Global capitalism and the commodification of breastfeeding: An investigation of its impact on the African conception of family life and motherhood

by

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DECLARATION

I declare that **"Global Capitalism and the Commodification of Breastfeeding: An Investigation of its Impact on the African Conception of Family Life and Motherhood"** is my original work and that all the sources cited or quoted were acknowledged through in-text referencing as per APA guidelines and written in the bibliography.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis to an originality software (Turnitin).

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ABSTRACT (ENGLISH)

Breastfeeding in public has become a contentious issue in contemporary society. Mothers are often subjected to unfair discrimination and harassment for simply responding to their maternal instinct to breastfeed their infants. The unwillingness of society to accept public breastfeeding as a natural, non-sexual act is partly influenced by the imposition of a pornified and hypersexualised Western culture, which was imported to Africa through colonisation. This culture was enforced by the apartheid regime and is now perpetuated by Western media.

The imposition of the modern nuclear family on Africans, and the coerced aspiration to subscribe to bourgeois values, has eroded the moral standing of the African family and its cultural values. Western-centric perceptions of African women have altered the experience of motherhood for many, commodifying the practice of breastfeeding. As a result, the use of bottles and infant formula is often perceived as the preferred method, while breastfeeding in public is viewed as primitive, immoral and unacceptable.

Methodology: A qualitative (normative) research design based on a thematic analysis that relied primarily on online peer-reviewed academic data sources was adopted for the study.

The aim of this normative study was to answer the question of what ought to be done to preserve the dignity of African mothers and to protect their right to breastfeed in public. The African philosophy of Ubuntu was employed to advocate mothers' right to breastfeed in public. This moral philosophy posits that the Western perception of a person seeks to isolate people from their environment and culture, thereby undermining the process of acquiring humanity, which fosters social cohesion. The Ubuntu philosophy embodies the aphorism, "*umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu*" ("a person is a person through other persons"), which signifies people's interconnectedness and interdependence.

The application of the key principles of Ubuntu, such as "survival, the spirit of solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity" as identified by Mbigi Lovemore (1997), and aphorisms like "*feta kgomo o sware motho*" can improve human interaction and unite the public to

support the South African government's efforts to increase the rate of exclusive breastfeeding and to reduce infant mortality.

Keywords: Ubuntu, Afrocentric, breastfeeding, motherhood, bourgeoisie, personhood, commodification, objectification, cultural imperialism.

ABSTRACT (SEPEDI)

Go nyantšha letswele phatlalatša go fetogile taba yeo go ngangišanwago ka yona setšhabeng sa mehleng yeno. Gantši bommagobana ba kgethollwa ka mo go sa lokago le go tlaišwa ka lebaka la go no arabela tlhago ya bona ya go ba bomma ya go nyantšha masea a bona letswele. Go se amogele ga setšhaba gore go nyantšha letswele phatlalatša ke tlhago, ga o akaretše tša thobalano (non-sexual) go huetšwa seripa ke go gapeletšwa ga setšo sa Bodikela sa go amantšhwa le thobalano (pornified) le go ba le kgahlego ya go fetiša go tša thobalano (hypersexualised), seo se tlišitšwego ka Afrika ge go hlongwa dikoloni. Setšo se se phethagaditšwe ke mmušo wa kgethollo gomme bjale se tšwetšwapele ke bobegaditaba bja Bodikela.

Go gapeletšwa ga botee bja lapa la sebjalebjale go Maafrika, le kganyogo ye e gapeletšwago go thekga mekgwa ya balatedi ba setšo (bourgeois), go sentše maemo a boitshwaro a lapa la Afrika le mekgwa ya lona ya setšo. Dikgopolo tša Bodikela tša basadi ba Maafrika di fetotše bokgoni bja go ba mma go ba bantši, di dira gore setlwaedi sa go nyantšha letswele se dirwe kgwebo. Ka lebaka leo, tšhomišo ya ditami le maswi a lerole a masea gantši e tšewa bjalo ka mokgwa wo o ratwago, mola go nyantšha letswele phatlalatša go bonwa bjalo ka mokgwa wa sekgale, mokgwa wo mobe le wa go se amogelege.

Mokgwa: Tlhamo ya nyakišišo ya khwalithethifi (tlwaelo) ye e theilwego godimo ga tshekatsheko ya tabakgolo yeo e ithekgilego kudu ka methopo ya datha ya thuto yeo e sekasekwago ke ditsebi inthaneteng e amogetšwe go nyakišišo ye.

Maikemišetšo a nyakišišo ye e be e le go araba potšišo ya seo se swanetšego go dirwa go boloka seriti sa bommagobana ba Maafrika le go šireletša tokelo ya bona ya go nyantšha letswele phatlalatša. Filosofi ya Afrika ya Ubuntu e šomišitšwe go thekga tokelo ya bommagobana ya go nyantšha letswele phatlalatša. Filosofi ye ye botse e šišinya gore kgopolo ya Bodikela ya motho e nyaka go arogantšha batho le tikologo le setšo sa bona, ka go realo e nyatša tshepedišo ya go kgoboketša batho, yeo e thekgago kgokagano ya leago. Filosofi ya Ubuntu e akaretša seka se, "*umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu*" (motho ke motho ka batho), seo se laetšago kgokagano ya batho le go ithekga ka ba bangwe.

Tšhomišo ya melawana ye bohlokwa ya Ubuntu, go swana le "go phela, moya wa botee, kwelobohloko, tlhompho, le seriti" bjalo ka ge Mbigi Lovemore (1997) a boletše, gomme dika tša go swana le *"feta kgomo o sware motho"* di ka kaonafatša tšhomišano ya batho le go kopanya setšhaba go thekga maitapišo a mmušo wa Afrika Borwa a go oketša palo ya go nyantšha letswele fela le go fokotša mahu a masea.

Mantšu a bohlokwa: Ubuntu, Botšo-Afrika (Afrosentriki), go nyantšha letswele, bomma, *bourgeoisie*, botho, go dira kgwebo, nyenyefatšo, boimpherialiseme bja setšo.

ABSTRACT (ISIXHOSA)

Ukuncancisa esidlangalaleni kuye kwaba ngumba oxhalabisayo kuluntu lwangoku. Oomama badla ngokujongana nocalulo nongcungcuthekiso olungafanelekanga ngenxa yokulandela nje ithuku lemvelo labo lobumama lokuncancisa iintsana zabo. Ukungafuni koluntu ukwamkela ukuncancisa esidlangalaleni njengento edaliweyo nengekho ngesondo, kuyinxenye yokuphenjelelwa kokunyanzelwa kwenkcubeko yaseNtshona enemifanekiso yamanyala/iphonografi kunye nokubaxwa kwezesondo, eyaziswa eAfrika ngobukoloniyali. Le nkcubeko yanyanzelwa ngurhulumente wocalucalulo kwaye ngoku iphenjelelwa ngamajelo eendaba aseNtshona.

Ukunyanzeliswa kwendlela yokuphila kweentsapho ngokuzimeleyo yanamhlanje kuma-Afrika, nomnqweno onyanzeliswayo wokwamkela iinqobo zodidi lobungxowankulu (*bourgeois),* kuye kwaphelisa ukuphila kwentsulungeko yeentsapho zama-Afrika kunye neenqobo zawo zenkcubeko. Iingcamango zaseNtshona zabasetyhini baseAfrika ziye zatshintsha amava okuba ngumama kwabaninzi, zirhwebisa ukuncancisa. Ngenxa yoko, ukusetyenziswa kweebhotile kunye nobisi olungumgubo lokondla iintsana kudla ngokubonwa njengendlela elungileyo. Ngelixa ukuncancisa esidlangalaleni kubonwa njengento yakudala, kungasulungekanga kwaye kungamkelekekanga.

Isikhokelo sophando: Kolu phando kusetyenziswe uyilo lophandontyilazwi (*normative*) olusekelwe kuhlalutyontyilazwi lomongo obeluxhomekeke ngokuphambili kwimithombo yedatha yezemfundo ehlolwe ngoontanga kwi-intanethi.

Injongo yolu phando lwe-*normative* ibikukuphendula umbuzo wokuba yintoni ekufuneka yenziwe ukugcina isidima soomama baseAfrika nokukhusela ilungelo labo lokuncancisa esidlangalaleni. Kusetyenziswe ifilosofi yobuAfrika yoBuntu ukukhuthaza ilungelo loomama lokuncancisa esidlangalaleni. Le filosofi yentsulungeko ithi, ingcamango yaseNtshona yokuba ngumntu ifuna ukubekela abantu bucala kokubangqongileyo nakwinkcubeko yabo, ngaloo ndlela ijongela phantsi inkqubo yokuba kunye koluntu, nto leyo ekhuthaza ukusebenzisana kwalo. Ifilosofi yoBuntu iqulethe intetho ethi, "umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu", nto leyo ebonisa unxibelelwano nokuxhomekeka okanye ukuthembela kwabantu omnye komnye.

Ukusetyenziswa kwemigaqo ephambili yoBuntu, efana "nokusinda, umoya wokumanyana, imfesane, intlonipho, kunye nesidima" ngokuchazwe nguMbigi Lovemore (1997) ngolwimi isiNgesi xa esithi *"survival, the spirit of solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity"*, kunye nentetho efana nale *"feta kgomo o sware motho"* kunokuphucula ukusebenzisana kwabantu kwaye kudibanise uluntu ukuxhasa iinzame zikarhulumente woMzantsi Afrika zokunyusa iqondo lokuncancisa esidlangalaleni kunye nokunciphisa ukufa kweentsana.

Amagama angundoqo: Ubuntu, into emvelaphi yayo iseAfrika, ukuncancisa, ukuba ngumama, udidi lobungxowankulu (*bourgeoisie*), ukuba ngumntu, ukurhweba, ukwenziwa komntu into, ukunyanzeliswa kwenkcubeko.

CURRICULUM VITAE

I was born on 5 July 1991 as the second child in a family of six. My parents, Mr Mokgoba Johannes Seabela and Mrs Maphoku Christina Seabela didn't have access to higher education, but they valued it for their children. My sister Molatela is the first-born, followed by me, and then my two younger brothers Nkwane, and Seshike. My father has been living and working in Pretoria, his entire adult life, which meant we only saw him a few times per year. Consequently, I became very close with my mother, who read a lot of *Sepedi* novels and instilled in me a love for books, despite her education being limited to the equivalent of National Senior Certificate (NSC) grade 10.

My education started at Mapudithomo Primary School in my home village of Nobody Ga-Mothapo which is about 30 km outside Polokwane. I wasn't a top achiever but always managed to score decent grades, keeping me in the top five throughout my primary school years. I attended Mountain View Senior Secondary School in the nearby township of Mankweng, where I matriculated in 2009. Although I didn't get the grades I had hoped for, I was admitted to the University of Limpopo's then-Medunsa campus (currently Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University) for a Bachelor of Sciences in Dietetics completed in 2015.

It was towards the end of my undergraduate degree that I developed a passion for bioethics and philosophy. Two years after graduating, while working as a community Dietitian in rural Polokwane, Limpopo, I registered for an MSc Med in Bioethics and Health Law at the University of the Witwatersrand. I had planned to undertake this research topic for my master's degree, but my then-supervisor deemed it too complex for me at the time, so I abandoned it. However, I remained passionate about the subject and, after completing my master's, found an institution (UNISA) and a supervisor (Prof M Cloete) who helped me fulfil my dream.

My interests lie in researching patients' rights, African philosophy (ubuntu), and teaching, which is a big part of my job in the Department of Health, as my facility is accredited to train dietetics students from the University of Limpopo. It is my passion for knowledge and teaching that makes me aspire to a career as an academician.

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I owe my gratitude to God and my ancestors for helping me get this far in life despite facing multiple setbacks and failures. My pursuit of higher education which lasted for nine years became a reality due to the support I received from people around me, and it reinforces the principle that it takes a village to raise a child. It's our interconnectedness and interdependence that shape our identity as individuals. It is for this reason that I would like to thank the following people for their contributions:

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2. My supervisor, Professor Mike Cloete, deserves a special mention for his constant constructive criticism and support. Prof. Cloete was incredibly supportive and quick to review my work, which motivated me to work more efficiently and with more dedication.

3. My children, Lefa, and Theto, and my late daughter, Letago, are my motivation in everything I do. The desire to provide them with a better life keeps me going through tough times.

4. My siblings Molatela, Nkwane, and Sishike for the love and emotional support they have shown me.

5. Lastly, I am grateful to the University of South Africa for allowing me to conduct my research under their institution and providing me with a bursary for my thesis module. This support helped me reduce my stress levels and focus all my attention on research. I would also like to express my gratitude to the entire UNISA community, particularly the M&D department, for assisting me with technical issues and the Philosophy, Practical and Systematic Theology department for making this research possible.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction and background to the study

The World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) breastfeeding has been identified as the most effective strategy to reduce infant mortality rates, especially in low-income countries (WHO,2003). Both organizations jointly support, protect, and promote breastfeeding to increase exclusive breastfeeding rates. Developing countries with high infant mortality rates and low exclusive breastfeeding rates have been urged to formulate appropriate and effective policies to promote breastfeeding, according to WHO and UNICEF recommendations.

These policies should include educating low to middle-income nations on the benefits of exclusive breastfeeding for the first four to six months of an infant's life, for both the physical and emotional health of both the mother and the child. These policies may also require amendments to labour laws that allow a minimum of four months of parental leave and breaks for breastfeeding or expression when mothers return to work (United Nations 1989; World Health Organization, 2009).

The current literature on breastfeeding practices is primarily focused on two aspects: (1) the health benefits of breastfeeding and (2) the reasons for some mothers' reluctance to embrace the recommended breastfeeding policy and (3) improvement in the health system in reducing infant mortality, despite its benefits. However, recent research has also explored the experiences of mothers who breastfeed in public and public perceptions of the practice.

Researchers have studied the factors that influence women's decision to breastfeed in public, as well as the places where mothers breastfeed their infants in public (Simpson *et al.,* 2016). Other studies have investigated public attitudes towards breastfeeding in public in Asia and South Africa, with a focus on determining the levels of support for this practice (Aloysius & Jamaludin, 2018; Nyaloko *et al*., 2020). The main objective of these studies is to determine the extent to which the public exposure of women's breasts during breastfeeding may cause discomfort or constitute a nuisance to others, according to the

authors (Hatton & Trautner, 2011). While the health benefits of breastfeeding and reasons for mothers' reluctance to breastfeed are commonly studied, recent research has shed light on the experiences of breastfeeding in public and public perceptions of the practice.

I contend that the commercialisation and commodification of breastfeeding through the explicit promotion of replacement feeding products have contributed to the degradation of the intrinsic self-understanding of women and mothers as autonomous, self-respecting, respected, and dignified members of society and thus may interfere with their ability to choose the best feeding method for their infants.

Recent scholarship examining the impact of colonialism on postcolonial African societies has tended to prioritise the economic imperatives of capitalism as the sole condition for a good life. One can argue that privileging the values and principles of neoliberal global capitalism has had damaging effects on most ordinary African people, resulting in structural unemployment and economic disposability. Furthermore, the integrity and dignity of traditional African family life, based on a broader moral ethos of inter-human solidarity, mutuality, and reciprocity between family and community life, has been undermined. This has had the effect of devaluing traditional African family values and violating the dignity of African women and mothers which will be argued in chapters 3 to 5.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the intrinsic dignity of indigenous African families and community life concerning the commodification and commercialisation of breastfeeding. commodification refers to the "social exchange that converts relational goods into commodities which means goods that were once valued for their connections to people and events relating to people become valued merely for their physical attributes" (Oliver & Robison, 2017, p. 1318).

 Specifically, the research aimed to challenge the privileged status of the Western bourgeois family as the universal standard for families, by advocating for traditional and indigenous African family life and its associated concept of motherhood as a normative alternative. The research argued that such family structures, as the preserver of life,

provide a more culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate model for addressing the issue of breastfeeding within the African context.

In postcolonial Africa, poverty, deprivation, and socio-economic inequality are pervasive, and the creation of a bourgeois family structure, as typically found in wealthy, industrialised Western nations, is unlikely to alleviate the struggles of African people. This research seeks to restore the intrinsic dignity and integrity of indigenous African family life, which places humane relations of reciprocity, mutual respect, and solidarity at its core and sees the preservation of human life as its primary function. It is my perception that according to this normative perspective, an authentic economy should always be guided by moral principles aimed at preserving and dignifying human life. However, the global expansion of the neoliberal capitalist agenda, which prioritises wealth accumulation and profitmaking, has led to the commodification of breastfeeding. I contend that this stands in stark contrast to the humanist value system of traditional African family life.

1.1.1 Definition of concepts as used in the thesis.

- Commodifying refers to the perception of people or their bodies as mere commodities or goods just as perceiving female breasts as merely sexual objects.

- African family structure refers to the traditional family structure pre-colonialism which comprised polygamous marriages and a mix of generations of extended families (aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents) living together.

- African women refer to native African women living on the African continent.

- African motherhood implies the sacred role of naturing and raising a child accorded by nature to African women with biological children.

- Western bourgeois family refers to middle-class families in Western countries.

- Bourgeois refers to the middle class.

1.2 Conceptual framework

This research utilised a decolonial feminist theory as a conceptual framework. The conceptual framework is something that has been poorly defined by research though one

researcher defined it as bringing together a few related concepts to explain and give a wider insight into the phenomenon under investigation (Imenda, 2014). Another scholar suggests that "conceptual framework should be regarded as the mental map that connects the various dimensions of the research process such as the researcher's a priori knowledge and interests, the literature survey, theory, methods, data analysis and findings" (Van der Waldt, 2020, p. 3). The reason for using a conceptual framework instead of a theoretical framework is that some of the statements are founded on my experience as a dietitian and an African living in a country that is still battling with decoloniality, so my experiences have shaped some of the perceptions of the world therefore on a few occasions throughout the research some conclusions were drawn from such experiences.

Taking into cognisance the fact that this research sought to argue for the decolonization and de-commodification of the African female body to restore her right to bodily autonomy so she can fully experience and enjoy motherhood as nature intended it is thus appropriate that this research was conceptualized as a decolonial feminist theory. "Decolonial feminism engages with debates on coloniality/modernity and indigenous identity and gender in "African", while providing a space for the voices and lived experiences of marginalized, non-Western(ised) women" (Manning, 2019, p. 1203). The choice of this decolonial feminist theory as a conceptual framework was also driven by the aspiration to give the African woman a voice and space to express herself and how she identifies culturally not only as a female but as a mother in her right. The cultural aspect of African motherhood is an important factor as well in choosing this framework because throughout the research I argued that cultural imperialism or the imposition of Western cultural values on Africans is destructive to the African way of life in this instance African motherhood, so arguing for the decolonization of the African cultures fits perfectly within this framework.

1.3   Brief literature analysis and critique

This section provides a literature review on breastfeeding, encompassing global exclusive breastfeeding rates, and how some countries are performing in this regard. It also

presents an analysis of the enablers and barriers to exclusive breastfeeding and society's perception of breastfeeding in public.

1.3.1 Exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) rates

Exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) refers to the practice of feeding an infant nothing but breast milk. This diet excludes water, herbal products, and home remedies for the first six months of life except for vitamins and medication (WHO, 2003; Motee & Jeewon, 2014; Mundagowa *et al*., 2019). Despite the World Health Assembly's ambition of raising global exclusive breastfeeding to above 50% by 2025, recent data suggests that the current prevalence rate stands at 45.7% (Zong *et al*., 2021), according to this report Some countries have already met the target, with others still falling far short. In a 2020 Centres for Diseases Control report, it was revealed that about 58% of infants were exclusively breastfed for the recommended six months in 2017, surpassing the World Health Assembly (WHA) target (Centres for Diseases Control, 2020). It may be prudent to analyse the exclusive breastfeeding rates of European countries as most of them had colonies in Africa, thus their attitudes, practices, and perceptions relating to breastfeeding may have been imported to those they colonised.

When monitoring progress for the 2025 deadline, by 2013, most of the WHO European Region Member States were nowhere close to achieving the 50% target set by the WHA. Eight out of the 45 member states did not have data for EBF at six months, and only four member states out of the 38 with available data had achieved rates over 30%. The member states with the highest rates were Turkey at 76%, Slovakia at 49%, Romania at 46.7%, Hungary at 43.9%, and Malta at 35.9% (Bosi *et al*., 2016; Cozma-Petruţ *et al*., 2021). By the end of the data collection period (1998-2019), the member states with the poorest exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) rates, i.e., below 10%, were Greece at 0.7%, UK and Finland at 1%, Italy at 5%, Luxembourg at 6%, and Norway with 7% (Bosi et al., 2016; Keleş Alp, 2021). Based on the presented data, it appears that most of these member states of the WHO in Europe may not achieve the set EBF target by 2025. The question that arises is how developing nations, particularly those in Africa, are performing in comparison. In 2017, the EBF prevalence rates on the entire African continent were

reported to be at 37%. However, Sub-Saharan Africa had lower rates of about 32%, which is way below the targeted 50% by the WHA (Bhattacharjee *et al*., 2019; Goon *et al*., 2021). A 2019 study that investigated "exclusive breastfeeding rates and associated factors among 13 of the 15 Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) members" reported rates ranging from as low as 13% in Cote d'Ivoire to as high as 58% in Togo (Agho *et al*., 2019). In Sub-Saharan Africa, some countries are on their way to achieving the 50% WHA target, boosting the continent's prevalence rates, with Ethiopia having attained 58.2%, followed by Tanzania at 52.6%, DRC at 45.9%, Namibia at 40.9%, and Kenya with 37.6% (Bhattacharjee *et al*., 2019).

South Africa has a national EBF prevalence rate of 31.6% (Vitalis et al., 2021), and although the country has not yet achieved the target, there has been a substantial improvement. Demographic and health surveys conducted between 1998 and 2003 reported a cumulative breastfeeding rate of 8%, which increased from 26% in 2008 to 31.6% in recent years (NDoH, 2019; Siziba *et al*., 2015; Vitalis *et al*., 2021). One of the main reasons why South Africa is still achieving rates way below the target is that four of its provinces have been persistently reporting low prevalence rates, with North West, Free State, Eastern Cape, and Gauteng being the worst-performing with a mere 19.4% prevalence rate (Bhattacharjee *et al*., 2019; Vitalis *et al*., 2021).

Comparing Africa, a developing continent, with well-developed nations, particularly those in Europe, one may initially assume that Africa would surpass these countries in EBF prevalence rates due to the poor socio-economic status of most Africans, which would make EBF a more appealing and suitable form of feeding. However, it is debatable that one of the reasons for this low prevalence rate is the use of traditional herbal remedies in treating minor ailments in children, which are not recognised as acceptable during EBF, although over-the-counter Western medicines like vitamin supplement drops are permitted.

1.3.2 Barriers to exclusive breastfeeding

Despite the indisputable benefits and strong recommendations by the World Health Organization and United Nations Children's Fund, some countries are still struggling to improve their exclusive breastfeeding rates, particularly in Africa.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of why some countries are still failing to meet the EBF target set by the WHA, it is crucial to identify the barriers preventing some women from exclusively breastfeeding. These barriers can be categorised into three types: mother-baby factors, family influence, and other responsibilities, community/society, and healthcare system (Rollins *et al.*, 2016).

- **Mother-baby factors**

Breastfeeding education has been incorporated into the antenatal and postnatal services of all public health facilities to encourage mothers to exclusively breastfeed their infants for six months and reduce infant mortality rates. The frequent exposure to evidence-based information has encouraged most mothers to choose EBF. However, some mothers face challenges in fully implementing exclusive breastfeeding, despite the necessary information and support from healthcare workers. Although antenatal services are available in all public health facilities in South Africa at no cost, some pregnant women do not receive them, either on their own accord or as a result of circumstances beyond their control. Research suggests that antenatal and postnatal counselling and education can significantly increase the likelihood of a mother choosing EBF as the choice of feed for her infant, and it also equips her to overcome some of the challenges that come with EBF (Piro & Ahmed, 2020).

Many new mothers complain of inadequate milk production, which is one of the reasons for mixed feeding or ceasing breastfeeding entirely (Ngongalah *et al*., 2018). Most mothers who complain of poor milk production have cited the constant crying as evidence that the baby is not satiated from the little milk they produce, which may increase the mother's stress and reduce her ability to lactate (Lau, 2001; Ngongalah *et al*., 2018). Some women have pre-existing perceptions about breastfeeding even before they fall pregnant or bear children, some of which are based on flawed or fictitious information.

Some young mothers think that breastfeeding makes their breasts sag, making them less sexually attractive (Apanga, 2014). Apanga (2014) further suggests that a previous history of breastfeeding has no relationship with the sagging of breasts or breast ptosis, as it is medically known. Instead, a woman's age and obesity are the most common risk factors for breast ptosis (Arefanian *et al*., 2018). The aversion of some mothers, particularly young mothers, to breastfeeding due to the fear of losing their sexual appeal highlights how women are perceived in society. It sheds light on the explicit and hyper-sexualisation of women and the misogynistic culture of objectification, which has led to some women self-objectifying.

An article published in the Menoufia Medical Journal in 2019 reported that 89.9% of mothers consider stopping breastfeeding due to tiredness resulting from frequent feeds, while 86.2% complain of no/poor milk production, with 53.3% reporting painful nipples during breastfeeding, 47.7 reported feeling embarrassed with breastfeeding, especially in public, and about 43.1% reported difficulty in attaching the infant to the nipple (Shaheen & Nashat, 2019).

Skin-to-skin contact between a mother and her newborn baby is a great enabler for facilitating lactation, and there is enough scientific evidence supporting its effectiveness (Thepha *et al*., 2019). However, not all mothers can experience this within an hour after birth due to the infant's health status. Some newborns may require immediate medical attention, making it challenging to initiate proper breastfeeding within an hour of birth, while other infants may refuse to nurse due to delayed initiation or nipple confusion (Thepha *et al*., 2017). These challenges can significantly affect a mother's ability to breastfeed exclusively for the recommended duration.

- **Family influence**

The environment in which a mother and her baby live is a crucial factor in determining how the child is fed. In most African families, decisions about raising and feeding children are made in consultation with the household's elders, and mothers cannot unilaterally decide on these matters (Afaya *et al.,* 2017). Although pregnant and postnatal women are usually the only ones who attend antenatal and postnatal classes and other reproductive

health-related sessions, women in many African communities have the power to decide on reproductive health issues and breastfeeding (Afaya *et al.,* 2017). Mothers-in-law were highly regarded in African families, particularly for their role in making health decisions for the entire family, including feeding options for infants (Apanga, 2014).

• **Other responsibilities**

Factors beyond a mother's control, such as work responsibilities, can force mothers to wean their infants prematurely or resort to mixed feeding. For example, working mothers, particularly those employed by private companies like restaurants, may not be granted a paid maternity leave and may have to resume work before the recommended exclusive breastfeeding period of six months is over (Matotoka, 2021). Although it is common practice in South Africa that mothers have the right to two thirty-minute breaks for expression, some workplaces may not have facilities that enable mothers to express milk comfortably.

Rising teenage pregnancies in South Africa mean that a significant number of new mothers are school-going teenagers. The number of teenage girls falling pregnant each year is around 30%, and the number is rapidly increasing (Amoo *et al*., 2018; Mchunu *et al.*, 2012). A recent study estimates childbirths among teenagers between the ages of 10-14 years increased from 2 727 in 2017/18 to 4 053 in 202/21 which is an increase of 48.7% while in the age group of 15-19 years, there was a 17.4% increase in the 2020/21 financial year (Barron *et al*., 2022). Unfortunately, school-going mothers are not afforded any leave, meaning they must resume classes as soon as they have recovered from childbirth. Breast milk expression is challenging because facilities are not tailored to accommodate such needs. When school-going mothers eventually reunite with their infants after work or after school, they may be told to express milk and discard it as it is believed to be contaminated by spirits encountered during the day.

• **Community/Society**

To address barriers to proper infant feeding practices, it is essential to view it as a "social practice" where the mother, the infant, and their family are members of the broader society with influence on feeding choices (Lazarus *et al*., 2013; Rollins *et al*., 2016). Societal

norms and beliefs play a significant role in a mother's decision-making process concerning breastfeeding. In many African communities, grandmothers and mothers-in-law often influence a mother's decision on exclusive breastfeeding. Whenever a child cries, many family members conclude that the crying results from hunger and coerce the mother to introduce solids before six months, leading to disputes within the family (Kakute *et al*., 2005). Some African cultures also believe that sexual intercourse while breastfeeding contaminates breast milk, which makes the baby ill, leading some mothers to opt to cease breastfeeding altogether for fear of losing their partners due to sexual deprivation (Chakona, 2020). Similarly, in some Kenyan communities, there is a superstition that if an evil person sees a breastfeeding mother's breast, the milk becomes cursed, making the child ill, which deters women from breastfeeding in public (Wanjohi *et al*., 2017). Such beliefs perpetuate the condemnation of breastfeeding mothers in public. Westernisation has also increased the rejection and discrimination of mothers who breastfeed their children in public in many African countries due to moral reasons in line with Western norms.

In the United Kingdom, some mothers avoid or prematurely cease breastfeeding due to the fear of embarrassment with public breastfeeding (Amir, 2014; Morris *et al*., 2016). Societal perceptions and reactions to breastfeeding in public continue to pose a significant threat to improving global exclusive breastfeeding rates. Mothers face the dilemma of either conforming to public expectations on when it is acceptable to breastfeed or risking banishment to feed their infants in public toilets. The tension regarding the acceptability of breastfeeding in public seems to stem from the breast as the organ secreting milk, creating a conflict between "clean" secretions such as tears, and "contaminated" ones such as urine (Amir, 2014).

- **Health system**

Some mothers who desire to breastfeed their infants often face significant challenges. Separation of the mother and infant due to treatment in hospital settings is a common occurrence, which can result in the infant being fed formula until the mother is available to express milk. Additionally, the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Africa initially discouraged HIV-positive mothers from breastfeeding. However, with the availability of antiretroviral

treatment, the World Health Organization now recommends that HIV-positive mothers on life-long antiretroviral treatment should breastfeed their children until they reach 24 months of age (West *et al*., 2019; WHO, 2021). In my experience as a Dietitian in practice, I came to realise that despite this recommendation and available research supporting it, there are still healthcare workers who advise against breastfeeding in the context of HIV, which can prevent willing mothers from breastfeeding their infants.

In hospitals, it is not uncommon for newborn infants to be given formula after delivery, which is known as pre-lacteal feeding. This practice is typically carried out if the infant was delivered through caesarean section, or if the mother experiences poor milk production (Jama *et al*., 2017). Pre-lacteal feeding is defined as the act of providing an infant with foods or liquids other than colostrum before the establishment of breastfeeding (Kavle *et al*., 2017). This practice is a significant obstacle to exclusive breastfeeding because even if the mother decides to breastfeed exclusively after discharge until the child turns six months, her infant will not be considered exclusively breastfed due to the stringent criteria for exclusive breastfeeding.

In some cases, it may be necessary for either the mother or infant to be admitted to a specialised ward, resulting in their separation, and making rooming-in infeasible. Rooming-in involves admitting the mother and infant to the same ward to facilitate on-demand breastfeeding (Ng *et al.,* 2019). The prolonged separation between the mother and her newborn can lead to reduced milk production and undermine the mother's confidence in her ability to breastfeed adequately.

1.3.3 Societal perceptions of public breastfeeding

To comprehend why some mothers, avoid breastfeeding in public or stop earlier than recommended, an examination and evaluation of how society perceives women who breastfeed in public is necessary. A 2014 study conducted in New York investigating the "perception and attitude towards breastfeeding in public" found that over 50% (50.4%) of the study participants were "not supportive" of mothers breastfeeding in public, and most of these respondents were senior citizens over the age of 65 years (MulreadyWard & Hackett, 2014). The age of participants who opposed or were uncomfortable with seeing

a mother breastfeeding in public may reflect the moral values imposed on their generation.

A 2011 study conducted in the United Kingdom revealed that approximately 11% of mothers reported having been "stopped or made to feel uncomfortable" for breastfeeding their children in public (Morris *et al.,* 2016).

In Italy, society's perception of breastfeeding in public is considered either "embarrassing or taboo", which is one of the reasons for its poor performance in exclusive breastfeeding rates. Although there is no law prohibiting women from breastfeeding their infants publicly, the perception of the public towards breastfeeding in public deters most women from sustaining exclusive breastfeeding for the recommended duration (DeMaria *et al.,* 2020).

Some communities are more accepting and tolerant of public breastfeeding. A South Korean study on the attitude towards public breastfeeding as a barrier to breastfeeding reported that over half (53.9%) of the participants disagreed with the view that "women should not breastfeed in public", while 64% of the participants reported that they "are not uncomfortable" with seeing mothers breastfeed in public (LoCascio & Cho, 2017). The responses from these participants are unsurprising when one considers the long history of the family-oriented culture of South Korea. Having a culture centred around family moral values seems to have partially immunised South Koreans against discrimination and harassment of breastfeeding mothers.

Limited information exists on society's perception regarding breastfeeding in public on the African continent. The best available article on the subject is from research conducted in Alexandra in Gauteng province, South Africa. This study reported that about 69.2% of mothers were comfortable breastfeeding their children in public, while only 38.3% of them were against the notion that breastfeeding in public is embarrassing (Nyaloko *et al*., 2020a). Nearly half of the mothers who felt comfortable with breastfeeding in public held the view that it was embarrassing to breastfeed publicly. An overwhelming majority of the community (81.2%) said they were comfortable seeing mothers breastfeeding in public, with 84.1% of the participants indicating that they support the practice. However, less than half the participants (community) agreed that it was culturally acceptable for mothers to

expose their breasts in public to feed their children (Nyaloko *et al*., 2020a). Even though the community supports mothers who breastfeed in public, most of them do not believe it is culturally acceptable or appropriate to do so.

It appears that most African countries will not be able to achieve the 50% target set by the WHA unless drastic measures are taken urgently. For the continent to move towards achieving the target, an environment that is supportive of breastfeeding, particularly breastfeeding in public, needs to be fostered. All barriers to exclusive breastfeeding must be adequately addressed, particularly the harassment and condemnation of mothers who breastfeed in public as this issue has not been addressed in South Africa, and the law is silent on this matter (Nyaloko *et al*., 2020).

1.3.4 Public breastfeeding harassment incidences recorded in South Africa

Given the strong recommendation for breastfeeding as a life-saving strategy for children by WHO and UNICEF and the attributable benefits to society, one would assume everyone would show support for mothers and make breastfeeding much easier. However, we have seen several media reports where mothers in South Africa were allegedly harassed and, in some instances, banished from public spaces just for merely breastfeeding uncovered. In this research public space refers to any place where a mother and her child are legally permitted to be which can be state or privately owned.

On one Sunday afternoon in 2018, a 36-year-old mother Tumi Mokgalabone was breastfeeding her three-month-old son in an Edgars store at Mall of Africa when a female employee approached her and "rudely told her to stop breastfeeding in the store as it was not allowed and rather go and breastfeed in one of the fitting cubicles" (Mahapo, 2018). To add more insult her humiliation when she complained to the store manager her was not dealt with discretely but rather addressed in the presence of other store customers. Edgars has since apologized to Tumi for her experience. Seemingly this was not the first time Edgars made the news for ill-treating a breastfeeding mother in one of their stores. Tasneem Botha is one of the mothers who was banished from an Edgars store in Cavendish Square for breastfeeding her five-week-old baby in-store (Qukula, 2016). After this incident, Edgars vowed to take corrective and preventative measures like educating its staff but given that Tumi also

experienced the same prejudice two years later it is fair to assume that not much had been done at the time.

Kulula Airlines was no different in their treatment of breastfeeding mothers on their planes, on the 9th of July 2016 Sara Rambarram was travelling with her husband and their eighteen-months-old baby from Lanseria to Durban when her baby began crying on take-off, she tried facing the window so that she does not feed her baby in full view of other passengers. As she was breastfeeding an air hostess caused a scene when she started shouting at Sara telling her to show her fellow passengers some respect and consideration by covering up Sara her husband tried to lay a complaint with the air hostess's supervisor all she did was to advise them to file a complaint with the complaints department at the airline. She did and only received a generic apology from the airline with no further communication (Rambarran, 2016).

One would assume health facilities will be at the forefront in promoting, supporting, and protecting breastfeeding but some of them are no different from retailers. Sizile Makola was breastfeeding her child in the waiting area of a private health care facility when a nurse approached her saying some of the other patients were complaining about her exposing herself in public as that is unacceptable and was instructed to go breastfeed in the nurse's station behind a curtain. She tried raising her grievance with the doctor who told her that the facility caters for all ethnic groups and cultures and that in some cultures public breastfeeding is unacceptable (Makola, 2015). Sizile Makola's story is greatly disturbing particularly because she was told "other patients are offended by her breastfeeding, and that the facility caters for different ethnic and cultural groups which in some cultures they find it unacceptable". As much as these media reports may be dated, they remain relevant because I am of the view that women in rural areas who have no access to such platforms where they can report their experiences would have their stories publicized, so I think there are many more similar and recent stories. What is more worrisome is the reason given to Sizile that in some cultures and ethnic groups breastfeeding in public is unacceptable from Sizile's name fair to assume she is a black South African mother, meaning what is acceptable and promoted in her culture offends other ethnic and cultural groups.

1.4   Problem statement

The WHO and UNICEF have issued recommendations to countries worldwide to eliminate barriers to the practice of exclusive breastfeeding as the best form of nourishment. In response, South Africa, like many other African nations, has concentrated on policies and interventions in the basic conditions of employment. These include provisions for longer periods of maternity leave and the introduction of two breaks (30 minutes each) for lactating mothers to express breast milk as stipulated in section 26(1) of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act (Department of Employment and Labour, 2018). Additionally, regulations prohibiting the promotion and advertising of breast milk substitutes were introduced.

However, the official implementation of these recommendations by the South African authorities has resulted in an uncritical acceptance of a Western-centric model. This acceptance has provided fertile ground for the perpetuation of the "sexual objectification of women" and mothers (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The exposure of female breasts in public has come to be associated with a moral and legal transgression of Western-inspired ideas of propriety and sanctions, thus leading to the condemnation of public breastfeeding.

The South African government's failure to introduce "appropriate laws to protect mothers" (Cole, 2016) from public harassment and condemnation, especially at the hands of public officials while breastfeeding in public, has further undermined pre-colonial, indigenous African cultural values regarding the African practice of breastfeeding. Various forms of public censure, especially in the urban centres of South Africa, have invariably led to the cultural alienation of African women from their communities.

The adoption of ambiguous policies from WHO and UNICEF has made African women into outcasts in their own country due to their inability to assimilate into the bourgeois family life of Western people. They are often required to absent themselves from public and family spaces to feed their infants. This enforced behaviour has significantly contributed to the erosion and desecration of the moral ties that have historically

reinforced solidaristic and dignified forms of social interaction within African families and communities.

1.5   Research questions

Why has South Africa, in the post-colonial and post-apartheid era, failed to recognise public breastfeeding as a normal, non-sexual act essential for child-rearing?

What implications and consequences does this have for African communities and family life, given the uncritical adoption of a Western-centric model of breastfeeding in public, based on foreign norms and values, which has led to cultural and moral alienation in a country where the majority of citizens are African?

These questions will form the basis of an investigation into the possibility of restoring the freedom, dignity, and pride historically and culturally associated with the birth, nourishment, and development of African children. From the African perspective, a person's sense of self is ultimately derived from a pre-colonial system of norms and values, where community and family life are considered foundational to a good society.

An honest and open debate about the profound significance and relevance of indigenous African thinking, and specifically Ubuntu's moral philosophy, is urgently required to address this problematic issue. Through an extensive engagement with Mogobe Benard Ramose's work on the philosophy, I will present arguments on how Western centrism is problematic to African motherhood and also argue that ubuntu is a better approach to the African way of life and motherhood which is primarily inspired by the work of Ramose.

1.6 Objectives of the Research

This research aimed to investigate the explicit harassment and cultural alienation of mothers who breastfeed publicly, leading to epistemic confusion and conflict between pre-colonial breastfeeding practices and those imposed on South Africans during colonisation, apartheid, and beyond. The specific objectives of this research were:

- To expose and critique how pre-colonial African cultural values have been eroded by the importation and imposition of Western cultural values on the African community and family life.

- To critique the Western-centric ideology that sexualises and commodifies breastfeeding, leading to a sense of cultural alienation and historical loss.

- To compare Western and African epistemologies regarding traditional cultural perceptions of the female body and their implications for breastfeeding in public.

- To advocate for the normative and conceptual foundations of Ubuntu philosophy as a representative of an important and relevant corrective and challenge to the hegemonic grip of the Western model of breastfeeding currently in force in post-apartheid South Africa.

1.7   Rationale and Significance

There is a lack of current scholarship and research on the nature and impact of the current liberal, Western-centric approach to the practice of breastfeeding, particularly in public, for African women. Most of these women still value pre-colonial norms and ideas as the only authentic moral foundation for breastfeeding. The rationale for this research was to increase awareness and initiate discussions about the problematic elevation and imposition of the Western perception of womanhood as the ideal approach to breastfeeding.

The uncritical adoption and imposition of the Western model of breastfeeding lead to public harassment and condemnation of African women, who often face criticism for indulging in a practice that is regarded as primitive and uncivilised in present-day South Africa. This research sought to demonstrate that a critical appropriation of the foundational norms and values at the heart of Ubuntu philosophy can provide an appropriate and relevant counterargument to the Western-centric perception of womanhood and breastfeeding.

Fiona Woollard (2019) presented a philosophical analysis of what is required to justify breastfeeding in public which is one of the few academic writings I came across where an

author wrote about breastfeeding in public from a philosophical perspective. Though Wollard's article is not cited much in subsequent sections of this research her arguments are valid and essential in arguing for the normalization of breastfeeding in public from a philosophical perspective. She makes the argument that society believes or presumes that breastfeeding in public is "potentially deviant" and thus needs to be justified and should be done discretely if it's to be accepted but raises the point that breastfeeding does not require justification as it is a moral right (Woollard, 2019, p.6). she further argues that mothers do not need to justify their moral right to breastfeed based on the health or developmental benefits of breastfeeding but rather on "the moral right to pursue our family way of life, and moral right to intimacy between parent and child" (Woolard, 2019, p.5). The section on how philosophical justification of breastfeeding in public should be based on the moral right to pursue our family way of life resonates significantly with what my research sought to do as I argue that breastfeeding in public is a moral right, particularly for African women as it is in line with their family way of life.

1.8   Methodology

This research employed a qualitative methodology, which relied on secondary data obtained from desktop-based data collection and formal peer-reviewed publications of relevant studies in the field of research. The research was in the form of a Thematic Analysis research. Thematic analysis is a widely used approach to qualitative research with wide application in different disciplines, this method is useful when a researcher seeks to understand behaviours, experiences, or thoughts from data sources (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Given that I seek to understand how people perceive breastfeeding in public and how they behave when seeing an act and the experience of mothers who have breastfed their infants in public using information from online academic sources.

The contemporary body of literature published in the field was reviewed to demonstrate that breastfeeding is typically construed from the dominant Western-centric cultural perspective, overshadowing African cultural traditions. Specifically, this research was developed within a South African context to reinforce the contextualist perspective that informs the epistemic cultural position of an African (male) philosophy student.

1.9   Ethics

This research received ethical clearance from the UNISA College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee, with reference number 13906607_CREC_CHS__2021 (see Appendix A).

1.10 Chapter layout

Chapter One presents the introduction and background to the research it also sets out what this research aims to achieve, and the methodology employed to achieve the research objectives.

Chapter Two reviews and critiques the multinational legislative frameworks and policies that are essential in protecting, promoting, and supporting breastfeeding as mandated by WHO. There will be a presentation of treaties and laws from various countries with a bearing on public breastfeeding rights.

Chapter Three is intended to critically examine and critique the modern nuclear family structure based on its moral status the role it played in perpetuating patriarchy and how the neo-colonial imposition of this family structure as the ideal structure in other nations.

Chapter Four focuses on the normative foundations of pre-colonial, indigenous African life, intending to demonstrate its continued relevance and significance for most Africans, despite the harsh cultural and social impact of colonial modernity.

Chapter Five critiques global capitalism and its problematic universalization of the Western bourgeois family and how Africans were coerced to adopt this family structure. In the adoption of this structure, African families underwent numerous changes most of which were destructive such as labour migration, and the emergence of the African middle class, all these harming African families, especially motherhood.

Chapter Six aims to critically examine and shed light on the perception of motherhood within the Western bourgeois framework. The primary discussion will be on the impact this perception had on African communities, especially concerning motherhood and breastfeeding.

Chapter Seven presents an overview of ubuntu philosophy as a relevant and valid epistemological framework for comprehending and interpreting the African lived experience, with a specific focus on motherhood to execute this a brief historical account of the philosophy is warranted and its interpretation of personhood and by extension motherhood.

Chapter Eight gives arguments for the activism of breastfeeding in public from an African philosophical perspective by applying the key principles of ubuntu as identified by Lovemore Mbigi such as compassion, survival, solidarity, respect, and dignity with the suggestion of a new doctrine of the activism of public breastfeeding rights in an African context.

Chapter Nine is a summary of key arguments presented in all chapters from one to eight, with a response to the research question and an account of how the aims were addressed then finally recommendations on future research.

CHAPTER 2: MULTINATIONAL AGREEMENTS, TREATIES, AND LEGISLATION RELATED TO BREASTFEEDING

2.1 Introduction

While laws cannot necessarily modify human behaviour or attitudes, they can safeguard rights and provide recourse for individuals whose rights have been violated within a given society. This chapter critiques the legislative framework of international organisations which aims to protect, promote, and support breastfeeding as mandated by the World Health Organization. The first section (2.1.1 to 2.1.4) presents legislative policies from international organisations, followed by a discussion of relevant laws and policies from various countries that represent a national consensus, even if not universally endorsed. The final section of this chapter provides a detailed discussion of relevant laws and policies in post-apartheid South Africa to demonstrate their articulation with the international (Western-centric) legislative framework, overlooking the African cultural and moral perspective. The chapter intends to lay the groundwork for a later discussion of the African hermeneutical framework of human self-understanding.

This chapter focuses on a discussion and critique of certain treaties that could help protect public breastfeeding. However, the primary aim is to engage critically with the documents that South Africa has ratified and is a signatory to, as it is legally bound to them. Breastfeeding is a human right and is warranted as such, given that the South African Constitution in chapter 2 (Bill of Rights) section 28, subsection (1) (c) states that "children have a right to basic nutrition" (Republic of South Africa, 1996). Breast milk is the most fundamental and natural form of infant nutrition. The central claim is that infants' most basic, nutritious, and natural method of feeding for good health and well-being – during infancy and beyond – is directly from the breast.

Furthermore, the maltreatment of mothers, particularly African mothers, while breastfeeding in public is considered an act of unfair discrimination and a violation of human rights, especially from an African ethical perspective. Therefore, the need to analyse (and reconsider) the implications of the uncritical adoption of the UN-inspired

promulgation of international human rights agreements, aimed at protecting individuals against unfair discrimination under the law.

2.1.1 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In 1948, the United Nations General Assembly introduced a declaration recognising the inherent dignity, and equal, and inalienable rights of all humans as the foundation of freedom, justice, and world peace (United Nations, 1948). The aim was to restore human dignity to those previously deprived and to ensure that all human beings enjoy the same rights under the law worldwide.

Article 7 of the Declaration states that all people are equal before the law and should enjoy the same protection without discrimination (United Nations, 1948). This article ensures equality before the law, meaning that both men and women should be subjected to the same treatment by the law. However, in most countries, there is no equality in this regard, which is unfair discrimination by the law.

Article 16(3) of the Declaration recognises the family as a natural and fundamental group or unit of society that requires special protection by society and the state (United Nations, 1948). The condemnation of women for breastfeeding their children in public is an attack on the African family structure and perpetuates the undermining of its family values. Article 25(2) proclaims "special care and assistance for mothers and children" while Article 27(1) declares "everyone's right to freely participate in the cultural life of their community" (United Nations, 1948). The unwillingness of some countries, such as South Africa, to introduce legislation that protects mothers and children while breastfeeding prevents women from the African culture from raising and feeding their children according to the cultural values of their communities.

2.1.2 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

The UNICEF introduced the UNCRC treaty in 1989, with 54 articles and 196 member states being signatories to it. The articles of particular interest in this chapter are Articles 3, 5, and 6.

Article 3 of the UNCRC states that state parties must ensure that "in all actions concerning the child, administrative and legislative authorities will be of primary consideration" (United Nations, 1989). Breastfeeding is in the child's best interest due to numerous health and psychosocial benefits, so failing to introduce laws that fully protect mothers and infants from being harassed, discriminated against, and sometimes banished from public spaces for breastfeeding is an indication of conflicting interests. Mothers are often ordered to cover up their breasts, including their baby's face when breastfeeding in public as a way to avoid offending other people. Forcing the infant to be fed while covered up even on hot days just to avoid offending people cannot be perceived to be in the child's best interests.

Article 5 of the UNCRC states that state parties must "respect the responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents" (United Nations, 1989). Parents have a responsibility and duty to give their children the best nutritious food they can access, and it is their right to raise their children in line with their traditional and cultural values. Breastfeeding remains the most nutritious and easily accessible infant feed, so a lack of legislation to prevent the victimisation of mothers who breastfeed in public is making it difficult for these mothers to fully discharge their responsibilities and duties towards their infants. By failing to protect the freedom for mothers to breastfeed in public, the state is complaisant in preventing these mothers from raising (feeding) their children in line with their cultural values.

Breastfeeding has been associated with a decrease in infant mortality. Preventing mothers from breastfeeding their infants anytime, anywhere, thereby compelling them to introduce feeds that may endanger their infants' health, contradicts Article 6 of the UNCRC. In this section of the treaty, state parties have committed to "ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child" (United Nations, 1989, p. 4). The imposition of restrictions on how and when mothers can breastfeed their infants can contribute to the early cessation of breastfeeding and the introduction of formula, which can jeopardise the infant's health and weaken the bond between mother and child nurtured through breastfeeding.

2.1.3 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

The relationship between the mother's right to breastfeed her infant and the child's right to be breastfed by her mother can be perceived as conflicting at times, but in this instance, they are presented as complementary because this research argues for the support of mothers who choose to breastfeed in public rather than forcing them to breastfeed in a way that is aligned with their child's rights. This section critically discusses the United Nations treaty designed to protect women from gender-based discrimination. In Article 2 of the treaty, state parties have adopted several resolutions that could potentially reduce discrimination against breastfeeding mothers.

Among these resolutions, Article 2 (a) requires state parties to "adopt the principle of equality of men and women and introduce laws to this effect" (UN, 1979). Article 2 (e) requires state parties to "take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization, or enterprise" (UN, 1979). In Article 2, sections (f) and (g), state parties resolved to "take all relevant measures to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations which constitute discrimination against women and to repeal all national laws which constitute discrimination against women" (UN, 1979). The implication of CEDAW Article 2 (a), (e), (f), and (g) is that state parties should take legislative measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including breastfeeding mothers, by amending or abolishing laws that perpetuate this practice.

However, it is disappointing that countries like South Africa, as signatories to this treaty, are not fully complying. Section 9 of Chapter 2, part 3, of the South African Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act 32 of 2007 still prohibits "persons 18 years or older to cause or compel anyone 18 years or older to witness exposure of or display or causing display of genital organs, anus or female breasts" (South African Parliament, 2007). The issue of contention in this Act is that female breasts are classified under the same category as genital organs and anus, making the public exposure of female breasts a lewd act. This is unfair discrimination against women because the exposure of male breasts does not constitute a lewd act and is not a violation of the Sexual Offences Act,

even though men do not need to display their breasts in public as they serve no essential role, unlike women's breasts.

Moreover, CEDAW Article 5 (b) requires state parties to take all appropriate action to ensure that family education includes a proper understanding of maternity as a social function and that the interest of the child is the primary consideration in all cases (UN, 1979). This section underscores the importance of educating society about the role of maternity as a social function and the centre of the family, and the need to create a supportive and enabling environment for mothers to breastfeed their children in public.

2.1.4 African Charter on the Rights of the Child

Under the African Charter on the Rights of the Child, introduced in July 1990, 49 member states have signed and assented to the treaty as a supplement to the UNCRC treaty, aimed at dealing with unique challenges on the continent. Article 4 of the treaty mandates state parties to ensure that "the best interest of the child will be of paramount importance in all situations, and all legislation dealing with children should ensure this" (African Union, 1990). However, South Africa's Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act of 2007 criminalises the exposure of female breasts in public, even during breastfeeding, which goes against the best interest of children who have the right to be breastfed anytime and anywhere. As such, the state has failed to implement this section of the treaty.

Moreover, the continued discrimination and harassment of breastfeeding mothers in public reveal a society that lacks knowledge and appreciation of the role and benefits of breastfeeding, which is also a gap in the information distributed by authorities about nutrition and breastfeeding. Article 14 2 (h) of the African Charter on the Rights of the Child mandates state parties to "ensure that all sectors of society, in particular, parents, children, community leaders, and community workers are informed and supported in the use of basic knowledge of child health and nutrition, the advantages of breastfeeding…" (African Union, 1990).

Furthermore, it is inhumane to force breastfeeding mothers to breastfeed their children in germ-infested toilets or cover them up during breastfeeding, which may lead to discomfort and fussiness for the child and affect the mother's emotional well-being. This practice

contradicts Article 21 (a), wherein state parties consented to "protecting children against harmful social and cultural practices that are prejudicial to the health of the child" (African Union, 1990).

2.2   Country-specific laws regulating breastfeeding in public.

Some countries have enacted laws that explicitly criminalise discrimination against mothers who breastfeed in public. Such laws may safeguard mothers and infants who must breastfeed in public. This section presents an analysis and evaluation of these laws.

2.2.1 The United States of America (USA)

The United States of America (USA) has progressive legislation on breastfeeding. "92% of the 50 states comprising the country have laws allowing mothers to breastfeed in any location, and 57% have exempted breastfeeding from indecency laws" (Nguyen & Hawkins, 2012). This implies that most states in the USA permit mothers to breastfeed in public and are protected by the law, and in over half the states, the law explicitly states that mothers will not be penalised for indecency.

Among these 50 states is Colorado, which authorises mothers to breastfeed their children in any location the mother is lawfully allowed to be (State of Colorado, 2016). The state of Minnesota has a similar law to that of Colorado but with more specifics. Women in Minnesota are allowed to "breastfeed in any location where the mother and her baby are legally allowed to be, irrespective of whether the nipple is visible or not" (State of Minnesota, 2021). In Minnesota, mothers are not obliged to cover themselves and their infants when breastfeeding. In the District of Columbia, mothers can report incidents of breastfeeding harassment to the Office of Human Rights, providing some remedy to mothers who have been ill-treated for responding to their basic maternal instinct (District of Columbia, 2019).

2.2.2 The United Kingdom (UK)

In the United Kingdom, under the Equality Act, it is unlawful "to treat a woman unfairly because she has given birth, including, in particular, treating her unfavourably because

she is breastfeeding" (UK Government, 2010). Some countries under the United Kingdom have enacted laws in line with the Equality Act.

Under the Scotland Act of 2005, (1) it is illegal to "deliberately prevent or stop a person in charge of a child from feeding milk to that child in a public place or on licensed premises" (Scottish Parliament, 2005). Under the same Act (4) (a), breastfeeding is one of the public feeding methods in public protected by law. Section 2 (1) of the same Act dealing with vicarious liability, states: "Anything done by a person in the course of that person's employment shall, in any proceedings brought under this Act, be treated for this Act as done also by that person's employer, whether or not it was done with the employer's knowledge or approval" (Scottish Parliament, 2005). This Act is particularly noteworthy because it not only protects mothers who must breastfeed in public, but companies are also responsible for the violation of the Act by their employees, even if the company did not mandate their actions. Imposing a penalty on the company due to the actions of its employees could motivate most of them to provide breastfeeding sensitivity training to their employees and create policies that expressly prohibit anyone, including their customers, from harassing mothers who breastfeed on their premises.

2.2.3 Australia

The Australian Sex Discrimination Act of 1984 7AA (2) prohibits "discrimination against a breastfeeding woman by imposing or proposing to impose a condition, requirement, or practice that has or is likely to have the effect of disadvantaging women who are breastfeeding" (Australian Government, 1984). However, the common and unacceptable practice of banishing breastfeeding mothers from public spaces to breastfeeding their infants in public toilets or forcing them to cover their children when breastfeeding can disadvantage such mothers. Such practices can lead to mothers being socially isolated, and they are expected to breastfeed their young children in unhygienic environments that could cause discomfort. Additionally, covering the baby's face during feeding could lead to a loss of eye contact, which has been shown to affect milk production and secretion (Krol & Grossmann, 2018).

2.2.4 Canada

The Canadian province of Manitoba has enacted The Human Rights Code that prohibits unfair discrimination. Under section 9, subsection (2) (f), the Code prohibits discrimination based on "sex, including sex-determined characteristics such as pregnancy, the possibility of pregnancy, or circumstances related to pregnancy" (Manitoba Province, 1987). Since breastfeeding is a result of childbirth which is a circumstance related to pregnancy, discrimination against a mother for breastfeeding could be considered a violation of the Code based on pregnancy-related matters. Mothers who experience discrimination can file a complaint to the commission within a year of the offence. However, it is concerning that the Code is not explicit about what "circumstances related to pregnancy" mean, leaving the application of this section subject to personal interpretation.

2.2.5 Kenya

One of the most explicit and relevant legislation regarding breastfeeding in public is from Kenya, under the National Assembly Bills of 2019. In part 2 section 9, subsection (1) & (2), the bill provides that "a woman may breastfeed in public, and the act of a woman breastfeeding in public shall not be construed to amount to an indecent act" (National Assembly Bills, 2019). This legislation not only protects a mother's right to breastfeed in any public location but also exempts breastfeeding from indecency acts. The Kenyan government's efforts to protect the right of the mother to breastfeed in public, and for her infant to be breastfed, is an indication of the country's efforts to abolish laws imposed by its colonisers, which sought to undermine African cultural values and practices.

2.2.6 South African laws and policies with implications on breastfeeding in public

In 2011, WHO urged countries to take decisive action to reduce infant mortality rates, with a particular focus on the promotion and support of breastfeeding. South Africa responded by drafting and promulgating the "Tshwane Declaration of Support for Breastfeeding in South Africa", which will be referred to as the Declaration. The Declaration was facilitated by UNICEF and WHO and was attended by the Minister of Health, the Deputy Minister,

traditional leaders and healers, academics, civil society, and Members of Executive Councils (MEC), among others. The attendees declared that the country will "actively promote, protect and support exclusive breastfeeding, and take actions to demonstrate this commitment, this includes further mainstreaming of breastfeeding in all relevant policies, legislation, strategies and protocols" (South African, 2011).

They also committed to ensuring "comprehensive services are provided to ensure that all mothers are supported to exclusively breastfeed their infants for six months" (South African, 2011). It is disappointing that the delegates did not discuss amending the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act to exempt breastfeeding as an indecent act and to encourage private and public institutions to adopt policies protecting mothers who breastfeed on their premises. If the Declaration had been properly implemented, it could have been an effective tool in changing society's perception of breastfeeding in public, particularly since civil society organisations and traditional leaders were represented at the meeting, and they could have used their influence in society to promote and encourage mothers to breastfeed in public and encourage society to embrace the practice.

The Tshwane Declaration also committed to regulating the promotion of infant formula to the public, and in 2012, amendments to the "Foodstuffs, Cosmetics, and Disinfectants Act, 1972 (Act 54 of 1972) Regulations Relating to Foodstuffs for Infants and Young Children" were made to deliver on this commitment. The regulation is commonly referred to as R991 and prohibits the advertisement and marketing of infant formula to the public (S.A Department of Health, 2012). However, there are loopholes in the act that formula manufacturing companies exploit. One of the most basic loopholes in the regulation is that South African TV programmes do not promote breastfeeding, and most soap operas depict formula feeding as the primary method of feeding. The regulation could have been used to encourage television content producers to promote breastfeeding, especially public breastfeeding, in their programmes to condition society to embrace the practice. One of the reasons why exclusive breastfeeding rates in the country are not improving as expected could be due to laws that do not protect the right to breastfeed in public.

Currently, South Africa has no laws that criminalise breastfeeding in public or protect the right to breastfeed in public. Although there is a perception that "mothers have a legal right to breastfeed in public and at work" (Foschini, 2016), a search for any legislation that proclaims the right for mothers to breastfeed in public has yielded no results. Currently, it is fair to conclude that South Africa has no legislation that explicitly addresses the practice of breastfeeding in public. However, due to the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act of 2007, one could argue that breastfeeding in public is a criminal offence, particularly since the Act criminalises exposing female breasts in public (South African Parliament, 2007). The failure to exempt breastfeeding from this Act makes it possible for opponents of public breastfeeding to continue their discrimination and harassment of mothers who breastfeed in public places without any inhibition.

The South African Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act, previously known as the Immorality Act, was enacted in 1957 by the apartheid government. The majority of laws introduced by the apartheid regime were intended to subjugate Africans and dismantle or destabilise African family structures. The introduction of such laws was a disguise to "civilise the primitive, ungodly and immoral Africans" through the imposition of Christianity and the transfer of Western laws and legal institutions to African societies, which was accomplished through colonisation and continued by the apartheid government (Ibhawoh, 2009). The traditional dress codes of many African communities include toplessness for both genders, but the importation of Western laws and religion altered their way of life and dress. The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act made it illegal for women to remain topless in public as part of their traditional dress code, a law that the democratic government has yet to repeal as part of rectifying past injustices.

At the dawn of democracy, a new Constitution was promulgated to correct the injustices of the past, including gender-based discrimination and the treatment of African cultures as inferior to Western cultures. The preamble of the Constitution states that it is adopted to "heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice, and fundamental human rights" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 1). The retention of archaic apartheid laws such as part 3 s8 (9) (c) and s21 (3) [9] of the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act, which are socially unjust and deprive women of their

right to provide basic nutrition to their children, is a travesty of justice. The Act is socially unjust as it permits the public exposure of male breasts while prohibiting the exposure of female breasts, which serve a significant role in infant feeding, while the former serves no significant purpose.

Chapter 1 of the Constitution contains the founding provisions, and section 1 declares that the Constitution is based on "human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms, and non-racialism and non-sexism" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 3). Retaining laws that force breastfeeding mothers to feed their infants in toilets or banish them from public spaces is undignified and limits their freedom to feed their infants whenever and however they please. As the perception that the public display of female breasts is immoral or lewd is against African cultural values and constitutes unfair discrimination against women, the principles of non-sexism and non-racialism are insufficiently upheld.

Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution sets out the Bill of Rights, which includes section 9(1) that provides that "everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 5). However, if it is permissible for men to expose their breasts in public without facing legal consequences while women are legally prohibited and not protected from harassment, then the Constitution perpetuates gender discrimination, as detailed in section 9(3), which states that "the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including gender, pregnancy, culture, and others" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 6). Prohibiting African mothers from publicly exposing their breasts for breastfeeding, which is mandated by their culture, while allowing men to expose their breasts without valid reasons is unfair discrimination against women. This discrimination is based on the fact that men's and women's breasts are perceived differently under the Act, and breastfeeding is a result of pregnancy and an essential practice in African culture.

Section 12(2) of the Bill of Rights proclaims, "everyone's right to freedom and security of the person, which includes, (a) to make decisions regarding reproduction and (b) security and control over their body" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 6). Women have the freedom to make decisions on matters of reproduction, and since lactation is a result of

reproduction, they have the liberty to choose how to feed their infant and when and where to expose their breasts when feeding. Dictating women on how they should breastfeed in public and when it is acceptable for them to expose their breasts constitutes a violation of the rights enshrined in this section.

Section 28(1) of Chapter 2 of the Constitution proclaims the children's constitutional rights, and subsection (c) provides that "children have a right to basic nutrition" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 11). The most basic form of nutrition for infants is breast milk, and prohibiting mothers from breastfeeding in public denies their infants' right to basic nutrition.

The Constitution provides and protects the rights of all citizens in the country. However, because children are unable to fully exercise some of their rights and are inherently unable to protect their rights and interests, the Children's Act was enacted. Chapter 2 of the Act in section 6(2) states that "all actions or decisions concerning a child must (b) respect the child's inherent dignity and (c) treat the child equitably and fairly" (South African Parliament, 2005, p. 20). When one looks at how breastfeeding mothers and their infants are treated in public, it is evident that the child's right to inherent dignity is being violated. Forcing a mother to feed her infant in a toilet is demeaning and undignified, and no person would choose or even be comfortable eating in a public toilet. Such treatment of mothers and their infants is unfair, as they are not compelled by society to do so. It is concerning that there seems to be no legal recourse in South Africa for the recurring harassment of mothers and their infants when breastfeeding in public.

Opponents of breastfeeding in public often cite the South African Constitution to justify their unfair discrimination against mothers who breastfeed in public. Section 16 of the Bill of Rights proclaims the right to freedom of expression. S16 (1) provides that "everyone has the right to freedom of expression" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, p. 7). Opponents use this section to express their disapproval of mothers who breastfeed in public and often do so in a rude and demeaning manner. However, it is important to note that s16 (2) (c) restricts the freedom of expression if it constitutes "advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or anything that constitutes incitement to cause harm" (Republic of South Africa, 1996, pp. 7-8). Thus, opponents of breastfeeding in public are limited by the

Constitution, as forcing a mother to ignore her crying and hungry child, forcing her to cover the child up when feeding, or banishing her from breastfeeding in the toilet can cause harm and promote intolerance based on gender and ethnicity, especially as African cultures encourage breastfeeding in public.

Some institutions also use the right to freedom of association under s18 of the Bill of Rights to discriminate against mothers who breastfeed "indiscreetly" on their premises by citing the "right of admission reserved" policy. However, the abuse of this provision by some institutions constitutes unfair discrimination against women, as women are the only ones who breastfeed (in a gender-binary world) and most of these mothers are African. Thus, discrimination against breastfeeding in public is largely experienced by African women who want to nourish their children in the most culturally acceptable way. Such discrimination is therefore based on gender, race, and culture, all of which the South African Constitution prohibits.

2.3   Conclusion

Breastfeeding in public has been a subject of legal debate in many countries including the United States where breastfeeding is considered a human right. In the case of Free the Nipple v. City of Fort Collins, Colo, the Free the Nipple movement challenged the city's legislation prohibiting the exposure of female breasts below the top of the areola, while allowing men to do so, arguing that it constitutes discrimination and a violation of the Equal Protection Clause (Free the Nipple v. City of Fort Collins, Colorado, 2017). Although the court did not rule in favour of the Free the Nipple movement, it made a notable observation that such legislation perpetuates gender stereotypes that female breasts are primarily sexual, whereas male breasts are not (Free the Nipple v. City of Fort Collins, Colorado, 2017).

Another case, The People of the State of New York (Respondent) v. Ramona Santorelli and Mary Lou Schloss (Appellants), saw the arrest of two women who had exposed part of their breasts in a public park, in violation of Penal Law 245.01 (exposure of a person) (People v. Santorelli, 1992). The court dismissed the charges, finding the law

unconstitutional, as the State failed to prove how the classification based on gender is substantially related to an important governmental objective (People v. Santorelli, 1992).

These cases demonstrate that the criminalisation of public breastfeeding and the exposure of female breasts perpetuate gender discrimination and stereotyping.

The Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act section 8 (9)(c) and section 21(3)[9] are still in effect, but not many case laws are available in the public domain. BC v The State is a notable case regarding this Act, where BC was convicted on eight counts of violating the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act, including the charge of exposing children to sexual offences or the display of genital organs or female breasts, resulting in a one-year prison sentence (B C v S (A8/2020) [2020] ZAFSHC 180 (30 October 2020), n.d.). It is important to note that the defendant was also charged with very serious offences, such as rape, sexual grooming of a minor child, and exposing a minor to a sexual act or pornographic material. The issue at hand is whether a mother should be criminally charged and sentenced for exposing her breasts while breastfeeding in public where a minor child and or adult are present, given that the Act prohibits the public exposure of female breasts to minors.

International and multinational agreements can fully protect mothers and their children from harassment and prevent breastfeeding in public, provided they are implemented correctly. Countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Kenya have progressive legislation that safeguards mothers from harassment when breastfeeding in public. This means that women can seek legal action if they are prevented from breastfeeding their children in public, as it is against the law for anyone to hinder them from doing so. South Africa is praised for having one of the most progressive and robust constitutions globally. However, Acts of Parliament, such as the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act and the Children's Act, were not adequately drafted to fully protect the rights enshrined in the Constitution. This at times contradicts the Constitution, resulting in a deviation from the treaties ratified. The fact that there are no public judgments where mothers were either charged or convicted for breastfeeding in public does not mean such incidences have never occurred. I think the reason such cases have not been publicised may be because they have been classified as schedule 1

offences as per the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act 32 of 2007 thus some are regarded as petty crimes and the sentence imposed is usually a fine especially if one is a first-time offender (South African Parliament, 2007). So, my contention with this piece of legislation is not based on case law but rather that the law is too broad and vague and may be exploited to harass mothers who breastfeed in public. Having an explicit law that excludes breastfeeding as an indecent act like the law imposed by the Kenyan government as discussed in 2.2.5 would be more beneficial.

As long as breastfeeding remains subject to public indecency or sexual offences laws, and laws that criminalise the prevention of mothers from breastfeeding in public are not implemented, the problem of harassment will persist. Women may feel that they have no recourse and may be deterred from initiating breastfeeding, leading to lower exclusive breastfeeding rates and higher infant mortality rates. It is also essential for countries previously colonised by the West to amend their laws to restore their native moral values, which align with human rights laws rather than upholding laws imposed on them by their former colonisers.

CHAPTER 3: THE MODERN WESTERN NUCLEAR FAMILY

The modern nuclear family has been widely promoted as the ideal family structure and has been universalised as the only authentic form of family. However, this has been challenged due to its forced adoption by many nations and communities across the world, including Africa, through colonialism and globalisation. This imposition may even be viewed as an act of sabotage, as the very family structure is presented as an ideal that has serious inadequacies.

This chapter aims to critically examine the modern Western nuclear family structure under the following headings:

- The Moral Status of the Nuclear Family
- The Nuclear Family Structure as an Agent of Patriarchy and Sexism
- The Neo-colonial Imposition of the Nuclear Family as the Ideal Family Structure

The purpose of the discussion and analysis of these points is to provide a relevant context for the examination of African life as a counter-narrative in the following chapter.

3.1   The moral status of the nuclear family

One of the most significant changes in the seventeenth century was the emergence of the nuclear family structure as a result of industrialisation. It became a foundational social structure in the development of the modern capitalist-bourgeois tradition within Western civilisation and culture (Silva, 2006, p. 391). Family structures are continuously evolving and adapting to cultural influences, and as cultures evolve, so do the family structures within those cultural groups (Itao & Kaneko, 2021). With the evolution of the family structure, the moral status and roles of each family member are also expected to evolve and adapt.

The conventional and normative nuclear family consists of two heterosexual parents and their minor children. The moral status and legitimacy of family life are based on each family member accepting their specific role and the values and responsibilities associated with being a mother, father, or child. The moral status of each family member has evolved,

and it is essential to understand these changes to meaningfully assess the moral status of the family.

Family structures are primarily influenced by the marital system practised and promoted within cultural practices and institutions associated with the community. The structure of every family is "culturally constructed" as a basic unit of society (Uddin, 2020). Each family has its culture and tradition, which determines how family members interact and communicate and what roles they play. These cultural and traditional practices are always influenced by the moral imperatives and principles accepted as the foundation necessary for the preservation and reproduction of society.

In most family structures globally, the roles and responsibilities of family members have historically been arranged hierarchically based on gendered roles. The modern Western nuclear family has perpetuated this norm, with the relationship between the two heterosexual partners assuming the form of a microeconomic unit that receives its legitimacy and respect to the extent that it can replicate the macroeconomic principles and values of wealth accumulation and material comfort intrinsic to the capitalist economic system. The male is typically the breadwinner, while the female is confined to the private sphere of the home as wife, mother, and homemaker. The husband is the only economically active member and is responsible for providing for the family's financial needs. His position in the family is powerful as most of the important decisions in the family revolve around finances.

The legitimacy of the husband's position of power within the home is primarily derived from a labour market that is male-oriented and male-dominated in both its ethical character and design. This results in various forms of discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion for women in the workplace. When women are employed, it is often in menial and low-wage jobs that men do not want to perform. The fact that men are typically the primary providers in the family has resulted in them occupying the most prestigious positions in society, while women are confined to a more submissive role within the private sphere of the home. This elevated role of men in a patriarchal-capitalist society, which is ideologically referred to as "patriarchal capitalism", has normalised male power and domination both within the family and in society at large. As a result, men have been

placed in a position of enormous power, with the sole mandate and authority to determine the moral foundations that legitimise the reign of patriarchal capitalism.

With the evolution of the family structure, there was a significant shift in the roles of family members, influenced by politics and law. It was common practice for parents to invest more in the education of male children than female children, as it was assumed that the male child would be the future husband and father who would provide for his family. The denial of higher quality education to women not only denies them access to the labour market but also reduces their ability to make decisions within the household, further reinforcing their sense of inferiority, inadequacy, and dependency as the junior partner in the home. The dependence of women on male authority undermines their moral status in both the family and the community, as the husband assumes the role of dictator in the home. Women are treated as partially autonomous beings who are unable to make decisions for themselves, while their male counterparts have the right to unilaterally make decisions for their families. However, contrary to patriarchal misconceptions, women are dominant and assertive beings with a superior instinct to provide for and protect their children. Unfortunately, due to the patriarchal nature of the nuclear family, women are often prevented from effectively discharging these moral responsibilities, thus diminishing their moral status within the household and community.

Western democratic states view families as social entities that require special protection from state interference, which results in the authoritative power of control being vested in the "strongest member of the family", who is typically the father or husband due to his role as primary provider and the most educated (Cutas & Smajdor, 2017). This has systematically meant that all members of the family are controlled by the man, giving him a higher moral ranking that extends to society in general. Morally, women have been reduced to the same level as children.

3.2   The nuclear family structure as an agent of patriarchy and sexism

The widespread discrimination and subjugation of women in both the home and society at large have resulted in the perpetuation of their reduced moral status in the world. The arrangement of moral and social hierarchies in communities and societies reflects the

structure of families. In cultures where women are considered inferior to men within the family, likely, they will likely also be seen as such in society as a whole.

The nuclear family structure promotes patriarchal ideals, which have a direct impact on the subordination of women in society. Men not only dictate gender-assigned roles within their families, but they also hold this authority in society at large. With the general acceptance of men's domination of women in both the family and society, most Western industrialised societies have been labelled "androcentric" for subscribing to a worldview that prioritises and absolutises the male perspective and experience. In this patriarchal and paternalistic context, women's sense of self and femininity has been defined by men, and the biological "nature" of women is used to justify their "natural" inferiority and the subordinate role they are expected to play in society. This application of gender essentialism, which argues that women's alleged "natural" biological condition is the basis for their inferiority to men, has led to the development of gender polarisation and conflict, as well as the emergence of women's liberation movements aimed at overcoming their inferior status in the world.

The women's liberation movement, also known as feminism, emerged in three major waves, with its first appearance in the early 1800s, aimed at challenging the patriarchal status quo in society (Malinowska, 2020). Feminism refers to the advocacy for women's rights and equal treatment for both men and women (Robertson, 2019). All three waves of the movement aimed to advance women's interests in areas such as education, work, social equality, and political participation (Raina, 2020). The struggle was not about recognition or validation, but rather for women to be able to freely exercise their basic human rights in their homes and society. Feminism challenges the androcentric perception of society, which views the world through the eyes and thinking of men, and the notion of the female gender as inferior and weak, in need of protection and control by men.

Western culture perceives masculinity and femininity from a biologically essentialist perspective, which is problematic as it hinders the possibility of alternative socio-cultural approaches that promote a more collective, mutually supportive social environment in which both parents and extended family members, as well as the community, can share

responsibility for the upbringing and care of their offspring. This would overcome the biological essentialism that continues to make women the prisoners and victims of their bodies. Xue's (2008, p. 55) account of the patriarchal ideology of biological essentialism is particularly relevant in this regard.

From a biological essentialist viewpoint, women may be regarded as inherently inferior to men in terms of morality, intellect, and physical ability to perform labour-intensive tasks, such as construction or military combat, simply due to their XX chromosomal composition. However, femininity and masculinity are not simply innate but also culturally or socially constructed, as they can vary depending on cultural nurturing and assigned roles. For instance, if a girl child is raised with traditionally masculine roles and spends time with boys, primarily nurtured by her male parent, she may grow up as a more masculine woman.

In a society where women at the household level are perceived as being of an inferior gender due to their XX chromosomes, this perception is reflected in the community. When roles at the household and community or society levels are assigned based on biological gender, it affects one's social roles to the extent that these respective roles are accepted as natural, obscuring their ideologically constructed nature.

The division of household labour responsibilities is based on biological gender and is traditionally (socially) expected of men and women. Women are typically assigned emotionally sensitive roles such as creating a comfortable, warm, and peaceful home, in addition to physical responsibilities such as cleaning, cooking, and laundry. However, the epistemic and social significance of emotional support and peacekeeping in the home has gone unnoticed for decades (Silva, 2006, p.393). Women are considered the "backbone of our social system and culture", and their peacekeeping role in the home and society elevates their moral status higher than any other member of society (Mathew, 2010). Despite fulfilling these roles assigned to them based on biological makeup, women still face treatment as second-class citizens.

Feminist scholar Simone de Beauvoir argued that women are not born but made (de Beauvoir, 2011), suggesting that one is not a woman simply by being born female, but

rather they are made into a woman. Scholars have differing opinions on the meaning of Simone's statement. Susan Hekman (2015, p. 143) posits that Simone was not suggesting a literal interpretation of women are not born but made, but rather that this is how men perceive women while perceiving themselves as men by birth. Hekman suggests that women, like men, are a result of their bodies but not defined in character and morality by those bodies (Hekman, 2015). Meanwhile, Judith Butler (1986, p. 35) perceives Simone's suggestion as a literal interpretation, that "one is not born a woman but rather becomes one over time" (Butler, 1986, p.35).

Simone's argument stems from the perspective of social constructionism, which dictates that for one to be considered a "real" woman, she must conform to society's definition and expectations of womanhood. The assumption is that a woman must be a wife or a mother and fulfil the relevant social roles expected of her, such as that of a homemaker. This Western perception of womanhood defines a woman's identity by what society, particularly men, expects of her rather than who she truly is.

One of the significant consequences of this ideological construct is the sexual objectification of women in society. The reduction of the female body to its erotic pleasures has resulted in images of the so-called "sexy" woman, a skinny woman with large breasts and a thin waist, circulating in modern Western society. The desire to conform to this unrealistic ideal has resulted in many women resorting to the wearing of corsets, often at the cost of their physical health and psychological well-being. As a result, women have become objectified and reduced to objects of sexual pleasure for men, leading to girls as young as six reporting dissatisfaction with their appearance, particularly their weight (Calogero *et al*., 2007).

The objectification of womanhood is not the only cultural pattern perpetuated by society; motherhood has also become subject to societal expectations. This has resulted in the emergence of the "yummy mummy" (Littler, 2010, p.1) concept (to be explained on page 70), which idealises the modern mother in a nuclear family. These cultural patterns have also been forced upon other nations through colonisation and industrialisation and sustained by Western media and various social media platforms on the internet, projecting

the female body as an irresistible object of desire through commercialisation (Sibani, 2018).

3.3   The neo-colonial imposition of the nuclear family as the ideal family structure

The family structures in Western countries have undergone significant change in recent times, which has since spread to other continents through colonisation, industrialisation, and globalisation (Furstenberg, 2019). Africa, as a continent that was largely colonised by the West, has experienced the demonisation of its socio-cultural systems and "traditional" way of life. The African way of life was denounced as primitive and its religious belief systems were considered paganistic and ungodly. The European perspective was that Africans needed to be introduced to a new way of life in both their indigenous political economies and social and cultural traditions, with the African family being a major target in this process of modernisation.

From the late 17th century onwards, several European-industrialised nations colonised most of the African continent. Upon their arrival, Africans had a way of life that was different from that of their colonisers. Monogamous marriages (nuclear families) were not common or the preferred family structure in Africa. Many African families were in the form of "extended lineage-based akin" families, which were made up of smaller family units comprised of a husband, his multiple wives, and children contributing to the larger family of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins living together (Russell, 2003).

The establishment of Christian missions in Africa, motivated by the desire to convert Africans to Christianity, had a significant impact on the "traditional" structures of family life and the institution of marriage. The Christian-European idea of monogamy, which entailed a family structure consisting of one husband and one wife with exclusive rights and authority over their children, was imposed on all Africans who either chose to convert or were forced to do so. Those who were in polygynous marriages had to choose between leaving their other wives or conforming to the Christian-European doctrine of monogamy (Bisong & Orji, 2020).

The Christian interpretation of the book of Genesis is that "God established marriage as a heterosexual monogamous union between one man and one woman" (Vorster, 2008,

p.446). Although the change in the African marriage system contributed greatly to the feminist movement on the continent, it also had negative effects. One major consequence of the introduction of the European model of monogamy has been social disruption and alienation, particularly in areas and communities where the female population exceeds the male population, leading to disturbing levels of unmarried women who are now forced to fend for themselves outside the cultural and spiritual confines of traditional African family life.

While post-colonial African nations are still recovering from the effects of colonisation, the neoliberal ideology of globalising the world economies, cultures, and socio-political systems has gained popularity. Globalisation refers to the process of homogenisation, universalisation, and merging of economies, socio-political systems, and cultures worldwide (Rahman & Zhang, 2017). When it comes to the merging of cultures and beliefs, there is bound to be a conflict, where the resulting culture or belief system from the merger mainly resembles that of the dominant party (Onuzulike, 2008). The modern Western nuclear family, as a product of European androcentrism, has also been a major component of the globalisation process.

In post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa, Western laws that unfairly discriminate against non-Western marriage systems, such as polygynous marriages under Sharia law, were still being enforced until as recently as June 2022 (Silva, 2006, p. 121). Although traditional African polygynous marriages have been recognised under the South African Constitution for the past decade, their relevance and morality are still questioned. As a result of the infusion of imported Western cultural practices in Africa, many African cultural traditions and practices have started to erode.

With the rapid merging of cultures in Western countries, facilitated predominantly by advanced telecommunication channels and the modernisation of media platforms, cultural homogenisation has been a relatively uninterrupted process in this region. Developing nations have responded positively to these new cultural influences by adopting and emulating the Western way of life, often to the detriment of their indigenous cultural traditions (Nova, 2020). "Poorer nations are striving to catch up with the richer,

developed Western countries by emulating their fashion while damaging their own culture by suppressing ethnic language and cultural identity" (Nova, 2020, p.2).

"Cultural imperialism" is widely regarded as one of the most troubling sociological effects of globalisation and cultural homogenisation. The concept of cultural imperialism in the academic sphere is primarily associated with scholars such as Edward W. Said (Said, 1994). Highly industrialised nations like the United States have used their strong economic influence and media coverage to impose their cultural values on weaker nations in Africa (Kraidy, 2002). American television programmes and films are widely preferred sources of entertainment globally. Through this medium, the United States has been able to influence many cultures across the world without direct physical interaction.

In the present era, many African people perceive that their cultural practices are no longer relevant and that an indigenous way of life is inferior to Western cultural practices, institutions, and belief systems. For instance, the adoption of Western culture has led many African families to prefer using English as the primary medium of social interaction, both at home, school and in the community, over their native languages. The growing preference for English, decades after colonisation, symbolises a people who are still "linguistically, psychologically, and culturally colonised". For Africans to free themselves from colonial control, they also need to "return to their roots by using their native languages through all spheres of life" (Borkar, 2016; Ngugi, 1986, p.220).

The consequences of cultural imperialism are far-reaching and damaging. Not only are native African languages being lost but traditional moral values have also been eroded. It has become acceptable for young women to walk around scantily clad in the name of keeping up with fashion trends, while they are quick to condemn others for wearing traditional attire. African marriages and families are also in crisis. Civil marriages, which are responsible for many modern nuclear families, have become very unstable and easily destructible. Although divorce was not non-existent in traditional polygynous marriages, it was rare and only considered as a last resort. Unfortunately, divorce has now become normalised and has become the inevitable end of many African marriages (Tlharihani & Olehile, 2021).

A 2018 Stats S.A. report on divorces suggests that the prevalence rate of divorce in the African (black) population is increasing, with the inverse being true for the white population. This trend is also observed in marriages in the United States of America (Maluleke, 2018; Zhang & Van Hook, 2009). Marriage is no longer considered sacred but is merely a legal arrangement between domestic partners that can be easily dissolved without regard for culture and tradition. Marriages are no longer regarded as the ideal union for conceiving and raising children, but rather as an afterthought. The African family has lost its cultural and spiritual meaning and value.

3.4   Conclusion

The integration of advanced transportation, telecommunication, and economic systems has facilitated the interconnection between peripheral countries. This has led to the exchange of cultures and the migration of individuals from one country to another. Through the widespread availability of television content, people have become exposed to various cultures, with American culture being the most dominant in the media. The promotion of this culture as superior has led to the adoption of the Western family system (nuclear family) as a universal norm, particularly in post-colonial Africa. This has resulted in the erosion of traditional African values and the increase in the prevalence of civil marriages. The impact of these cultural shifts on the moral foundations of African life will be explored in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: A CRITIQUE OF THE MODERN NUCLEAR FAMILY FROM AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

The legacy of colonial oppression still impacts the socio-cultural and religious aspects of life in Africa, where the protocols of the Western way of life and the authority of laws and administrative structures imposed by former colonisers continue to be followed. This is evident in the names adopted by most Africans, who still bear European or Christian names (Igboin, 2021), and in the existence of sovereign nation-states and territorial demarcations introduced during colonial rule, which serve as evidence of the division of the African continent because of colonialism. Despite independence from imperial powers, cultural and social remnants of colonial rule continue to impact the consciousness of African peoples.

One of the primary targets of colonial acculturation was African family life, leading to pressure on "traditional" African families to transform and adopt the Western nuclear family structure as the ideal normative model. Those who yielded to this pressure have internalised the values and principles of the Western nuclear family to the extent that they now dismiss, or even view with contempt, the "traditional" African family.

European culture was claimed to be a "civilising force" during the colonial era, and the imposition of foreign rule and policies was seen as having long-term cultural and social benefits for Africans (Arowolo, 2010). Africans were trained to adopt Western ways of dressing, speaking, and living, resulting in the dilution and erosion of local, indigenous cultures (Mikail & Abdullah, 2017). Given that morality is heavily influenced by religion and cultural background (Vauclair *et al*., 2014), it was to be expected that through the coerced and imposed assimilation into Western life, Africans would adopt some of their colonisers' moral values while abandoning their own.

In this chapter, the focus is on the normative foundations of pre-colonial, indigenous African life, intending to demonstrate its continued relevance and significance for the majority of Africans, despite the harsh cultural and social impact of colonial modernity.

4.1   The moral status of a traditional/extended African family.

The concept of a family has been the subject of sociological research for many years, but to date, there is still no universal definition of a family due to the varied cultural traditions across the world (Okon, 2012). In comparison to Western nations, the African family structure is distinct and includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and first cousins. Many African communities still possess specific terms for family members such as aunts, uncles, and cousins (Mafumbate, 2019). For example, in Sepedi, the mother's older sister is referred to as *Mmamogolo,* meaning the "eldest mother", and her younger sister is referred to as *Mmangwane/mmane,* meaning the "youngest mother". On the paternal side, the father's older brother is referred to as *Rramogolo,* meaning the "eldest father", and his younger brother as *Rrangwane.* The children of these aunts and uncles are not considered cousins, but instead, they are referred to as brothers and sisters. This represents the close bonds that exist within African families.

A primary African family comprises grandparents, male adult children, along with their wives and children living together, as well as all able-bodied adults in the family. All individuals within this extended family have parental obligations and responsibilities towards all children living in the family compound. For an extended family to be considered a primary family in African culture, they must share the same paternal ancestry, which creates a spiritual bond that is more than just a social structure. Care for one's family is a significant moral obligation, and adult siblings work together to care for their elderly parents. Caring for the elderly within the extended family rather than sending them to retirement homes, is a fundamental moral aspect of African family life.

Parents have a moral obligation to care for their children as they grow up and also to care for their parents when they are no longer capable of taking care of themselves. Despite the spread of westernisation in many parts of Africa due to globalisation, it is still considered morally unacceptable for orphaned children to be sent to orphanages while their parents' siblings are still alive. Family is considered the foremost priority in Africa (Siegel, 1996), ensuring that the family stays together at all costs. If a married adult male in the family passes away, his younger brother (*Rrangwane)* will assume responsibility for

his late brother's family by marrying his late brother's wife and infusing her children into his family. Likewise, if a daughter-in-law passes away, her husband will marry her younger sister *(Mmangwane/mmane)* if she is unmarried, to care for her late sister's family. The moral obligation to care for a deceased sibling's family is a foundational principle of African family life and is strongly emphasised in the socialisation of African children from generation to generation.

There are critiques around the above issue in a modern setting which compromises democracy and human rights. From the research point of view, family is extended and has no boundaries especially when it comes to the relativism of family circles. Caring as mentioned was one of the aspects that made a close-knit family experience communalism and ubuntu to ascertain that from generation to generation. Hence assistance, responsibility, caring and love were not centred around the father and mother in the name of family. But that was an extension of those attributes to siblings of the brother or the sister and vice versa. This amalgamation of family ties was concretised through marriage to ensure the continuity of family ties after the death of the head of the family.

4.2 The African family and its duty as a foundation for moral development

The family is considered a fundamental unit of society and plays a crucial role in shaping the moral fabric of individuals and communities. The cultural and moral values of communities reflect the collective values of families and their members. When a child displays problematic behaviour in the community, their family background is often considered, as it is expected that they should have learned better moral values at home.

Before the arrival and introduction of Christian missions and the formalisation of the education system in Africa, teaching and learning took place within families (Mosweunyane, 2013). Each family was responsible for educating its members about their traditional practices and cultural beliefs, and there was an African proverb that stated: *"A child who does not learn morals at home will learn them from the streets"*. People with poor moral values were often seen as lacking *semelo* or good character, and it was the family's responsibility to instil moral values in their children. The transfer of indigenous African knowledge from generation to generation within families provided a strong

foundation for moral development (Iwuanyanwu, 2023). Mothers and grandmothers were typically the primary caregivers as well as custodians/library of character and were tasked with teaching young children about their culture and traditions through observation and storytelling. In the evenings, when fathers and older children returned home, the entire family would gather around the fire where grandparents would tell stories and recite African proverbs that promoted morality and warned of the consequences of immoral behaviour.

The moral education of African children was primarily focused on the home and was rarely delegated to third parties, except in the case of initiation into adulthood. However, with the colonisation of Africa, the status quo changed, and children no longer spent most of their formative years with their mothers or grandmothers as primary caregivers. Instead, they spent this time in early childhood development centres and schools. The challenge with entrusting the education system with the responsibility of imparting moral values is that these values are often based on Western religious values rather than African cultural values. This shift in moral education from families to educators has resulted in the marginalisation of African women, who were stripped of their responsibility to instil moral values in their children and were reduced to second-class citizens with inferior moral values. The centralisation of moral values shifted from being directed by culture and tradition to being mandated by Christianity and Western-origin constitutional laws. With modernisation and industrialisation, both women and men were required to work to support their families, and the crucial role that women played in child-rearing became diminished.

4.2.1 The Afrocentric perception of the moral value of African women

Even in Afrocentricism families constitute the most fundamental unit of any society, and therefore, its harmonious ethical patterns of social interaction are essential for the stability of the larger community. The teaching and enforcement of moral values within the family unit is of utmost importance for the preservation of law and order in society. This responsibility should be entrusted to individuals who possess the necessary moral insight

and authority, and who are equipped to instruct and guide their offspring following the cultural and traditional values of their society.

As stated above meant that women, as primary caregivers, and givers of life, play a crucial role in shaping the moral and socio-religious values of society (Hurskainen, 1996). They are best suited to transmit the foundational moral values that guide the behaviour of individuals within a community. In pre-colonial societies, women were highly respected for their moral intuition and were accorded a superior moral status. For instance, in the Akan community of Ghana, the role of the traditional priesthood was mostly occupied by women, who were perceived to have superior spiritual abilities (Sackey, 1989, p. 19). African women also held prominent political positions, such as Queens, Queen mothers, regents, and rainmakers (Moagi, 2019, p. 2). An example of such a woman is Queen Modjadji of the Balobedu tribe in Limpopo, South Africa, who served as both a political leader and diviner (Rafapa, 2008, p. 51; Yates, 1998, p. 3). Queen Modjadji was revered for her ability to perform rainmaking rituals during droughts and was considered a powerful leader in the farming province of Limpopo.

In traditional communal African societies, women were held in high esteem for their moral standards and their role in moral education and peacekeeping. However, the colonisation of Africa led to a reduction in the moral status of women and their perceived agency. Women were no longer respected for their high moral standards but were instead reduced to mere objects with no moral capacity. This paper views African women as superior moral agents who are expected to exhibit better behaviour than men, particularly in terms of sexual morality. Despite this, it is unfortunate that the moral status of African women has been questioned and diminished because of colonisation.

4.2.2 African women in a communal setting

The role of women in African societies has undergone significant transformations, largely influenced by the socio-political developments in their countries. To comprehend the present-day perceptions of African women, it is imperative to examine their status in their communities before colonisation.

Although most African societies have been patriarchal to a considerable extent, women have always held positions of authority within their rights and did not occupy subservient positions to their male counterparts, but rather more complementary roles (Abiola, 2019). In pre-colonial Africa, women were not considered as mere subjects, but were rather highly significant role players, particularly in terms of unifying their communities and households. They were entrusted with the important task of instilling good moral values and social skills in their children and grandchildren, a responsibility deemed critical for the survival of their families (Taiwo, 2010).

Although roles were assigned based on gender, this did not imply that women were only assigned inferior roles, leaving them at the mercy of their male counterparts. Women held positions of power that men were deemed unable to occupy, particularly within the family structure, where a social system was in place based on seniority rather than gender (Therborn, 2006). For instance, it was not uncommon for the most senior female to head the family and make the most important decisions, even in the presence of older male family members.

Marriage was a critical aspect of most pre-colonial African cultures and conferred a high degree of dignity and respect to women (Moagi & Mtombeni, 2020). Marriage helped to integrate women more smoothly into their new families and communities (Potokri, 2015). However, when women entered their matrimonial families, they initially held the lowest status within the family, but over time, they would inevitably rise through the family's social rankings. The quickest way for women to attain higher positions of power within the family was when their husbands decided to marry a second wife. The responsibility to choose the second wife rested with the first wife, who then became a senior member of the family with decision-making authority (Suda, 1996). The seniority of a woman was also based on the seniority of the husband, if the husband was the eldest of the family amongst their siblings, then she would be afforded the status of being the senior to other women who are married by the eldest's siblings.

Motherhood was one of the most important and respected roles assumed by women in most traditional African communities. The significance of this role is evident in the way women are addressed within the family and community. For example, in Sepedi, Sesotho,

and Setswana, a mother of her first-born child is addressed as *mmago* (mother of) - child's name, linking her identity in motherhood to that of the child (Siwila, 2015). The role of motherhood is so highly regarded in African communities that women who do not have children are discriminated against and accorded a lower status in society (Siwila, 2015). Motherhood is also viewed as a sacred and spiritual aspect of womanhood (Akujobi, 2011a). Women who choose not to conceive are often considered "anti-community", given the belief that the survival and expansion of the community depend on the life-giving role (physical, emotional, and moral) that mothers play in the home and society (Ngunjiri, 2007).

Simone de Beauvoir, a French philosopher, and feminist scholar, made the distinction between gender and sex. She argued that sex refers to the phenotypical differences one is born with, while gender refers to the cultural meaning and form that the body acquires (de Beauvoir, 2012, p. 42). She posited that no biological, psychic, or economic destiny determines a woman's place in society, but rather it is defined by society (de Beauvoir, 2012, p. 330). In African societies, women are seen not just as physical bodies, but rather as individuals with their rights. They are not just women because of their biological sex, but rather because of the role they assume in the family and community. This view makes sexual objectification and commodification of women unacceptable. This cultural norm may be why breastfeeding in public is more accepted in African societies, while it is often stigmatised in Western societies. Unfortunately, colonialism and media have resulted in the domination of African nations by foreign socio-cultural, religious, and linguistic structures, which has led to the assimilation of these foreign ways of life at the expense of indigenous cultural traditions (Omordu and Amaele, 2014).

4.3   The modern nuclear family and the Erosion of African family Values

The imposition of the modern Western nuclear family structure on African social life has caused the erosion of fundamental African family values. During the colonial era, polygamous marriages were condemned and demonised by colonial authorities who viewed the African marriage system as ungodly and primitive in comparison to Western religious standards. This led to the disintegration of the communal African family, as young

couples increasingly succumbed to the ideological pressure of Western cultural domination. The nuclear family structure, which was seen as the ideal family structure in modern society, was adopted by those who believed that it afforded them financial independence and prosperity. The nuclear family's smaller size was believed to make it easier to care for loved ones. Ageing parents could be sent to homes for the elderly, and those incapacitated by illnesses, life-threatening illnesses, or disabilities could be entrusted to the care of professional medical staff and social workers in private and government-sponsored facilities, as well as frail care centres.

Outsourcing healthcare responsibility away from the family homes of patients can have cruel consequences, as demonstrated by the tragedy linked to the Life Esidimeni psychiatric facility in South Africa. During the arbitration hearings led by former Deputy Chief Justice Dikgang Moseneke, it was revealed that about 143 patients died and 59 were unaccounted for due to the ill-advised decision by government officials to transfer these patients from a well-run facility to an alternative, inadequate, and ill-equipped places to cut costs (Dhai, 2017). The treatment that these patients endured was extremely inhumane, resulting in a deprivation of their basic human rights, such as the right to life, the right to quality healthcare, and the right to dignity (Ferlito & Dhai, 2017, p. 53). Though the hearings into this tragedy are still ongoing the primary reason that was given for the appalling conditions under which these mental healthcare users were living was that the facilities were poorly resources and skilled, so they did not have the required resources like food and staff training to care for people with special needs.

This tragedy highlights the negative consequences of outsourcing healthcare responsibility in African societies. Some patients' families failed to discharge their moral obligations, as some patients were essentially dumped in these facilities by their families. The State also failed by deferring its responsibility to care for vulnerable members of society to ill-equipped facilities without following due process. Health professionals involved in the transfer of these patients failed to perform their professional and moral obligation to advocate for their patients' rights or to act in their best interests.

It is against the spirit of Ubuntu for African people to defer or outsource their moral obligation to care for those who have given them life and cared for them. Just as parents

have a moral obligation to take care of their children, adult children have a moral obligation to take care of their elderly parents. The tragedy at Life Esidimeni underscores the importance of not outsourcing healthcare responsibility and the need to ensure that patients receive proper care and treatment within their families and communities.

Indigenous African knowledge is gradually diminishing as younger generations spend less time with their grandparents, who are regarded as the guardians of African cultural traditions. According to an African proverb, "*When an elder passes away, it is like a library burnt down*" (Maina, 2012, p. 13). It is not surprising that African cultural practices are being replaced by Westernism which is not compatible with Africanism. In African families, the elderly were responsible for teaching the younger generation about moral principles and taboos that regulate behaviour (Ndlovu, 2020). Today, many children grow up without knowledge of these moral principles and taboos, which may contribute to social problems such as teenage pregnancy and the high number of orphaned children due to HIV/AIDS. They use technology like Google, Facebook, and WhatsApp to learn and be advised about morals and values.

The imposition of the Western nuclear family structure on Africans has resulted in a family system consisting of just two adults. If both parents pass away, their children may be left stranded without care or guidance. This is a marked departure from the traditional communal African family structure where extended family members, such as grandparents, aunts, and uncles, would take on the responsibility of caring for orphaned children. The rise in child-headed families in recent years has left many children without support, as there is often no option to place them in foster homes or orphanages, as a result, they are forced to grow up without parental guidance, which can have serious consequences for their well-being and development.

The erosion of the communal African family and the imposition of the modern nuclear family structure have had significant adverse effects on the moral education of African children. In traditional African families, moral education was centred on the family, with mothers and grandparents playing key roles. Children who grow up in orphanages or alone are not properly socialised according to African culture and traditions. Orphanages are communal facilities wherein at times there are only a few of them per province. So,

children from different cultural, socioeconomic, and religious backgrounds are placed in these homes together where they are raised or cared for by people with different values from theirs (those from their birth homes). It is expected that they adopt the values of those they attach to be, either peers or carers, so some of the values they adopt may not necessarily be morally acceptable in society. Also, these homes are often very congested making it hard to maintain moral discipline so some children with severe behavioural may go unnoticed.

The modern nuclear family model, with its emphasis on individualism, has replaced the sense of communitarianism that characterised African communities in the past. An Indian study that looked at how the nuclear family destabilized communitarian, communities reported that family members have become increasingly self-centred, with many perceiving themselves as independent and not needing other family members to survive (Gopalakrishan, 2021). This has resulted in the complete erosion of the meaning and value of family, to the extent that even marriages no longer hold any sentimental value. Such an erosion has destabilised many communal communities, with a consequent loss of the sense of social cohesion that is central to the traditional communal way of life (Gopalakrishan, 2021, p. 51; Rahman & Zhang, 2017, p. 66).

In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of divorces among African couples, and this has raised concerns among African communities. Traditionally, divorce was not an option, as the couple typically resided with extended family members who acted as mediators and advisors during disagreements. Additionally, polygamous marriages were more common, making allegations of infidelity less common and less likely to lead to the breakdown of the marriage. Marriage was viewed as more than a legal or social contract; it united families and ancestors and had a spiritual dimension that made it difficult to dissolve. Traditional cultural rituals were performed to unify the ancestors from both sides of the family. Today, however, couples are more likely to file for divorce without consulting their families and without regard for the cultural rituals performed when they were first married. Many Africans have come to view the Western cultural tradition as the only path to a successful and fulfilling life, and they have come to see their traditional way of life as outdated, irrelevant, and oppressive, particularly for women.

Importantly, a woman was perceived as a mother in the context of her body structure and her being a mother who sustains life. The land was seen as Mother Earth because it supplied soil, and water and nurtured the seed to maturity of producing food. The relationship between Mother Earth and the mother/woman was the core spect that made some women be given the higher status of being prophets, mediators, and other responsible positions amongst communities. The umbilical cord which was a link between the unborn child and the mother illustrated that the first point of call for an unborn child was the relationship with the mother. This cord was ploughed back into the soil to ensure and concretise Mother Earth's relationship with the environment and creation (Marumo 2016).

4.4   Conclusion

The traditional African family was communal and polygynous, providing a supportive network for the growth of the bloodline and ensuring that no one was left without care. This communal structure facilitated the moral development of children, who had more interaction with their grandparents and mothers, and women were held in high regard for their role in imparting moral education to children and promoting harmony within the home and community. Motherhood was considered a sacred duty, elevating the status of women in society and promoting a family-oriented mindset. Marriage was not just a social contract but also a spiritual undertaking aimed at perpetuating and preserving life.

However, with colonial domination and the imposition of the modern, Western nuclear family structure, the traditional African family has suffered significant harm. The modern African family is now highly unstable, leaving the elderly and orphaned children without proper care, which is contrary to the normative principles and values of the Ubuntu moral system. African society is being influenced to adopt a bourgeois value system, characterised by self-centredness, consumerism, and the sexual commodification of women and motherhood.

Africans, through the application of the Ubuntu moral philosophy, emphasise the importance of building strong communal relationships with family and community members over the pursuit of materialistic goals. The Gauteng Department of Health

ignored this principle when they decided to transfer mental healthcare patients to inadequate facilities to cut costs, as depicted in the Life Esidimeni tragedy where 143 patients lost their lives and 59 remain unaccounted for (Dhai, 2017; Ferlito & Dhai, 2017, p. 53). This tragedy highlights the need for individuals and the state to fulfil their moral obligation to care for their fellow human beings, as expressed in the *Sepedi* proverb, *"feta kgomo o sware motho"* (Ramose, 1999, p. 115), which loosely translates to "people come before wealth or material".

The tragedy of Life Esidemi is not the only instance in which an African government has disregarded Ubuntu principles by prioritising profit over the lives of its vulnerable and impoverished citizens. From August 11th to 17th, 2012, at the Lonmin mine in Marikana, the government utilised state resources to defend foreign white capital and senselessly killed approximately 44 mine workers who were demanding better wages and working conditions (Boëttger & Rathbone, 2016, p. 1). It is disheartening to note that the same government that incorporated the Batho Pele principles in its policies was the same one that deployed its security forces to take the lives of its citizens. Batho Pele model comprises of eight principles consultation, service standards, courtesy, access, information openness, redress, value for money and transparency (Pietersen, 2014).

 The most alarming aspect of this event was the alleged abuse of political power by the current head of state, who was then a National Executive Committee member of the ruling party, to exert pressure on the security cluster to quash the protest which was costing him and other mine shareholders money (Fagunwa, 2019, p. 523). Ramose (1999, p. 119) has argued that in a capitalist society, profit takes precedence over everything, including human lives, and that "if souls do indeed exist, they are marketable as they can be exchanged for money" (Ramose, 1999, p. 119). The souls of the Marikana miners were traded for profit and the preservation of the opulent lifestyles of the mine shareholders.

The Life Esidimeni tragedy and the Marikana massacre are both examples of serious violations of human rights in South Africa. These individuals were denied their right to life as a result of the collusion between the state and capital, and the fact that years later, those responsible have yet to be held accountable highlights a serious lack of accountability for the elite. South Africa is widely regarded as one of the most unequal

societies in the world, where basic resources such as quality healthcare, liveable minimum wages, and access to nutrition are scarce, and the lack of distributive justice only benefits the already rich elite at the expense of the poor and vulnerable (Francis & Webster, 2019, p. 2; Ramose, 1999, p. 136). The state has strayed from its role in protecting the rights of its citizens, particularly the right to life, and is instead focused on accumulating wealth, which primarily benefits its executive members and capital, at the expense of the poor (Ramose, 1999, p. 139).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa, like the rest of the world, had to reprioritise its finances, human resources, and infrastructure to combat the spread of the virus. However, instead of addressing the crisis, politicians and private companies took advantage of the emergency procurement process and fraudulently acquired tenders, embezzling money from the public purse (Mlambo & Masuku, 2020). At a time when people were losing their jobs due to government-imposed lockdowns and frontline healthcare workers were risking their lives to combat the pandemic, greedy and corrupt politicians and businesses capitalised on the suffering of millions of South Africans with no regard for human life.

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CHAPTER 5: GLOBAL CAPITALISM AND THE PROBLEMATIC UNIVERSALISATION OF THE WESTERN BOURGEOIS FAMILY

The globalisation of Western culture and the imposition of the Western model of the nuclear family unit are having a detrimental effect on the development and preservation of African cultures. Critics of globalisation argue that it is destructive to African culture and development, as it erodes the African identity and threatens its development (Oni, 2009, p. 9). Many African states, including South Africa, have lost their African identity as they have embraced neoliberal, capitalist ideologies that prioritise wealth accumulation, profit-making, and financial self-interest, resulting in tragic consequences. The recent events in South Africa, such as the Life Esidimeni tragedy, the Marikana massacre, and the widespread corruption during the COVID-19 pandemic, all demonstrate the rise of crass materialism with devastating consequences for the poor.

The globalisation of capitalism and the subsequent coercion to adopt the Western bourgeois family lifestyle as the norm for non-Western nations has had a profound impact on the structure and form of many African societies and family life. Some of these changes have been aimed at the development of African communities, while others have destabilised these communities and families.

This chapter will examine the complex nature of these changes under the following headings:

- The effects of industrialisation and labour migration on African families (5.1)
- The emergence of the middle class in African communities (5.2)
- The Western bourgeois family and associated views on the practice of motherhood concerning breastfeeding (5.3)

5.1   The effects of industrialisation and labour migration on African family structures

Before the advent of modernisation and industrialisation in Africa, families served as the foundation of African social life. Traditionally, the African family was a complex network of

generations and relatives living together, in which this structure supported reproduction and nurtured and socialised children (Mayowa, 2019). Unlike some of the Western nuclear families, consisting of a mother, father, and children, traditional African families consist of multiple nuclear families living together as an extended family (Makiwane & Kaunda, 2018). It was not uncommon for grandparents (first generation) to live with their adult children (second generation) and their children (third generation), who, in turn, helped raise their grandchildren and great-grandchildren (fourth generation).

The African family structure has undergone significant changes over time, primarily due to the profound impact of global industrialisation and modernisation, leading to the disintegration of the traditional African family structure. Industrialisation refers to the shift from a primary economic activity, such as agriculture, hunting, and fishing, to a secondary economic activity, where people are forced to seek employment in modern industries, which led to the violent uprooting of people from their pre-colonial, indigenous economic systems and the forced migration to urban centres for employment (Simandan, 2009).

One of the most significant legacies of colonialism and apartheid in South Africa is the disruption of African family life (Hall, 2017). Pre colonialism, Africans grew and planted food and kept livestock which was the way to look after the families. However, the situation changed after colonialism and the effects of apartheid. (Martiniello, 2010). The widespread land dispossession of African communities began in the 1650s with the arrival of Dutch settlers in the Cape Colony, who dispossessed the Khoi and San people and continued with the introduction of the Native Land Act of 1913, which legally dispossessed more Africans of their land (Lephakga, 2013). The inability to produce their food due to landlessness or living on bare land resulted in many young African men leaving their families to seek employment in cities, leading to a change in the traditional African family structure.

The African family structure was traditionally comprised of several nuclear families living as one extended family and often, these nuclear families were polygynous. There were various reasons and theories as to why Africans preferred to enter into polygynous marriages and live as extended families. Before the colonisation of Africa, families were primarily agrarian and engaged in growing food for sustenance. Women were responsible

for the majority of the work related to planting and cultivating food, as well as for childrearing, maintaining the home, and food preparation. For some women, the workload was overwhelming, leading to the expansion of the family to alleviate the burden of work traditionally associated with women. Some married men opted to marry additional wives to help in the fields and household, resulting in more children who could assist with household tasks. The expansion of family ties also provided the moral possibility and imperative to preserve the family name (Lawrence-Hart, 2019). Polygyny was significant on both socio-cultural and practical grounds of economic necessity. With more people available to help with food cultivation and livestock herding, the family's socio-economic status improved significantly in the eyes of the community.

The colonial land dispossession and the accompanying industrialisation processes brought about a radical shift from the traditional agrarian way of life to a supposedly more progressive and advanced modern way of life. Globalisation, with its interlinked technology, financial market, and economic trade (Atta-Asiedu, 2020), has resulted in the transfer of predominantly Eurocentric political ideologies and cultural values, leading to the devaluation and distortion of the normative structures and foundations of many African communities (Therborn, 2006). The transfer of cultural values from the West to Africa during the colonial era has had the greatest impact on the disruption of the traditional African family structure.

The colonisation of Africa by Europe provided a platform for the Western world to impose its cultural values, political structures, and economic systems of capitalism on the African population (Mikail & Abdullah, 2017). The transplantation of these values and ideologies aimed to homogenise cultures and practices across the world, which was an attempt to overpower and replace traditional values with those of the West and replicate Europe in Africa (Ogbo *et al.,* 2014). There are two significant consequences of this homogenisation process that are of particular interest. The first pertains to the influence of the West on African marriages and family structures, while the second concerns the formalisation of the economy through industrialisation and its impact on African family life. These points will be discussed in more detail in the following sections (5.11 and 5.1.2). African people became very dependent on the government for survival, they needed permits to go work

outside their place of origin (which was predominantly rural with no economic activity), and they had to learn Afrikaans and English just so they can be able communicate with employers. It is therefore not surprising that to this day many African people send their children to schools where English is the medium of instruction and, some of these children cannot speak their mother tongues.

5.1.1 The impact of Western acculturation on African family life

The impact of Western culture on traditional African societies has been significant and contradictory (Sibani, 2018). One of the positive impacts has been the formalisation of education, which has facilitated the documentation and archiving of African cultures and traditions that were being lost with the passing of the African elders. Consequently, Africans can now study their own cultures and document them objectively, unlike in the past when Western scholars demonised and misrepresented them as being uncivil and inferior to Western culture. Western propaganda aimed at civilising and converting Africans to Christianity resulted in the distortion of all African values to the advantage of the West (Chukwuokolo, 2009, p. 24; Okon, 2013, p. 93). The acculturation and religious conversion of Africans were driven by the expansion of Christian missions on the continent, which created a conflict of moral values. Acculturation is the emulation of the objects of one culture by another culture (Imbuye *et al.,* 2020, p. 1170). In a situation where traditional African values and Western values coexist in the same community, conflict is likely to occur, as two or three cultures meet, and the potential for conflicts such as the conflict between Christian and traditional religious values arises (Onuzulike, 2008, p. 164). One of the conflicting moral values was the practice of polygamy, which is still widely promoted and embraced in most African cultures and communities, often in direct opposition to Christian values (Becker, 2022). The practice of polygamy has often been criticised and stigmatised by Christian adherents, leading many forcibly converted Africans to view it as immoral. African moral values are not just social contracts aimed at maintaining law and order, but are largely spiritual, serving as a system of beliefs and customs that individuals in the community must follow to avoid bringing curses upon themselves and others in the community (Idang, 2015, p. 103). As of 2018, Africa was estimated to have the largest Christian population in the world, with approximately 599

million individuals (Johnson *et al.*, 2017). With such a high number of Christians on the African continent, it is clear that Western missionaries were successful in converting Africans and displacing key cultural African values with those of Western origin. However, where Christian values could not be fully adopted, some level of tension resulted, primarily due to the negative perception of traditional African religious practices by the Christian faith (Adamo, 2011).

African perceptions of their traditions have become increasingly influenced by Western values, leading to the rejection and demonisation of practices that should be preserved and protected (Sepota, 1998). One such cultural practice that the African Christian community deems immoral is polygamy. The displacement of traditional African values not only impacted African religion but also the composition of many African marriages and families. The widespread conversion of Africans to Christianity has resulted in a significant decrease in the occurrence of polygynous marriages across the continent. With the decline of these marriages, many African families have shifted from living as extended families, comprising multiple nuclear families, to the standard Western nuclear family, comprising a father, mother, and a limited number of children. As a result of being dispossessed of land through the Native Land Act of 1913 and being forcibly encouraged to adopt the Western system of smaller, monogamous family units, most families were unable to maintain their agrarian way of life. In response, many African men left their families in rural areas and migrated to cities in search of employment. This migration of African males to cities triggered a chain of events in African families that continue to have repercussions to this day.

5.1.2 Effects of the labour migrant system on the African family structure

As a result of the Group Areas Act No. 77 of 1957, which prohibited Africans from obtaining permanent residency in cities, the apartheid regime established "migrant labour hostels located near mines and factories (townships) (Vosloo, 2020). The hostels were intended for African men as temporary residences and provided work permits for them to work in cities. However, Africans were not allowed to own land or attain permanent residency in the cities and were treated as foreign migrant labourers on their land (Hall & Posel, 2020,

p. 86). The National Party (apartheid government) implemented a policy called "influx control", which aimed to control the movement of Africans in cities. This policy necessitated Africans to carry passbooks with stamps that enabled them to work in white cities without permanent residency, thereby perpetuating the migrant labour system (Cox & Hemson, 2004). The migrant labour system was one of the key outcomes of apartheid legislation and was driven by the imperatives of racial capitalism, which served the interests of white South Africans and relied on a steady supply of cheap black labour in mines and factories.

The impact of the colonial industrialisation and modernisation process in South Africa remains a subject of debate. Some scholars and politicians contend that it was beneficial to the African people, while others argue that it had a damaging effect on African societies. Both perspectives contain elements of truth. The industrialisation of the African continent may have brought about some positive changes in African communities, such as the formalisation of the education system through Christian missions, which, though not ideal, enabled Africans to interact with the outside world and was instrumental in the fight against the apartheid regime in later years. The laws introduced by the apartheid regime were structured to accord different racial groups with different rights and privileges based on a racial hierarchy that perpetuated a system of "divide and rule" among black oppressed communities, within the broader political context of legalised racial segregation, discrimination, and differential socio-economic privileges.

The apartheid system, which refers to "apartness" in Afrikaans (United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, 1978), was a discriminatory regime used to segregate people based on race. The term "apartheid" was first mentioned in parliament by the leader of the Herenigde Nasionale Party, Dr. D. F. Malan, in 1944, with the controversial idea that apartheid would allow different racial groups (Whites, Africans, Coloureds, and Indians) to "uplift themselves" in their separate spheres of socio-economic existence (Lemon, 2004).

Under apartheid, economic segregation was instrumental in ensuring that the dominant minority group (Whites) had greater access to economic opportunities, such as higher wages, better education, and superior health services, while the majority (Africans) were

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only allowed to work as unskilled labourers for minimum wages and were prevented from becoming formal entrepreneurs in white South Africa (United Nations Centre Against Apartheid, 1978). Africans generally received an inferior education and limited access to health services.

Occupational segregation along racial lines was designed to ensure the systematic impoverishment and dependency of the majority groups, particularly Africans, within a hierarchical system of racial capitalism. Africans were required to provide cheap labour for both farm and mine work, with the highly profitable foreign-owned mining sector being operated exclusively for the economic benefit of the white minority group (Gradín, 2019).

Because of low wages, Africans were not always able to travel from their homelands to work in cities. To address this, the apartheid regime constructed low-cost labour hostels exclusively for African male workers. This resulted in a negative impact on the formation, functioning, and sustenance of many African families and households (Montgomery *et al.,* 2006), as husbands and wives were separated for months or years, destabilising and destroying many African marriages and families (Hosegood *et al.*, 2009, p. 281).

The creation of the labour hostels was a calculated move, as it placed African male migrant labourers closer to the key economic centres of South Africa. This reduced their travel time and maximised profits for the industries they served while separating them from their families who remained in their homelands. As a result, many African families were forced to operate without a head, as men are traditionally considered the heads of families, which harmed both the individual nuclear families and the wider communities, with lasting effects that persist to this day.

African women were most affected by labour migration, as they were forced to manage households on their own, which meant they were required to assume responsibilities typically performed by men. The apartheid administration was aware of the cultural and social significance of the role played by African women in families, and as a result, introduced policies that prevented African women from residing or visiting their husbands in urban areas. This weakened the bonds within African families and prevented the establishment and strengthening of African families in urban areas (Landis, 1975). During

this era, it was illegal for an African labourer working in the city to bring his wife with him (Brock, 1972, p. 20).

The ongoing subjugation of African people under apartheid had the greatest impact on African women. They were reduced to a sub-human status due to their inability to fulfil their primary role of maintaining and strengthening families (Landis, 1975). The effects of racial segregation were particularly felt by African women as they suffered a triple burden of discrimination based on race, gender, and class (Landis, 1975; Nolde, 1991). Racially, African women were prohibited from residing in white cities unless they worked there, and as women, they were considered subordinates to men, resulting in lower pay for the same jobs. Additionally, their poor socio-economic status resulted in a lack of necessities such as sanitation, water, electricity, and quality healthcare services, as they were confined to poorly resourced homesteads (Kehler, 2001, p. 42).

The Pass Law Act of 1952 Restricted African women's access to employment in cities, resulting in their confinement to rural areas. The majority of African women were unable to work in the mines and factories, leaving them to reside in homesteads. A few African women who were granted permission to work in urban areas were employed as domestic workers and maids in white households, receiving lower wages than their male counterparts. Accommodation was provided by their employers to extend their working hours, leading to separation from their husbands and children.

This prolonged separation between spouses created opportunities for infidelity and abandonment, destroying African families. Men often established new families closer to their places of employment, leaving the children to be raised by extended family members, primarily grandparents and aunts. This distorted family structure, in which most African men were not involved in their children's lives and women were the heads of households, became a common and acceptable norm that continues to persist to this day (Makofane, 2015). The nuclear family structure imposed on Africans was used to dismantle many African marriages and families.

5.2 The democratisation of Africa and the emergence of the black bourgeoisie

With the fall of the apartheid regime and the liberation and democratisation of South Africa, the hope was that the injustices of the past would be effectively addressed, and the dignity of the African people restored. The African National Congress (ANC)-led government, elected democratically in 1994, offered hope to many Africans that they would finally be treated as equals to other racial groups and that they would have access to better education, health, and economic opportunities. The African majority expected that land reform and employment equity policies would receive priority. If implemented effectively and driven by the imperatives of historical and social justice, democratisation and restitution policy could potentially lead to the decolonisation of the African people.

However, it was expected that there would be challenges in policy and legislative reform, given that the new South African democracy was still in its infancy and the legacy of colonial apartheid posed a vast array of difficult challenges. There have been arguments suggesting that the Western definition and structure of democracy, which was intentionally adopted by the ANC-led government to perpetuate the globalisation of Western economies, politics, and culture, is unattainable and unrealistic in the African context (Andreasson, 2001). The challenge with globalisation is that it has negative impacts on poorer nations whose economies are still colonised, as it weakens sovereignty, causes marginalisation, and constrains the internal management of governments, promoting neo-colonialism (Pacho, 2020, p. 85).

Another challenge in implementing the Western democratic political-economic structure is that most Western countries are homogenous in culture and language, while most African countries are multi-cultural with multiple language communities. The sense of unity and solidarity within African communities exceeds culturalist models that are grounded in a common language, making it difficult to draft a constitution that is entirely acceptable and in line with all the different traditional groups in the country. The attempt to globalise democracy to mirror democratic states of Western nations has caused many problems on the African continent, portraying it as failed states, while disregarding the destructive historical impact of colonial racial capitalism (Wing, 1995).

The homogenisation of democracy through the globalisation of the economy, politics, and culture has revealed that Africa, including South Africa, remains economically colonised by the West, rendering the continent subjugated and exploited. Although the apartheid government surrendered political power, the economy remained controlled by the minority (whites). The lack of control over key economic industries, such as mining and farming, gives the appearance of independence, but the continent is still economically colonised and controlled by the West. Despite Africa's vast natural wealth, which includes being one of the largest suppliers of raw minerals on the globe, many African citizens continue to live in poverty and dehumanising conditions (Muigua, 2020). The expected outcome of such mineral reserves would be for African countries to be among the most developed and for their citizens to live above the poverty line. However, even a progressive country like South Africa is considered to be one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Cultural identity politics have been cited as a contributing factor to the civil wars in some African nations, which are still struggling to solidify their democracies, with the Rwandan genocide in 1994 being one of the greatest atrocities in post-colonial Africa. Identity politics often arise from the struggle between different groups in society for political control and allocation of resources owned by the state (Alumona & Azom, 2017, p. 292). The occurrence of civil wars in different parts of the continent leads to an increase in illegal extraction and smuggling of natural resources to European nations, specifically (Wijeratne & Weeks, 2017). It is peculiar that countries that have control and ownership of their natural resources are plagued by civil wars, while those whose economies remain in the hands of their colonisers seem immune to such disasters. Regardless of whether there is a civil war or a peaceful democracy, Africa has yet to benefit from its mineral reserves, as minerals are extracted by African miners who receive low wages, while the raw minerals are exported to be processed outside the country, with the end products sold back to citizens at exorbitant prices, forcing African states to rely on other nations for goods and creating a culture of consumerism on the continent (Okeke, 2015).

One of the founding principles of the South African Freedom Charter was that "the people shall share the country's wealth" (Saul, 2015). Steve Tshwete interpreted the document as promoting equity, where the bourgeoisie would not strive for more than what was

contained in the charter, while the working class could aspire to more. Affirmative action programmes, such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and employment equity, were introduced to give the black working-class access to better-paying jobs and control over some sectors through tendering processes. However, these initiatives widened the gap between the rich (Whites) and the poor (Blacks), with only a few black people benefiting and the majority remaining in poverty. This gave rise to the "black or new middle class", which is predominantly black and consists primarily of civil servants and corporate employees with higher wages but "no direct control of the means of production" (Southall, 2013). The few members of the black middle class perceived to control the means of production are often appointed as directors in white-owned companies or fronted as owners, creating the illusion of economic transformation, and concealing the ANC's failure to nationalise key industries (Murray, 1997; Sibanda, 2015). The ANC appears to have agreed to adopt neo-colonial policies in their negotiations on democratising South Africa, which perpetuates the economic domination of white people, with only politically connected black people being the primary beneficiaries.

The concept of the "middle class" refers to individuals who occupy a socio-economic position that is neither characterised by poverty nor wealth and who are typically the dominant residents of urban areas. The term "bourgeoisie", of Latin origin, is often used to describe this group and may be perceived either positively or critically (Wallerstein, 1955). The black middle class, or black bourgeoisie, is often viewed as a symbol of success in African society. This group is perceived to have adopted a culture of consumerism, in which they are preoccupied with purchasing and accumulating assets and commodities as markers of their success.

A South African study on the spending habits of the middle class found that the black bourgeoisie's culture of consumerism exceeds that of their white counterparts, even at similar salary levels (Nieftagodien & Berg, 2007). As the black bourgeoisie continues to grow in South Africa, and its culture of consumerism becomes increasingly prominent, the erosion of traditional cultural values and practices is likely to occur. This is because the consumerism culture of the black bourgeoisie is heavily influenced by Western values and practices, as evidenced by their preference for European-made goods such as German

cars and Italian clothing. The influence of Western bourgeois culture may have far-reaching effects on the African bourgeoisie, impacting not only their taste in materials but also their way of life.

5.3   Conclusion

The apartheid government made life difficult for young African men in their homesteads by restricting their ability to live off their land. This forced them to migrate to the white cities in search of employment, resulting in the destabilisation of their families. In response to the mounting pressure on the apartheid regime and the need to keep labourers closer to the factories, the establishment of townships was established, allowing African workers to live closer to their places of work, and a greater number of Africans were permitted to study and take up "white collar" jobs, leading to the rise of the African middle class. However, this resulted in the forced assimilation of Western culture, with a focus on consumerism and materialism, and neglect of traditional African cultures. The impact of this coerced assimilation of bourgeois family life on the practice of breastfeeding will be the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6: LIBERATING THE AFRICAN FEMALE BODY AND RESTORING THE DIGNITY OF MOTHERHOOD

6.1   Introduction

The preoccupation with the accumulation of wealth among the African bourgeoisie necessitates the participation of both parents in the highly competitive marketplace to maintain the family's material well-being. This leads to a situation in which the mother may have to spend extended periods away from her children, thereby raising questions regarding societal perceptions of women as economically active citizens vis-a-vis their roles and responsibilities within the family structure.

This section aims to critically examine and shed light on the perception of motherhood within the Western bourgeois framework. The discussion will then proceed to consider the impact of this perception on the African community, specifically concerning motherhood and breastfeeding.

The analysis will commence by examining the globalisation of the Western bourgeois family structure and its role in shaping the African bourgeoisie family structure, which is equally committed to the capitalist imperative of material well-being for its members. The analysis will be structured under the following headings:

- The Western Bourgeois Family Structure and Associated Views on Motherhood and Breastfeeding (6.2)
- Western-Centric Perception of Women's Bodies and Its Impact on Breastfeeding (6.3)
- Colonisation and Commodification of Women's Bodies through Western Media (6.4)
- De-commodifying African Womanhood to Restore the Sacredness of African Motherhood (6.5)
- Conclusion (6.6)

6.2 The Western bourgeois family structure and associated views on motherhood and breastfeeding

Iruonagbe *et al*. (2013, p. 5635) describe the family as "society's oldest institution with the responsibility to provide guidance, support, and a sense of belonging for its members". This viewpoint suggests that society precedes the family and that the latter serves as a smaller or basic unit of society, providing a sense of belonging for each member. Families, as the basic units of society, play a critical role in teaching society's norms, values, and culture, as most of its members are family members where these values are taught and enforced. According to Iruonagbe *et al*. (2013, p. 5635), the family is where children learn "discipline, respect for elders and constituted authority, responsibility, integrity, and credibility". It can be argued that the proper functioning of society is greatly dependent on the functionality of its basic units, families. If the family is where morality, respect, and discipline are taught, then families ought to be virtuous and functional. Conversely, if families are overly patriarchal and children are taught that women are inferior to men and their purpose in life is to serve them, such perceptions will be reflected in society. If toxic masculinity is constantly present in the family, where the father dominates the mother and female children, children in that context are likely to grow up with the perception that women are inferior to men.

At the beginning of global industrialisation, the nuclear family structure, with the male as the sole breadwinner and the female as the homemaker, formed the foundation of many Western societies (Cooke, 2018, p. 3). Given this family structure, many families embraced the patriarchal society's ideological values and practices.

The rise of Western industrialisation saw the emergence of patriarchal characteristics in many Western societies, where women were subjugated, commodified, and exploited within the system of liberal capitalism. Their labour was not fairly remunerated, if at all, and their male counterparts accepted this form of injustice as the norm (Armstrong, 2020). This socio-cultural subordination and subjugation, along with political exclusion, economic discrimination, and exploitation, led to the formation of feminist movements in the early 19th century. The "first wave" of feminism aimed to fight for women's political rights and

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inclusion in the formal economy, while the "second and third waves" from the 1960s to 1990s fought for women's legal and social rights in a male-dominated society (Odhiambo & Mutuku, 2022).

As women gained more political power (voting) and socio-economic independence, there was a shift in society's perception of their roles. The feminist movements led to women being seen not only as mothers and housewives but also as economically active members of society with equal legal and social rights to men. While women were theoretically seen as equal to men, in practice they were still subjugated and exploited. They were not equally remunerated for their work and were expected to perform household chores in addition to their work responsibilities (Carrim, 2017, p. 2; Poduval, 2009, p. 66).

One of the many challenges faced by the feminist movement was the sexual objectification and commodification of women, which remains a challenge to this day. In patriarchal societies, women are fragmented into beautiful bodies made up of sexually appealing parts and are enslaved into a life of materialism and consumerism (fashion, plastic surgery, and beauty products) to meet society's beauty standards, while still earning 10% less than their male counterpart at work (Dozier, 2013, p. 13; McRobbie, 2008, p. 5; Xaba, 2019, p. 184).

The perpetuation of the perception of women as sexual objects for the gratification of men not only undermines their humanity but also their significant roles in society, particularly motherhood. Patriarchy and capitalism have contributed to the erroneous portrayal of women, obscuring their true identity within the home and particularly in the nuclear family structure in industrialised societies.

Capitalist states have widely propagated the bourgeois nuclear family (consisting of heterosexual partners and their children) as the ideal family to emulate, with the father serving as the primary provider and the mother often occupying a domestic role (Munro, 2021).

Infant mortality has been a major concern since the early 20th century. However, instead of capacitating women, families, and communities to better care for their infants, the middle-class convention of the 20th century assumed that the family, with the mother as

the primary caregiver, was the proper context for childhood (Davin, 1978). As a result, the role of motherhood in building families was distorted, as it was no longer revered for its central function of "social reproduction", but was instead promoted for "capital reproduction", where the primary goal was to increase the labour force, soldiers, and taxpayers for the state (Vilenica, 2012).

The commodification and exploitation of motherhood for economic purposes have resulted in women being treated as instruments to be utilised, not only as sexual objects but also as tools for capital reproduction in the pursuit of producing more bodies for the workforce and consumers of capitalist products. A society with a profound consumerist culture that perceives women as sexual objects is likely to have a distorted perception of the biological functions of women's bodies, as well as their role as agents of morality and socialisation in the family and society at large.

The imposition of the bourgeois family structure and the need for increased sales has led to the commodification of women's bodies, particularly through the fashion industry, which is driven by a "beauty ideology" that imposes specific aesthetic standards on women (Malik, 2014). The use of aesthetically pleasing, scantily clad, middle-class women in advertising by major Western media outlets has created a culture of commodifying women's bodies and presenting them as objects rather than subjects. Breasts have become a focal point in these advertisements, with small waists and large breasts representing the ideal of female beauty.

I postulate the commodification of female breasts as sexual objects should be regarded as a major concern as it undermines their important biological function in the nourishment of children. In Western societies, the public display of breastfeeding is often met with objections and discomfort, reflecting a skewed perception of the breasts as organs of sexual pleasure rather than a source of nourishment for infants. This hyper sexualisation of female breasts, driven by the greed and self-interest inherent in neoliberal capitalism, has detrimental effects on mothers who seek to breastfeed their infants, not just in terms of nutrition but also emotional well-being.

In a capitalist neoliberal society, the role of the mother in breastfeeding has been influenced by the portrayal of the "working mother" and the "involved father". The mother, who is typically employed full-time, is unable to breastfeed her infant on demand, leading to the invention and promotion of breast pumps, which are marketed as a solution to this issue. This way of dividing labour within the family structure, where the father is actively involved in feeding while the mother is working, has become the norm for many bourgeois families. This lifestyle requires financial resources, such as the purchase of breast pumps and feeding bottles, contributing to the consumerist culture in this class. With effective labour policies that allow women paid maternity of at least six months so they can exclusively breastfeed, most women will be able to experience motherhood as close to natural as possible.

Motherhood under neoliberal capitalism has become associated with consumerism, as represented by the so-called "yummy mummies". The concept of motherhood has been commodified, sexualised, and exploited for profit gain rather than being viewed as a sacred experience (Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015). The term "yummy mummy", which is commonly used in contemporary Britain, refers to a sexually attractive and well-dressed woman who prioritises self-care during motherhood and is portrayed as the "ultimate modern woman", particularly within the bourgeoisie (Littler, 2013).

The promotion of this unrealistic and unattainable image of motherhood has the potential to demean and confuse "traditional" mothers, causing their experience of motherhood to be stressful instead of fulfilling (Cooper, 2020). The "yummy mummy" lifestyle is often marketed by celebrities who present breastfeeding as a fashionable and classy practice, utilising expensive breast pumps and feeding bottles while wearing designer clothes. However, this approach can hinder a mother's ability to breastfeed directly from her breasts, as the clothing is designed for style rather than for maternity purposes (*Taylor et al*., 2020). When mothers attempt to imitate the media portrayal of breastfeeding and are unable to do so, they are often presented with commercialised solutions, such as infant formula, perpetuating the commodification of breastfeeding.

The perception of mothers who choose not to conform to the commodified image of motherhood, as represented by the "yummy mummy", is often negative. These mothers

are sometimes viewed as being subservient, domesticated, unenlightened, or even as being anti-feminist. If such mothers choose to stay at home and breastfeed their infants directly, the father may not be directly involved in feeding the infant. This may be seen as perpetuating patriarchal domination, as the mother is expected to be with her infant constantly. However, it is important to recognise that choosing to respond to one's maternal instincts and care for one's infant at all times need not be incompatible with a sense of liberation or empowerment.

6.3   Western-centric Perception of women's Bodies and its impact on Breastfeeding

The categorisation or perception of the public exposure of female breasts as lewd and inappropriate is, arguably, a result of the explicit commodification and sexualisation of women's bodies. As noted by Sheehan *et al.* (2019, p. 2), "the sexualisation of the breast is the reason why breastfeeding in public is disapproved by society". These perceptions are deeply ingrained in many societies and are perpetuated by the media's representation of women, as seen in the visuals used in print and television advertisements, leading to concerns that Western culture is becoming increasingly sexualised and even "pornified" (Hatton & Trautner, 2011). In Western culture, it is acceptable or tolerable for a woman to wear revealing clothing that barely covers her breasts, but at the same time, a mother who exposes her breasts to feed her infant is expected to be condemned. This is a hypocritical attitude, as young women are encouraged to idolise celebrities and wear revealing clothes to boost their confidence, while men who commend and applaud their "sexiness" consider breastfeeding in public to be disgusting, lewd, and immoral. This indicates the extent to which women's bodies have become sexually objectified. Women are not only being objectified by society, but as a result of adapting to this narrow and discriminatory perception, some women have begun to view themselves through the same objectifying gaze, thereby actively contributing to their self-objectification (Calogero *et al*., 2011).

The general perception regarding a woman's body and her breasts appears to be shaped by two distinct positions. The first position relates to the stage of a woman's life when she

reaches puberty and begins to develop breasts. At this stage, her body is often considered to be erotic and is therefore worthy of being displayed for the enjoyment of others. The second position arises from the stage of a woman's physical development when her body is expected to serve its primary role in reproduction. Conventional norms dictate that the woman should then be concealed from public view (Silverio, 2017). When young women expose part of their breasts as part of their fashionable dress code, they are generally applauded for being sexy and confident but should another woman expose part of her breasts while breastfeeding her infant such exposure may be perceived as leud. So, to me, it appears as though society is more comfortable with the aesthetic exposure of female breasts rather than them being exposed to serve their biological purpose to feed children.

This dichotomy between the functional and aesthetic roles of a woman's breasts is a cause for concern, as the aesthetic appeal seems to be more highly valued in Western society than their functional role, such as infant feeding. This distinction may be due to the problematic perception that a woman's breasts are solely sexual organs, as opposed to having a multidimensional purpose (Ward *et al.,* 2006). Female breasts can serve as a "powerful symbol of beauty, motherhood, and vitality" (Webb *et al*., 2019, p. 49). The use of breasts for sexual gratification is a learned practice in Western culture, where breasts are viewed as objects to be looked at and enjoyed by grown men (Ward *et al*., 2006).

The roots of the patriarchal and misogynistic aspects of contemporary Western society can be traced back several centuries. The discriminatory societal system of masculinity has been deeply ingrained in Western society before the 20th century, which to some extent has been exacerbated by the Christian belief that a woman (Eve) introduced sin into the world when she disobeyed God's command and gave in to the serpent's temptations in the Garden of Eden regarding the origin of sin (Hasan, 2017). Given the widespread popularity of this interpretation, it is not surprising that society (primarily men) feels entitled to regulate women's bodies in terms of what they can wear and when it is acceptable for them to reveal their bodies in public, thereby treating women as non- or semi-autonomous, inferior beings (Webb *et al*., 2019).

Inferior or non-autonomous beings or objects are unable to safeguard their interests and thus require a high degree of supervision. The domination and control of women by men throughout history have direct links to these problematic assumptions regarding women's nature and the endorsement of a patriarchal society. The word "patriarch" is of Latin origin and consists of two components: "*pata*", which means father, and "arch", which means to rule. Patriarchy, therefore, means "rule of the father" (Ademiluka, 2018). Under this social system, women are considered property, first belonging to their fathers or the eldest male in the family, who will eventually pass ownership to the woman's future husband upon marriage. Women's bodies are not only subjugated by their male relatives but are also commodified by society, where they are expected to conform to certain (racially biased) phenotypical patterns of "white" beauty as the universal standard. This Western-centric view of beauty is often portrayed in Western media and other social platforms, leading to racial discrimination and pressure on women (especially young women) to conform to this problematic view of feminine beauty (McKay *et al*., 2018). Patriarchy poses a threat to women's ability to breastfeed freely as men feel they have control over women's bodies, so the perception that women can show parts of their breasts if it's sexy but cannot do the same for breastfeeding is entirely misogynistic.

The sexual objectification and commodification of women is a widespread issue globally, but African women have been subject to particularly harsh treatment. African women's bodies are often seen as not conforming to Western and European beauty standards, which has led to the sexual objectification and "demonisation" of their natural appearance (Collins, 2014).

One notable example is the case of Sara ("Saartjie") Baartman, a South African Khoisan woman who was taken from her home as an enslaved woman during the 19th century when South Africa was under British colonial rule. She was displayed in Britain as a "freak of nature" because of her physical appearance, which was deemed "ugly", "unusual", and "huge" (Settler & Engh, 2015). Baartman was displayed naked and treated as a spectacle, leading to her dehumanisation and exploitation (Mothoagae, 2016). This demeaning perception and treatment of Baartman have contributed significantly to the sexual

objectification and commodification of African women, as well as their use as objects of scientific enquiry and targets of ridicule and derision.

The legacy of colonialism has compelled Africans to adopt "European sexual morality and puritanical values" (Bawa & Adeniyi Ogunyankin, 2018, p. 19). This reinforcement of the perception that the bodies of African women are "unruly and in need of control and monitoring" has led to the implementation of regulations for public indecency (Settler & Engh, 2015, p. 40). This imposed assimilation has caused the erosion of traditional African values that previously protected women from sexual objectification and recognised the significance of their roles as moral and religious educators of their children.

These narrow and misogynistic views of the female body have infiltrated almost every aspect of society, undermining indigenous moral values and perceptions of the female body. Unless the public perception of female breasts is changed from a sexual to a nurturing viewpoint, it will be indicative of a failure to decolonise the African mind and body, perpetuating barriers for African mothers to exclusively breastfeed their infants.

6.4 Colonisation and commodification of women's bodies through western media

Even though women are perceived as being liberated from patriarchal gender-based oppression and sexual discrimination, the images conveyed by Western media paint a different picture. The sexual commodification of women by the media and entertainment industry is widespread and highly effective in blurring the lines between images of the sexualised and commodified woman with liberal-feminist ideas of modern, liberated women. This distorted and manipulative representation of women has led to self-sexualisation and commodification, with women feeling pressured to conform to these degrading images.

Some women feel compelled to represent themselves on social media with sexually appealing images as a means of gaining appreciation and admiration, which is perceived as empowering (Leiliyanti & Chaerunnisa, 2020, p. 1981, citing Liss *et al*., 2010, p. 65). The Western media and entertainment industry can be considered the new colonisers, exploiting women's sexuality for financial gain in a manner that is equally oppressive as the former colonisation of African countries for the exploitation of natural resources.

The first step in commodifying human beings was to take away their names and identities, and the same can be said for the colonisation of the female body. The true identity of women is taken away and repackaged into a commodity that can be sold for financial gain by the media and entertainment industry. The modern woman has been rebranded from being perceived as docile and subjugated to a "sexy, powerful socialite" who expresses her freedom from patriarchy through revealing clothing. This image is perpetuated by social media influencers such as Kim Kardashian (Leiliyanti & Chaerunnisa, 2020).

The images of the "liberated, powerful" woman promoted by the media and entertainment industry, particularly hip-hop music videos, appear to undo the work of feminist movements as women are misled into self-objectifying in the name of proving their autonomy. Rap or hip-hop music is often criticised for its misogyny (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009, p. 3) as it still presents women as sexual commodities, used to sell recorded music. The portrayal of sexually appealing women, some with surgically enhanced features, in the media has created the perception that such women are ideal and that all women should aspire to resemble them. This has led to women perceiving themselves from the perspective of the observer, resulting in self-objectification (Kahalon *et al*., 2018, p. 2). Although self-objectification of women is a direct result of the sexual commodification of the female body, it is anticipated that the perception of the roles and functions of the female body, particularly the breasts, would be viewed as misogynistic and rejected. However, this has not been the case. The dual sexual commodification of the female body by both the media and the women themselves continues to undermine the morality of women in society and impairs their ability to fulfil their responsibilities in various spheres of life, such as motherhood and the associated tasks. Society must change its perception of the female body to afford women the respect and space they deserve. This shift in attitude and perception would enable women to fulfil their moral obligations, particularly regarding motherhood, without being restricted by patriarchal expectations and standards, which are shaped by the consumerist materialism of neoliberal capitalism.

6.5 De-commodifying African womanhood to restore the sacredness of African motherhood.

For African women to fully enjoy and experience motherhood as closely naturally as possible, it is important to argue for their bodies to be viewed and respected for their intrinsic biological value and not for their social or sexual value.

6.5.1 The colonisation and consumption of the African female body

The African woman's body, just like her ancestral land, has been subjected to colonisation and exploitation by imperialists. She was stripped of her humanity and treated as a mere object. The "eroticisation of the African female body" is a result of colonialism, even though her ancestral land has been decolonised (Benard, 2016, p. 1). The Eurocentric perception of the African woman, which represented her as a hyper-sexual and immoral being, contributed to the genesis of the African Jezebel myth (Granowski, 2014, p. 71). This misrepresentation stripped the African woman of her true identity and moral status, rebranding her as a Jezebel and normalising her sexual exploitation.

The African woman's entire being was colonised and regulated by patriarchal imperialists, and her flesh was exposed to exploitation. An example of this is the experience of Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman. With her extraordinary voluptuousness, Saartjie was regarded as a "freak of nature" and became an icon of the commodification of the female black body, which was to be studied and sexually exploited (Romero Ruiz, 2017, p. 137). She was removed from her motherland, South Africa, just like its minerals, and transported to the foreign land of her colonisers, where she was displayed and paraded like an animal. Her sexuality was consumed as entertainment by Westerners. Saartjie's sexual commodification and exploitation did not end at her death; her body was dismembered and preserved for display in museums for continued profit generation, just like the remains of a dead animal. Her brain and genitalia were among the organs preserved, symbolising how her mind and sexuality were colonised by the West, just like other African women whose countries were colonised.

The exploitation of African women extended beyond their sexuality to include their motherhood qualities as well. During slavery, lactating African female slaves were forced to wet nurse their masters' children, while seeking alternative sources of nourishment for their offspring (Freeman, 2018, p. 1545; Roth, 2018, p. 805; Winer, 2008, p. 167). African women were not only subjected to hard labour as domestic workers but also had their breasts used to nourish the offspring of imperialists. Enslaved African women were separated from their infants to nurse their oppressors' infants, and in some cases, their motherhood was even exploited for financial gain. For example, slave masters would advertise the rental of African mothers as wet nurses to other slave masters with infants in need of nursing. Advertisements were printed in newspapers, such as the Rio de Janeiro newspaper on 13 November 1827, with captions such as "For sale, two wet nurses, from their first pregnancies, on the rua de S. José, n. 22, basement" (Roth, 2018, p. 805). These enslaved African women were deprived of the fundamental right to experience motherhood as nature intended, as it was commodified by imperialists who violently removed them or their ancestors from their motherland to serve as mere means to an end for the building and development of their oppressors' country and economy.

The institution of formula feeding by African women was never a voluntary choice but rather imposed upon them by imperial policies. The systematic barriers to exclusive breastfeeding by African mothers began in slavery and continue to persist to this day (Freeman, 2018, p. 1545). It is therefore not surprising that African countries face enormous challenges in meeting the exclusive breastfeeding targets set by the WHA, while their Western counterparts perform exceptionally.

In countries such as South Africa, the image of a domestic worker is synonymous with an African woman. To this day, African women are still separated from their infants to care for the children of their former colonisers and oppressors, preventing them from mothering their children. Domestic workers are often not registered or unionised and therefore do not enjoy the benefits of the Employment Equity Act, resulting in the deprivation of benefits such as four months of maternity leave. These women are often given only a few weeks to recover before returning to work, with some working as stay-in maids and unable to breastfeed their infants at night, forcing them to seek alternative feeding options.

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Formula feeding continues to be imposed on Africans of all social classes for various reasons, including the intended use for the feminist working class within the African bourgeoisie, as both heterosexual parents can equally participate in feeding while still working full-time jobs, and secondly, those living below the poverty line are forced to resort to formula feeding if they want to secure their low-wage jobs by returning to work prematurely (before the six months of exclusive breastfeeding) or by having to go job hunting, as most are sole breadwinners.

Moreover, not only are African bodies still colonised and policed, even in a 'democratic' South Africa, through the enforcement of apartheid laws such as the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act, but their minds are also still colonised, perceiving breastfeeding in public as a lewd act, subjecting African women to a life of consumerism (breast milk substitutes).

The body of the African woman remains colonised and commercially exploited by imperial capitalists, as evidenced by the use of scantily clad African women in music videos. This perpetuates the misperception of African women as sexually immoral and commoditised objects for entertainment. The African Jezebel myth continues to be legitimised by such representations in music videos and pornographic material. The colonisation of the African woman's body continues to strip her of her identity and dignity, and she remains separated from her being so that she can be commoditised as a sexualised object. Although African feminist movements have brought about a new social order that recognises the equality of women (especially African women) with men and their white counterparts in both the workplace and home, society still perceives African women as sexual commodities. Moreover, sexual harassment of women in the workplace remains a prevalent but often unspoken issue in many industries. To eliminate the barriers that prevent African mothers from exclusively breastfeeding their infants, particularly in public, it is imperative to decolonise the body and mind of the African woman and restore the sanctity and dignity of motherhood.

6.5.2 Restoring the dignity and sacredness of African motherhood.

Just as the body of Sarah Baartman, also known as "Saartjie", was returned from the grasp of her oppressors and colonisers, so too should the liberty and body autonomy of other African women be restored. Freedom and democracy without control over one's own body and mind is not true freedom, as such control remains in the hands of others. It is imperative to abolish all psychological colonial systems and restore the identity of the African people. Africans cannot claim to be free and liberated while still bearing the marks of their colonisers and upholding colonial laws. The reclaiming of their identity and the rejection of cultural imperialism is crucial in freeing themselves from psychological and bodily colonialism. To correct the injustices of the past and restore the humanity, cultural heritage, and identity of the African people, it is necessary to instil a sense of nostalgia for self-identity, free from colonial mentality (Ezebuilo, 2020, p. 179).

Motherhood confers a new identity on African women, as noted in Chapter 4 (4.2.2). Therefore, restoring the identity of African women as individuals within their communities should also involve the restoration of their identity in motherhood. The conventional understanding of African motherhood imposed by colonial imperialists must be discarded in favour of the true identity of African motherhood, which is described by Akujobi (2011) as a "sacred and spiritual process that morally transforms a woman, causing her to come to terms with being different, as she ceases to be an individual and becomes attached, both morally and spiritually, to another - her baby" (p. 2). The bond between mother and child implies that their collective well-being should not be at odds with each other. The notion that breastfeeding is a sexual or obscene act is damaging to the moral status of African motherhood and is an indication of the ongoing colonisation of African minds, culture, and motherhood. A study conducted by Nyaloko, Lubbe, and Minnie in Alexander, a predominantly African township, found that 10.4% of community members strongly agreed and 8.3% agreed that breastfeeding in public is culturally unacceptable (Nyaloko *et al*., 2020, p. 587). Although the percentage of those who hold this perception is small, it is nonetheless concerning that there are still Africans who view breastfeeding in public as being contrary to African cultural values.

The ongoing discrimination and harassment of African mothers who choose to breastfeed in public, as well as forcing them to breastfeed their infants in toilets, is an attempt to undermine the sanctity of motherhood. This may lead some African mothers to choose formula feeding in public instead, giving in to the pressures of commodifying motherhood. The alternative of breastfeeding in toilets is also far from ideal, as covering up both the breast and the child while breastfeeding in public interferes with the natural emotional connection between the mother and her infant, as established through eye contact (ElseQuest *et al*., 2003).

Breastfeeding has spiritual implications in various religious practices, as it not only fosters an emotional bond but also a spiritual one, providing "spiritual nourishment" to the child and promoting their spiritual well-being (Farhadi, 2020, p. 230). Religious beliefs play a significant role in shaping an individual's breastfeeding pattern. For example, in the Christian faith, breastfeeding is encouraged and mentioned in several scriptures, such as in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 where the Apostle Paul compares his gospel to breast milk and states that he gave the early Christians "milk, not solid food" as they were not yet ready for it (The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments, 1913).

Considering that most African traditions and dominant religious scriptures in Africa support and promote breastfeeding, there is a compelling argument to be made for it to be regarded as not only a God-given right for both the mother and child but also as a cultural (African) and human rights issue, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

6.6   Conclusion

To allow African women to experience and enjoy motherhood, their bodily autonomy should be restored, and they are allowed to exercise their discretion on how they would prefer to mother (breastfeed and nature) their children in line with their cultures without society imposing unrealistic standards on them would make restore the sacredness and authenticity of motherhood.

CHAPTER 7: UBUNTU PHILOSOPHY – A NORMATIVE FOUNDATION FOR THE CONCEPTUALISATION OF MOTHERHOOD

7.1   Introduction

The chapter aims to provide an overview of Ubuntu philosophy as a relevant and valid epistemological framework for comprehending and interpreting the African lived experience, with a specific focus on motherhood. To this end, the chapter will begin with a brief historical account of Ubuntu philosophy (7.2). This will be followed by a discussion of Ubuntu's conceptualisation of personhood and humanness as articulated by Mogobe Ben Ramose (7.3). Finally, Ubuntu's philosophy will be presented as a useful framework for understanding and expressing the African lived experience, particularly as it relates to motherhood (7.4).

7.2   Ubuntu philosophy in historical perspective

The existence and relevance of African philosophy have been a matter of contention for a considerable time, with various scholars presenting arguments both in favour of and against its existence, credibility, and relevance. As Masaka (2018) highlights, the sad reality in discussions of African philosophy is that the initial point of departure is often the need to "assert its authentic self-existence" (p. 4). The failure of modern philosophical epistemology to acknowledge the philosophy of Ubuntu is due to cultural imperialism and epistemological racism. Cultural imperialism refers to "the practice of promoting, distinguishing, separating, or artificially injecting the culture or language of one nation into another" (Ezema, 2010, p. 15). Meanwhile, epistemological racism refers to the perception that "only the regime of truth would be provided by the tradition of Western, scientific thought, whose worldview should be disseminated as a superior form of knowledge at the expense of other cosmologies and knowledge" (Reis, 2020, p. 8).

Ubuntu is a philosophy based on the principles of communitarianism, humanness, and solidarity, which contrasts with the individualistic utilitarian nature of modern Western philosophy (Bolden, 2014; Metz, 2011).

Ubuntu (also referred to as Botho or Hunhu) means humanness and is a term commonly used in Southern Africa among the Bantu-speaking people. There is consensus that the Bantu-speaking people are divided into two basic groups; one group comprising various Shona dialects mostly found between the Limpopo and Zambezi rivers, and the second group made up of the remaining languages like Sotho, Nguni, Tsonga, Chopi, and Venda (Ehret, 1972, p. 10). These cultural groups are the predominant inhabitants of countries like South Africa, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Botswana, Zambia, Eswatini, Malawi, Mozambique, Angola, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (Mangena, 2016).

The existence of a common understanding within African dialects that emphasises the moral and social expression of human relationships in the form of reciprocity, mutuality, and solidarity has been well documented. Mligo (2021) provides examples of this in two languages – Bena and Swahili – and demonstrates how the hand is used as a metaphor for reciprocity. In Bena, the phrase "*hawoho bite, hawoho wuye*" is used, while in Swahili, the phrase "*mkono nenda, mkono rudi*" conveys the same meaning, which roughly translates to "for every hand given, a hand is to be returned". Similar expressions can be found in other African languages, including Tshivenda, where the phrase "*tshanda lya tshanda vhuya*" means "a hand that gives is a hand that receives". In Sepedi, the expression "*maoto a rekana*" uses feet as a metaphor and means "you can only expect visitors when you also visit them". These expressions, each articulated in different languages, convey a fundamental understanding of the philosophy of Ubuntu. Ubuntu/Hunhu is synonymous with the Nguni and Sotho-Tswana aphorism "*Umuntu Ngumuntu Ngabantu*" or "*Motho ke Motho ka Batho*", which translates to "a person is a person through other persons" or "I am because we are" (Mangena, 2016, p. 67; Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013, p. 83).

The validity and relevance of Ubuntu philosophy have been met with significant criticism, with several authors such as Paulin Houtondji in his work "African Philosophy: Myth and Reality" (1983) questioning its appropriateness for modern society.

7.3   Ubuntu philosophy and the question of personhood

Ramose (1999) proposes that the term Ubuntu be approached as a hyphenated term Ubu-ntu (Ramose, 1999, p. 36). The prefix Ubu- denotes the process of becoming or being, while -ntu denotes personhood (Ramose, 1999, p. 36). Therefore, it is accurate to say that we are not born as umuntu (personhood); we rather become a person through our connection and association with others who are also in the continuous process of becoming persons. Thus, becoming umuntu is a continuous process that fosters moral bonds between individuals to create a web of interconnectedness, which is the foundation of communal life. The Shona version of the word ubuntu, which is Hunhu, retains its proper significance when it is translated to mean "humanness" instead of "humanity". In this sense, Ramose argues that Ubuntu should be understood to mean "humanness" rather than humanism, as the former refers to a condition of being or state becoming, while the latter refers to a state of completeness or finality (Ramose, 1999, p. 108).

As stated in the introductory section (7.1), Ubu-ntu is synonymous with the maxim "*umuntu ngumuntu nga bantu*", or "*motho ke motho ka batho*". If a person is a person through other persons, as the aphorism suggests, then an individual cannot claim the moral status of being a human being or possessing humanness while they cannot coexist with others in the community. From this perspective, a proper (moral-ontological) understanding of human existence presupposes social and moral relations of coexistence with others within a communal context that privileges the values of inter-relationality and interdependence. Ramose (1999) articulates this interdependence well when he argues that "to be a human being is to affirm one's humanity by recognising the humanity of others" (Ramose, 1999, p. 38).

In African culture, for an individual to be recognised as a human being, it is imperative to acknowledge the sanctity of life and the dignity of others. This recognition is necessary for individuals to respect themselves and others. To disregard the dignity of others renders an individual "go hloka botho/go sebe le botho", meaning a person devoid of humanness. Everyone is inherently deserving of human dignity based on their physical-spiritual value and significance, and respect is granted according to one's moral stature in society. Social

milestones and responsibilities that the community recognises serve as legitimate standards and criteria for individual moral achievement. For instance, motherhood is a milestone for women, while boys graduate from initiation school to be regarded as men.

Ubuntu is a holistic worldview that emphasises interconnectedness and unity in the human experience. I suggest that the pursuit of understanding others requires the recognition that individuals cannot be detached from their spirit/soul (metaphysical), physical being (biological), and relevant moral and religious values. Together, these elements constitute the moral foundations of human life in society, and they contribute to an individual's humanness. Becoming human is a dynamic and continuous process, and individuals coexist with others to achieve botho/ubuntu or the essence of being a human being.

In my view, the concept of a holistic human being incorporates the soul, body, and mind, and is more than just an entity that possesses life. The question of when life begins and ends is controversial, particularly when viewed through different cultural, religious, and racial lenses. In Western medicine and law, for instance, life begins at 20 weeks when the fetus becomes viable and ends when most brain function has ceased, with no possibility of revival (Peterfy, 1995; Wicks, 2017, p. 121). In contrast, African cultures regard life as starting when pregnancy is realised and ending when the heart stops beating and the individual's body temperature drops. The African concept of death does not reduce a person to an object (corpse or medical waste). Rather, when an African infant dies or a woman miscarries, it is said that they "came but quickly passed over to the spiritual realm" (*ngwana o fitile/mosadi o gomile tsileng*). This phrase also implies that the woman's pregnancy was terminated before it was completed. Additionally, in African tradition, individuals do not "die", but "pass away" or "*go hlokofala*". It is considered disrespectful to say that someone "died" (*o hwile*) because it denies their existence in the spiritual realm where they continue to exist until the end of time. Ramose characterises an individual as an immortal being that survives death and should not be objectified after death because the holistic concept of the person (spirit, body, and mind/morals) is preserved in African traditional thinking (Ramose, 1999, p. 60).

In African culture, death does not diminish the inherent dignity of a person; rather, it elevates it as the spirit is more revered than the physical body. This is because the spirit is seen as being incapable of sin, whereas the body is often associated with immoral conduct. The spirit is the only form of being that can experience both sides of human existence, which enables it to traverse between the living world and the spiritual realm. This is why ancestors, the living-dead, can communicate with the living. The body and spirit combined make up a living person, and it is the existence of the spirit within the body that is the primary reason for a person to be regarded as worthy of dignity and respect. These values, which are underpinned by the sanctity of life, form the basis of social and moral interactive processes that enable us to develop the status of a human being, or humanness. In this regard, people's social and moral obligations serve as a means of connecting them to others and allow them to retain their personhood, just as the soul cannot be detached from a person without killing the body.

As the focus of this research is African motherhood, it is important to view the African mother not merely as a noun, but as a verb, highlighting motherhood as both a title and an experience. I propose that a woman's holistic being is grounded in the sacred, unique powers that enable her to preserve, sustain, and nourish life. I, therefore, argue that fragmenting her life experience by viewing her as an individual with separate roles, such as a career woman, daughter, wife, or member of society, devalues her personhood and unique and irreplaceable, God-given duties and responsibilities. It is imperative to perceive her as a whole being, grounded morally and ontologically in the constitutive forces of life itself. Women in traditional African cultures are not perceived as inferior beings; they are accorded the highest moral status due to their distinctive role as the preservers and bearers of life. Women are seen as beings uniquely created to nourish life nutritionally and morally. They are the only ones who can host and help build a vessel for another soul, and then serve as a medium for this creation, the child, to enter this world, both soul and body. In this way, mothers provide nourishment for the growth of the vessel and a "home" for the soul, acculturating and socialising their offspring by laying the necessary moral foundation for their journey towards humaneness. This will be explored further in Chapters 4 and 6.

In African culture, if a child becomes an immoral adult due to a lack of proper moral upbringing or uninformed decisions, they will be regarded as a person "*wa go hloka botho*", which means someone without humanity or personhood. Although they retain the status of a person, they are not considered worthy of respect. It is important to note that the subject in question is characterised as someone who lacks humanity rather than someone who lacks morality. If someone acts out of character in a specific situation, they will be perceived as "*motho wa go hloka mekgwa/semelo*", in which *mekgwa* denotes morals and *semelo* denotes character. Thus, our humanity makes us people of integrity and worthy of respect, not necessarily our morality. The term "subject" is used to refer to morality because moral values are subjective and determined by social mores, historically grounded in particularistic traditions of culture, religion, and law. Humanity, on the other hand, is a more objectively conceptualised process that refers to the process of becoming human through other human beings.

According to Ramose (2004, p. 204), the reality of motherhood as the preserver of life necessitates the mother's respect in African tradition. Motherhood is a spiritual and sacred journey that requires great reverence. From this perspective, the mother holds an elevated moral status in society due to her unique ability to preserve life. The woman's role is particularly significant as it contributes to the preservation of humanity by laying the foundations for the moral development of future generations.

If women are indeed central to the preservation of life, given their distinctive role as hosts for the souls of future generations, as vessels for the souls of their unborn children – and as a portal for their entry into this world, duly charged with the responsibility to nourish their children and provide moral education for their journey towards personhood – the worrying question that confronts us is the following:

Why is there such a widespread and deep-seated tendency to deny the fact that the African woman does indeed have agential powers of decision-making and autonomy within the social and family structures of the indigenous African community?

The devaluation of the indigenous African way of life is a result of an epistemic will to ignorance that is influenced by a racist paradigm. This paradigm aims to justify the

problematic claims of European/Western superiority. As a result, it becomes difficult to reflect, with philosophical integrity, on the universal significance of the basic tenets of indigenous African epistemological systems of thought.

7.4　The significance and relevance of Ubuntu

African people worldwide have long been subject to the perception of sub-humanity and lack of moral values (Waytz *et al*., 2014), leading to their policing through Western laws and religious values, specifically Christianity. The imposition of Western cultural and religious values has resulted in prejudice against African motherhood and breastfeeding in public. The clash between Western and African values has created tension, which has reinforced Western ideas of privacy and discretion regarding breastfeeding practices in public spaces. The unfortunate consequence of such "privatisation" is the divisive tension it has caused in the African community and family life.

Ubuntu can provide an authentic normative alternative to the Western-centric approach that informs the ethos and practice of breastfeeding in the African community. In a country like South Africa, with a violent past of colonial conquest, land dispossession, and anti-African and anti-Black racism, an appropriate moral-political philosophical orientation is required that resonates with the victims of such a violent past. Ubuntu philosophy is such a philosophy, encompassing many ethical principles and ideas that are spread diffusely across the current field of Western ethical theories. However, these ethical theories lack coherence and interconnectedness when viewed from a broader, more universalistic perspective. Ubuntu's philosophy offers a universalistic platform for communication and dialogue.

According to Mayaka and Truell (2021), Ubuntu's philosophy is grounded in "generic life values of justice, responsibility, equality, collectiveness, relatedness, reciprocity, love, respect, helpfulness, community, caring, dependability, sharing, trust, integrity, unselfishness and social change" (Mayaka & Truell, 2021, p. 3).

The philosophy of Ubuntu calls into question the anthropocentric belief that humans are the most important creatures in the universe, with the God-given right to control, manipulate, and exploit the environment and other forms of life for human survival

regardless of the consequences. In African metaphysics/ontology, the environment is holistically viewed as a sacred component of life, providing humans with land to live on, food for sustenance and herbs for healing, as well as serving as a resting place for ancestors. The earth and its resources hold spiritual significance in the indigenous African worldview, comparable to the spiritual, emotional and physical gifts that a mother provides within family and community life.

Mother Earth provides water, which is considered sacred and life-giving. In addition to quenching thirst, water also enables cleansing and treatment of various ailments, similar to how a mother's milk can help an infant fight illness. Both these life-sustaining liquids are integral elements in the well-being of African life. Just as humans are interdependent with the environment/ecosystem, they are also dependent on their fellow humans. The survival of human life is reliant on the realisation of the fundamental importance of spirit togetherness/unity and interdependence. According to the philosophy of Ubuntu or personhood, *motho ke motho ka batho,* or a person is a person through other persons. This philosophy of unity acknowledges interconnectedness and interdependence, differing significantly from the Western-centric perception of personhood.

The notion that an individual is a self-contained entity, with total freedom of choice and unaffected by their environment or community, is a fallacy that negates the importance of social interaction for a healthy moral life. Attempts to force mothers to breastfeed their children in restrooms while in public is a form of cultural and social isolation that erodes their cultural identity. Individual identity is not solely a voluntary process but is the result of inevitable social constructs and interactions. The decisions individuals make are not entirely of their own free will, as they are also influenced by the conventions and limitations imposed by their sociocultural environments (Katsanouli, 2020, p. 1).

Katsanouli (2020) argues that although individuals may wish to view themselves as autonomous entities, they are limited to choosing from the options that have already been presented to them, thereby ensuring that their choices align with their society's and culture's values. Violating social norms often results in being treated as a social outcast.

It is my perception that the philosophy of Ubuntu does not threaten individual autonomy since the available choices to members of a community do not necessarily conflict with the collective's foundational values and interests. Conflicts, which are inevitable in human society, can lead to a breakdown of social and community life if not properly managed and resolved. The African philosophical tradition provides the possibility of dialogue and consensus building whenever conflict arises, seen as a form of healing in indigenous African society to resolve any threat of social conflict and division caused by self-interested pursuits of personal goals to the detriment of the collective's welfare (Lawal & Ibikunle, 2020).

In African communitarian society, members do not have to give up their autonomy; instead, they are socialised to recognise the moral significance of exercising their right to self-determination while promoting the interests of the collective. Wiredu states that traditional African life relied heavily on consensus, where vigorous deliberation was mandatory in making communal decisions to ensure they served the majority's best interest, as all community members present at such a meeting were given the chance to voice their opinions (Wiredu, 1995, p. 53).

The Ubuntu philosophy is a valid and genuine reaction to the African reality – both historical and cultural. As a philosophical resource, it offers opportunities for promoting social harmony, particularly in countries like South Africa with painful and violent pasts. The world is experiencing a rise in orphanages and nursing homes, revealing a tendency for people to overlook their dependence on others.

7.5   Conclusion

Ubuntu philosophy should not be viewed as a replacement for other ethical theories or as superior to them, but as a unique theory that has a place in modern society. It is not an entirely perfect philosophy, like any other philosophical theory. The argument is made that Ubuntu's philosophy does not pose a threat to civil liberties; on the contrary, it can protect the freedom of individuals within a community if applied correctly. The researcher believes that Ubuntu's philosophy has the potential to restore the dignity of African motherhood by providing epistemic and ethical guidance. Furthermore, it can help individuals appreciate

the sanctity of human life and recognise that humanity is not an abstract possession but rather a potential that can be achieved through social-moral interaction with others, within a communal context of reciprocity, mutuality, and relationality.

CHAPTER 8: MOTHERHOOD AND THE PRACTICE OF BREASTFEEDING IN PUBLIC – AN AFRICAN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

8.1 Introduction

Breastfeeding should be considered a human rights issue as well as a cultural and religious issue, which requires a comprehensive defence of human rights through the application of an ethical theory that encompasses the law, culture, and religion. In an African context, Ubuntu as an ethical theory provides an appropriate framework for addressing human rights issues. The proper application of Ubuntu's moral philosophy has the potential to improve social interaction and enhance respect for humanity, thus creating a social environment where breastfeeding is accepted without any prejudice or hindrance.

To effectively advocate for the right for mothers to breastfeed their children freely, an Ubuntu philosophical approach to the advocacy of this right can be effective. Therefore, the researcher proposes Ubuntu lactivism, which is the advocacy of breastfeeding from an African philosophical perspective. This concept extends beyond activism by lactating mothers and encompasses any action by individuals or groups aimed at advancing the right for women to breastfeed their infants freely at any time and in any place without hindrance. The term "lactivism" refers to a set of practices carried out by breastfeeding women that are enacted through breastfeeding, either online or publicly, as proposed by Stearns (2010).

Advocating for the right to breastfeed in public is the central theme of this chapter, approached through the application of key principles of Ubuntu. The researcher proposes the use of ubuntu lactivism as a tool to support and educate for the right to breastfeed in public, raising awareness and demonstrating solidarity with mothers who choose to breastfeed their children, promoting the health benefits of natural nutrients. This advocacy aims to restore women's autonomy over their bodies and challenge patriarchal power structures that have long claimed ownership and control of women's bodies and minds in both domestic and societal spheres. This section aims to argue that barriers to the full realisation of motherhood in Africa should be effectively removed, to enable African

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mothers to practice breastfeeding in line with their indigenous cultural beliefs and practices. This chapter will focus on two main issues:

8.2   The bodily autonomy of African women

8.3   Ubuntu philosophy and the right to breastfeed in public.

8.2   The bodily autonomy of African women

Significant progress has been made by the two waves of feminism in the Western industrialised world towards ensuring that women are treated equitably in society and given the same education and employment opportunities as their male counterparts. However, the female body continues to be objectified and commodified in Western society, which goes against the ethical principles of female liberation at the core of the feminist movement.

Similarly, African decolonisation's history, ideology, and politics have led to the misconception that post-colonial African independence has addressed the twin legacy of colonial domination and racism on one hand, and patriarchal domination and gender-based violence on the other. Concerning the ubuntu maxim, *"I am because you are",* the social and moral importance of women as life bearers, particularly about their role and responsibility as moral educators of their offspring and future generations, should be recognised and valued. For societies to flourish, women should be treated fairly and equally to men so that they can enjoy the dignity and freedom of bodily autonomy. This would enable them to carry out their motherhood responsibilities while being fully conscious of the numerous physical and emotional benefits associated with breastfeeding. Patriarchal Western media has often portrayed women as "child-like beings that are lower, smaller than men while semi-autonomous", which requires men's protection and care (McKay *et al.,* 2019, p. 69).

Although many developed and developing countries have established Western democracies and human rights cultures, the treatment and perception of women and men as equals have not been fully achieved. Women are only granted autonomy if it does not

disturb the existing natural order set up by the entrenched patriarchal powers of society and politics. McKay *et al*. (2019) argue that women are "empowered" only as long as they do not disrupt patriarchal norms of marriage, motherhood, consumerism, female beauty, and female sexuality (p. 71). From the patriarchal perspective, women are viewed as "nothing but sex objects for global consumption and exploitation by the gender elite" (Malik, 2014, p. 87).

One can argue that the reality of Western-inspired patriarchal domination persists, with women continuing to be degraded and exploited as inferior beings. This toxic masculinity is a prevalent feature of many societies across the globe. Additionally, African women suffer not only from patriarchal domination but also from systemic and structural racial oppression. Even to this day, African women bear the painful legacy of a colonialist racist ideology that seeks to legitimise the problematic notion that their alleged inferiority is a result of both their gender and race. Within the historical context of European colonialism, the body of the African woman has been sexually exploited for centuries, and her ontological presence in the world has been reduced to an animal-like status, both in her own country and in the countries of the European colonisers. During the slave trade, women were often transported like livestock from Africa and then stripped bare to be paraded as exotic animals in zoos for the entertainment of their colonial masters and mistresses abroad, as was the tragic case of Sara *Saratjie* Baartman (Crais & Scully, 2010; Romero Ruiz, 2017, p. 137; Thomas, 2007).

The sexualisation of the African woman's body for male pleasure is still prevalent in many patriarchal societies. The power dynamic between men and women is reinforced by a toxic value system that endorses male domination and control over female bodies. Women who fight for sexual and bodily autonomy are often labelled as promiscuous and go against the idealised role of women in a patriarchal society, as wives and mothers. The control of women's bodies, including the exposure of sexualised body parts, remains in the grip of patriarchal ideologies that reinforce male fetishism. Women are often denied the opportunity to breastfeed in public due to social stigma, while breasts are simultaneously objectified for male pleasure (Young, 1995).

The sexualised control of women's bodies is tied to a politics of sexual puritanism, where women's behaviour is constantly regulated and monitored based on the standards and preferences of masculinised sexual desire and power. Failure to conform to these standards results in women being labelled as modern-day Jezebels, a status they bring on themselves. South Africa's history of colonialism, patriarchy, and racism has had a devastating impact on the lives of vulnerable women and children (Young, 1995). In contemporary post-colonial South Africa, there has been a significant rise in violent gender-based crimes against women and children. Shocking figures indicate that approximately 52 420 sexual offences cases were reported in South Africa between 2018 and 2019. Of particular concern, about 31.3% of adolescents aged between 10 and 17 years experienced some form of physical abuse, with 8.4% of those cases being rape or other forms of sexual abuse (Karim & Baxter, 2016, p. 1151; Oparinde & Matsha, 2021, p. 3).

Women in South Africa are often blamed for being victims of gender-based violence and crime due to their "seductive" and "revealing" dress and conduct in public. This expression of widely assimilated toxic masculinity serves to reinforce the belief among men that they are entitled to women's bodies, which are viewed as objects of pleasure with no autonomy (Vincent, 2009).

The debated issue is not whether women can expose certain parts of their bodies, but whether men in society should find such exposure sexually arousing. The ongoing debate about women's ability to breastfeed in public while praising those who wear extremely revealing clothing in the name of sexual liberation suggests that women still lack full control over their bodies. African women are especially affected by sexualisation and commodification, which are prevalent in media-informed images and enticements of modern, neoliberal capitalist tradition. Hip-hop music videos and Western TV programmes, which circulate globally, often depict women as loose, uncivilised, and reckless individuals with no sexual restraints (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2009, p. 3).

Women are frequently scantily dressed in music videos, portrayed as entertainment for men at parties or clubs, and presented as women who cannot control their sexual urges in many TV shows. Such images and narratives undermine the moral status, dignity, and autonomy

of women, particularly African women. Even motherhood as a natural process is called into question. African women have long experienced injustice because Western culture's development has been seen as incompatible with the moral ethos of African culture. During colonial times, Christianity was used to police the bodies of so-called "uncivilised and morally loose savages". This system was later replaced in South Africa by apartheid laws like the Immorality Act no. 5 of 1927, which was later replaced by the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act of 1957, which is still enforced to this day (South African Parliament, 1927, 2007). The ongoing effort to globalise Western culture is a modern-day ploy to continue exploiting the African continent, especially the bodily presence of African women, a historical experience whose justification was often grounded in the doctrines and teachings of the Christian religion viewed as an essential element of the "civilising mission" of European missionaries during colonial times (Cochrane, 1987; Majeke, 1952).

I contend that, in negotiating a meaningful space within the modern Western cultural-political tradition, Africans face difficulties subscribing exclusively to Christianity and abandoning their traditional sense of spirituality and the divine. This dichotomy between Western and African modernity creates confusion within African society, particularly concerning the role and status of women. African women who still follow the traditional way of life are seen as anti-feminists who support the patriarchal system, while those who embrace Western values at the expense of their indigenous African cultural values are viewed as misguided and socially alienated individuals who have betrayed their cultural roots. The supposed cultural and civilisational superiority of the industrialised West becomes the universal framework for evaluating the cultural behaviour and practices of African people. Advocates and supporters of Western feminism, for example, often disparage the African practice of lobola, wrongly viewing the exchange of prospective brides as comparable to trading cattle, thus regarding the African woman as a commodity with a commercial value. The cultural imperative of marriage weighs so heavily on the minds and in the lives of African people that women who choose cohabitation are often perceived as culturally rebellious and morally corrupt.

In my view, the conflict between African and Western cultures has made it difficult for African mothers to breastfeed their infants publicly without social stigma. The Western world values

female bodily autonomy only when it aligns with their patriarchal aesthetic ideals of feminine beauty. Conversely, African culture promotes female autonomy through the spirit of Ubuntu, which prioritises human dignity and compassion over sexual objectification. Unfortunately, some Africans perceive their traditional values and practices as primitive due to the lasting effects of colonialism and apartheid. It is therefore crucial to decolonise the African woman's physical presence to truly decolonise the African mind.

In terms of reproductive rights, it is generally accepted that women have the right to choose whether to have an abortion, free from societal expectations or pressure. Similarly, there should be no social regulation of a mother's decision to breastfeed in public. Forcing women to adhere to societal standards of "decency" reduces them to second-class citizens and undermines their moral standing as mothers. Embracing Ubuntu philosophy can offer a path towards ethical liberation for historically colonised African women. Woollard (2019, p. 3) argues that imposing discretion standards on breastfeeding negatively affects a mother's ability to care for her infant.

8.3   Ubuntu philosophy and the right to breastfeed in public.

Breastfeeding in public is a natural practice that offers numerous benefits to both the mother and the child, as well as the environment and the healthcare system. Despite this, there exists social tension due to the condemnation of mothers who breastfeed in public. This tension is a result of the conflict between the individualistic attitudes of some members of society and the collective interests of the community. By reviving the spirit of Ubuntu/Hunhu, with its core values of survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity, society can enhance social cohesion and restore the dignity accorded to the moral status of motherhood and child-rearing. The revival of Ubuntu values can serve as a legitimate source of inspiration and motivation for moral-political conduct. The importance of breastfeeding should be recognised as a societal interest that overrides individual autonomy.

Mbigi (1997, p. 33) has identified five core values of Ubuntu: survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity. These values are of fundamental importance in promoting social cohesion and unity in African communities and restoring the dignity of

motherhood, as well as related practices such as breastfeeding and child-rearing by allowing mothers to practice motherhood in line with their cultures without fear of it being perceived as immoral or inappropriate. Breastfeeding in public should be accepted and celebrated as a natural practice that promotes the general welfare of society.

- **Survival**

South Africa is still grappling with the aftermath of colonial conquest and apartheid, with the post-apartheid society remaining divided along "racial" and economic lines. The majority of black South Africans face alarming levels of poverty and unemployment, highlighting the lingering effects of colonial-apartheid rule and its disregard for historical justice. As a result, genuine social cohesion has been elusive, with tension and animosity persisting among "racial groups". To overcome this social division, Ubuntu values such as survival, solidarity, compassion, respect, and dignity must be promoted (Mbigi, 1997, p. 33).

In a country where neoliberal economic policies disproportionately benefit the wealthy, the challenge of survival looms large. The Ubuntu value of survival can help people to "live and exist even in times of hardship" (Poovan *et al*., 2006, p. 19), but requires the solidaristic support of the community during times of hardship. Although conflicts are inevitable in a multi-racial and multi-cultural society, all "racial" groups must coexist and look beyond skin colour and culture to support each other in a communitarian spirit.

South Africa is yet to achieve the 50% target for exclusive breastfeeding set by the WHA by 2025, which has a direct impact on infant mortality rates (Zong *et al*., 2021). To protect the lives of its most vulnerable citizens and future leaders, society must prioritise infant health. Breastfeeding has been identified as the most effective strategy in reducing infant mortality, especially in developing countries like South Africa; it protects against fatal respiratory and diarrheal infections by 6-1 (Victora *et al*., 2000, p. 451).

To ensure the survival of infants, it is important for the entire community to actively create a supportive environment for breastfeeding. This involves creating an atmosphere where mothers can breastfeed both at home and in public without fear of discrimination, thereby contributing to the survival of future generations. According to an African proverb, raising

children is the collective responsibility of the community, not just the immediate family (Mikucka & Rizzi, 2016, p. 944). Breastfeeding can be a challenging experience for many women, and a unified voice of support and encouragement from society can help make it a more positive experience. The national motto of Kenya, *Harambee,* which means "let us pull together", was popularised by former Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta, who sought to unify the country and overcome social problems arising from political and economic corruption (Dolamo, 2013, p. 6; Godfrey & Mutiso, 2009, p. 85).

The condemnation of cultures that embrace public breastfeeding due to a Western-centric perception of female breasts as sexual organs creates a hostile environment that undermines efforts to lower infant mortality rates and ensure the survival of future generations. The promotion and preservation of cultural African practices that emphasise communitarianism should be embraced by all citizens to create a conducive environment for breastfeeding. Poovan *et al*. (2006) emphasised that personal responsibility, accountability, and sacrifice are fundamental to the collaborative spirit that Africans have developed to promote survival. All citizens must share the responsibility of improving the country's breastfeeding rates and lowering infant mortality rates by creating a supportive environment for mothers to breastfeed. Finally, citizens must re-examine their reservations about public breastfeeding and recognise its benefits to society, including the health and emotional benefits associated with the condoning of breastfeeding in public, which outweigh the negative perception of Western cultural prejudices. The urgent challenge that requires attention is the prevention of harmful substances such as drug and alcohol abuse by breastfeeding mothers.

- **The spirit of solidarity**

One of the core principles of Ubuntu philosophy is the spirit of solidarity, which emphasises the collective sense of mutual dependence and responsibility (Zijderveld, 2006, p. 306). As a result, everyone in a communal society is dependent on others, and collectively, they have common responsibilities to advance the interests of the community for the benefit of all its members.

Breastfeeding is in the best interest of all members of society, irrespective of whether one is a parent or not; thus, it should be a common interest for all members of society. The African spirit of unity has played a crucial role in helping many communities to survive during times of difficulty (Ebong, 2020). The maxim in the baPedi culture, *"Tau tša hloka seboka di šitwa ke nare e hlotša"*, meaning "a divided pride of lions can easily be defeated by an injured or limping buffalo", is a reminder of the need for unity. Unity is the foundation of a communitarian way of life, making coexistence easier while ensuring the community's survival.

The common enemy in this regard is the negative perception of breastfeeding which has resulted in high infant mortality rates. The negative prejudice and Western-centric view of the female breasts as sexual organs have created a hostile environment for breastfeeding in public. This undermines efforts to lower infant mortality rates and ensure the survival of future generations. The revival and preservation of African practices that promote communitarianism must be encouraged and embraced by all (Poovan *et al*., 2006, p. 18).

I propose that all citizens should take responsibility for the role they play in creating a conducive environment for breastfeeding, and there should be a deliberate and urgent unifying voice rallying behind breastfeeding mothers to support them in initiating and maintaining breastfeeding, at least for the first six months of their infant's lives. This would increase their infant's chances of survival. I also postulate that competing individualistic interests in society may deter the achievement of a common vision about breastfeeding that avoids the selfish pursuit of individual interests at the expense of the collective interest of others, usually the weak and vulnerable. Therefore, there must be a unified effort to ensure that women feel safe to breastfeed anywhere in the country without fear of discrimination (Mikucka & Rizzi, 2016, p. 944).

This research emphasises the need for a unifying voice in support of breastfeeding mothers to encourage and maintain breastfeeding, particularly for the first six months of an infant's life, which can significantly increase the chances of survival. However, individualistic interests in society could detract from achieving a common vision and could lead to a selfish pursuit of individual interests at the expense of the weak and vulnerable members of society. The article cautions against perceiving breastfeeding from an

individualistic perspective as it could deprive women and children of their fundamental human rights associated with breastfeeding.

Breastfeeding in public is a matter of common good and public interest. According to Etzioni (2015, p. 1), public good refers to goods that serve all members of a community, not any particular group, and benefit future generations. Breastfeeding in public meets this description as it provides essential nutrition for infants and benefits all members of society (Del Ciampo & Del Ciampo, 2018). By encouraging public breastfeeding, future generations can breastfeed on demand, reducing the incidence of preventable diseases and ultimately lessening the burden on the health system.

   • **Compassion**

Compassion is a fundamental Ubuntu value, defined as "suffering with others in their suffering" from the Latin word "*Compati*" (Strauss *et al*., 2016, p. 16). It entails empathising with others and having the desire to assist them. Compassion is especially critical in societies like South Africa, where the majority of the population still exhibits racially discriminatory behaviour as a result of the legislation, policies and decrees of the colonial apartheid state. The apartheid regime systematically denied black and African people a dignified existence, which violated the humanity of these historically oppressed groups.

I believe, one of the most significant atrocities committed during the colonial and apartheid eras was the systematic devaluation of African cultural identities and the imposition of Western cultural values as the only legitimate normative foundation of human civilisation. I think this is why many Africans today face a dilemma between proudly practising their African cultures and adopting the value system of Western culture, inspired by a capitalist modernity of cultural globalisation. Western European and American European communities, based on a political culture of white supremacy, may not comprehend the experience of being told that their culture is uncivilised, primitive, and against the will of God - and that abandoning their culture is a necessary condition for becoming a "civilised" human being. If the foundational principle of Ubuntu's moral philosophy, "I am who I am through other people", is applied, there would be a more positive view of motherhood and

breastfeeding, which would help people appreciate and, hopefully, remedy the humiliation, pain, and injustice often experienced by breastfeeding mothers.

Men may not have first-hand knowledge and understanding of the experience of sexually objectified women, including being told that breastfeeding in public is uncivilised and violates the dignity of motherhood and womanhood in society. By applying the foundational principle of Ubuntu's moral philosophy, *"I am who I am through other people"*, which acknowledges that one's humanity is dependent on the recognition and acceptance of others, a more positive view of the process of motherhood and the practice of breastfeeding in public can be fostered. This may contribute to appreciating and potentially remedying the humiliation, pain, and injustice that breastfeeding mothers often face.

As a husband, partner, father, or male in general, empathy and understanding of the discomfort, embarrassment, and shame that breastfeeding mothers may experience when feeding their child in public should be cultivated through close communication and support. Public institutions typically provide mothers with the option of either breastfeeding their child in a public toilet or covering their breast and the face of the feeding child, ostensibly to shield them from the lascivious stares of strangers and protect public virtue and decency. Although it might be expected that women would be more empathetic towards lactating mothers due to their maternal instincts to soothe a crying child with their breast, men and women alike should acknowledge that mothers breastfeed in public solely to feed their hungry child. The stigma associated with breastfeeding in public and the consequent public response of "insults, disapproving stares, name-calling, and banishing from public spaces" can be a very painful and stressful experience for breastfeeding mothers (Bresnahan *et al.,* 2019, p. 4).

The needs and experiences of the child are also important to consider. Everyone can relate to the discomfort and pain of being hungry without being able to eat for any reason. The idea of children being prohibited from feeding, simply because someone finds the act offensive, is concerning. Such an action can be seen as an unfair form of discrimination, violating the basic human rights of both the mother and child. When a society treats mothers and their children this way, while others simply observe, it indicates a lack of

compassion, a fundamental value of Ubuntu. The principle of treating others as one wishes to be treated, as taught in the Christian faith, is also consistent with the Ubuntu principle that requires the recognition of the humanness of others as a pre-condition for affirming one's humanness. Ubuntu is about empathising with others and taking steps to care for them, as well as striving to enhance their happiness (Odari, 2020, p. 61).

The concept of Ubuntu, a South African philosophy that emphasises the interconnectedness of all human beings and the importance of empathy and compassion, was famously described by Nelson Mandela. According to Mandela, a traveller passing through a village was offered water and food without asking because the community understood his need (Odari, 2020, p. 61). This act of compassion reflects the Ubuntu principle of recognising and responding to the pain and needs of others. In the same spirit, it is incumbent upon society to create a welcoming environment for mothers to breastfeed their infants in public. The denial of this basic right to mothers and infants is an act of discrimination and a violation of human rights, deserving of empathy and protection by the wider community.

- **Respect for dignity**

Shwalb and Shwalb (2006) argue that respect is the foremost factor in nurturing relationships and promoting social justice, indicating that without respect, relationships may be destabilised, and societies may become unjust (Shwalb & Shwalb, 2006, p. 1). Nevertheless, the conception of respect is culturally determined and governed by moral values and principles that vary between cultures, and what is deemed disrespectful in one culture may be acceptable in another. Therefore, in South Africa, a multi-cultural and multireligious society, there may be differing opinions about certain moral norms. Additionally, the concept of respect is contingent upon a person's social, professional, religious, and political status, which may compromise the notion of human dignity as a universally applicable concept.

The concept of dignity derives from the Latin word "decus" meaning adornment, honour, and distinction. It refers to the status of a person who merits respect, with "superlative non-instrumental value deserving respectful treatment" (Lebech, 2003, p. 1; Metz, 2011,

p. 19). Social status determines how individuals are perceived in society and the level of respect accorded to them. According to scholars, the reason humans are important is that they possess dignity, which is an essential aspect of being human (Metz, 2011b, p. 19). When a society objectifies and denies women access to basic nutrition, it results in them leading undignified lives. Dignity and respect are interrelated, and both are key to recognising and acknowledging the humanness of others, without which no one can lay claim to being an authentic human being ontologically and morally. However, the process of determining who is deserving of respect and therefore has a life of dignity is often the prerogative of the elite, wealthy, and powerful classes, often with devastating consequences for the marginalised and excluded (Fanon, 2005). Discrimination based on social standing, family history, class, or race is cruel and alienating. Humans inherently have dignity by being human, and it is the sanctity of human life that determines the process of human dignity. Dignity is a human right that should be accorded to all human beings equally and cannot be diminished or waived (Metz, 2011, p. 21; Steinmann, 2017, p. 2). Banning mothers and their children from public spaces for breastfeeding or forcing them to breastfeed in public toilets is a violation of their inherent dignity as human beings, which is also against the culture of universal human rights and the spirit of Ubuntu.

8.4   Conclusion

Breastfeeding in public is a cultural and human rights issue, encompassing the rights of both the infant and the mother. Therefore, a philosophical approach that addresses these concerns is essential. The Ubuntu philosophy provides a framework for resolving many social issues, including gender-based violence and the mistreatment of mothers who breastfeed in public spaces. By recognising and respecting African experiences such as motherhood through Afrocentric terms, the potential for cultural clashes between Western and African values in society can be reduced. It is essential to incorporate the principle of Ubuntu into lactivism advocacy, resulting in the development of a more robust advocacy doctrine, which I propose should be Ubuntu lactivism.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusion

9.1   Introduction

The purpose of this research was to critique the commodification of breastfeeding and examine the impact that the processes of European colonialism and the globalisation of the Western bourgeois/patriarchal nuclear family have had on the experiences of motherhood and cultural identities of women, with a particular focus on African women.

The research is grounded within the conceptual and normative framework of Ubuntu philosophy, an African philosophy of enlightenment and liberation that resonates with and addresses the colonial experiences of oppression and alienation suffered by African women. The aim is to enunciate the political, ethical, and epistemic conditions for their liberation.

The thematic focus of this study is twofold. First, it recognises and acknowledges the transformative nature of the feminist movement and its struggle to overcome the negative effects of deeply entrenched patriarchal ideas and practices in the industrialised countries of the Western world of capitalism. This includes the struggle to question and reject problematic assumptions of male superiority and female inferiority.

Secondly, the research highlights that in the African historical context of colonial rule, the struggle for the liberation of African women involves not only the struggle against patriarchal power and domination but also the struggle for liberation from racial oppression in the face of white supremacy. This struggle is motivated by the idea that African women suffer not only as women but also as black women whose humanness has been questioned and violated in the face of white supremacy. The questioning and problematising of African indigenous practices of motherhood and breastfeeding in public, which is the central focus of this thesis, represents a further example of the perpetuation of the African woman's/mother's oppression.

This thesis consists of eight main chapters that focus on various aspects of the experience and challenges of motherhood and breastfeeding in public.

9.2   Chapter 1: The significance of the study as a research project

The chapter aimed to provide the background and significance of the research. It sought to present the actual experiences of women when breastfeeding in public and to highlight the negative perceptions surrounding this practice. These negative perceptions have frequently resulted in harassment and condemnation of mothers who choose to breastfeed in public. Therefore, this issue is not only important in highlighting the obnoxious nature of social and cultural prejudice but also in evaluating the problem from an African philosophical perspective that resonates with the specific cultural identity of indigenous African women.

9.3   Chapter 2: Multinational agreements, treaties, and pieces of legislation

This chapter presented multinational treaties, international legislation, and local (South African) legislation that are relevant to the practice of breastfeeding. The treaties analysed included the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the African Charter on the Rights of the Child, and legislation from Western countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Australia. The regulations from African countries like Kenya and South Africa were also presented.

It became evident from this chapter that Western nations are making progress in protecting the right to breastfeed in public, with most of them having explicit regulations in place to protect this practice and prohibit any interference with this right. The chapter also revealed one of the reasons why breastfeeding in public is still a contentious issue in South Africa, which stems from apartheid regulations such as the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act of 1957, which classifies female breasts as immoral and illegal to display in public.

9.4   Chapter 3: The modern Western nuclear family

This chapter critiqued the modern Western nuclear family structure and its imposition on Western colonised African nations, leading to the replacement of the African family

structure, which was communal. It is argued that the forced adoption of this unrealistic nuclear family by Africans and the abandonment of their family structure have destabilised and negatively impacted African families. With the rise of civil marriages in post-colonial Africa, there has been a significant increase in the de-legitimisation of the moral foundations of African life.

Furthermore, it is argued that the nuclear family structure serves as an agent of patriarchy and sexism as it presents the man as the head of the family with sole decision authority while the woman is relegated to second-class citizenship in her home, distorting the moral values of African communities and leading to a false narrative that African culture is patriarchal and oppressive to women. The imposition of the Western nuclear family structure has contributed to the destabilisation of African families and has distorted the moral values of African communities.

9.5   Chapter 4: An African philosophical critique of the modern nuclear family

Chapter 4 presented a critique of the modern nuclear family from an African philosophical perspective. The chapter addressed the issue of how the imposition of the Western nuclear family and Western cultural and religious values disrupted the African family structure, which promoted polygamous marriages and communal family set-ups, comprising several nuclear families living together.

The African family structure, which was communal, meant that all adults in the family were involved in the upbringing of the children, so if the biological parents passed away, their children would not be left "orphaned" as other family members would continue to raise them as their own. Additionally, this structure provided care for the elderly members of the family, where adult children would take on the responsibility of caring for their aged parents, which prevented elderly family members from being placed in old age homes or orphanages. However, due to the unstable nuclear family structure imposed on African families, they are now dissociated and unable to care for one another.

9.6 Chapter 5: Global capitalism and the problematic universalisation of the western bourgeois family

Chapter 5 focused on global capitalism and the problematic universalisation of the Western bourgeois family. The central aim of this chapter was to critique the effects of industrialisation and labour migration on African families. It is argued that during the labour migration period, many African males were forced to leave their wives and families to seek employment in the cities, which greatly contributed to the destruction of many African marriages and families.

The chapter also presented the argument that Africans were coerced to adopt a life of consumerism and materialism, which gave rise to the black bourgeoisie and led to competition among Africans to become members of this elite group. This section also provided an account of how the African middle class (bourgeoisie) emerged and how motherhood and breastfeeding are perceived within the Western bourgeois family structure.

9.7 Chapter 6: Liberating the African female body and restoring the dignity of

African motherhood

This chapter presented arguments for the liberation of the African female body to restore the dignity of motherhood. It is argued that the bodies of African women should be decolonised, and their autonomy returned to them, similar to the return of Sarah Saartjie Baartman's remains to her homeland as a symbol of her posthumous liberation.

The chapter also posited that for African mothers to be able to experience motherhood in line with their cultural norms, they should have their cultural identities restored and their cultural practices respected and protected.

9.8 Chapter 7: Ubuntu philosophy – A normative foundation for the conceptualisation of Motherhood

In this chapter, the history and relevance of Ubuntu philosophy as a valid moral philosophy in contemporary society were discussed. The erosion of moral values in society has led

to the constant questioning of universal human rights, making it necessary to defend Ubuntu philosophy as a valid moral system. The chapter focuses on the African concept of personhood, which is perceived as a process of being and becoming rather than a permanent and finite status. The works of Magobe Benard Ramose and his interpretation of Ubuntu and personhood are highlighted, presenting a contrast to the Western perception of personhood. The African philosophical perspective on motherhood is presented, contrasting it with the Western-centric perspective commonly seen in literature. The goal of this chapter is to position the status of African motherhood in its rightful place, which is considered sacred and revered in African communities and serves as the foundation for the moral status of African communities.

9.9 Chapter 8: Motherhood and the practice of breastfeeding in public – An African philosophical perspective

This chapter focused on advocating for breastfeeding in public and aimed to promote the destigmatisation of this practice through the lens of Ubuntu's moral philosophy. A brief historical background of Ubuntu's philosophy was provided, followed by an examination of its core values as identified by Mbigi (1997). These values were then applied to support the right of mothers to breastfeed in public. The central argument of this chapter was that if the principles of Ubuntu were implemented in everyday experiences such as breastfeeding, there would be less conflict between cultural values and a more harmonious society. The proper application of these principles could encourage social cohesion, bring diverse racial groups together in the Ubuntu lactivism movement, and improve exclusive breastfeeding rates, ultimately reducing infant mortality rates.

9.10 Concluding remarks.

The research aimed to address two questions: (1) What are the reasons behind South Africa's inability or unwillingness to accept breastfeeding in public as a normal and non-sexual act? (2) What are the implications and consequences for African communities and their family life, when they uncritically adopt a Western-centric model of breastfeeding in public, which is based on foreign norms and values and leads to cultural and moral alienation?

This research aimed to shed light on the everyday experiences of African women who are discriminated against for breastfeeding in public due to their perceived immorality based on Western cultural and religious values.

In addressing the first research question, the central argument was that Western culture has sexualised women's bodies and this perception has been imposed on African nations that were colonised by the West, including South Africa, through laws such as the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act. This act classifies women's breasts under the same category as genitalia and ani and is a product of Western culture imposed through colonialism, apartheid, and globalisation. Post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa, as a result of these imposed Western cultural values, perceives breastfeeding in public as lewd and immoral, leading to incidents of discrimination and harassment.

The second research question was addressed by presenting the argument that the condemnation of breastfeeding in public, because of imposed foreign norms and values, has created an unfavourable environment for mothers, particularly African mothers who constitute the majority. The fear of harassment and criticism while breastfeeding in public forces some African women to resort to formula feeding, which, in turn, supports the multinational capitalist companies that produce infant formula. This leaves African mothers with difficult choices to make, such as feeding in public and facing insults and judgement, making their babies uncomfortable during feeding by covering up, feeding in unhygienic public toilets and risking the infant's health, or supporting capitalism by using infant formula instead of the cost-free and safer natural method.

Often, research on breastfeeding focuses on a public health or clinical viewpoint, with little consideration given to social epistemology or the impact on different cultural frameworks, including pre-colonial, apartheid/post-apartheid, and industrialisation eras. The westerncentric perception of motherhood and breastfeeding is often prevalent, due to the exclusive breastfeeding definition and requirements being rooted in Western culture. For example, the definition of exclusive breastfeeding (EBF) refers to "feeding an infant nothing but breast milk, excluding water, herbal products, and home remedies for the first six months of life, except for vitamins and medication" (Motee & Jeewon, 2014, p. 7;

Mundagowa *et al*., 2019, p. 45). This definition only permits Western medicines, while African herbal remedies are not allowed. Western cultural values continue to undermine African cultures and dictate how they should be practised to conform to Western standards. This research presented African motherhood and the moral status of African women from an African perspective, presenting breastfeeding as "a non-sexual act of maternal instinct essential for the nourishment of infants", instead of the Western perception that views it as a perverse act.

In this research, the central argument was to advocate for the right of mothers to breastfeed freely in public spaces from an African philosophical perspective of Ubuntu moral philosophy, thereby raising questions about the morality and legislation regulating this act. This approach differs from previous research and writing on the subject of breastfeeding, which has largely been perceived from medical and anthropological perspectives.

The cultural imperialism and socio-economic exclusion experienced by Africans during the colonial and apartheid eras have caused psychological harm and exacerbated racial tensions. To heal from these wounds, there must be a concerted effort to decolonise African minds and build a new social structure that promotes greater social cohesion. To foster racial and cultural tolerance, it is important to be accepting of cultural differences, even if they differ from one's own. In African culture, practices such as breastfeeding in public are accepted and should be tolerated by other races and cultural groups to prevent acts that could fuel racial and cultural tensions. The application of Ubuntu philosophy played a critical role in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the early days of democracy in South Africa. This section of the research proposes a path forward to help heal the psychological damage experienced by mothers and families who were discriminated against and to encourage those who caused this harm to be more culturally and racially sensitive.

To foster healthier social cohesion, it is important to embrace the principles of Ubuntu, which involve recognising one's connectedness to others and working together for the common good (Arthur *et al.,* 2015, p. 71). However, many corporate entities still lack internal policies that support mothers who wish to breastfeed on their premises. This is

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often because the majority of these industries are controlled by individuals with cultural values that do not condone the public exposure of the female breast. Ubuntu, being a cornerstone of African hospitality, requires individuals to make strangers feel welcome and at home. This includes supporting the poor, vulnerable and marginalised (Magezi & Khlopa, 2021, pp. 18-19). Women and children in South Africa are particularly susceptible to violence, with illiterate and poor African women being the most affected.

It is crucial to avoid creating further tensions in South Africa, as the discrimination and harassment of mothers who breastfeed in public may be perceived as an act of racism, particularly since it is mainly African mothers who are likely to engage in this culturally acceptable practice. Both cultural practices and the basic right to provide infants with the necessary nutrition through breastfeeding are protected by the South African Constitution.

It is proposed that breastfeeding constitutes a human rights issue, as the right to basic nutrition is enshrined in the Constitution, and for infants under six months of age, breast milk is considered the fundamental source of nourishment. An individual's rights cannot be reduced or surrendered but can only be restricted if they pose a threat to others. There is no justifiable harm that can occur when a mother is breastfeeding her child in a public setting (Steinmann, 2017, p. 2). Demanding that mothers cover their breasts and their children's faces while breastfeeding in public spaces, or risk being excluded from these spaces, is equivalent to forcing them to forego their right to basic nutrition and self-determination. Any practice in society that poses a threat to a citizen's constitutional rights contravenes the spirit of Ubuntu. Reviving and valuing the spirit of Ubuntu could aid in ensuring equal access to constitutional human rights, particularly for vulnerable members of society such as women and children.

For African nations to improve their exclusive breastfeeding rates and lower their infant mortality rates, the spirit of Ubuntu must be fully embraced. The key moral principles of Ubuntu, as presented by Mbigi (1991, p. 3), including respect, compassion, human dignity, and survival, may be instrumental in solidifying social cohesion and supporting mothers to breastfeed freely, comfortably, and exclusively for the first six months of their infants' lives.

I suggest that the definition of exclusive breastfeeding be expanded to encompass African cultural practices wherein the use of African herbal remedies is accommodated in the definition as it includes Western medicine, thereby accommodating African mothers who would like to breastfeed their infants while still observing their traditional child-rearing practices.

9.11 Recommendations on the way forward

The continuation of activism towards the right to breastfeed, as mandated by African culture, is crucial in advancing the revival of African philosophy and the restoration of the moral status of African womanhood and motherhood. Further research on the perception of African communities, linking the spirit of Ubuntu with communal child-rearing, such as supporting and advocating for breastfeeding, would broaden the understanding of the impact of westernisation and cultural imperialism on African family and community values. This could be achieved through conducting case studies on "ubuntu lactivism".

It is recommended that policymakers consider incorporating the principles of Ubuntu into their policies, as this has the potential to unify different cultural groups in South Africa and steer away from the adoption of neo-colonial policies, which often lead to instability in African nations.

To combat the discrimination faced by mothers who breastfeed in public, the following proposals are submitted:

1. Exemption of breastfeeding from the Sexual Offences and Related Matters Act.
2. Implementation of regulations that explicitly prohibit the prevention of mothers from breastfeeding their children in public spaces where both the mother and child are legally allowed to be present.
3. The normalisation of breastfeeding through the inclusion of uncensored images of mothers breastfeeding in television advertisements and shows, such as local soap operas.
4. Imposition of vicarious liability fines for organisations and facilities that do not uphold the right to breastfeed on their public premises.

5. Accreditation of all public spaces that admit mothers and infants as breastfeeding-friendly and family-friendly.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A1: Waiver approval

UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

22 December 2021

Dear Mr Mosito Jonas Seabela

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 22 December 2021 to 22 December 2026

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
13906607_CREC_CHS_2021

Researcher(s): Name: Mr Mosito Jonas Seabela
Contact details: meyiwt@unisa.ac.za
Name: Prof Michael Cloete
Contact details: mcloete99@gmail.com

Title: Global capitalism and commodification of breastfeeding: An investigation of its impact on the African conception of family life in general and the question of motherhood in particular.

Purpose: PhD

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for five years.

The *medium risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the

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APPENDIX A2: Waiver approval

confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.

7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (22 December 2026). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 13906607_CREC_CHS_2021 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature:PP

Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP

Prof K. Masemola
Exécutive Dean: CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
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