional times Kikuyu women had their own gardens which fed their families; men had their own gardens which women worked, the produce from which was either stored or sold. Kikuyu men were said to have made all major decisions about social, political, and legal affairs, and all decisions about what to plant in their own gardens (Kenyatta, 1937:167ff; Kershaw, 1975:178-80).

The example of Kikuyu women of Kenya therefore shows although women worked for the survival of their families, yet they were not involved in decision-making related to all spheres of life - legal, economic, political.

Generally African historians and anthropologists tend to emphasise that women have lost status and material benefits within the family in the last 75 years (Robertson, 1976:111-33)³.

Colonization and labour migration placed an intolerable burden on the African women left behind. They had to increase (or at least maintain) agricultural production, feeding themselves and their children, and sometimes their absent sons and their spouses, while providing cash crops for export or market sales. Between food and cash crop production, the amount of time women spent cultivating increased dramatically, and they still had to perform their traditional tasks of child care and cooking (Skinner, 1965:70)⁴.

Where labour migration was the norm, some women found new opportunities to trade in foodstuffs year round. In east and central Africa, local employers found it cheaper to encourage peasant women to sell cooked food to their work force, and this provided a new source of cash for women who would otherwise have had to scrape by with farming (Hay, 1976:92ff)⁵.

³ See also Etienne (1980:214) and Okeyo (1980).

⁴ Scholars such as White (1977:249ff) and Hay (1976) share similar sentiments about this issue.

⁵ See Chauncey (1981:136-42).

To recap, as a result of colonization and labour migration, African women were forced to perform multiple roles - to sustain the family through farming and also to continue with their traditional tasks of child care and cooking. Rural women therefore had to assume greater responsibilities and take on new ones as managers of families and farms. The role pattern of the past was broken once and for all.

In urban Africa three main roles that have emerged for rural women are: housewives, sellers of cooked food, and brewers of illegal liquor. On the whole, labour migration and rural poverty have increased women's workloads and anxieties. On the other hand these factors have also increased the options available to women and have placed many of these options under the women's control. In African families of rural wealth, however, women have become appendages of their fathers and/or husbands much more than their poorer counterparts. This becomes especially clear if we look at poor and wealthy women who farm adjacent land in the same society.

According to Wipper (1984:69-86) voluntary associations form the bases for socialising among African women today outside their immediate domestic or family group. Voluntary associations are important for a variety of reasons. Traditionally, women come together to promote their common economic, political and, social interests. Colonialism and urbanisation, however, undermine many of these associations, leaving women in a much less powerful position than men (Ardener, 1973; Boserup, 1970:53-60)⁶.

⁶ Van Allen (1972,1976) has expressed similar opinion.

Wipper (1975/6:198-214) asserts that in traditional African societies, the bases of women's associations included kinship (membership in lineages), age (age-sets) sex (society-wide puberty rites, secret societies, and women's interest groups) and village-level dance or work groups. Traditionally African women have engaged in co-operative efforts for the efficient cultivation and harvesting of their crops (Boserup, 1970). Since women do most of the day-to-day farming, it is less onerous and more sociable for neighbouring women to share these time consuming tasks. Work groups of perhaps a dozen women can farm one member's farm one day and move on the next day to another member's land. These groups often serve under political and social structures that can provide women with organisational and affiliative bases for other, non-agricultural pursuits (Lambert, 1956:67; Stamp, 1975-76).

In some traditional societies women had considerable autonomy in such areas as farming, trading, markets, and female rites of passage. In these areas, women's groups made and enforced rules and regulations. Van Allen (1972:169-70) argues that in pre-colonial Igboland, 'mikiri' (from a root meaning 'meeting') played an important role in women's daily self government, serving as a forum where they could air complaints against those who broke the rules. Women were accustomed to protecting their own interests as farmers, traders, wives and mothers, and if their requests for compliance were not forthcoming, other tactics such as strikes, boycotts, the use of force and 'making war' were employed.

According to Arhin (1983:91-98), Akan women performed military and political roles. He argues that female stools complemented male stools. In the village the elders, mpanyinfo, heads of the matrilineages, who constituted with the odekro the village

council, had their aberewa or obaapanyin, who looked after the women's affairs. The ohene, head of a division, and the omanhene, head of the autonomous political community, had their female counterparts known as ohemma, female ruler, who sat on their councils. An ohemma was a refuge for a fugitive from the ohene's court who often successfully sought her intervention in cases of the death penalty.

With regard to military role, Arhin (1983:96) explains that Akan women and adolescent girls were normally camp-followers and performed commissariat duties. They also performed pantomime dances and sang dirges in support of the men at war. The songs and dances were believed to have practical effect of shaming potential war-dodgers into joining the war. Women were also authorised to compose songs which could drive confirmed war-dodgers to suicide.

In summary, African women, today as in the past, come together to promote their common economic, political and social interests. They use co-operative efforts for the efficient cultivation and harvesting of their crops. In areas such as farming and trading, markets and rites of passages, traditionally they made and enforced rules and regulations. They also utilised strikes, boycotts and physical force, if necessary, to achieve their goals if their requests for compliance were not met. The example of Akan shows they performed military and political roles.

Today there are many new women's groups like rural co-operatives, social welfare, church and entertainment associations. These groups amply demonstrate that present-day African women, as in the past, have the ability to take collective action to solve their various problems. Work groups are used today as they were in the past to lighten

the farm chores of individual women (Wipper 1984:85-86).

Secret societies, some of which are still functioning, are another type of traditional group. The function of female societies are multiple: the education of young girls, the creation of cohesion among women, the provision of mechanisms to balance male political power, the strengthening of stratification patterns in the larger society. In particular, these societies provide vehicles through which older, aristocratic women control younger women's reproductive and labour services, thereby, consolidating and increasing both their own power and social status and that of their lineage and age group (Bledsoe, 1980:70).

Some secret societies, however, are restricted to male membership and thus serve to strengthen male prestige (Parrinder 1978:128). Some of the reasons often given for women's exclusion are the following: they are not trustworthy and are considered to be incapable of keeping secrets; they do not have the time to be committed outside the domestic family. Sometimes, a lone woman who has passed child bearing age is admitted and given a place of honour with a title bestowed on her. This corresponds to the period when her role in the extended family is increased by the fact that her ripe age and mature judgement now command a lot of respect in general while her role in the nuclear family diminishes accordingly.

Okonjo (1976:49) contends that various religious roles are open to women. They may be ritual specialists for activities that pertain to women's affairs or concern fertility. For example, the 'omu' among the Igbo of Nigeria controlled medicines and performed sacrifices to ensure the safety and success of the marketplace, where women were

active traders.

Another example is found among the Lovedu in South Africa. The queen is responsible for bringing rain when needed and for guaranteeing the fertility of both the soil and the population (Lebeuf, 1971:97). The link between agricultural and human fertility is that since women give birth, they are thought to have special capacities related to fertility generally. Moreover, most African women are active farmers. The link therefore, is not merely symbolic.

Onwurah (1988:67-9) maintains that in African traditional religions in addition to rituals in which men dominate or in which they barely tolerate the participation of women, other rituals are performed in which women participate on an equal footing with men. They participate freely in the worship of the community gods and spirits, and, in a number of rites de passage such as naming ceremonies, youth initiation rites, marriage and burial ceremonies, women have definite roles to perform by virtue of their positions in the family.

Wipper (1984:91) contends that perhaps the most prevalent religious experience for females, both as participants and as leaders, occurs during rites of passage that mark transitions from one socially significant stage in life to another.

Sundkler (1961: 139ff) maintains that a large number of spirit possessed people who act as mediums are women. They are considered to be talented psychics, and many Africans believe that women have mystic powers naturally. Their roles as mothers, protectors, and nourishers prepare them naturally to care for the spiritual or moral life

of the community.

Often women act as mediums and members of spirit possession cults. This phenomenon is found throughout African religious groups, not only in African traditional religion. Some anthropologists have explained women's predominance in the spirit cults as an aspect of the 'war' between the sexes. In male dominated societies, they argue, where women are excluded from political and religious positions of authority, spirit possession compensates for their otherwise low status (Lewis, 1971:79-80).

Analyzing the Zulu in particular, one scholar Sibisi (1977:167-77) views spirit possession as response to conquest by whites, the resulting separation of families and consequent mixing of ethnic groups due to the migrant labour system. He points to the general insecurity that is a mark of the 20th century. Spirit possession that is a manifestation of mental disturbance must be diagnosed and treated by diviners (Sibisi 1977:167-77).

In African Independent Churches many women hold church office as a consequence of their husbands being office bearers. According to Kretzschmar (1986:54) there are also women bishops. Women fill elected positions such as organisers, secretaries and treasurers. Kretzschmar suggests that through the exercising of their prophetic gifts women have had a direct influence upon the church.

Brandell-Syrier (1984:13-14) confirms this observation by saying that African women have expressed their wishes and imprinted their own views upon the smaller independent churches, almost from their earliest days as founders, as

healers/prophetesses and as members of special women's organisations, a common feature of most African churches.

A variety of religious roles are therefore open to African women. Some of them are ritual specialists for women's affairs (for example fertility rituals) while others act as mediums, diviners and herbalists. In some cases, they also participate in religious activities on an equal footing with men. Puberty rites for girls are exclusively officiated by women. Although most secret societies are restricted to male membership, women may, on occasion be admitted and some women have formed their own societies.

Women also play a significant role in African Independent Churches. Some of them occupy important positions as a consequence of their husbands being office bearers, but some of them become church officials, or even founders of their own churches, in their own right.

SUMMARY

To recap, although in general African women can be considered a homogeneous, marginalised group, one should exercise caution in considering them strictly as a social category, since they do not share the same interests, needs and desires, nor do they experience the same degree of oppression. Above all, there are variations in the interpretation of the female role within the ranks of different ethnic groups.

As far as sex-role ideology is concerned, sexual division of labour along gender lines is commonly found. Labour for economic rewards is the prerogative of men, while women's roles fall more commonly within the domain of reproduction and the carrying

out of domestic activities.

Various arguments with respect to theoretical explanations for gender differences have been put forward. Among other things biology as destiny determining has been suggested, as has the argument that the categorisation of roles according to gender helps in the maintenance of social stability and harmony. Marxists suggest that class struggle explains human relationships, and feminist theory, more recently, has explained the pitiable state of women as the result of a collusion between patriarchy and capitalism.

While Kikuyu women were not involved in decision-making, the examples of the 'omu' of the Igbos of Nigeria and the queen of Lovedu and others show that women were generally involved in all spheres of life - economic, political, religious and decision making in pre-colonial time. Colonization and labour migration forced African women to perform multiple roles in the absence of their husbands and children. Although women utilised (and still utilise) voluntary associations to promote their common economic, political and social interests, colonialism and urbanization, tended to undermine many of these associations. There is, nevertheless, a continuity in the formation of rural co-operatives and self-help projects, social welfare, church and entertainment groups. The objective of these groups is to take collective action to help solve various problems that women experience. Work groups are still used today as in the past to lighten the farm chores of individual women. Women also fill religious roles. Some of them are traditional healers and leaders of African Independent Churches. In the historical ('mainline') churches, women's positions are often related to their husbands' importance within the church structure.

The picture which emerges from a review of studies of the socio-religious role of women in traditional African societies is piecemeal since it remains still as one of the least researched areas. Even those few studies which have been done have generally been concerned with African societies other than those of southern Africa. In matters of religious beliefs and practices in traditional Africa, one may sometimes safely speak in general terms. After all, as indicated by Idowu (1973:103), the common denominator is 'a common Africanness.' One can also observe that the plight of women in pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary times has never been easy. While many women have succumbed to male pressures and therefore accepted male dominance as the natural order of things, a few women in some societies have openly challenged the status quo. The latter group should be encouraged to work for change in the interests of justice for society at large.

Much of what was reviewed in this chapter applies to African peoples who are not Hlubi. A word of caution is therefore in order. One must not lose sight of the dangers inherent in blatant generalisations which sometimes occur in studies on Africa. It must also be acknowledged that no matter how many different African ethnic groups one uses for illustrations, those illustrations cannot in every detail and respect apply everywhere. Indeed, this is rightly pointed out by Swailem (1969:83), 'Africa is a large continent, composed of hundreds of peoples of several races, and it would be misleading to make general statements about "African" beliefs and practices.'

Among the Hlubi specifically, however, there is a paucity of information available for research. No studies have been done on women. This sorry state of affairs calls for a need to undertake research to help put Hlubi women in their proper place.

Given the operational definition of 'role' to be adopted in this study and having cited a catalogue of prior evidence concerning the socio-religious role of women in traditional African societies generally, it now remains to discover whether or not these factors are consistent with women's place in the Hlubi society of Qumbu. This issue will be addressed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE STUDY REGION: THE HLUBI OF QUMBU

Tradition exercises a tremendous influence on the African. The African follows tradition out of a sense of family cohesion, out of religious sentiments and out of fear. African belief is that any infidelity incurs the wrath of the dead and of evil spirits. Again religion is a single entity integrated with individual, family, social, economic and political life (Baeta, 1968:294-5). It can therefore be concluded that there is a relationship between religion and family. It is because of this relationship between religion and family that this chapter seeks to examine briefly the conception of family as well as to outline the beliefs and practices of the Hlubi. This chapter also deals with the historical and socio-economic background of the Hlubi society in Qumbu.

With regard to the historical aspects of this chapter, I greatly relied on one of the headmen, a retired school principal and a Fort Hare history graduate. Apart from the facts that he gave me, he provided me with volumes of history books as well as journal articles and unpublished papers.

3.1 GEOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF THE SURVEYED AREAS

The three administrative areas in which this study took place are part of the Qumbu Magisterial District. Qumbu plays an important role in the region. This is due to its position as administrative seat of the Emboland Regional Authority which includes the Magisterial areas of Kwabhaca, Qumbu and Tsolo which together, according to the Hawkins Associates Report of 1990 and the Osmonde Lange report of 1982, had a population of 267 417 in 1975.

In an agro-ecological classification of this region, the Hawkins Associates Report (1980) identifies two main patterns or systems in the Qumbu district.

- (a) Areas with relief characterised by rolling hills, but with rugged plateau remnants.
- (b) Areas with an undulating to rolling relief.

3.1.1 SOILS

Soils in Qumbu area are partially hydro-morphic, shallow to moderately grey soils, with Kroonstad and Cartef soil identified. Cartef is a shallow soil and Kroonstad is a soil with a clay subsoil. Both can support grazing, and agriculture, and are suitable for urban development, although they are poorly drained.

3.1.2 CLIMATE

Qumbu district has an average annual rainfall of 815mm per annum, falling predominantly in summer between October and May. The highest rainfall usually occurs in March. Eighty percent of the district's rainfall falls during October and May. Thunder is experienced on \pm 50 days per year and hail \pm three and half days.

The temperatures in the vicinity of Qumbu range from 27°C to 13°C during the hot months, such as January and in colder, mid-winter months, such as July they drop to between 17°C and 0°C.

Winds are fair to moderate, blowing predominantly from the south-west. In short, Qumbu district has a very healthy climate, and this, coupled with the favourable soil composition mentioned earlier, makes it ideal for agriculture and grazing.

3.1.3 POPULATION

Rural and Urban Population

In 1975 the total population of the magisterial district of Qumbu stood at 82 617, composed of urban and rural inhabitants as follows:

Table 1 Distribution of Population 1970 and 1975

	1970	1975
Rural	65103	81867
Urban	716	750
Total	68819	82617

Source: Department of Statistics and Survey conducted September 1979

Concerning population distribution, the surveyed areas had a population of 20 346 (unpublished results of 1992 census). This has been estimated to grow at an annual rate of 2,7 percent which had earlier been projected by Osmond Lange (1982:17) and Thomas (1982:16-18).

A survey conducted by an independent organisation indicated that 11 percent of the population is absent. The majority of these absentees are economically active males and this accounts for the relatively low number of males living in the areas surveyed. Qualified women are also drawn away to larger towns in the Transkei and to cities such as Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and East London in the Republic of South Africa.

3.1.4 VEGETATION

Like most of the Transkei, grassy veld extends over most of the surveyed areas. Light forests are also found in mountains. There are also artificial forests found in Maquibini, Kalankomo and Qhancu. Sweet grasses are located in valleys and river basins. Furthermore, sour grassveld is found on the Great Escarpment inland.

3.1.5 AGRICULTURE

As already indicated the favourable environmental conditions include mild climate, rich soils, expanses of grazing land and an irrigation potential from many of the rivers in the surveyed areas. It follows therefore that cattle, sheep and goat farming are the main pastoral activities. Maize, sorghum and legumes are the major crops cultivated. There is a division of labour along gender lines. Cattle, sheep and goat farming are the prerogatives of the relatively few men left behind, whilst the major crops cultivated for subsistence are the domain of women.

3.1.6 HEALTH SERVICES

The district as a whole is served by the Nessie Knight Hospital at Sulenkama, about 36 kilometres from Qumbu. Permanent clinics are located in the hinterland. Mary Therese Hospital at Mount Frere is utilised by some of the surveyed areas. These include locations such as Qhancu, Kalankomo, Silitwa and Mdeni.

In conclusion, the general impression of the areas suggests a relatively cut off marginalised rural population, located in a fairly rugged landscape. Services are poor and access to them is often a severe problem. The population is a mixture of a number of tribes, and conflicts from the past appear still to be an issue.

3.2 THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE HLUBI

It is said the recorded oral history of the Hlubi goes back to an unspecified, semi-mythical time, when according to tradition, their ancestral chiefs lived near the Lumbobo mountains which lie along the eastern border of present-day Swaziland (Wright and Manson 1983:1-2). Surprisingly, nothing else is known about these chiefs - not even their names. Wright and Manson suggest that Hlubi society evolved in south-eastern Africa sometime before the 18th century. They suggest that how and when these peoples came to be called Hlubi has long been forgotten.

The Hlubi are of Makalanga origin. The name Hlubi, however, is of a comparatively late date. According to the genealogical table for this tribe, there are sixteen names of ruling chiefs, covering approximately a period of 400 years before the tribal name was changed on the death of Ncobo, the sixteenth in descent from Ludiwu. Halfway between these two names occurs that of Mhuhu. From this time down to that of Ncobo, the tribe was called Imi-huhu. The change of the tribal name from Imi-huhu to Ama-Hlubi took place on the death of Ncobo, the sixteenth in line of descent from Ludiwu (Soga, 1930:403-6).

Norman (1976:2-3) argues that the Hlubi tribe was one of the largest, perhaps the largest of the historic eMbo Nguni. These Nguni who entered Natal as far back, perhaps, as the 13th century, were aggressive. Norman (1976:3) asserts that at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Zulus were a tiny insignificant clan and from a higher social pinnacle the Hlubi could look down upon them as being simply despised tobacco-sellers. He maintains that as the Zulu star ascended the fortunes of the Hlubi declined. The Ngwane then turned on the Hlubi, still a numerous tribe though

weakened by internal dissensions. The broken remnants of the Hlubi finally fled under the shadow of the mountain, some, indeed, crossed over it and grappled with the Sotho clans. The years which followed were full of confusion and death, drawing one tribe after another into bloody conflict. The story of these battles is not the focus of this study, so nothing more will be said about them. Suffice it to say that after the dispersal of most of the Hlubi, a small portion of the tribe, comprising about 7000 men, women and children, remained in their tribal home extending along the Buffalo river from its source to its junction with the Tukela. It can be said then that the Hlubi represent only a segment of the tribal hordes who were uprooted due to the seemingly endless conflicts in Zululand and resultant flooding of immigrants into the colony.

Norman (1976:4ff) further explains circumstances leading to the weakening of Hlubi power. He suggests that the Hlubi were sprawled across the Drakensberg foothills. As a result of Chief Langalibalele, a rainmaker and a man of mystical attributes and human failings, the Hlubi, along with their neighbours, were 'eaten up' as a punishment for Langalibalele's resistance to the government of Natal and his stand against the imperious Shepstone, the so-called Moses of the black people. In fact, Chief Langalibalele's popularity helps to shed more light on Hlubi history. Theophilus Shepstone was the designated Diplomatic Agent to the Native tribes in Natal. The title, 'the Moses of black people', as used by Norman probably stems from the fact that his affection for the Africans was undeniable. Norman (1976:4;135) vividly describes Shepstone as follows:

...he set out to rivet his authority in the minds of the people in his charge. He therefore put on the mantle of a patriarch - a nineteenth century Moses.... Every discussion with a chief or an induna was converted into an indaba. He humbled the man squatting before him with the coldness of his eye. Each slow and deliberate nod of that leonine head was a confirmation of omniscience and every spoken decision was an interpretation of the Law engraved on a tablet in his mind.

When one goes back to the biblical stories of the Old Testament, one cannot but accept that the picture portrayed by Norman aptly fitted Shepstone. It is against this background that Chief Langalibalele's popularity helps to explain the dispersal of the Hlubi tribe.

Tribes are often called by the names of their chiefs. For instance, the Xhosa were named after their chief Xhosa, a descendant of chief Nguni, after whom all Nguni peoples were named. Through Mtimkulu, scholars are able to trace the whole Hlubi society. Today, the descendants of Mtimkulu I are found throughout Southern Africa, namely in the Republic of South Africa, Transkei, Ciskei, Bophuthatswana and Zimbabwe.

Jolobe (1959 in Lamla 1991:2ff) has tried to trace the original geographical area of the Hlubi before the dispersal of tribes following the wars of Shaka Zulu. All indications are that the Hlubi lived between the upper reaches of the Thukela (Tugela) and Mzinyathi (Sundays) rivers, east of the Lundi (Drakensberg range of mountains) in present day Natal.

Lamla (1991:5ff) reports that the descendants of Mtimkulu II settled permanently at Qhanqu in the Qumbu district. The second house of Mehlomakulu (another Hlubi chief) produced Milani whose descendants are found at Kubuse and Nxaxa on the Tina river in Qumbu.

Since the upheavals that began in the early nineteenth century, namely, the dispersal or mfecane, annexation of the various native territories by colonial authorities, movements in search of living space, inter-tribal skirmishes, frontier wars, labour migration, urbanisation, etc, it is difficult to find areas that are still occupied exclusively by the Hlubi (Lamla, 1981:4).

To summarise, oral history indicates that Hlubi ancestral chiefs lived near Lumbobo, which share borders with present-day Swaziland. African historians suggest that the Hlubi society evolved in south-eastern Africa before the eighteenth century but no one knows how and when the Hlubi came to be so-called. The Hlubi tribe was one of the largest of the eMbo Nguni. Chief Langalibalele's resistance to the government of Natal, as well as his stand against Shepstone, led to the demise of Hlubi power. The migration of the Hlubi was probably also due to the wars of the Zulu king, Shaka. Through Mtimkulu, scholars are able to trace the whole Hlubi society, found in southern Africa.

3.3 THE HLUBI OF QUMBU

Life amongst the Hlubi is organised according to traditional and stereotyped gender roles. Men are entrusted with heavier and dangerous work while women attend to tasks close to home. It must be pointed out, however, that these functions are

complementary, depending upon the needs of the particular society.

The Hlubi man is traditionally considered the warrior, the hunter and the stockman. The most precious game are herds of cattle. Traditionally cattle represented the ultimate wealth, calculated not so much in quality as in quantity. Like all other Xhosa-speaking Nguni, cattle were the only means of economic exchange, other than assegais which were difficult to make. Today cattle are important not so much as a source of food but as a means for men to obtain wives through the 'ukulobola' system.

3.3.1 LIFE AS A GROUP

A Hlubi believes he or she is not born to live alone. He or she is born into a family and his/her responsibility is to that family and its ancestors. He or she is a member of the clan of Hlubi and must be loyal to his/her chief or headman, who is not so much an individual as the embodiment of the whole tribe, one who acts on behalf of the tribe even if, at times, his decisions appear to be against its best interests.

Family life revolves around the head of the house, the provider and defender, and those who make it a home. Females are prohibited from holding the head of lineage position because of menstrual taboos forbidding contact with sacred objects. The explanation for preventing women from holding this position is bound up with the concept of ritual impurity. The belief is that menstruation devalues the potency of medicine; the blood of the woman renders it powerless. The family is the backbone of the whole Hlubi system for it is the social and economic unit at the root of clan and tribal life. Each member has clear-cut responsibilities regarding rewards and benefits apportioned in terms of age and gender. Sons will found new families and homes of

their own but will maintain links with father and brothers and indeed with far distant members of the family.

This actually explains the genesis and establishment of the chieftaincy system. Each person belongs to his/her tribe, which in turn belongs to its chief. The head of a clan and all its members are descended from a common ancestor. Below the head are subordinate chiefs with lesser roles and under them the various groups and families.

When a Hlubi dies, his heir provides for his widow. Among brothers and sisters, brothers are given a 'start in life' and are expected to care for their sisters until they are married. If a male should need help he calls on his brothers. It is said that in earlier days chiefs could call on young men and women reaching maturity to serve in their households without expectation of payment. In return, they were treated as members of the household, fed and clothed according to the financial strength of the chief.

The concept 'communitas' is very helpful for defining the Hlubi worldview. This term expresses unity and oneness in a traditional situation. The Hlubi live as a group and any member of that group, even a complete stranger, is accepted as being entitled to a share of whatever the others may have. During feasting occasions although no one is asked to attend, every one is expected to be present. In the same vein if there is work to be done all must give a helping hand. A stranger in trouble is entitled to help or protection, while a transgression against the rights of an individual is at the same time a wrong done to all members of his/her group.

Like all other Xhosa-speaking Bantu, to live in the Hlubi community is to share all the good things of life - the responsibilities, the dangers and the losses without thought of reward. This kind of attitude is ingrained in every Hlubi from birth. He or she must cultivate the habit of sharing his/her life with others. It is amazing to see that when a child is given a drink he shares it with his peers, rather than hiding it to feast on later. This is in line with Mbiti's (1969:113-120) twist of the Cartesian "cogito ergo sum" which is appropriate here. Mbiti says "I belong, therefore I am". Temples (1967:103) also argues that Bantu ontology is opposed to the European concept of individuated things --- things which exist in themselves in isolation from others. Such an assertion confirms the African concept of solidarity of the family and extends to include the tribe. For Temples, humanity in the African context is not a lone being but a ritual force which interacts with others, and is itself influenced by other beings.

In theory, all men and women are considered brothers and sisters and are all members of the race of humanity. Based on this principle, the tribe lives as a rigidly defined, extremely conservative and well regulated community with established rules and laws which govern every one of its members and all they stand for. This truth must be acknowledged along with the recognition of current inter-tribal conflicts which were prevalent even in pre-colonial times.

3.3.2 HOME AND FAMILY

The Hlubi is considered as the true owner of all his/her cattle, but in earlier days only the chief who personified the whole tribe had full right to the land each one occupied. When the tribe arrived in a new area it was the responsibility of the chief to allocate the available land to heads of the various households, based on their needs. He

usually set aside grazing land and hunting grounds for the tribe or clan as a group and allotted fields to each head of family on the basis of one for each wife.

In establishing a home, the head of the household had first to build his umzi or group of huts, normally sited to face east on to the precious ubuhlanti or byre in which he would keep his cattle. The criterion for site for the umzi of a householder was a sloping place to allow for drainage in wet weather and the assurance that the umzi was fairly close to a source of fresh water.

Like other Bantu tribes, the Hlubi views hut building as basically a communal activity, with the entire family, friends and neighbours giving a helping hand. The head of the umzi will probably have many wives, and of these the chief and each of the lesser wives will have her own living hut, store hut, children's hut and cooking arrangements so that she has complete charge of her own household.

Each hut has a hearth in the middle where a fire is lit at night and in cold and rainy weather. It is said the back of hut and the right hand side are reserved for the head of the family and other males, while women occupy the rest. Mealies still on the cob hang from the rafters, and against the back wall lean sacks and calabashes of amasi, the fermented milk which is the Hlubi's staple diet.

Behind the hut is the cooking area, which is the woman's domain. Each is supposed to fetch her own water and fuel and cook her family's food in three-legged and other pots: gruel or porridge first thing in the morning and the evening meal when she returns from working in the fields. The meal may include fermented milk; porridge or

a gruel of maize or millet; whole or stamped mealies, alone or with beans; bread baked from ground corn or green mealies; the tops of pumpkin runners cooked as a vegetable stew, by themselves or with meat. Meat is reserved for special occasions, or when a beast has died. The women have an assortment of pots, wooden spoons and sticks to stir the porridge, a stamping block, a grinding stone and a kneading trough.

3.4 SUPERNATURAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES

Like any other primal society, religion permeates Hlubi ontology and no aspect of culture can be discussed without reference to religion. One of the principles underlying the religious world of the tribe is a sense of holistic well-being and since supernatural beliefs and practices form religious orientations a brief discussion of this issue will throw light on this study.

The Hlubi believe in a higher order of being, who is a single creator (umdali) or supreme being (uthixo). They also believe in the spirits of their ancestors (izinyanya) who are the Hlubi's mediators with the 'powers of good'.

Whenever they find themselves in serious trouble the head of the family calls in a diviner (iqqira), to interpret the wishes and demands of the ancestors. It must be noted that this office is not hereditary and the diviner holds it through supernatural possession which usually manifests itself in a strange disease generally diagnosed only by the isanuse, the most skilled and specialist diviner of the locality.

It is believed by the Hlubi that the chief opponents of the diviners are witches and sorcerers whose familiars are feared as much as the witches and sorcerers themselves. They also believe that the crocodile lures humanity to certain destruction; that the horned owl's cry is an indication of disaster; the leguaan and the snake are to be feared. The wagtail bird which is always found among grazing cattle is considered semi-sacred, for to kill it will bring poverty. Should one be found alive in a trap the herdboys will immediately free it. If it is already dead, they will reverently bury it with an offering of a few white beads.

The Hlubi fear the impundulu bird which, it is believed, sets its own fat on fire and so causes lightning as it streaks through the sky. Any time lightning strikes an iggira is summoned immediately to prevent a second occurrence.

The Hlubi also believe in uthikoloshe, a little man covered in coarse hair who normally plays with children on the banks of rivers where he lives, telling them funny stories. This creature can be mischievous and malicious when frustrated by adults.

The above is not meant to imply that there are no Christian and Moslem converts among the Hlubi. One cannot underestimate the impact Christianity, together with Western culture, has had on the Hlubi. This has led to a dilemma in the experiences of many Hlubi. At least two kinds of African Christians have emerged: first those converts who were able to break completely with their traditional religion and second those with a 'foot in both worlds'. Archbishop Tutu (1978:366) speaks of such a tension created as a result of the clash between world-views as 'religious schizophrenia' in which 'believers were doing no more than giving lip-service to

Christianity'. There is no doubt that urbanization, western education, Christianity and technological changes have had a tremendous impact on the Hlubi society. It is against this background that the study attempts to ascertain the extent to which the clash of cultures and world-views has affected the socio-religious role of women in the Hlubi society. The next chapter begins to tackle this issue.

CHAPTER FOUR

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ROLE OF PRE-COLONIAL HLUBI WOMEN

In chapter two an attempt was made to review related literature with respect to the socio-religious role of women in traditional African societies. This chapter seeks to ascertain how the phenomenon existed in pre-colonial times. This will be done by examining the Hlubi's perception of women in the Hlubi society through sources such as myths, proverbs and taboos. Since the social role of a person is used as a yardstick to measure one's status in that society, the Hlubi woman's social role will also be discussed. In view of the fact that religion is the most binding factor, inextricably tied to all aspects of tribal life, the religious role of the Hlubi woman will finally be considered.

Indeed Primary sources such as mythology and proverbs reveal the religious beliefs and practices of African traditional societies. This was rightly pointed out by Mbiti (1991:59) when he used such sources to highlight the place and role of women according to African Religion. It is against this background that myths and proverbs are used in this study:

Rural Hlubi women amaze me for their dedication, hard work and attitude to domestic and household chores. I say this with some authority because of my eight years' stay with them. I am especially impressed when I compare them with women in my own country (Ghana) and tribe (Asante) in particular. I have seen them thatch huts, smear rooms with cow dung, send livestock to the field and 'dipping tank', paint houses and even wash their husbands' cars. At social ceremonies whilst their men are sitting in the kraal drinking beer, 'hot' drinks and local beer and eating meat the women are busy

cooking and drinking tea. It seems to me the plight of Hlubi women has never been easy. This state of affairs has made me develop an interest in the plight of women in Hlubi society. I have therefore talked to them both formally and informally to listen to their experiences. From these formal and informal discussions with women, I am inclined to believe, however, that the plight of Hlubi women has become increasingly difficult.

As indicated in chapter one, participant observation was largely used for this study. During eight years stay with the Hlubi of Qumbu, I identified myself with one of the tribes, amaBelle. I was known and called Andile Majeke and by adoption related to the late Chief S. Majeke, former Minister of Police and also once a Speaker of Parliament in the K.D Matanzima and George Matanzima governments. The community also knew me as the brother of the wife of the de facto headman, a former principal of the oldest secondary school in the district who is widely respected in the Emboland. I also involved myself with the community by attending ceremonies and donated when needs were presented. Further, I assisted (for a token fee) in adult education classes organised for teachers and nurses who wanted to write Standard 10 examinations. Unisa undergraduate students also approached me for assistance. Access to the community in the course of the study was therefore not a problem.

The material used in this chapter was gathered from conversations and interviews with some Hlubi women. Thirty five women were interviewed of which five were key figures. The respondents were divided into three groups. In group A, 15 of the respondents were in the 50-60 age group. Five of them had gone beyond School Certificate level and five had Standard 8 education. Five were illiterates. In group B, 10 women were

selected and were in the 41-48 age bracket. Five had School Certificate qualification and 5 were illiterates. Group C had 10 respondents who were in the 35-25 age group. All of them had gone beyond Standard 10 in the secondary school with some professional qualifications. Fifteen women were chosen in group A because of their connection with the past. Since it was not easy to verify the reliability and authenticity of data given in this group, a relatively large number was chosen in order to obtain consistency in their responses. Since the study was primarily based on participant observation the number of additional conversations with women in informal and or chance encounters is not given.

4.1 WOMEN IN HLUBI MYTHOLOGY

Mbiti (1991:60) explains that myths play an important role in throwing some light on the religious world-view of the African. Myths, like history are employed to enshrine a people's beliefs about their remote and sometimes recent past. However, he maintains that myth is broader than history in explaining some aspects of society. Mbiti argues further that it is a language depicting truths or realities for which history does not provide a full explanation. Some myths have an historical base and could have taken place.

One Hlubi myth says deity created the first human reed from which came a man and two women, who were the progenitors of the human race. This myth, shows that men and women are the co-creators of the human race. In other words, the myth points out the equality of women and men from the beginning. Another myth indicates that the first parents were responsible for teaching people agriculture and the storing of grains and berries, the milking of cattle, the brewing of beer and the making of bread. The

implication is that the socialisation process in the lineage was not the domain of men alone and, therefore, men were not the sole fountain of knowledge. This makes nonsense of the argument normally used by male chauvinists that women are deficient in rational activity. These myths place men and women on an equal footing as opposed to the Biblical perspective whereby man was created before woman thus, by inference, making him superior to woman. Another myth associates the hole from which the first man and woman came forth as being in the sky.

Surprisingly, only a few of my interviewees could give folktale or legends indicating the role of women with regard to the creation of the earth and the origins of humanity. This seems strange when one considers the fact that such themes are portrayed in many myths in East and West African countries.

With regard to stories about the discovery of food, there is a folktale which relates to the discovery of pumpkin by two co-wives who cooked it, ostensibly to poison their younger, and lactating rival who happened to be the favourite wife of their husband.

The above shows that through myths we can get a picture of the place and role of women in Hlubi society. It has also been shown that a woman occupies a special position in the sense that she shares with man in the creative process of life. This places her on an equal footing in the social ladder with man. Women are also credited with inventing foodstuffs although as human beings they also have weaknesses --- jealousy.

4.2 HLUBI WOMEN IN PROVERBS

Proverbs are described as being concentrated in the sense that they put a lot of thoughts, ideas, reflections, experiences, observations and knowledge and world-views into a few words. Mbiti (1991:63) says proverbs are closely related to the culture of each given society. He explains that proverbs express wisdom that is acquired through reflection, experience, observation and general knowledge.

When asked about proverbs highlighting the role of Hlubi women I was told proverbs are the product of the advent of Christianity and its Western education. Whilst accepting this explanation as a possibility, I believe that it is not wholly accurate since proverbs constitute primary sources of traditional religion. Lestrade (1937:291-4), writing on South African Bantu literature emphatically states that the bulk of this literature was in existence before the advent of the Europeans in South Africa, although as far as is known none of it was recorded. Lestrade concedes, however, that a certain proportion was conceived and produced after the arrival of the white man. There are numerous proverbs used by other southern African societies revealing both the positive and negative image of women. For example, the Tsonga-Shangana of South Africa say 'the woman is a fire' or 'this woman is a deceitful and ferocious crocodile'.

Nevertheless, a few proverbs were gathered although it is not clear whether such proverbs were used before or during the missionary venture in southern Africa. One proverb says 'the stick has no kraal'. The meaning is that the abuse of authority destroys home life and thus breaks up the family. This proverb was specially directed to wife beaters, who thought that because they had paid lobola, the woman was their property and they could therefore do whatever they liked to her. The proverb gives us

a picture of the plight of some women who were (and still are) the victims of battering by husbands.

Another proverb, though not specifically referring to women, can be applied indirectly. This proverb says 'a bird builds with other bird's feathers'. It means that no one can be wholly independent, but must depend on others as well as upon one's self. This seems to touch on mutual interdependence and complementary roles normally played by husband and wife. Other proverbs indicate that the well being of every homestead depends on the wisdom of the woman in the house.

Proverbs, therefore, give pithy symbolic form to some bits of folk-wisdom and pose some mental challenges. They contain the accumulated philosophical experience of generations, moral in tone, for the benefit of posterity. Though few have been recorded, proverbs throw light on the place and role of women in Hlubi society. The extent to which these primary sources are revealed in the world-view of the Hlubi society can be ascertained in practice through the discussion of the social role of Hlubi women.

4.3 SOCIAL ROLE OF HLUBI WOMEN

It must be pointed out at the onset that what follows mainly concerns married women. The tradition of the Hlubi people, just like any other African ethnic group, did not favour single women. A woman was duty-bound to marry partly for procreation and partly for security. An unmarried woman was more or less considered a minor and remained attached to her parents where she helped with the household chores.

The extended family consisted of the grandmother, daughters, sons and grandchildren and as such family was governed by the grandmother who instituted norms and values which bound the whole family together. Although Hlubi society was (and still is) patriarchal, decision-making was the prerogative of the grandmother. This appears to correspond to the period when her role in the extended family was increased by the fact that her mature age and mature judgement now commanded a lot of respect while at the same time her physical work in the nuclear family diminished correspondingly.

Through their contribution to the reproduction of human life, Hlubi women played an essential role in the continuity of human society. Among the Hlubi, childbearing was considered a pride to the family (and perhaps the tribe). A childless woman was therefore not accorded respect in the sense that she failed to contribute to the continuity of the human race. A Hlubi woman was not given the right or choice as far as childbearing was concerned. She understood and felt that her society demanded that she ought to have children if she was to find fulfilment as a person in the community. Moreover, the number of children in a family was an index to one's wealth and for that matter one's position on the social ladder. After all the respect accorded to the husband was vicariously also enjoyed by the wife. The Hlubi woman therefore saw nothing wrong with having many children.

As a wife, the Hlubi woman was also respected by the husband in that she was consulted on issues that affected the family. For example if the husband wanted to marry a second wife, the wife's consent was sought. In the sale of a beast the wife was consulted before any transaction was effected.

Among the Hlubi, one's mother occupied a very central and respected place in the family and community. Ill-treating one's mother was considered to be the worst sin inviting scorn not only from family but from the community at large. The Hlubi followed the patrilineal system of inheritance. Yet, the ethical laws were strict on the mother's line than on the father's. For example, one was strictly prohibited from offending a relative on the mother's side. This is explained in terms of the prominent roles mothers play in the formation of an individual's character from cradle to the grave.

One is also surprised to observe that indirectly the attachment of siblings of one mother to another was far much closer than that between those from one father. A mother's influence was strong on her children even if those children were born to different men in different towns. The influence of a father as a rallying point of unity was minimal when compared with that of mother. This is because mothers in polygamous homes act as the real 'heads' of their 'nuclear families' and provide moderating factors between their 'biological' children.

As far as agriculture was concerned, there was a constant need for Hlubi women's labour. In pre-colonial times, women did not own land separately because available land was considered a family estate. Members of the family (including women) worked on the land to produce farm products to feed the family. However, there was a division of labour along gender lines under the control of the husband/father, who allocated arable land for the use of the various houses to which his wives belonged on which they worked with their children for their support and for that of the homestead. Cattle, sheep and goat farming, digging and cleaning grain-pits were the prerogatives of men whilst the major crops such as sorghum, pumpkin and green mealies cultivated for

subsistence were the domain of women. Nevertheless, men and women reaped together, though, as with weeding, the greater part of the work was done by women.

The first virtue demanded of a bride was that she should be diligent. She would wake up at dawn, before any one else, to fetch water. She swept before she went to the fields. Everyday she went to fetch wood, and it was her duty in winter to gather wild spinach from the distant fields. She did the heavy grinding and cooking, helped in garden work, muddying and repairing old huts. As part of their domestic duties, Hlubi women brewed beer of two types: the mildly inebriating utywala for all in the neighbourhood, and non-intoxicating amarewu for private consumption in the family.

In the pre-colonial era there was no organised voluntary associations as we have today. Hlubi women simply engaged in co-operative efforts (amalima or work-parties) for the efficient cultivation and harvesting of their crops. Work groups of perhaps a dozen of the neighbours (or clan members) would farm at one member's one day and move on the next day to another's. Attendance at an ilima was not compulsory for any one. It was considered a friendly gesture for near neighbours of the owner to go, but there could be no accusation against them if they failed to participate in the exercise. This co-operative spirit was carried over into other aspects of their lives. For example, neighbours would bring wood and thatched grass to the needy such as a widow.

One other role of women is observed during marriage ceremonies. After lobola (bridewealth) had been paid, the women of the umzi usually went through an elaborate pantomime to demonstrate the bride's new responsibilities: hoeing the fields, gathering firewood, accompanying festive dances and taking part in them.

The above discussion shows that Hlubi women were solely responsible for activities surrounding the feeding of the family and rearing of young children. Within the lineage, the most basic unit was a woman and her children. They were mainly peasant farmers whose livelihoods depended on the cultivation of subsistence crops. Almost all of them were engaged in subsistence agriculture and were faced with lives of hard work. Surprisingly, these hardships made them physically strong. Combined efforts were utilized to cultivate fields and also to reap the harvest. It has also been shown that life-long ties of emotional intimacy and affection between children and their mothers was a characteristic. Women who bore exceptionally large numbers of children were honoured. On the other hand, a woman without children was sometimes an object of pity, sometimes of ridicule. One is tempted to conclude that the Hlubi woman went about her duties without any obstacles. In the light of this, it will be appropriate to discuss some of the prohibitions or taboos the Hlubi woman observed.

4.4 TABOOS FOR HLUBI WOMEN

As already pointed out in the preceding chapters, women are viewed not only as producers of life but also as sources of danger. This, perhaps explains why so many taboos are hedged around them in the Hlubi society. There are some injunctions as to what constitutes incorrect or improper behaviour for Hlubi women. Many of these rules have the status of taboos. In other words, these are categorical prohibitions the breach of which would bring extreme shame and fear of supernatural punishment.

According to Parrinder (1978:172) 'taboo' (or tabu) is a word taken over from the peoples of the Polynesian and other Pacific islands to indicate a special or forbidden thing or person. It has been linked with totems since totem animals are taboo to their

followers. Nevertheless, there are many taboos and prohibitions which have nothing to do with totems. The whole question has been complicated by the renowned theory of the psychologist Freud who attempted to explain all taboos, as well as religion itself as originating in totemism. Although academics accept his findings as valuable, many of them have rejected this theory.

Taboos are a way of maintaining the harmony and well-being of a small scale society. Since harmonious living is a core concept of African Traditional Religions in general, it follows that taboos are religious characteristics. Furthermore, considering the fact that religion is the most binding factor, inextricably interwoven with all aspects of tribal life, it is reasonable to suppose that there is a relationship between taboo and religion. The prohibition if violated, in some cases, can be the subject of legal action. Taboo among the Hlubi therefore has religious sanction.

In Xhosa, the taboos or prohibitions are termed amaconini, and they cover every aspect of daily life. Their application is formal and inflexible and observed with utmost loyalty (Broster 1982:17).

Eating of eggs

Women would not eat eggs under any circumstances. It was said to be a self-imposed prohibition. It was believed that eggs were supposed to make women both incontinent and incapable of conception. In view of the fact that the Hlubi society attaches importance to childbearing one can appreciate the extent to which women strictly observed this prohibition.

Debarred entrance to the cattle-kraal

All Hlubi women were debarred entrance to the cattle-kraal as they would render it unclean, and the cattle would become weak in the knees and die. In other words entrance to the kraal resulted to the depletion of the stock. This idea emerged from the fact that women, being subject to periodic menstrual cycles were liable to defile anything they came into contact with, especially as no protective shields were used. The taboo was relaxed for old women who had passed the menopause stage. They could enter the kraal when circumstances demanded. For example, if young calves which were herded apart from their mothers got to the latter while within the kraal, and there were no men about, any woman could enter the kraal to separate them, but she ought to scatter a few white beads in the kraal, and at the same time conciliate the ancestral spirits by saying 'ndi ngenel' ama-tole' --- 'I am entering for the calves'. The belief was that if she entered without uttering such a statement she would have an excessive flow during her menstrual period.

Marrow taboo

Hlubi women would not partake of marrow (u-mongo), for if they did so any children which they might give birth to would be troubled with nasal mucus.

Milk taboo

The first milk from a cow which had just given birth to a calf was not partaken of by women for the belief was that if they partook of the beestings the new-born calf would wither and die. Furthermore, it was believed that the local cattle would contract sickness and they could die.

Cooking pot taboo

There was a taboo against putting an empty pot upon the fire before the meat had been placed within it. In those days Hlubi always kept the pot off the fire until it had been filled with meat. It was the belief that the sickness from which the animal died (since almost all animals that died from sickness or accident were eaten) would spread in the herd belonging to the family affected. It must be noted that although this taboo affected women particularly since cooking was their particular sphere, it affected men as well, because they sometimes had charge of the cooking.

Dishing up food

It was the normal practice that in dishing up food in a family, a Hlubi woman would first dish up either for the children or for the females, never first for the men. To reverse and change that order and dish up for the men first would cause them to suffer from a stitch in the side (i-vubukululu or i-hlaba).

Bride's taboos

Until her first child was born, a woman could not approach her husband's hut, nor in fact any hut in that kraal, from the front. Wherever she might come from she must pass round behind the huts and come to the front from thence. Again, until she had weaned her baby, a nursing mother was excluded from having sexual relations. This was probably a precaution to protect her baby from being harmed by another pregnancy. Furthermore, a bride who usually shouldered the greater part of the domestic work in her husband's kraal, must not, under any circumstances, sweep and smear the floor of a hut on that side reserved for the male section of the family.

Other important prohibitions were called ukuhlonipa (avoidance customs). There was a ban on a wife not to pronounce the name of her husband or his male ancestors out loud, or even to use words with a similar sound. If a stranger arrived at the umzi and asked for the wife whose it was she would call someone to answer in her place. This prohibition was the beginning of linguistic changes leading to the developing of a completely new vocabulary. Women also showed respect by avoiding what belonged to a man --- particularly the cattle byre, as it was the burial place of the head of the umzi. Furthermore, the head of the family might forbid his wife to use a particular article like an axe or pipe.

From the perspective of a non-adherent, it seems unfair to prevent the Hlubi woman from enjoying milk, eggs and marrow for religious reasons when they needed these food items as a physiological necessity. Again, it would seem to present a dilemma for women because, as part of their domestic duties, they needed cow-dung to smear huts of the homestead and yet they could not enter the kraal to pick it up.

What has been said above with respect to these prohibitions does not mean that Hlubi women in pre-colonial times appeared socially paralysed in everyday life. To the casual observer, it would be difficult to tell that the prohibitions existed, and he or she might simply note that Hlubi women seemed to have their own way of doing things. In tribal life the traditions and customs of the people are firmly established in age groups of children, teenagers, adults, middle-aged and aged. Each group has its own set of taboos in respect of dress, beadwork, songs, dances, allocation of work, food and many other activities.

In the light of this, one can say that taboos in this context were used as in-built mechanism to safeguard social harmony and for that matter stability in social structure --- in this case Hlubi society. The relationship between religion and taboo has been established in this chapter. The question arises whether these prohibitions prevented women from performing religious roles in Hlubi society.

4.5 RELIGIOUS ROLE OF THE HLUBI WOMAN

Hlubi women were closely associated with a variety of religious practices. As elsewhere in the world, Hlubi symbolic systems often included the premise that women were more 'mystical' beings than men. Their special powers or potential is due partly to their control over the processes of childbirth, which were seen as forces needing to be channelled, powers to be appeased, or evils to be suppressed.

Within the lineage of the family, women generally played roles within the domestic practice of religion that were complementary to those of men.

Hlubi women participated in a number of rites de passage such as naming ceremonies, youth initiation rites, marriage and burials ceremonies in which women had definite roles to perform by virtue of their positions in the family.

One religious role of Hlubi women was seen in the status transformation rites for girls called intonjane. Before a girl could marry she had to undergo ceremonies to mark her first menstruation. In the course of the next winter, the women of the neighbourhood would gather to roll her in a blanket with her face and head covered with a kerchief and escort her through her father's umzi to a special hut in which she would live in

seclusion behind a screen made of mats. The intention here is not to give a detailed description of the ceremony but rather to highlight the prominent role played by Hlubi women. The fact that women outside the immediate family were involved in the ceremony indicated that obligations were inculcated which referred to a wider circle than the immediate biological family. The initiate was taught interdependence and the spirit of belongingness. Women involved in the intonjane gave the initiate some sort of formal education on motherhood and mothercraft. During the girl's seclusion she acquired, through the women, knowledge not accessible to the uninitiated. This gave the girls a sense of wholeness which was reflected in the entire African attitude to life. Not only were the girls at peace within themselves but they were also fully integrated into the community. This made them proud of their gender. In the process of education they were made conscious of their role as mothers who were to sustain and preserve the future generation as well. Unfortunately however such an education emphasises a sex-role ideology in the minds of females.

An area in which Hlubi women's religious role is prominent is in their function as healers. It must be pointed out that the 'profession' of traditional healers are not restricted to women alone. Men are diviners and herbalists as well. Two types of traditional healers are subsumed, namely 'herbalists', amaxhwele, and 'priest-diviners' (amagqira).

The herbalists traditionally treat diseases. It must be pointed out that they do not diagnose illness. It is clear therefore that their expertise and art can be learned. Their knowledge is often inherited from a mother (or father) by a daughter (or son).

The diviners both diagnose and prescribe medicines. They also undertake to cure all kinds of diseases. Their medicines are both mystical and practical. Furthermore one can group diviners into two classes viz- ordinary and special diviners.

Special diviners are usually women.

Ordinary diviners	Amaxukazana
Extractors	aqubulayo
Revealers	ambululayo
Ventriloquists or Whistlers	awemilozi
Appeal diviners	awomhlahlo
Omniscient diviners	izanuse

Special class of diviners (only women)

Bone diviners	awamathombo
Mirror diviners	awezipili
Rain maker	umnisi

Generally, the task of the diviner is to diagnose the cause of the sickness at hand. They use many different herbs, barks and roots that often have specific medicinal value.

Hlubi women who are traditional healers use medicines in a variety of circumstances for disabilities or illnesses. The healer use certain medicinal plants when curing injuries due to accidents such as fractures, sprains and burns. Medicinal plants are used for curing diseases of the skin, chest, abdomen, head and sense organs, while other specialised medicines are used for curing procreative organs. Also they treat mental

illnesses including hysteria, fainting fits and madness. They also work on issues such as protection against witchcraft and other ailments.

It was also believed in pre-colonial times that traditional healers used certain plants and herbs to cause a famous person to lose prestige while other charms enhanced one's dignity. There were also medicines used by these traditional healers to ensure that a newly married woman would never abandon her husband, to make her remain faithful. Similarly, they caused women to refrain from flirting, while others were used to cure sterility.

SUMMARY

It can be concluded that, among the Hlubi, women carried out a variety of religious roles such as initiates, priests, rainmakers, diviners and mediums. Hlubi women, through divination in a traditional setting, fulfilled an important function arming people against doubts and misgivings. They functioned to give the patient new strength. They also fulfilled a function in a tribal setting where religion was part and parcel of the society. The intention of the traditional healer was to make her knowledge available for the betterment of humanity.

'The good old days' is a common and popular phrase among the aged. By 'the good old days' they normally refer to the time when there was social harmony and togetherness, when the problem of an individual was the problem of the entire community. The religious law of the land permeated all spheres of life, and this exercised effective restraint on the conduct and behaviour of the community. When an

aged person talks of the good old days he or she specifically refers to the pre-colonial period when there was little or no dissension or rebellion in the community. This explains why women accepted men as 'the god of all creations' in their homesteads and never questioned their (women's) subordinate positions. Taboos and other conventions imposed restrictions on women and defined their roles primarily as that of feeding the family and rearing the children. Nevertheless, these women also participated in a variety of religious functions as well, especially as traditional healers. It is against this background that the impact of colonialism on this 'golden age' as far the socio-religious role of the Hlubi woman is concerned is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ROLE OF HLUBI WOMEN - COLONIAL ERA

It was suggested in the preceding chapter that myths and proverbs could throw some light on the position and role of the Hlubi woman in her society during the pre-colonial era. It was also indicated that Hlubi women carried out a variety of roles. Among other things, they functioned as initiates into religious groups such as priests, rainmakers, diviners and mediums. Furthermore, it was shown that taboos and other customs imposed heavy restrictions on them. Hlubi women's roles were traditionally defined as the feeding of family and the rearing of children. This pre-colonial period was seen as the 'good old days', a time in which the aged felt there was social harmony and togetherness.

This chapter aims at describing the socio-religious role of Hlubi women during the colonial times. It also examines continuity and/or changes in these roles and the underlying factors.

5.1 THE POSITION OF THE HLUBI WOMAN

The colonisation of Africa, including of course the Hlubi, had a dramatic impact on the lives of women in general. It seems that their status as respected members of society with a clearly defined and valued economic, social and political role was changed to that of landless farm workers, housewives and 'minors' as far as decision making in the family was concerned.

An educated Hlubi woman believes that the plight of women during the colonial times was the result of the advent of Christianity and the introduction of the Roman-Dutch

legal system. What the colonists referred to as 'customary law' was 'codified' to supplement this process of subordination. In view of their crucial role in the oppression of black women, it seems useful to look briefly at these laws.

Roman-Dutch law was the legal system of the colonists' mother country, Holland. It was a mixture of ancient Roman law and the common law of Holland at the time of the occupation of South Africa. This is the legal system which was (and is still) used by the colonial state. The notions about women which the ancient Romans had were reflected in their laws. Women were regarded as feeble-minded, in need of constant supervision and protection by father, brother and husband. Women could not enter into contracts in their own right, nor could they acquire or dispose of property. They could do these things only with the 'assistance' of their husband. (This refers to the consent of the husband, and in modern times to the actual appending of his signature to a document).

In view of the fact that Christianity was presented to Africans in European garb and style, it has rightly or wrongly been linked with colonialism. Whilst it is not the focus of this study it is proper to discuss its influence on the Hlubi woman's position and role.

5.2 THE INFLUENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

To put the discussion in the correct perspective, it seems expedient to discuss briefly why Christianity was embraced by the African.

According to Strobel (1984:92) the spread of Christianity was integral to the extension of European influence in Africa, although missionaries were at odds with colonial governments over the treatment of the 'native.'

Converts found various attractions in Christianity. Reasons generally offered are varied. For some, the failure of traditional spirits to protect them from the disruptions of war and disease led to a crisis of faith, which they resolved by adopting a more universal and cosmopolitan religion. Others fled to mission stations in order to escape slave traders and slave owners. Others were attracted to the new 'redemptive' religion because they wanted to gain access to mission education and the new source of power in the colonial situation (Strobel, 1984:92ff).

Interestingly, gender differences succeeded in making in-roads into the spread of Christianity, just like other apparatus or so-called 'agents' of colonialism. Christian missionaries brought with them to Africa strong beliefs in the 'separate spheres' of male and female activity. This does not mean that such dichotomy between male and female was non-existent in Africa. Indeed Africans also separated male and female activities, but the content of the spheres was different.

For nineteenth century Victorians, the role of women was that of mother and wife, of preserving the home as a haven from the difficult world of capitalist competition in which men operated. Politics was the prerogative for the world of men. The same men controlled the affairs of the church. Furthermore, Victorian sexuality sanctioned the idea that the normal female felt little arousal and that sexual activity that did not result in conception was a dangerous waste of precious energy. As might be expected, such

an ideology found much to criticise and question in African societies where, for example, grandmothers and mothers-in-law played an important role in decision-making for the entire family. Nevertheless, missionaries were appalled at the scant clothing, polygamy and social customs which seemed to victimise women. For example, according to Wilson (1981:137), a father chose husbands for his daughters without consulting with them and a girl who refused to go to a man could be beaten. It is against this background that the socio-religious role of Hlubi women should be appreciated and understood during the colonial era.

It must be pointed out that whilst the aforementioned factors reflected the general trend in Africa, nevertheless, it is believed that this will throw light on the specific position and role of women in Hlubi society.

5.3 SOCIAL ROLE

Nineteenth century Hlubi society extolled the virtues of marriage and motherhood. Hlubi women had no other choice of vocation and they needed none. Motherhood in particular was their God-given purpose. By extension women were guardians of children and their husband's morals and, by some alchemy, they performed these mentally and physically demanding responsibilities while remaining the embodiment of feminine delicacy and frailty. In addition the role played by the Hlubi woman traditionally still continued without any change.

A household was made up of a woman and her children and the in-laws, especially when the man worked elsewhere. Often early in the morning the woman would rise before other members of the family to clean around the compound and prepare

breakfast for the children. Sometimes they had to go to the stream (about a mile away) to draw water for drinking before doing the normal household chores. There were also many other chores performed by women that remain unrecorded. They regarded such labours as the primary duties of running a household.

The dramatic change and influence of colonialism is most evident in that the white man needed labour for his mines and farms and ruthlessly broke down tribal customs to obtain it. This situation prevailed throughout the whole of Africa and so was applicable to Hlubi society as well. In order to build the apparatus of colonial states and produce exports, African colonies at the turn of the century had enormous labour requirements. In order to encourage able-bodied African men to leave their homes and go to work in European-owned enterprises, taxation was introduced in most of Africa. Men had to work in order to get money to pay their taxes. The first tax was usually levied on huts, which amounted to a tax on wives, so that polygynous men had the greater tax burdens.

The absence of young men, the fathers of families, who went to work in the mines and on white farms, did more to break down the old ways than any other single factor. Not only did this increase the number of young men leaving their rural homelands to go to work, it also gave them new currency to use as bridewealth, a process that kept them working for most of the year for many years (Hay, 1972:172-3)⁷.

Nevertheless, there was another aspect to this issue. Colonisation and labour migration placed an unbearable yoke on the Hlubi women left behind. They had to work hard to

⁷.See also Kitching,1980:217 for more information.

increase (or at least to maintain) agricultural production for feeding themselves and their children, and sometimes their absent sons and spouses and, worst of all their absent husbands' parents. It should be noted that most of these married women still lived in their absent husbands' households where they were subordinate to their mothers-in-law.

It seems reasonable to assume that the amount of time Hlubi women spent in cultivating gardens increased tremendously while they still had to perform their traditional duties of child care and cooking. They also had to send the cattle and sheep to the veld - duties which were supposed to be reserved for men. Besides, the husband's absence meant that the poor Hlubi wife was the major decision-maker for virtually all matters.

However, the only area in which Hlubi women's work did not increase was in the day-in and day-out responsibilities of being a wife and sexual partner. It was a rare phenomenon to see in the colonial times married couples living together for more than two months at a time. A visit to a Hlubi village would reveal that about 40 to 60 per cent of all males were away from their matrimonial homes at any point in time.

For much of the day the Hlubi woman was concerned with the cultivation of crops. She made use of the amalima (work parties) facilities to cultivate her field and also to harvest her crops. Unfortunately, the church discouraged the use of these voluntary groups because they were regarded as a 'pagan' practice. Probing further why the missionaries labelled the amalima as 'heathen' 'pagan' etc, one respondent asked 'Young man, if due to circumstances beyond my control, I am lagging behind in

cultivation and harvesting of crops, and I ask my neighbours to help me, is there anything wrong? Of course, I have to motivate them by providing food, meat and beer. The problem with these missionaries is that anything African is heathen'. It was explained that the first fields were normally weeded by the owner or the umzi's group, but as the season progressed, and especially after frequent rains, it became difficult to cope with the crop of weeds. Then amalima parties were extensively utilized. Nevertheless, the explanation given by some women was that Christians are forbidden to make beer, and beer always attracts more people to an ilima than anything else.

Another job the women did was that of the brewing of beer, and beer was more than a pleasant drink for the Hlubi. Even today, beer has its place in ceremonies. It may be poured out as a libation to appease the ancestors or evil spirits. Weddings and feasts all need beer, and moreover, it is food that is usually on hand when a man drives his cattle home in the evening. Considering the complicated job of beer brewing, one cannot but admire the ingenuity and work of the Hlubi woman. Brewing involved a number of processes that had to be carefully timed after the beer had been boiled to get the right taste and potency. This was a fermented corn beer, strained through a fine reed mesh. This was no easy task, and a woman who brewed well was worth any man's consideration. I was told that some widows secured husbands easily because of their reputation as brewers. Hlubi women's role as traditional brewers often landed them into a lot of trouble, for they became the notorious 'shebeen queens' in the urban villages or locations.

To summarise, it can be argued that labour migration and abject rural poverty during colonial times increased Hlubi women's workload. At the same time the situation

demanding that they shoulder more responsibilities. The work load of Hlubi women more than doubled. Most of them performed the role of heads of family, making major decisions which affected the entire family because of the absence of their husbands. However, they were still expected to consult their husbands before major decisions were made, and they still had to perform their 'normal' duties as mothers and wives.

5.4 RELIGIOUS ROLE

It must be pointed out that traditional myths and proverbs concerning women were still given credence by Hlubi people during the colonial era. During this time an attempt was even made to write them down. One of these myths told how man was created from earth and cloud by God the chief, while woman was made from a mixture of a man's short rib, cloud and moon^B. Satan as the cook, God, man and woman lived in round grass huts and the man tended the cattle. Women's taboos were observed by Hlubi women even though the missionaries started questioning some of them. This caused mental conflicts for these women.

For the Hlubi woman the world was full of unseen forces, most of them malign and capricious. She had to deal with these uncompromising forces and, if possible, bribe and placate them with sacrifices, especially for rain (and to bring an end to rain). Attempts were therefore made to please them by behaving morally and by adhering to the norms and sanctions of Hlubi society. These beliefs and practices were inculcated in women, along with their male counterparts, from infancy.

^B. This story has been confirmed by Janet Hodgson 1982 The God of the Xhosa O.U.P Cape Town. She suggests that this was a subtle way (couched in traditional idiom) of bringing a Xhosa myth into the line with biblical teaching, the second and third chapters of Genesis. I believe this was the influence of Christianity.

A variety of religious roles remained open to Hlubi women during the colonial era. They were ritual specialists for certain activities particularly those concerning females. A case in point was fertility rituals. The amaggira and amaxhwele professions were predominantly for women. As pointed out in the preceding chapter, these women as traditional leaders generally performed dual functions. As herbalists they treated diseases. As diviners they diagnosed and prescribed medicines. Their medicines were used to enhance or repair mystical as well as social and economic spheres of life.

There was, therefore, a continuity in the religious role held by Hlubi women in the sense that their role as traditional healers continued to be appreciated by their society even after the advent of Christianity and Western medicine. Not only did their role as traditional healers keep them on the social ladder, it also allowed them to accumulate wealth thus helping them to shoulder the financial responsibilities brought about by the absence of their husbands.

Another area in which Hlubi women continued to be active, both as participants and as leaders, was in the sphere of rites of passage marking transformation from one socially significant stage in life to another. They remained involved in activities such as singing bride's laments at wedding ceremonies, instructing young girls during intonjane rites, and cooking meals for burial and other social ceremonies. Again, the implication is that in spite of the introduction of Christianity and Western culture, Hlubi women performed these status transformation and other social rites.

Nevertheless Christianity and Western education did have an influence on many Africans including some Hlubi. Christianity charged that African 'medicine' was merely

sympathetic magic and had no curative potency and effect; that the African 'doctor' had little or no knowledge of anatomy, none of surgery except of the crudest sort (amputation, sewing of wounds after fights or trouble with animals, et cetera), and surprisingly little knowledge of normal bodily functions (Scobie, 1960:81). Consequently, some Christian converts felt reluctant to consult these traditional healers and the more committed ones completely severed all ties with them. This caused a certain decrease in the authority of the amaggira and amaxhwere in the religious sphere of Hlubi society.

Furthermore this period saw Christian culture beginning to influence naming ceremonies, puberty rites, burial and funeral rites. For example the intojane rite was obligatory for girls reaching puberty and was also linked to Hlubi traditional religion. Apart from the fact that it checked moral laxity and the birth of illegitimate children, it afforded Hlubi women the opportunity to teach adolescent girls skills associated with wifely duties. Unfortunately, the church opposed it because it was regarded as heathen. This was also the time that girls started going to Western schools and the kind of education offered them there made them look down on African religious and cultural practices. Since many Christian converts did not participate in these rites of passage, women were handicapped in their teaching of socialization skills to the young girls of their communities.

The advent of colonialism and Western culture had a tremendous impact on the religious role of Hlubi women. As a living faith Christianity had drawn people away from their traditional religion. Religious devotion on the part of a Christian was enough to lead to a certain loosening of traditional kinship ties binding society together and this

invariably forced Christian converts into a situation of isolation from their kinsmen.

The situation which developed was that these Christian converts followed injunctions given by the leaders of their respective churches. Since some of these ceremonies namely, puberty, burial and funeral, were regarded as heathen, Hlubi women's participation was dramatically reduced. In their place were substituted those roles prescribed by the particular historical churches such as serving children, the old and the sick.

Talking about converts brings to mind the matter of the status of Hlubi women in the historical churches during colonial times. As was already pointed out the hierarchy of the church was predominantly male because the nineteenth century Victorians felt men should be in charge running the church. It was a man's world. Consequently, Hlubi women were denied leadership in the churches for the same reasons they were denied leadership in society. They therefore played only a passive role in the giving and receiving of ministry. One dimension of this issue was that the subservient position occupied by the Hlubi woman was not only to her gender but was partly due to the paternalistic, racist and hypocritical attitudes held by many missionaries at that time.⁹

⁹. Missionaries also came to Africa with European and American cultural values as well as ideologies peculiar to that particular time and context. Many statements and utterances by some missionaries confirm this assertion. For detail information consult the following articles and books.

- (i) Reade, W "Efforts of the missionaries among the savages in The Anthropological Review Vol 3 1865 pp. clxvi, clxviii and clxv.
- (ii) Owen, B " Missionary success and Negro converts" ibid p.clxviii.
- (iii) See also Stanley, H.M 1874 Through the Dark Continent London.
- (iv) Laurens van der Post 1955 The Dark Eye in Africa New York p.54
- (v) Majeke, N 1986 The role of Missionaries in conquest. Cumberwood, UPDUSA.
- (vi) Kalu, O. 1979 "Church presence in Africa: A historical Analysis of Evangelisation process" in (eds) Appiah Kubi and Torres, S African Theology en route Ravan, Johannesburg.

SUMMARY

The above discussion shows that the European colonisation of Africa and the advent of Christianity had a dramatic impact on the lives of Hlubi women. Colonisation brought about labour migration for men which placed an intolerable burden on the Hlubi woman left behind in the rural areas. She had to fend for herself, care for her children and sometimes provide for parents of absent sons and spouses. In relatively wealthy rural families Hlubi women became appendages of their fathers or husbands. Women left behind had to perform double roles - as head of families as well as the traditional roles for women associated with motherhood.

In the religious sphere, there were many changes. Christianity officially does not recognise the potency of the gods and ancestors with which traditional healers claimed to work. The introduction of Western medicine also undermined the efficacy of African medicine. This period saw the beginning of the reduction in the authority and role of traditional healers (who unfortunately happened to be predominantly women). There was however continuity in the role of Hlubi women as traditional beer brewers. Status transformation rites were still performed and supervised by women but their frequency began to decrease because the church branded these rites as heathen.

In contemporary times, technological developments and industrialisation have had no small influence on Hlubi traditional religious life. Today, Western education and Christianity have been fully embraced by Hlubi society in general. It is against this background that the impact of these factors on the role of Hlubi women is examined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ROLE OF HLUBI WOMEN - CONTEMPORARY TIMES

The preceding chapter focused on the impact of the colonisation and evangelisation of Africa on the socio-religious role of Hlubi women. It was demonstrated that colonization brought about labour migration for men which placed an intolerable burden on the Hlubi women left behind in the rural areas. They had to fend for themselves, care for their children and sometimes provide for their sons' spouses and/or parents. In addition they still had to perform their traditional duties as mothers, as well as filling their new role as head of the family.

With respect to her religious role, the Hlubi woman still performed and supervised status transformation rites which involved girls. It was also noted that this period saw the beginning of the erosion of the role and authority of Hlubi women as traditional healers due to the introduction of western medicine and the coming of Christianity.

Indeed the impact of Christianity, increasing technological developments and western education in contemporary times cannot be overemphasised. There has been a considerable reduction in illiteracy in both males and females in Hlubi society. People trained according to western education consider it unfashionable to identify themselves with traditional religion, let alone to consult traditional healers. Above all, the introduction of western medicine has undermined the belief in potency of African medicine. It is against this background that the socio-religious role of Hlubi women in contemporary times is examined in this chapter.

The objective of this chapter is first to look at the continuing relevance of myths and proverbs concerning women. Secondly, an attempt will also be made to discuss the continuity or otherwise of the traditional role of females as mothers and the newly acquired role as head of families. Finally, Hlubi women's role in the Christian church and as traditional healers will be considered.

6.1 RELEVANCE OF MYTHS AND PROVERBS IN CONTEMPORARY HLUBI SOCIETY.

Today, Hlubi people still believe that myths and proverbs reveal their basic religious beliefs and practices. They also contend that in the absence of written theology, myths serve as one of the means for studying their traditional religion and practices. When questioned about Mbiti's position (1991:60), most Hlubi women agree that myths depict truths or realities, and to them, myths help to link the present with the past.

In light of the above it is not surprising therefore that Hlubi still give credence to the role played by women in traditional myths. Most Hlubi women are excited about the traditional myth in which women and men are portrayed unitedly as progenitors of the human race. To them this myth emphasizes the equality of men and women and gives them a much needed motivation to fight for their cherished aim of liberation in a male chauvinistic world.

Concerning the myth which indicates that woman was made from a mixture of a man's short rib, cloud and moon, not only do they believe it to be a version of the biblical story found in Genesis, but also they are convinced that it is the handiwork of men from a patriarchal background. This suggestion mostly comes from educated women.

With regard to proverbs, the general agreement of Hlubi women is that proverbs are closely related to the culture of each given society. One woman said: 'We Africans are deep in thought. We usually give messages in proverbs and challenge our audience to think in order to get the message'.

Once again these women believe that all the proverbs given in chapter four concerning women have relevance in contemporary times since they validate the place and role of women in Hlubi society. However, they argue that just as a coin has two sides so also do women have potentialities and limitations. 'After all,' they say, 'human beings are not perfect', and so they are not worried about the negative side presented in most Hlubi proverbs.

The above analysis indicates that religious beliefs of and practices of Hlubi can be well understood if one takes an interest in their traditional myths and proverbs. In a sense every myth or proverb has a message to give --- in this context it demonstrates the place and role of women in religion and society.

6.2 TABOOS

Taboos are still observed but not with the diligence and commitment of pre-colonial times. It seems this situation is due to the advent of Christianity, western education and the urbanisation process.

Women are still forbidden to enter the cattle kraal because stock will not grow well if they do so. There are still some sites in the homestead which are reserved for men only. The following interesting incident was recounted to me by a female teacher. This

lady teacher had to leave her rented apartment in the village because she could only enter her room by passing through the cattle kraal. Since there was no other gate or door which led directly to her apartment, she had to seek temporary accommodation with a colleague. The unfortunate thing is that it is not easy to secure accommodation in that village and as adults both the host and the 'victim' wanted to enjoy their privacy. One can imagine not only the inconvenience caused to the colleague but also the desperate situation of the lady teacher all because of a taboo. A male teacher could have gone through the cattle kraal and, for that matter, have lived in the house with the owner.

The taboo on women which forbids them to work with cattle has prevented them from assisting in planting when ploughs are used, and ploughing is now regarded as the work of the boys and young men of the umzi.

Nevertheless, not all taboos are currently observed. It was indicated in chapter 4 that in pre-colonial times women were not supposed to eat eggs but today women do not observe this taboo. One informant jokingly said, 'Nowadays, it is rather the contrary. Women eat eggs like snakes.'

It is still a taboo for newly married women to drink amazi (sour milk especially in calabash). Nowadays, these women attempt to observe this taboo at least in their matrimonial homes. Interestingly, whenever they go to 'town' they buy amazi and drink it.

The taboos enumerated above do not exhaust female taboos in Hlubi society. The point being made here is simply that taboos are still given credence among the Hlubi but are not religiously observed as in pre-colonial and colonial times. The simple explanation is the coming of Christianity, western education and urbanisation.

6.3 SOCIAL ROLE

In contemporary times a vast majority of Hlubi women still live in rural areas, not in towns or cities. Unlike their male counterparts, female migration is less common, except when women accompany their husbands to their workplace in the Republic of South Africa (which, incidentally is a rare phenomenon).

Hlubi women today work harder with fewer resources and with less economic reward. As increasing numbers of men migrate to the Republic of South Africa and urban areas of the Transkei, the women and children are left behind to cope with a reduced labour supply and with an increased workload. Under such circumstances the main tasks rest on the women, and family stress becomes more pronounced. Comments by three of the respondents summarise the plight of Hlubi women in rural areas.

We would like our husbands to work nearby - but there are no jobs here. When my husband is away he cannot see what happens at home.

I grow potatoes and exchange these for maize and salt.

I make bricks for people to buy. I charge R10.00 for 100 bricks.

Information gathered from the respondents indicate that sexual division of labour within the Hlubi society allocates to women the responsibility for sustaining the homestead. This was the finding after my personal discussion of the sex-role ideology with a

sample of the respondents. Men and boys generally tend goats and cattle. The women who were interviewed generally considered their importance as residing in their roles as mothers and housekeepers in the absence of male members of the family. They concede that women are important for the children. They have to stay at home and look after things. Women think about things in the home. Because of their repetitive daily routine tasks, they notice what is needed in the home, and they show the men since they (men) do not notice these things.

Concerning their role of continuing to serve the needs of men, opinions are divided. Whilst the educated and urbanised object to this role, most of the illiterate and rural women accept their value to the household as including services rendered to the men. For them a man cannot make a home without a woman.

It was also heard that Hlubi women perform a variety of repetitive activities on a routine daily basis. These women receive little or no assistance from the few men who are around, even in such physically demanding situations as fencing and roofing houses. As a result of the migration of their husbands to the Republic of South Africa, women are compelled to send the family cattle to the veld. Their services of meeting the pressing material commitments of their homestead are scarcely appreciated.

It will be helpful to use Murphy's model (1992:3-7) to classify Hlubi women's multiple workload into three categories, namely: survival tasks, household tasks and income generating tasks. Murphy argues that survival tasks serve to sustain daily life within the household (subsistence food production, supplying the household's water and fuel, manufacturing for home-use and health care, child care and care for the sick and

aged). For Murphy, household work is aimed at maintaining the orderly functioning of the home (cleaning, washing, food preparation, food storage and cooking). Finally, income-generating tasks contribute directly to the family budget.

6.3.1 SURVIVAL TASKS

Hlubi women feed the family.

The burden of feeding the household is the responsibility of Hlubi women. Shopping facilities are hopelessly inadequate in the surveyed areas and the few shops in the vicinity sell consumer items at very exorbitant prices. Consequently, most of the Hlubi women cannot afford to buy consumer items in bulk. The only solution to avoid buying these expensive consumer items is through the cultivation of food crops (maize and vegetables such as beans, carrots, potatoes and cabbages). Some of these women even use mealies and potatoes to exchange for salt!

Hlubi women are therefore mainly peasant farmers, whose livelihoods depend on the cultivation of subsistence farming. A few of them raise fowls at home as well.

Hlubi women are water managers

In addition to their duties as providing their respective families with food daily, Hlubi women are responsible for supplying water. Among other things water is used for drinking, personal hygiene, cooking and watering livestock. Since there is no pipe borne water in the surveyed areas, it is the responsibility of women to fetch water from springs and streams. Most of the time women are seen carrying litre drums of water on their heads and at the same time carrying babies on their backs.

Hlubi women must provide wood

Again, there is no electricity in the Hlubi administrative areas and virgin forest is non-existent. Hlubi women travel kilometres away from their home to government created forests to buy wood, otherwise food cannot be cooked in their homes. A single 'headload' can weigh between 35 to 40 kgs. Dankelman (1988) reports that carrying these heavy burdens damages the spine and causes problems with childbearing (in Murphy, 1992:5). After fetching water from such long distances, they have to continue with other routine household activities for the day.

Hlubi women are caretakers.

The women interviewed complained that when women are sick no one looks after them. Surprisingly, when men are sick, they are looked after by the women. The implication is that it has become the accepted practice for Hlubi women to maintain the health of the members of their homestead. When one considers the fact that there is one hospital and few clinics catering for the whole of the Qumbu magisterial district, the work of Hlubi women as caretakers must be appreciated.

6.3.2 HOUSEHOLD TASK

Hlubi women maintain that apart from the survival tasks mentioned above, they are responsible for all household chores. Men, they maintain, will neither cook nor clean the home because this is a woman's job. The only thing men do in the house is to sit down and issue commands.

The extent to which one can appreciate the role of women can be seen in the experiences of one of the interviewees.

There is too much work for women. Men push everything on us...wow! When we go to the forest to fetch wood, men are basking in the sun. When we go to the stream carrying babies on our back, and when we are cooking, men are smoking pipes...! When rain falls, it's time for ploughing. We cook food and prepare amarewu. Our children (boys) push the sledge and plough. Our men only walk in front or the other side of the cattle. We seldom see our men pushing the plough. We even wash their cars! We smear the huts. We plaster houses. When we are doing all these things they are just eating. Men exploit women too much. (No)! There should be few men in this world. They are useless creatures!"

6.3.3 INCOME-GENERATING TASKS

In addition to executing household and survival tasks, circumstances compel Hlubi women to contribute to the family budget as well. They normally sell items such as potatoes, maize, cabbages and carrots. It must be pointed out that these items are sold when a surplus of food has been produced beyond subsistence. Some of them sell paraffin and sour milk. A few of them are illegal beer sellers --- the 'shebeen queens'. Some of them also sell brewed beer locally. Abject poverty likewise has forced some of the women to sell their labour as maidservants to salary earners in the villages or in the cities of Transkei.

It is not uncommon to see Hlubi women keeping fowls for sale. It is reasonable to suppose that the popularity of poultry farming among these women is that a quick cash flow is guaranteed, and one does not need either much land or capital to embark on such a project.

To summarise, Hlubi women perform a variety of functions in the three areas outlined by Murphy, namely survival tasks, household tasks and income-generating tasks. They receive little or no assistance from those few men who remained in the area. These roles have become roles associated with their gender. Furthermore in the absence of their husbands and sons they are compelled to fill male roles as well. These hardships have made Hlubi women very strong physically and responsible mentally.

Other social roles are also performed by Hlubi women. A classic example is their role during traditional and Christian weddings. During traditional weddings Hlubi women continue with their survival and household tasks. They prepare local beer, grind and stamp mealies, and fetch water from kilometres away from their homestead. If they are closely related to the bride or bridegroom they are also expected to provide dresses for the women. They also join in various song and dance groups during the festivities. In the words of one of the women interviewed, 'If the function is going to last for a week, women are busy the whole week --- day and night. We are always on our feet'.

Hlubi women still utilize the principle of co-operative effort in their survival tasks. This is done on an ad hoc basis during the ploughing season. They engage in cooperative efforts for the efficient cultivation and harvesting of their crops. When a woman is unable to work according to schedule, the only way to catch up is to organise amalima for the cultivation of crops and for hoeing. Women also use this exercise for reaping their produce during harvesting season. When asked to explain the principle of amalima one respondent said, 'When it is time to harvest, we make a group. We go to the fields and help one another, and then help carrying the maize up to each others' home.'

This cooperative spirit is carried over into other aspects of their lives. Customarily women take enough firewood and water to a woman who is bereaved or who is performing some status transformation rite. In a few instances women have also been known to take firewood and water to a woman who had just given birth, sufficient to last until she is capable of performing the work for herself. This is done especially for a woman who lives alone and has no one to help her.

Hlubi women also have dance groups that compete with each other. These groups provide entertainment at weddings. They sing songs, some of which shame or ridicule members of the community for various offenses. Among the Hlubi the singing of praises for family members and the community is normally a masculine duty but young women have begun assuming such a role. This is particularly true in gatherings held at secondary schools and teacher training colleges. Praise poems are society's way of giving a person definition. It can be argued that song is thus used as an instrument of praise, social criticism and the enforcing of societal norms. Members of these dance groups help each other, by giving money and helping to prepare food, particularly for weddings and funerals. They thus provide mutual aid and supportive services.

Another important discovery was the membership of these women in burial societies. Huge sums of money are incurred during funeral and burial ceremonies. With the prevailing inflationary trend organising these ceremonies by a single person is a nightmare. The aim of burial societies is to help members to offset some of their financial burdens during their bereavements. Like the dance groups people give money and help to prepare the food for such occasions. It must be pointed out, however, that membership in these burial societies is not restricted to women but is open to men as

well.

Thus the amalima, dance groups and burial societies amply demonstrate that present-day Hlubi women, as in the past, have the ability to take collective action to solve various problems. The amalima is used today as it was used in the past to lighten the farm chores of individual women, especially when they are behind schedule. Dance groups provide an outlet for entertainment and burial societies render both social and financial support.

6.4 THE PLIGHT OF HLUBI WOMEN

One would have thought that the advent of Christianity and western education should have changed the plight of women. It is interesting to note however that men who are about to embark on important tasks are still admonished to avoid women. The implication is that women have a negative influence. Some of the Hlubi believe that failure of men in their endeavours are attributed to the unfaithfulness of a wife. Sometimes men's incompetencies are blamed on a woman's practice of witchcraft. Even some educated men believe that as husbands they are the sole source of authority in the home. One woman said, 'My husband has been saying, "I am the boss, bring your money/salary to me".'

The impression gathered from the women is that many divorces are caused by the chauvinist attitudes of Hlubi men. A lady quipped, 'I have discovered that my needs are not met by my husband. I am struggling financially. He cannot even pay for my children's school fees. Yet my husband has been drinking like a fish. When he comes home and food is not ready he turns me into a punching bag'. This summarises the

plight of some women in the surveyed area. Many of them recounted terrible experiences of being battered by men in contemporary times. It was also discovered that most of the women are aware that no man wants to marry a jobless woman. Unfortunately the vast majority of adult women are ill-educated or uneducated. Many of them regret their lack of education.

It must be recalled that in the early 20th century women's education was mainly concerned with the domestic sciences of cooking and needlework. Various orientation courses gave girls a very sound and satisfactory knowledge and kept them well disciplined in accordance with native custom. By the middle of the 20th century, however, one could see the emergence of different types of African women. The influence of church oriented schools and domestic centres has increased educational opportunities for women. With increased women's education the problems of rigid subordination are being challenged.

During the pre-colonial and colonial eras, university education for females was so inaccessible that few parents could educate their daughters. Even in contemporary times only a few privileged women can go to a university, primarily those who come from affluent families.

Some Hlubi women shoulder the responsibility of paying their children's school fees and providing for their school uniforms and stationery. This, of course, refers to those who are employed --- teachers, nurses, social workers and clerks. But paying school fees, and providing books and uniform are, in many places and circumstances supposed to be the responsibility of the father.

It should be emphasised, however, that there are far more women receiving post-primary schooling today than in the past. Most young women who succeed in their schooling and who receive specialized training, still tend to enter professions that are sex-stereotyped as appropriate for females. Nursing, teaching and social work are favourite choices. Nevertheless some jobs formally filled by men, such as office clerks, secretaries and sales personnel in shops, are today increasingly being filled by women. This refers to Hlubi women who have immigrated to the cities in Transkei. One woman is currently the Dean of the Faculty of Arts for the University of Transkei where she has been occupying this position for the past six years. This means that major decisions are being made by such an administrator, imposing a high degree of responsibility on a Hlubi woman.

Some female interviewees were not permitted to make decisions. These were made by their absentee husbands or older women who had acquired the status of men (typically, the mothers-in-law). This kind of situation was lamented by one woman who said 'When you have children you sometimes have to make quick decisions about some problems. But first, I must inform my husband. When the phones at Qumbu and Sulenkama are down, this certainly delays the decision'. Some Hlubi women are lucky to share with their husbands the responsibility for making decision on issues affecting their families. Often they do not have a share in all decisions, especially those, for example, concerning farming. They are nevertheless decision-makers. However, some Hlubi women have been made functional heads of households because migration has taken their men away from their families. They make most decisions, deal with kin and raise children.

However, there are always constraints militating against women as 'functional heads of families.' Since the majority of migrants are males, most women are dependent on their husbands and/or sons for financial support. This is because in most cases it is the men who work, remit and indirectly control the available cash. These migrants usually send money home for the maintenance of their household and families. Incidentally the money is customarily sent to the migrant's mother or family guardian. Only in a few instances is it sent directly to the migrant's wife, with specific instructions as to how the money should be used. Among other things, the wife is expected to purchase such things as material for the building of new hut, livestock, fencing or brewing of beer for a home-coming ritual. Most of the time these directives are in conflict with the wife's priorities. Nevertheless any deviation from the husbands' instructions will result in a conflict as reflected in the statement below by a woman when asked why she could not use the remittance for immediate and pressing needs. 'No, we are women and so we have to do what we are asked. If we don't... we will be in serious trouble,... It can lead to a conflict and subsequently end our marriage'

The following incident was narrated by another woman. She recounted that her niece suddenly fell ill at night and she had to rent a taxi to send the child to the nearest hospital which was 15 kilometres away. She had to spend R60 for this purpose. Some few days later, her three children were sent home for not paying their school fees. R150 was given to the children to pay for the fees in arrears. As a result instructions to fence the house with the money received were not carried out. The husband, on his arrival was angry about this job not being done and would not listen to or accept any explanation.

Such is the plight of Hlubi women. Stories recounted by the women interviewed indicate that they are still going through these experiences. What these experiences bring to the fore is that Hlubi women, as in colonial times, are experiencing ambivalence regarding their role. As 'family heads' they are burdened with responsibility but are not given proper authority to carry out that responsibility.

To some extent marriage in Hlubi society has been an agent of oppression. The woman loses her status because she changes her name and takes that of the husband's family. She also has to submit to the dictates of the husband and his family if she does not want to be frowned on in her community in where she wants to be fully accepted as a person of worth and integrity. She finds herself in a dilemma. There seems to be a cultural lag. Nwachuchuku (1992:233) argues that while society is fast changing its structures in principle, yet in practice, the same society expects the powerless minorities (women, children, the aged and minority ethnic groups) to remain unchanged in their traditionally prescribed roles and functions.

To recap, not only has the plight of Hlubi women never been easy it has become increasingly difficult with the passage of time. It is appalling to learn that women are being battered by some men even in the 20th century. Since women are considered to have a negative influence it is not surprising that men are advised to avoid them when embarking on important tasks. It is gratifying to note that with the help of church oriented schools, educational opportunities for women have increased, and this has armed them to challenge women's subordination. That apart, education has equipped them with resources to shoulder economic responsibilities. Today, women dominate the teaching and nursing professions and even compete with men as secretaries and

clerks - areas which were formerly reserved for men.

6.5 RELIGIOUS ROLE

As far as the modern Hlubi woman's perception of the religious world are concerned, it is not markedly different from that of the pre-colonial and colonial eras. Even with the advent of Christianity, western education, urbanization and technological advances, she still believes the world to be full of unseen forces --- malign and capricious. To be at peace with these forces she must, if possible, bribe and placate them with sacrifices.

Traditional Hlubi women still participate in status transformation rites. These transformation rites have changed over time with the coming of Christianity and changing attitudes on the part of urban or educated Africans. However as parents and neighbours, women provide clothing, bedding, food items, drinks and many other presents for their children as well as their neighbours' children. In the case of their own children, it is their duty to provide all the resources for mgidi (male circumcision rites) feasts as well as intonjane rites. As neighbours, not only are they obliged to offer presents because they are members of the community but also as a reciprocal gesture for something given by the officiant or to be given to her (neighbour) children in future. Even unmarried women are ethically obliged to give presents to their relatives and neighbours.

It is interesting to note that even many Christians perform these traditional puberty rites for their children, although some Hlubi Christian women send their daughters to their respective churches for either baptismal or confirmation ceremonies as substitutes for the intonjane rites. With respect to Christians who perform both traditional and

Christian rites, one would have thought that they would only perform the Christian rites because of the missionaries' attitude towards traditional African rites. Rather such Christians prefer to satisfy both worlds. The implication is that they are caught in a quandary, being both Africans and Christians. As Africans they are proud of their culture, yet they are ridiculed by those who consider themselves to be westernised Christians who will have nothing to do with traditional rites --- a conflict of loyalty indeed! It is no wonder that evangelists and preachers often speak against the divided loyalties of most church members, between Christianity on one hand and the traditional religion on the other.

6.5.1 ROLE IN THE CHURCH

An interesting phenomenon is taking place in Hlubi society. Almost everything in some of the churches is done by women. Perhaps this is because females outnumber men in the Hlubi society. Women are involved in conducting services as well as preaching sermons. A female member of an Ethiopian church said: 'We believe we are all equal in the sight of God, that is why we are involved in all activities in the church'.

It appears females are still handicapped as far as leadership positions in the church is concerned. When one woman in the same church was asked to comment on this issue she said, 'We don't like the situation. We are still fighting for our rightful place in the church but some male chauvinists think we are rebels and that our education has "ruined" us. But I don't think I'll live to see the fruits of our struggle.' (She is 65 years of age). She added, 'Women are true leaders in the sense that we have one heart. We say "yes" and we don't go back on our decision ---for example, from the very first day of marriage.'

Another woman said, ' We are fighting for our rightful place in society and the church. We are fighting for the restoration of our dignity as human beings and our real culture.' When asked to elaborate further on this issue, she explained thus, 'We find ourselves in two worlds. There is a clash of culture. There are many women and girls wearing spectacles and trousers which are foreign. We also want to share in decision-making both in the society and the church.' Statements such as these, even though coming from the outspoken and most articulate, cannot be dismissed simply as outbursts from a few disgruntled females. This reflects the general view of women regarding their experiences in the church and in society in general.

In Zionist churches membership consists largely of women and boys. There are only a few men. It is not uncommon to see only one man, who happens to be the bishop in the group. Perhaps this exemplifies the general trend of a preponderance of women in Transkeian society.

Within these churches there are also women's groups. These groups are basically concerned with fund-raising and providing entertainment. They also work to preserve Christian values and to support their particular church by means of fund-raising endeavour such as teas and bazaars. The money collected is generally designated for the maintenance of the church or for the purchase of some special item. A significant aspect of these groups is that while they afford women opportunities for religious leadership they enable the perpetuation and continual entrenchment of a situation in which men occupy the most prestigious and official church roles. It must nevertheless be acknowledged that 'half a loaf is better than none'. This is because leadership of women's group commands considerable respect outside the churches, and this

probably accounts largely for their importance among women. A leader in the church is recognised as a very good Christian, and this puts her on the social ladder in a given community.

6.5.2 ROLE OF TRADITIONAL HEALERS

Hlubi women still play important roles in the traditional religious sphere. They function as amaxhwele (herbalists) and amaggira (diviners). These positions are held by both males and females, --- both illiterate and educated. In the surveyed areas, the female traditional healers outnumbered their male counterparts. In the three administrative areas twenty traditional healers were recorded, of which only two were men. As might be expected, the men were thought to be more powerful. This is reflected in the name given to them makwekwethe (powerful).

Various explanations have been given for female participation in spirit cults in South Africa. As a result of apartheid women were forced to live separately from their families and it was believed they thus suffered a multitude of daily problems. It was also said even that for those who had jobs wages were low. They lived in fear that family members might be arrested and detained for opposition to apartheid. The reminders of their lack of citizenship in their own country were always present. Moreover they were and still are subordinate to their husbands. The above factors compelled them to resort to spirit cults for relief from the tensions of daily living and to create a community among their sister sufferers (Hay and Stitcher 1984:90). It is claimed that these females collectively deal with special problems they face as a result of gender roles assigned to them under apartheid. Whilst this explanation may have been valid during apartheid days, it does not explain the situation now that the policy has been

removed from the statutory books. In addition it does not explain the phenomenon in other independent African countries. Once again the possible explanation may simply be the predominance of the female ratio over men in general in Transkei. One can also add that it may be a subtle way for women to be on their own and for that matter to assert themselves in a male chauvinist world.

The advent of Christianity, urbanisation and western education has had a tremendous impact on the position and authority of female traditional healers. Ironically, these factors seem to have contributed to a situation in which people feel compelled to consult these religious personages. In spite of the advances of western medicine, there are certain diseases that orthodox medicines cannot cure but which can be treated by traditional medicine, for example psychic and supernatural diseases. Thus the work of traditional healers supplements the work of scientific medical practitioners.

It is also claimed that there are some physical problems that are more easily cured by traditional healers, e.g. fractures. It is claimed that bad fractures which might require surgery or amputation if Western scientific medicines were to be used, can be cured easily by traditional medicines. These female traditional healers serve more frequently in the rural areas where hospitals and clinics are not available. In the surveyed area, there is only one hospital, Nessie Knight at Sulenkama, and a few clinics. There are no mobile clinics.

Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to see traditional healers in the urban areas as well. At times they are called by their 'clients' who have migrated to the Republic of South Africa and other urban areas in Transkei. It appears that generally, the cost of

traditional treatment is cheap. The taboos attached to some medicines enjoin the practitioners to charge only small token fees --- a coin, fowl or sheep might do in some cases.

Some of the amaggira claim to be mouthpieces of the spirits, especially ancestral spirits and act as intermediaries between the gods and humanity. As diviners, they are able to foretell the future. Some of them practise divination in order to read the will of the spirits and pass it onto the people. In times of epidemics, drought, or anything that threatens the peace and stability of Hlubi society the priestesses and their male counterparts consult the spirits or resort to water-gazing, mirror-gazing or reading of the entrails of fowls to determine what to do to avert the situation.

As amaxhwere (herbalists) they claim to discover the causes of sickness and apply the right treatment. When possessed by the spirits, the diviners are able to choose the appropriate herbs, roots or barks to perform their cures.

Some traditional healers also claim to heal and help bewitched people. Like most other primal societies, witchcraft is believed to be a real phenomenon among the Hlubi, and many misfortunes and atrocities are attributed to it. Not all the shamans are witch-hunters but they all offer antidotes against the wicked activities of witches.

To recap, traditional healers occupy an important position. They perform moral and religious functions and are greatly respected. Female traditional healers outnumber their male counterparts and the possible explanation for this may be the preponderance of the ratio of women over men in Transkei. Christianity, urbanisation,

and western education have, to a lesser extent, led to an erosion in the role and popularity of the female traditional healer in Hlubi society. However, it is not unusual to see educated Christians visiting traditional healers. This is because there are some inexplicable deaths and diseases which are rife in this society and traditional healers claim to have answers to them. That many practising Christians consult female traditional healers for protection against witchcraft and for material prosperity is an open secret. The relatively cheap fee charged by traditional healers has also led to these people not severing their ties with these shamans.

An area where Hlubi women have lost considerable power and prestige is in the deterioration of their duties as local midwives. In pre-colonial and colonial eras grandmothers and mothers-in-law performed this role. Today, doctors and nurses at Nessie Knight Hospital and a few clinics have taken over this role.

SUMMARY

To summarise, in the absence of written theology, myths serve as the means of propagating traditional religion and practices. For Hlubi women, myths and proverbs depict truths and realities that cannot be dismissed merely as romanticization of the past. Moreover, they are generally clothed with messages concerning the talents and limitations of women.

Today taboos are still observed in Hlubi society but not with the meticulous commitment that they were given in pre-colonial and colonial times. This is undoubtedly due to the coming of Christianity, western education and urbanisation.

In contemporary times, women have multiple workloads: namely, survival, household and income generating tasks. The place and role of women in Hlubi society can be summarised in the words of one of the interviewees. This woman reflected, 'When a man dies the home can go on, but when a woman dies the home dies.' From the above it can be argued that there are few if any changes in Hlubi women's role in the household. The Hlubi woman's day is very full. In addition to the hours spent in domestic labour and child care, there continue to be the long, sometimes hot and sometimes cold hours in the field from just after sunrise to midday. Hlubi women still use work parties (amalima) for efficient cultivation and harvesting of crops. This cooperative effort is also carried over into other aspects of their lives. An interesting new development is that most women are no longer solely dependent on men economically. They engage in income-generating activities to supplement what is given to them by their men.

In the religious sphere Hlubi women play a variety of roles. Although there seems to be a continuity in this area, there is a gradual decrease in the role and authority of female traditional healers. Nevertheless, female traditional healers outnumber their male counterparts. In the church the situation is better than it was twenty years ago. At least Hlubi women are involved in activities in the church but are still denied major leadership positions. Sometimes one is inclined to believe that the shortage of men in these areas give men little or no choice but to involve women in less prestigious and important activities.

From the above, one can safely conclude that the plight of Hlubi women has never been easy, and with the passage of time it has become increasingly more difficult. It

is not surprising therefore that a few educated women are pushing for equality, but this has been misconstrued as rebellion which emanates from western influence. Most of the rural areas are now beginning to change however, and this has had a tremendous impact on Hlubi women.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The study was an attempt to examine women's socio-religious role through a descriptive analysis of the contemporary role of women in traditional African societies. The Hlubi society in Qumbu Magisterial District in Transkei was used as a case study because of my association with them. The objective was to ascertain whether or not, to what extent, and in what way these roles are changing over time and to attempt to identify some underlying factors causing the changes. The objective of the study was achieved through interviews and discussion with women - sometimes when I offered them 'lifts' in my car.

Research on the socio-religious role of women has indicated that although anthropologists, travellers and missionaries have studied religion on the African continent, there is a paucity of information and data on Hlubi society. Their contribution to our knowledge of the socio-religious role of women in Hlubi society is limited, frankly inadequate. There is no evidence, from a literature review, to show that there has been a study employing the techniques adopted in this research in the Transkei. It must be pointed out that writing about the position of women in Africa is indeed a hazardous task. Not only is the material about traditional African societies in general and women in particular non-documented, the only available data is that which can be gleaned currently. Besides, whatever data is available has been coloured by colonisation and evangelisation and has been preserved only in oral tradition. Thus the problem facing the student of phenomenology of religion seeking to unearth the active participation of women in African society (in this case the Hlubi of Qumbu) is that of re-interpreting the oral traditions which tend to lock women into the stereotyped roles

of mother, wife or peasant farmer. Furthermore, what exacerbates the situation is the fact that studies done are more or less exclusively based on male evidence and thus, as Paulime (1960:204) remarks, provide a picture of a society which is purely male. Under such circumstances the woman's identity and social position can only be viewed at second hand. She is, to all intents and purposes, diminished.

It is against this background that a different approach was adopted in this study. The sample chosen in this study were all women from a broad spectrum --- young and old, literate and illiterate. The objective was to obtain first hand information about their experiences as women. For this reason, qualitative methodology was principally used in the study to look at Hlubi women holistically in the context of their past and the situations in which they find themselves. It was also felt that by adopting this method, central to the phenomenological perspective, we will be able to come close to reality as experienced by Hlubi women in particular and by African women in general.

The research was also based on the assumption that Africans operate according to the norms of African religion in the primary instance since it is an integral part of African culture (Oduyoye:1991:71). Myths and proverbs which are considered some of the primary sources of African traditional religion were therefore used to help in assessing the socio-religious role of women in Hlubi society.

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

7.1 HLUBI WOMEN AS A SOCIAL CATEGORY

One thing common to the African woman, whether she is educated or illiterate, patrilineal or matrilineal, in a monogamous or polygamous relationship, Christian or

Moslem, is her relationship to her family. This is applicable to the Hlubi woman as well. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily mean that Hlubi women, even though they constitute a group, can be described as homogeneous. In an article, Dobert and Shields (1972) draw a scenario depicting the African woman, past and present (in Ankrah 1975:20). They suggest that to ascertain whether women are free or oppressed, one needs to distinguish between the illiterate or semi-educated, rural, tradition bound woman and the educated or semi-educated, urbanized woman. Again they argue that the traditional patterns of living still entrenched in many parts of the continent should be seen as distinct from those which are emerging because of colonial experiences and modernization through science and technology (in Ankrah 1975:20). From my discussions with a sample of Hlubi women, it can be argued that not all of them share the same interests, needs, and desires, neither do they experience the same degree of oppression. Furthermore, interviews with them also revealed variations in the interpretation of the female role within the ranks of Hlubi society.

7.2 SEX-ROLE IDEOLOGY

Hlubi society can be described as patriarchal. Labour is divided between the male sphere of economic production and the female sphere, which is anchored in the area of reproduction and the preservation of domestic felicity. Men occupy more powerful and prestigious positions from which they exercise authority over women. Women derive a certain amount of status from such a subservient position. There is a division of labour along gender lines. Cattle, sheep and goat farming, digging and cleaning grain-pits are the prerogatives of the relatively few men left behind, while the major crops cultivated for subsistence are the domain of women. Generally, females do not

have a dominant part in decision-making. My findings revealed that most of them define their importance as Hlubi women according to their value as mothers and housekeepers in the absence of male adult members of the family. Results of the research show that the sexual division of labour within Hlubi society allocates to women direct responsibility for sustaining the household. Is there any explanation for this Sex-role ideology?

Scholars have attempted to explain gender issues from various perspectives. One school of thought suggests that biology is destiny. Some sociologists maintain that categorisation of men and women into two different spheres is functional for the maintenance of social stability and harmony. Whereas Marxists explain all human relationships by class struggle, feminists suggest that the plight of women is due to a collusion between patriarchy and capitalism. This study maintains that all arguments put forward thus far are faulty and unconvincing.

7.3 MYTHS AND PROVERBS

Through some Hlubi myths we can get a picture of the place and role of women in Hlubi society. Some of the myths reveal that a woman occupies a special position in the sense that she shares with man in the creative process of life. This therefore, places her on an equal footing on the social ladder with man. Other myths also suggest that the socialization process in the lineage was shared by men and women alike, thus demolishing the traditional argument that men are the fountain of knowledge. Nevertheless as human beings women also have weaknesses and such characters are also portrayed in some myths. With respect to proverbs, the Hlubi argue that they are related to their culture. For most Hlubi proverbs give pithy, symbolic form

to bits of folk-wisdom and likewise pose mental challenges. Today, as during the pre-colonial and colonial times, Hlubi people still give credence to traditional myths and proverbs and believe that they reveal their religious beliefs and practice. People contend that myths and proverbs help to link the present with the past. The extent to which proverbs and myths are revealed in the world-view of Hlubi society can be ascertained in practice through the social and religious roles of Hlubi women.

7.4 SOCIAL ROLE OF HLUBI WOMEN

Hlubi women perform both social and religious functions. Results from the research revealed that the status of women in pre-colonial Hlubi times was markedly different from what it is now. Even though there were no written laws stipulating their legal status, they enjoyed a certain amount of freedom. The extended family was governed by the grandmother who instituted norms and values which bound the whole family together. Despite the patrilineal structure of the tribe, decision-making in domestic affairs was the prerogative of the grandmother.

Hlubi women also played an essential role in society through their contribution to the reproduction of human life. In this way they were accorded respect because they contributed to the continuity of the human race. The number of children in the family was an index to one's wealth and the woman who contributed through childbearing indirectly enjoyed the respect given to such a family.

As a wife, she was consulted on issues that affected the family. As a mother, she occupied a central and respected place in the family and community.

With regard to agriculture, Hlubi society was in dire need of her labour. Although a Hlubi woman did not own land, she had access to land that was regarded as a family estate. However, it was the responsibility of the husband, as head of the household, to allocate arable land for the use of various houses (in the case of a polygamous family). In addition to these productive and agricultural survival tasks, she engaged in household tasks such as cleaning, washing, food preparation, food storage and cooking. She also brewed beer for all in the neighbourhood and for private consumption in the family.

Other social roles performed by Hlubi women were joining song and dance groups during wedding, burial and status transformation ceremonies. With the consent of their husbands, they also made use of co-operative such as work-parties for the efficient cultivation and harvesting of their crops.

In colonial times there seemed to be no change as far as motherhood and marriage were concerned. Society extolled motherhood and marriage. The Hlubi woman performed all the roles under the broader concepts of survival and household tasks. However, the introduction of Western patrilineal and patriarchal ideologies by missionaries as well as the introduction of colonial education further exacerbated the subordination of women and for that matter further introduced a model of Western sexism. Moreover introduction of a cash economy and resulting taxation brought about labour migration which also placed a further, almost unbearable yoke on Hlubi women left behind. Apart from working hard to increase (or at least maintain) agricultural production, in addition they had to perform their traditional duties of child care and cooking. Now also they had to perform certain duties supposedly meant for men, such

as sending cattle to the veld. In addition the absence of the husband meant the poor Hlubi wife was the major decision-maker on virtually all matters affecting the family and often had to support the older members of the group alone.

Today, Hlubi women still perform a multitude of activities which centre around survival tasks, household tasks and income-generating tasks. There is a fair amount of continuity in the performance of survival and household tasks, but the interesting, new development is that Hlubi women are no longer solely dependent on income from their husbands who are working elsewhere in South Africa. Circumstances have compelled them to contribute to the family budget as well. They sell paraffin, local beer and 'surplus' items such as potatoes, maize, cabbages and carrots. In addition they help at weddings, burials and other social functions by preparing beer, grinding and stamping mealies, and fetching water from kilometres away from their homes. The degree of their involvement in these tasks depends on their relationship to the family sponsoring the function. Most the women are members of burial societies and dance groups. Dance groups provide entertainment at weddings. They use songs as instruments of praise, social criticism and the enforcing of norms. Traditionally men composed these praise songs. The interesting development therefore is the fact that women have now in some instances assumed this role. It is not uncommon to see female students in secondary schools and teacher training colleges featuring as praise singers. Members of these dance groups help each other, by giving money and helping to prepare the food, particularly for weddings and funerals. They thus provide mutual aid and services.

Today, Hlubi women still employ the principle of co-operative effort in their 'survival tasks' on an ad hoc basis during ploughing and harvesting seasons. The amalima, dance groups and burial societies amply demonstrate that present-day Hlubi women, as in the past, have the ability to take collective action for solving or at least for lightening various problems. From the above, it might seem that the Hlubi woman goes about her duties without any hindrances, yet the truth is her activities were and still are, although to a lesser extent, hedged around with prohibitions and taboos.

7.5 TABOOS FOR HLUBI WOMEN

Among the Hlubi, there are some injunctions as to what constitutes incorrect or improper behaviour for Hlubi women. Many of these rules have the status of taboos. Traditionally, it was believed that any breach of these rules would bring societal shame as well as the fear of supernatural punishment. For example, women would not eat eggs under any circumstances. They were debarred entrance to the cattle kraal, would not eat marrow nor drink milk. For the bride, there were other avoidance customs - ukuhlonipa.

In colonial times these taboos were observed by Hlubi women even though the missionaries questioned some of them.

Today, taboos are still observed although not with the same diligence and commitment as in pre-colonial times. This may be due to the facts that Hlubi society has almost totally embraced Christianity and also that health services personnel have been educating these women in ante-natal clinics.

7.6 RELIGIOUS ROLE OF HLUBI WOMEN

As far as the perception of the spiritual world is concerned, there is a continuity between pre-colonial, colonial and contemporary times. Even with the advent of Christianity, western education, urbanization and technological advances, Hlubi women, like their pre-colonial and colonial counterparts still believe the world is full of unseen forces, malign and capricious. They contend that these forces, if possible, must be bribed or placated with sacrifices.

Like other primal societies, Hlubi symbolic systems include the premise that women are more 'mystical' beings than men. This view is still given credence in contemporary Hlubi society.

In pre-colonial times Hlubi women were involved in a number of rites de passage such as naming ceremonies, youth initiation rites, marriage and burial ceremonies in which women had definite roles to perform by virtue of their positions in the family. These roles included activities such as singing brides laments at wedding ceremonies, instructing young girls during intonjane rites and cooking meals for burial, wedding, circumcision and other social ceremonies. These activities were still performed by Hlubi women in colonial times. In recent times, Hlubi women perform these activities, but these roles have been decreased in some spheres. For example transformation rites have changed with the coming of Christianity and resultant changing attitudes on the part of urban and educated Africans. Some parents with such Christian, educational and urban backgrounds refuse to perform the rites. Traditional or Hlubi status transformation rites in which women feature prominently are replaced with Christian baptismal and confirmation rites which are normally officiated by the male priests. Since

Hlubi society is predominantly Christian, it seems reasonable to deduce that traditional status transformation rites have been reduced dramatically. The implication is that Hlubi women have thus been hindered in teaching socialisation roles to the young girls of their communities.

7.6.1 HLUBI WOMEN AS TRADITIONAL HEALERS

An area in which Hlubi women's religious role is prominent is in their function as traditional healers. It must be pointed out, however, that both males and females can be traditional healers. The significant aspect about the role is the fact that women are accepted and share this role with men in such a strongly patriarchal society. This unique area of sharing roles with men possibly is based on the premise that women are more 'mystical' beings than men. Traditional healers function as herbalists (amaxhwele) or diviners (amagqira). According to Thorpe (1990:49-62) they are shamans. Not only does their religious role as herbalists and diviners help to elevate them on the social ladder but also it helps them to accumulate wealth and enables them to shoulder their financial responsibilities brought about by the absence of their husbands.

As herbalists, they do not diagnose illness, rather they treat diseases. Like their male counterparts their expertise and art can be learnt. Such knowledge is often inherited from a mother (or father) by a daughter (or son).

As diviners, they diagnose and prescribe medicines. They also undertake to cure all kinds of diseases. Their medicines are both mystical and practical.

Their roles as traditional healers which were performed during the pre-colonial and colonial times are still performed today. However, during the colonial era there was a serious questioning of African traditional medicine. This was the time when Christianity, western education and orthodox medicine were first introduced. African medicine was said to be merely sympathetic magic which had no curative potency or effect. African traditional doctors were regarded as lacking basic knowledge of scientific medicine. There was little wonder that Christian converts were torn between severing ties with their local doctors and maintaining their relationship with them. Indeed this period was the beginning of a gradual decrease in the authority and the popularity of shamans in Hlubi society.

Results of the research indicate that women traditional healers outnumber their male counterparts presently. One possible explanation for this phenomenon may be the dominance of the female ratio over men in general in Transkei. It is an understatement to say that the advent of Christianity, urbanisation and western education has led to an erosion of the position and authority of female traditional healers. Ironically, these same factors have contributed to a situation in which people find it difficult to completely sever their relationship with shamans. There are some inexplicable deaths and illnesses which are rife, and traditional healers claim to have answers to them. Poverty and unemployment have plagued all African societies (including the Hlubi). That many practising Christians secretly consult female traditional healers for protection against witchcraft and for material prosperity is an open secret. It is also possible that the relatively cheap fee charged by the traditional healers has led to their adherents persistency in consulting them.

Hlubi elderly women have generally lost their power and role as traditional midwives. In pre-colonial and colonial times, grandmothers and mothers-in-law performed this role by virtue of their experience and mature age. Today doctors and nurses at Nessie Knight Hospital and Mary Therese at Sulenkama and Mount Frere respectively and a few clinics in the two Magisterial Districts have taken over this function.

7.6.2 THE ROLE OF HLUBI WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

In this regard the results of the research are quite revealing. The responses of my interviewees echo the feelings and frustrations of women throughout the various churches in Hlubi society. Statements such as those coming from the articulate and outspoken should not be misconstrued as simply outbursts from a few disgruntled, liberated women. They all point to the prominence of women in African Independent churches. In mainline churches it seems that women play a significant role by providing the backbone of church finances through the various activities of their organizations or groups. Hlubi women support the church financially. Surprisingly, in spite of the significant part they play regarding finances, church women are assigned 'women's interests' only, even as board members. Women are denied valid leadership positions. They concede, however, that there is significant progress, (as compared to their plight in the early 1970's) in the light of their present position as church mothers, lay readers and preachers, ushers, society stewards, and deaconesses. The path to ordination as full ministers and equal participants in church politics and leadership is comparatively slow.

7.7 EVALUATION

Today, the vast majority of Hlubi women still live in rural areas, not towns or cities. Hlubi women are caught in a web. Semi-educated and educated urbanized Hlubi find themselves torn between old tribal customs and modern western cultural values. Rural, illiterate Hlubi find themselves engulfed in traditions of patriarchal systems sanctioned by both traditional religion and by Christianity.

In Hlubi society, male dominance is strengthened by an ideology of male superiority and control. Under such circumstances, women suffer biological, social, and political exploitation. Women's roles are hedged about with religious beliefs and practices. There is sexual division of labour, at the same time migration of men has compelled Hlubi women to combine their traditional roles with that of their absent husbands. Sexual division of labour within the Hlubi society allocates to them the responsibility for sustaining the household. These multiple activities are daily performed repeatedly with little or no assistance coming from the relatively few men still in the area. These daily routine tasks may be categorised as survival tasks, household tasks and income-generating tasks. Women are expected to perform all these tasks because they are regarded as 'women's work'. In contrast, women's control over resources is limited. Men still retain a dominant decision-making role, especially over issues relating to the household's income and wealth. In spite of the fact that labour migration has made some women functional heads of families they are experiencing ambivalence regarding this role. Even though they are saddled with responsibility they are not given proper authority to carry out that responsibility. Hlubi women's work is unremunerated and undervalued. It is clear from this study that women, especially the daughters-in-law or amakoti, are responsible for the majority of functions crucial to the survival of the Hlubi

rural household.

From this research, one thing is also clear about Hlubi women. Their tasks are closely related to the home. They are associated with the reproduction of life. They are also wives, mothers, and domestics with no rights to their own persons but are available to serve their children, husbands and their husbands' families. Such was the plight of Hlubi women in pre-colonial and colonial times and nothing has been done to restore their personhood.

Relatively speaking, marriage in Hlubi society has been an agent of oppression. The woman loses her status because she changes her name and takes that of the husband's family. She also has to submit to the dictates of the husband and his family if she decides to stick to upholding traditional values. For the Hlubi woman this is the only way she can realise fulfilment as a person in a community, although it is achieved at a heavy price.

To some extent the religious role of Hlubi women confirms the assertion that discrimination in African religion is less pronounced. This is primarily because Hlubi women share with their male counterparts the role of traditional healers. Indeed in a patriarchal society such as the Hlubi one this is a unique situation of equality. At the same time the question that has to be asked is, apart from this religious function what other cultic functions are performed by women and how influential are they? Even in family rituals, Hlubi men officiate and women are mere spectators. Hlubi women are even not allowed to touch men's sacred objects. Although at present, female traditional healers outnumber their male counterparts, men are traditionally considered more

powerful. One really wonders who decides the basis or criteria for such an assessment.

In the church the plight of a Hlubi woman is no better. She plays a supportive role especially in fund-raising and other areas that affect women. As for church politics and leadership positions however men are ordained to do that and not women. The research has therefore shown that the plight of Hlubi women has never been easy, and with the passage of time it has become increasingly difficult. Something therefore needs to be done to address this sordid state of affairs.

7.8 AREAS OF NECESSARY CHANGE AND SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING THESE CHANGES.

The issue of taboos in contemporary Hlubi society and, for that matter, throughout Africa must be addressed. African women need liberation from those traditional customs that hold them in bondage. Although taboos are a way of maintaining the harmony and well-being in small scale societies, with the advent of education and urbanisation, their enforcement in modern times is not very effective. To put it mildly, they have outlived their usefulness. It must be pointed out that there is continuity and discontinuity in all cultures and that no living religion can be considered truly primitive. Similarly however, societal norms are not however static or sacrosanct. They can and need to be transformed with the passing of time. Cultural practices of pre-colonial times need not be considered as norms to be followed in present-day societies.

Although equality is not yet a fact and men continue to dominate in this world, women have begun to make noticeable inroads. However, the tasks that are relegated to

women within the household have not been similarly challenged. Men have not truly been called upon to share women's work.

Nwachuku (1992:245) suggests a re-consideration of 'power sharing' which she considers to be at the root of all struggle against injustice. For her, African men and women need to re-examine such questions as the following: Who holds power? Do those who hold the power use it to assist the powerless to rise to their full human potential? Are the powerful willing to share power? If so, in what proportion and in what areas?

It must also be pointed out that most African women do not understand or are not aware of the nature of their struggle and possible alternatives. Whereas some women feel they have never been in bondage and therefore do not relate to all the agitation, others feel that they need assistance to help them grapple with the social and technological changes which confront them in their daily lives. Other women also believe they have to keep abreast with the times.

It is an understatement to say that the church is the last bastion of male exclusivity. This is because many other professions such as the legal, teaching and medical professions, have accepted women in the most senior positions. That apart, the business community, too, has opened its doors and employs women at a variety of levels. This does not mean that exploitation in terms of promotion and salaries has been entirely rooted out. But women at least have increasing access to employment and power in these other spheres.

Socialisation is an area which must be looked into. It is not an exaggeration to say that some women contribute to their own oppression by the way in which they rear their children. Further, education, job opportunities and the development of women's pride and self confidence are essential if women are to have the skills to fight for their own equality.

Attention also needs to be given to legal restrictions on women (especially in areas under customary and Roman Dutch law), and to labour practices (eg training and maternity leave). In addition, traditional definitions of 'women's work', especially for those who are active in the labour market, need to be radically revised. Sexual harassment of women also needs to be seriously addressed.

It must also be admitted that women often oppress other women (eg the white and black 'madams' that employ domestic or other workers). It must be admitted that such a decision by 'Westernised women' who engage the services of domestic workers emanates from their dilemma of having a foot planted in two worlds - traditional and western. In other words they try to combine their maternal and professional roles. Much as we appreciate their problem and give our sympathy that should not give them the licence to oppress their fellow human beings.

7.9 RECOMMENDATIONS

The main argument against Christianity is that it is wrapped in western clothing and that missionaries and African Christians failed to relate Christianity to indigenous beliefs and practices. It is against this background that I call for the transformation of puberty rites. Puberty rites could be held at the home of the parents, or in the church or both

places. Should they be performed in the traditional way, the minister of religion of the local church could be invited. The aim is not to elevate him, rather it is a good way for creating mutual understanding and respect for both Christianity and African traditional religion. In view of the educational value of status transformation rites Christians could be encouraged to participate in these ceremonies.

Transformation of the puberty rites in Hlubi society will demand that officiating priests should be well-versed in African religious beliefs and practices. Many of the ministers of religion of mainline churches have received their training in Western cultural situations and are therefore out of touch with situations in an African environment. This calls for the inclusion of African Traditional Religion in the curriculum of secondary institutions as well as theological colleges in Africa. African Studies should also be made compulsory in the universities and other institutions of higher learning.

Community leaders, elders, diviners and other religious personages well-versed in African culture or studies could be asked to give lectures in institutions. They could also participate in symposia organised by institutions of higher learning.

The church could also strengthen its programme of Sunday school classes by educating children on topics such as pre-marital sex, disrespect for authority, individualism, spirit of generosity and most importantly on the overall matter of being human.

As initiation ceremonies are more and more falling into disuse the burden of transmission of traditional values has been passed to the schools. One area of

concentration should be the elementary school where a concerted effort ought to be made to foster and encourage African religious values.

The church is known for its attempt to assist its female congregation through evangelisation, but that is not enough. It should also do something to assist these women who are still outside the church.

With regards to the oppression of some women by other women the church needs to step up its crusade by speaking loudly and clearly from the pulpit against such practices including racial conflicts. Other social welfare institutions should also initiate programmes to help women obtain trade skills which will make them self-sufficient (or at least enable them to earn a decent living).

All over the world education is said to be a major solution to the plight of women. Women's access to vocational and technical opportunities is nevertheless disappointingly low. The tendency is rather to give such opportunities to men. This is an area in which the church can offer assistance by providing awareness and assertive training programmes with a view to encouraging women to reorient themselves towards vocational and technical courses.

Educational opportunity, as indicated above, is often cited as the panacea for women's predicaments. Not only does education contribute to eliminating the idea of women's inferiority but also to the actual changing of the inferiority of their position. It is only women who can react against the traditional stereotyped education offered to them. This means that women, with the assistance of sympathetic men, should start a

consciousness raising campaign to help liberate other women psychologically. The formation of small groups in villages will help women to examine and reflect on their position and oppression. Such education nevertheless should not emphasise attempting to wrench power from men since such a course is likely to antagonise men - even those who may be sympathetic.

The church has the challenging duty of starting programmes for the education of women beyond basic literacy and primary education levels in order to combat the traditional practice of choosing to advance male children over female children due to lack of free education.

Since women are known for their role as converts and converters, the church can also assist women to build a more dynamic community of women by educating them to be their own advocates.

As indicated above the church has functioned as a legitimator of the status quo and thus has contributed to the exploitation of women. If the principles of feminist theology could be brought home both to men and women, and systematically enacted, a radical change could take place in the lives of all church members.

Structures in the church need to be overhauled. All appointments made to the clergy should be based on merit. This means that educated men who dominate the leadership of the church will still have an advantage over their female counterparts, but this is better than the situation where these leadership positions have been perpetually reserved for men only. With the progress made in the education of women, it is my

conviction that many of them can fill such leadership positions when given the opportunity. This will go a long way towards enabling women to test and prove themselves.

Conscientisation needs to take place at the level of theological formulations (and education), the power structures of churches (eg bishops, priests, elders, council members) as well as the administration of the sacraments, preaching, pastoring, organisation and the general exercising of Christian ministries.

Greater attention needs to be given to the radically new attitudes which Jesus held regarding women and the implications of his example for modern believers. If people are committed to being liberated from racism and economic exploitation, they cannot ignore the need for women (and children) to be liberated as well.

Various African governments should consider throwing open to public debate the problem of payments for family labour. Women often work for the family, but the male head of the household usually controls the family's profit from crop production. This makes husbands bosses and their wives servants. It creates friction and undermines cooperation. It is not easy to legislate payments for family labour, but legal protection for women's rights to household assets and active prosecution of such laws would be welcome.

Further, African governments should make concerted legislative efforts to safeguard or change women's domestic rights. These issues are often raised with no concrete action being taken because women in most African countries do not today have

significant political influence.

Since some diseases are more effectively healed by either traditional or Western orthodox medicines, and since certain diseases are better cured by a combination of traditional and Western medicines, it is reasonable to consider both as complementary. African therapeutics should be encouraged. Various African governments should accord official recognition to traditional healers. They should be allowed to form associations to facilitate the exchange of ideas, talents and knowledge among their members. Like any other professional association they must be empowered to weed out dubious traditional healers or members who contravene their code of ethics or act unprofessionally.

These are suggestions which appear to be utopian but I hope this study will contribute toward consciousness raising regarding the plight of African women in general and Hlubi women in particular.

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APPENDIX

SAMPLE OF QUESTIONS

Proverbs

- 1 Do you have any idea about proverbs?
- 2 Can I give you some examples from my own ethnic group?
- 3 Now that I have given you some examples from my tribe, may you give me as many proverbs as you can.
- 4 Now, give me some proverbs specifically concerning women.
- 5 How are women portrayed in proverbs among Hlubi?
- 6 Do you think proverbs are relevant these days (as compared to pre-colonial and colonial times)?

Myths

- 1 What is a traditional myth?
- 2 Are there myths in Hlubi tradition?
- 3 Can you give me some myths indicating the role of women in Hlubi society?
- 4 What is the relevance of myths today?

Taboos

- 1 What are taboos?
- 2 Give me some taboos in Hlubi tradition.
- 3 Kindly give me specifically some examples of women taboos.
- 4 As compared to pre-colonial times, colonial times and today, in which period do you think taboos were observed meticulously?
- 5 If there is a change, what explanation can you offer for it?
- 6 What effects do you think taboos might have on women?
- 7 Do you think taboos are necessary today. What reasons do you have for your

answer?

Women as Social Category

- 1 Are women different from men. Why do you say so?
- 2 Do you think Hlubi women are different from other Xhosa women. Do you have any reason for your answer?
- 3 Would you agree with the statement that Hlubi women have similar or same interests or experiences?

Sex role ideology

- 1 What role do you normally perform at home?
- 2 Are such duties different from what men do at home?
- 3 Apart from the above mentioned duties, do you perform any other duties?
- 4 Do Hlubi men also perform such duties?
- 5 Do you consider it necessary to serve men in the family? Give reasons for your answer.
- 6 If no, what do you think are some of the reasons for the sexual division of labour among Hlubi?
- 7 With the advent of education, Christianity and money economy do you think something should be done about sexual division of labour? Why do you say so?
- 8 Do you consider it necessary for men and women to perform complementary roles? Give reasons for your answer.
- 9 Are your duties too much for you?
- 10 Who (in the family) does the following?
 - * ploughing
 - * hoeing
 - * planting in the fields

- * reaping
 - * grinding mealies
 - * collecting water
 - * buying/fetching firewood
 - * looking after the home
 - * looking after livestock and poultry
 - * preparing food for the day
- 11 Is there anything to sell in this house? (e.g. hides or beer, potatoes, paraffin, cabbage)
- 12 Who does this?
- 13 (If owning land:) How much land do you have for planting?
- 14 What do you get, from the vegetables you grow in your garden, to eat and to sell?
- 15 How often in a day is water fetched?
- 16 How do you keep in contact with the people (e.g. son or husband) living away?
- 17 How often do you hear from them?
- 18 Who makes decisions about?
- * farming
 - * livestock
 - * poultry
 - * spending large sums of money
 - * children sent to school or taken out of school
 - * When a family member is sick
 - * repairing or building huts

Women as traditional healers

- 1 Is traditional healing a feature of Hlubi society?
- 2 Has it been the practice since pre-colonial times?
- 3 Is it the domain of men or women or both?
- 4 Has there been changes in the discharge of such role with the advent of Christianity, education and urbanization?
- 5 Do you consider traditional healing important in modern times?

Other religious roles of women

- 1 Beside traditional healing, what other religious roles are performed by women?
- 2 What is intonjane rite?
- 3 Who officiates the rite?
- 4 Which period in the history of Hlubi has this rite been very important and why?
- 5 Has the advent of Christianity and education affected this rite?

The Role of Hlubi women in the Church

- 1 What role do women play in your church?
- 2 Are your roles in the church different from those performed by men?
- 3 If yes, what explanation is given for that?
- 4 Are you satisfied with the explanation given?
- 5 Who are in charge of the administration of your local church?
- 6 Are you satisfied with the composition of the leadership of your local church?
- 7 Has the situation been so from colonial time?

FIGURE 1

DIVISION OF LABOUR IN AFRICA

DOMESTIC WORK	95	5
PROCESSING AND STORING CROPS	85	15
WEEDING	70	30
HARVESTING	60	40
CARING FOR LIVESTOCK	50	50
PLANTING	50	50
PLOUGHING	30	70



WOMEN



MEN

Percentage of each type of work done by women and men in Africa.

Source: *United Nations Handbook on Women in Africa, Economic Commission for Africa, 1975.*