

THE EMERGENCE OF A SOUTH AFRICAN WOMANIST
CONSCIOUSNESS: A META-ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The emergence of a South African womanist (Black) consciousness was investigated. More specifically, the present study examined how the politics of survival gives rise to a feminist consciousness. A meta-analysis of 8 case studies was conducted on how (South) African women's daily struggle for survival in three socio-political and historical contexts translated into a womanist consciousness. Of the 8 case studies examined, 2 pertained to (South) African women's involvement in the national liberation struggle, 3 pertained to the migrant labor system, and the remaining three pertained to the struggle against poverty as a context for the emergence of a womanist consciousness. It was found that women's involvement in the national liberation struggle, the migrant labor system, and the struggle against poverty provided a context in which (South) African women learned about their feminism. The results suggest that the new Black feminism that is slowly emerging on the African continent is rooted in the politics of survival. Also, the findings from the study suggest that the current state of African women's engagement with feminism is one of two extremes. On the one hand, women are individually advancing themselves and on the other women are collectively/politically organizing for the good of all women. The implication of the findings are that (poor) African women's daily

struggle for survival leads them (through their actions) to engage with feminism. This in turn sets the stage for an emerging African womanist consciousness. Furthermore, the results of this study imply that in order for the newly emerging Black feminism to grow and make a meaningful contribution in the lives of all, African women need to engage with feminism at a collective, and not just individual level.

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In closing, I would like to state that this dissertation is my own work in conception and execution. The opinions expressed and conclusions reached in this volume are my own, unless otherwise indicated; and must not be regarded as a reflection of those of the University of Natal or the School of Psychology, Anthropology and Centre for Social Work.

PREFACE

This dissertation is about feminist consciousness in South Africa (S.A.). It is about the survival politics of African women and how this gives rise to a feminist consciousness. More specifically, it is about how certain African women, through their struggle for survival, have come to reject their socially prescribed role. Overall, this volume is about the new Black feminism that is slowly emerging on the continent and the socio-political and historical circumstances which have given and are giving rise to an African womanist/feminist consciousness.

In presenting this thesis, I would like to provide some clarification on my use of certain terminologies. Whilst acknowledging that within the South African context, the term "African" may, depending on who one speaks to, denote anyone --irrespective of skin colour-- who identifies as such, I have chosen to use this term to refer exclusively to the descendants of the indigenous inhabitants of South Africa (Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana, etc...). The reason being that my study is concerned with the socio-political and historical contexts which set the stage for the new Black feminism. Looking at South Africa's past, the term "African" has historically denoted the indigenous inhabitants of the country. Furthermore, for the purpose of this paper, my use of the term "African continent" or "the continent" refers exclusively to sub-Saharan Africa and its inhabitants.

Closely related to the above discussion, is my use of the term "Black". I acknowledge that in the new (post-apartheid) political dispensation, this term not only denotes Africans, but also includes Indians, and "Coloured" or people of

<i>Race</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
African	31.2 million	77%
Coloured	3.6 million	8.9%
Asian	1.0 million	2.6%
White	4.4 million	10.9%
Total Population	40 million	100%

*Source: Statistics South Africa (1998)

mixed races/African-European descent [see Table 1 for a breakdown of South Africa's population groups]. However, for the purpose of this research, I have chosen to use this term to refer exclusively to Africans, unless otherwise indicated. Another terminology used in this volume, is that of "womanist". This term is an alternative to "feminist" and denotes a Black or Third World feminist. I am not particularly concerned with labels, but I use both the terms "womanist" and "feminist" alternatively to acknowledge that whilst some Black feminists may prefer the former, others prefer the latter.

Also, I would like to clarify my use of the terms "Third World women", "Third World", and "diaspora/s". The term "Third World women" refers to a socio-political constituency made up of women of colour from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean as well as women of colour from Western nations (Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mohanty, 1991); whilst the term "Third World" refers to a geographical constituency made up of underdeveloped countries (Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mohanty, 1991). I use both of these terms with the full knowledge that not all feminists scholars of

colour within the broad field of women's studies agree with these terminologies and their implied "otherness". However, I use these terminologies for reasons of practicality and not necessarily because I find them agreeable. As for the term "diaspora/s", I use it to denote the dispersion of people of African descent (from the mother continent) throughout the world, particularly the West.

In closing, I would like to state that I acknowledge the cultural diversity of the continent and the broader "community" of Black/Third World women. Accordingly, any talks of "us", "we"; and "our" within the context of this volume, should be loosely interpreted and not mistaken as an attempt on my part to homogenize African women or Black/Third World women. It is not my intention to present African women as a unitary grouping of women. Although inclusive, the newly emerging brand of African feminism consists of various strands that are marked by differences in class, nationality, location (urban/rural), and regional or cultural practices amongst African women (Mikell, 1995, 1997a; Steady, 1981b, 1987).

INTRODUCTION

Although African/Third World women "...have always engaged with feminism..." (Mohanty, 1991: 7), research on African/Third World women's engagement with feminism tends to be scarce (Mohanty, 1991). Literature on the social reality of (poor) African women abound. However, feminist interpretation or articulation of the social reality of these women's lives is in short supply (Mohanty, 1991). Furthermore, although the existing body of literature on African women's engagement with feminism has shown the relevance of this ideology to Black women on the continent, the issue of African women and feminism is a hotly contended one (Aidoo, 1996). Many men and women in sub-Saharan African (and elsewhere in the Third World) dismiss feminism as cultural imperialism and only relevant to white middle-class women (Aidoo, 1996; Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989; Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mikell, 1995; Russell, 1989). Others feign disinterest and some claim that "we don't need feminism" (Aidoo, 1996: 163).

The prevalence of negative perceptions of feminism on the continent are largely due to the fact that many men and women tend to equate feminism with lesbianism or stereotype feminists as "loose", male-hating, emasculated women (Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989; Dolphyne, 1991; Lindsay, 1980a). Such a view of feminism is highly contentious because first and foremost feminism is an ideology or world view of "...how life should be organized and lived by half of the entire humanity here on earth"; whereas lesbianism is a sexual preference (Aidoo, 1996: 164). Furthermore, feminism is not concerned with male-bashing, rather it is concerned with

empowering women with the knowledge and tools needed to overcome their oppression.

One only has to look at the survival politics of poor African women to realize that "(f)eminism is an essential tool in women's struggles everywhere" (Aidoo, 1996: 163). Hence, this research seeks to articulate the new feminism that is slowly emerging from the survival politics of (poor) single African women: African feminism. More specifically, this study seeks to examine how certain (South) African women come to reject their socially prescribed role. The objective of this research is to examine how African women's struggle for survival against socio-economic factors such as poverty and racism, gives rise to a womanist/feminist consciousness. Three key issues will be addressed.

The first is how the history of (South) African women's involvement in the national liberation struggle informed them of their feminism. Second, how the migrant labour system (both male and female) provided a context for the emergence of a womanist consciousness. And third, how (poor) African women's struggle for survival leads to an engagement with feminism and gives rise to a feminist consciousness; and how their engagement with feminism defines their lives. What does this womanist consciousness mean to these women i.e. how does it translate or manifest itself in their everyday living?

Ramphele and Boonzaier (1988) in their study on the oppression of Black women in S.A. found that for many poor African women, the daily struggle for survival translated into a womanist consciousness defined by a deliberate refusal to marry or remarry; and the manipulation of sexual and reproductive capacities. Similarly, in her study on the exploitation of Black

domestic workers in S.A., Cock (1980) found that this most marginalised group of women had deep insight into women's oppression.

Whilst the present research seeks to articulate the newly emerging African feminism, it also seeks to address a fundamental question in feminist (social) psychology: how does feminist consciousness emerge and what does it mean to those espousing it? The projected outcome of this analysis is that it will ground the feminist/womanist consciousness that is slowly emerging amongst (South) African women in their struggle for survival. The analysis will show that (poor) African women's daily struggle for survival leads them (through their actions) to engage with feminism, and this in turn sets the stage for an emerging African feminist consciousness.

It is hoped that this project will contribute to the current body of literature on feminist social psychology, specifically literature on the newly emerging African feminist consciousness. Also, it is hoped that this project will provide relevant information to various audiences, such as: Black women activists, development policy makers, and HIV/AIDS research psychologists.

Black women activists and development policy makers would be interested in the project since its findings would highlight the importance of adopting an African feminist agenda in the implementation of development policy. In order for the African continent to develop, policy makers must target the well-being and development of African women so as to put an end to all forms of marginalisations [e.g. unequal access to economic resources/opportunities, inadequate nutrition, poor housing, lack of primary

health care, gender discrimination and sexual harassment at the work place, etc...] (Aidoo, 1996; Pala, 1981).

As for HIV/AIDS research psychologists, they would be interested in the project since the newly emerging African womanist consciousness is characterized by a number of survival strategies such as multiple sexual partnerships (Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988; Schoepf, 1997). This has grave implications for African women's health since it puts them at a higher risk for HIV/AIDS infection and other sexually transmitted diseases (Schoepf, 1997). Meaning, if polygynous relationships are part and parcel of the survival kit against poverty, then poor African women may not be in a position to negotiate safe sexual practices, particularly the use of condoms. Last but not least, it is also hoped that this research will lend support to arguments for the relevance and applicability of feminism to African women.

At the outset, it should be pointed out that my study is a meta-analysis. That is, it is concerned with a theoretical analysis, as opposed to a field work survey, of the new Black feminism that is slowly emerging from the continent through (poor) African women's daily struggle for survival. Thus, I am concerned with articulating the emergence of a South African womanist consciousness by means of a feminist interpretation or analysis of the social reality of (poor) African women's lives. This is achieved by analysing case studies concerned with the survival politics of (poor) African women in a number of socio-political and historical contexts, namely: African women's involvement in the national liberation struggle, the migrant labour system, and the struggle against poverty.

The present study was deliberately restricted to a theoretical analysis for two reasons. The first being that feminist (theoretical) interpretation or articulation of the social reality of (poor) African women's lives is in short supply (Mohanty, 1991). The second reason being that financial and time constraints did not allow for a field work survey of (poor) African women. This is regrettable, as such a survey would have bolstered and complemented the findings of the meta-analysis and provided me with first-hand information on the newly emerging African womanist consciousness.

PART I: A FEMINIST PSYCHOLOGICAL “GAZE”

CHAPTER 1**FIELD OF STUDY AND METHODOLOGY**

As previously mentioned in the introduction, this study is concerned with the survival politics of African women and how this gives rise to a feminist consciousness. More specifically, this study seeks to examine how certain (South) African women come to reject their socially prescribed role. The main objective of this research is to articulate the new Black feminism that is slowly emerging through (poor) African women's daily struggle for survival.

DEFINITION OF THE FIELD OF RESEARCH

As a field, feminist social psychology is a body of social psychological theories and practices that are informed by feminist goals and principles (Wilkinson, 1996). Feminist social psychology is concerned with issues and topics that are of importance to women and the psychological demands that flow from women's social role (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1992; Miller, 1986; Squire, 1989). This field of study originated in the work of feminists in psychology and the consciousness-raising groups of the women's liberation movement in psychology in the 1970s (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1992; Miller, 1986; Unger & Crawford, 1992; Wilkinson, 1996). The women's movement created and fostered consciousness-raising groups

in which women examined their life experiences as women and identified the social structures and patriarchal systems that were at the root of their oppression (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1992). Through these consciousness-raising groups, women discovered that they shared common life experiences of marginalisation and began to analyse and understand the social basis of their individually experienced oppression; which ranged from being confined to certain socially prescribed roles and activities, to gender discrimination, right through to sexual oppression and restrictions in other areas of life and personal growth (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1992; Wilkinson, 1996).

The women's liberation movement made its presence felt in all sectors of society: virtually no androcentric or male-centred social structure, i.e. institution of patriarchal power (including psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis) was left unchallenged (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1992; Unger & Crawford, 1992; Wilkinson, 1996). The women's liberation movement provided a theoretical platform from which a women-centred theory of psychology developed: the consciousness-raising groups were the first practical means through which feminist social psychology was articulated (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1992). The current feminist theory on women's psychology is avowedly political and committed to dismantling the social and political oppression of women (Wilkinson, 1996). It is part of the broader feminist struggle for social change, whose main objectives are to put an end to women's oppression and social inequalities (Wilkinson, 1996).

Feminist social psychology is rich and varied in its approaches and theoretical frameworks, ranging from psychoanalytic to cognitive theories (Unger & Crawford, 1992; Wilkinson, 1996). Feminist social psychologists

draw on this broad range of approaches and theoretical frameworks to analyse from a feminist perspective a number of issues and topics that are of importance and concern to women (Wilkinson, 1996). For example, gender discrimination, racism, social class, sexual violence, and motherhood (Wilkinson, 1996). More specifically, feminist social psychologists are concerned with analysing these (women's) issues and topics in a social context in terms of the exercise of power in society (Unger & Crawford, 1992; Wilkinson, 1996). Feminist social psychologists are also concerned with analysing social relations between men and women and developing new ways of going about doing this (Unger & Crawford, 1992).

FEMINIST/WOMANIST RESEARCH

Feminist Research

Given that the field of feminist social psychology is diverse and varied, there is no intrinsically feminist methodology or criteria by which a piece of research may be evaluated as "feminist" (Burman, 1994). How feminist a piece of research is depends on a number of factors such as the objectives of the research in question, its content and context, what it seeks to achieve, as well as what it does achieve, and the theoretical framework or structure informing the body of research (Burman, 1994; Phoenix, 1990). Despite the lack of a consensus on the criterion by which a piece of research is to be deemed feminist, all researchers generally acknowledge that a feminist research must be woman-centred, with a female perspective taking centre-stage (Phoenix, 1990). Furthermore, the research must also entail a critical evaluation of the research process itself (Phoenix,

1990). Other values generally shared by feminists within the field of social psychology are (Unger & Crawford, 1992):

1. That research can never be fully objective or value-free since the individual brings her own personal beliefs and ideas to the research process.
2. That although “mainstream” scientific methodologies are far from perfect, they are still invaluable to feminist research and that it's more a question of selectivity, application, integration, and alteration to find the best methodological “fit” for any given research topic.
3. That there is no universal law of human behaviour, rather it is shaped by the dynamics of psychological, as well as sociocultural and biological forces.
4. A commitment to non-sexist research and the belief that whilst the majority of feminist researchers are women, this should not be construed as meaning that only women can conduct feminist research. There are male psychologists who identify as feminists and conduct feminist research. Similarly, not all women identify as feminists nor do they conduct woman-centred research.

In general, three different models or approaches usually guide feminist research: namely feminist empiricism, cultural feminism (feminist standpoint theories), and feminist relativism (feminist poststructuralism) (Burman, 1994; Hawkesworth, 1989). Feminist empiricism adheres to existing or 'mainstream' scientific methodologies and posits that sexism and androcentricism (male-centred bias) can be corrected and overcome within

the current/"mainstream" scientific methods of research and inquiry (Burman, 1994; Hawkesworth, 1989). In contrast, cultural feminism rejects the assumption of a (wholly) "unmediated truth" and posits that knowledge/the "truth" is never fully objective since it is always mediated by a host of socio-political and historical factors (Hawkesworth, 1989). Thus, cultural feminists do not ascribe to the methods and values of "mainstream" science; instead they work within an essentialist framework, whereby feminist analysis is grounded in the assumption of a unitary female experience (Burman, 1994). The notion of a unitary female experience has been criticised by Black/Third World feminists and other "minority" groups (e.g. lesbian feminists) on the grounds of cultural imperialism and heterosexism since cultural feminism is eurocentric and assumes that the experiences of white middle-class heterosexual women is "woman's" experience (Burman, 1994; Hawkesworth, 1989). Feminist relativism/poststructuralism rejects the very idea of a truth/unitary experience altogether and argue for plurality, pointing out that knowledge/truth is never fixed nor neutral and is subject to a particular socio-political and historical context (Hawkesworth, 1989).

Womanist Research

Womanist (Black feminist) research adheres to some of the general guiding principles/values of "mainstream" (or "white") feminism, but from an Afrocentric point of view (Collins, 1990; Sudbury, 1998). Whilst Black feminists reject the notion of a universal female experience, they are not altogether against the notion of a (Black) woman's standpoint (Collins, 1990). The term "Black" denotes a diverse group of women, ranging from

those of various African ethnicities, to those in the diaspora, right through to those who politically identify themselves as Black (Sudbury, 1998).

However, Black women/Third World women do share similar forms of oppression in terms of the interlocking dynamics of race, class, and gender (Johnson-Odim, 1991). Thus, there is a need to articulate (for political) purposes a Black woman's standpoint.

The approach adopted is one of varying degrees of objectivity, whereby the research, although not wholly objective or neutral, possesses the ability to be as close to the best claims of "truths" as possible (Sudbury, 1998). The argument being that as outsiders to the social/scientific order, (Black) women are more likely to produce research that challenges the status quo and thereby maximize objectivity (Sudbury, 1998). However, many Black feminists are wary of the implications of such a positionality and point out that it alludes to notions of a superior standpoint or claims of authority on knowledge (racism and oppression) by virtue of the researcher being Black i.e. in touch with her marginality (Sudbury, 1998). Furthermore, critics have pointed out that such positionality runs the risk of perpetuating the very same exclusionary and marginalising practices that "mainstream" or "white" feminist standpoint theories have been criticised for (Sudbury, 1998).

Whilst there is no single womanist methodology by which a piece of work may be evaluated as womanist, there are some general criterions to which most Black feminist researchers ascribe. The most important being that a womanist research must address the totality of Black women's oppression and not prioritise one aspect of our oppression over another (Amos & Parmar, 1984). The argument being that the impact of the

interlocking dynamics of race, class, gender, and sexuality on the social realities of Black women's daily lives, demands that we adopt an integrated approach in our analysis of the nature of Black women's oppression (Amos & Parmar, 1984). The aforementioned authors go on to argue that only such an integrated approach can lead us forward in our fight against our oppression, since these racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism constitute the matrix of Black women's lives (Amos & Parmar, 1984). Other womanist values that guide Black feminists' research are (Collins, 1990; Sudbury, 1998):

1. Writing primarily for an audience of Black women and producing a knowledge that could be of use to Black women activists.
2. Ethical treatment of the women being researched and treating them as knowing subjects of their own lived experiences and social realities.
3. Selecting a representative sample.
4. Not generalizing the experiences of any given group of Black women as representative of all Black women.

In general, womanist research is guided by accountability to the community or group of women being researched as well to one's role as a researcher/academic (Sudbury, 1999). Writing as a heterosexual African womanist declares my refusal to prioritise one aspect of Black women's oppression (i.e. race, class, or gender) over another in twenty-first century sub-Saharan Africa. More specifically, writing as a Luba Zairean-born South African declares my interest in issues affecting Black women on the continent and my willingness to be held accountable for the findings of my research by such "communities". Whilst these "communities" are largely

imagined constructions of an academic endeavour, they are nevertheless important reminders to womanist scholars of the ethics and outcomes of our respective scholastic endeavours (Sudbury, 1999).

One may ask why the need to write “as a”, or locate one's writing from such multiple systems of positionality. Failure to locate one's writing within a geographical framework (i.e. culture, history, psyche/sexuality, etc...) runs the risk of universalising the experience of a certain group of African women as representative of all Black women on the continent and the diaspora (Sudbury, 1999). With particular reference to the present study, failure to locate my writing within a geographical framework ignores the “outsider-within” effect, whereby as a Black woman with roots in central Africa, I am doing an empirical study on the emergence of a womanist consciousness in southern Africa spanning the period from the 1950s to 1990s. By the same token, failure to locate one's writing within an ideological perspective (i.e. “identity”, beliefs, etc...) implies that one is primarily writing for an audience of white male social scientists (Collins, 1990). Granted, the fact that this research is being carried out for a Masters dissertation means that I am really writing for two audiences: the academia and Black women activists. The former has the power to confer “academic legitimacy”, whilst the latter has the power to confer “community legitimacy” (Sudbury, 1999). Thus, I must strike a balance between researching the emergence of an African womanist consciousness, and presenting my work as a (research) psychologist.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

The method of research used was theoretical analysis (meta-analysis). The reason being that although literature on the social reality of (poor) African women abound, feminist interpretation/ articulation of the social reality of these women's lives is in short supply (Mohanty, 1991). A computer/literature search was conducted to locate potential studies for the meta-analysis. More specifically, two forms of computer searches were conducted: an "internal" computer search on the University of Natal's library cataloguing system or "Online Public Access" (OPAC); and an "external" computer search on the national cataloguing system for all libraries in South Africa or "South African Bibliographic Network" (SABINET). Also, the South African Commission on Gender Equality was approached for assistance in this regard; and I was referred to the newspaper archives of the Daily News.

The criteria used in selecting studies for the meta-analysis was four-fold. The first being that the study had to be published or (in the case of unpublished manuscripts) cited in a published text. Second, the study had to be concerned with African South African women since women's movements in S.A. appear to be the most promising in terms of the newly emerging African feminism (Mikell, 1995, 1997b). Third and most important, the study had to be concerned with (rural/urban) African women's daily struggle for survival in relation to relevant factors such as: poverty, family/community life, labour migration, economic exploitation, or marriage. Studies concerned with the survival politics of rural and/or urban (poor) African women were considered since manifestations of the newly emerging feminist consciousness have been documented in both rural and

urban areas throughout South Africa (van der Vliet, 1991). Fourth and last, but equally important, the studies had to document or duly note manifestations of a feminist/womanist consciousness within one of the aforementioned contexts vis-à-vis the struggle for survival.

The computer search on OPAC yielded 100 items on feminism. Of these, only 7 were on feminism in Africa; and of this lot, only 2 were on feminism in South Africa. The computer search on SABINET, using general keywords such as 'women + Africa + poverty' yielded 30 items. Of these, only 4 were relevant to the research topic being investigated. Most of the studies examined in the meta-analysis were located by means of a "snowballing" technique. Meaning that a key text (such as Mikell, 1997 or Byrne & Ontiveros, 1986) was located and then the references given in that book were used to locate other relevant references and so on and so forth, "snowballing" from there on. The reason being that most of the relevant studies could not be located using keywords because their titles did not use such keywords, these titles tended to be metaphors or "poetic" or incorporated as chapters of "social development" books. In total, 8 case studies were found for the meta-analysis. Of these, 2 pertained to (South) African women's involvement in the national liberation struggle, 3 pertained to the migrant labour system, and the remaining three pertained to the struggle against poverty as a context for the emergence of a womanist consciousness.

RESEARCH DIFFICULTIES

My major difficulty has already been touched upon: not being able to locate many relevant texts via keyword computer searches. Related to this was the fact the dearth of research on African/Third World women's engagement with feminism further complicated the task of locating case studies for the meta-analysis. Another difficulty, albeit of a less serious nature, pertained to not having direct access to the written work of the South African Commission on Gender Equality. Literature pertaining to my study seemed to have been misplaced; hence I was directed to the newspaper archives of the Daily News.

In closing, contrary to popular perceptions by many on the continent of feminism as being "irrelevant" to African women, my examination of some of the existing body of literature on this topic indicated otherwise. The existing body of literature on African women's engagement with feminism argues for the relevance and applicability of feminism to African women. In fact the existing body literature maintains that African women, like our sisters elsewhere in the Third World have always engaged with feminism since we did not wait for "feminist consciousness-raising to initiate struggles for social justice" (Sudbury, 1999: 46).

Finally, although African women (like women elsewhere) are separated by class, regional, and cultural boundaries, we do share a number of socio-historical legacies that are directly tied to our oppression as women in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, whilst acknowledging that one must always be wary of generalizing, I feel justified in stating that the conclusions reached

in this study could probably be applied to other strands of womanist consciousness on the continent.

DIFFERENT FEMINISMS, DIFFERENT MEANINGS

WHAT IS FEMINISM?

The definition of feminism is complex and varies depending on a number of factors. These include time period (era), socio-political and/or geographical constituency/location, the needs and priorities of a given constituency of women, theoretical approach and practice (Bassnett, 1986; Delmar, 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Offen, 1988; Spencer, 1986). Textbooks and dictionaries abound with different meanings of feminism (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Delmar, 1986; Offen, 1988; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Spencer, 1986; Tong, 1989). Similarly, opinions differ on the content of feminism (theory and issues –what constitutes women's oppression), who can be a feminist, and even the chronology of feminism (Bassnett, 1986; Beasley; Bouchier, 1983; Cott, 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Offen, 1988; Ramazanoglu, 1989).

Due to its fluidity and diversity, there are a number of approaches that can be used to define feminism. For instance, feminism can be defined in terms of the first-wave (liberal) movement in the West, which emerged in the early 1800s with the suffragette struggle (women's struggle for the right to vote) [Cott, 1986; Cowley, 1971; McKay, 1994; Mitchell, 1986; Offen, 1988; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989]. Or, it can be conceptualised in

terms of the second-wave (radical/ revolutionary) feminism of the late 1960s/early 1970s, which also witnessed the emergence of separate Black/ethnic women's movements in response to the "mainstream" (liberal) movement's white middle-class Eurocentric bias and marginalisation of Black/ethnic women's experiences (Combahee River Collective [CRC], 1983; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981, 1984; Mitchell, 1986; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Terborg-Penn, 1981). The 1970s also marked African/Third World women's "official" engagement with feminism: a number of women's rights movements spawned in different parts of sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere in the Third World in response to the United Nations General Assembly's endorsement of 1976-1985 as the United Nations Decade for Women (Dolphyne, 1991; Lindsay, 1980a).

In addition to the aforementioned, feminism may also be defined in terms of the third-wave (international) movement which emerged in the 1980s in attempts to bridge gaps between different feminisms, form (political) alliances and share some common grounds (Cott, 1986; Mitchell, 1986; Offen, 1988; Patel, 1997; Sudbury, 1998). Given the complexity of feminism, for the purpose of this research, **feminism** will loosely be defined as ideology, practice, and/or theory concerned with women's experiences in a given socio-political, economic, and/or cultural context, which seeks to address the causes and consequences of women's oppression and prescribe strategies for liberation and/or take action towards overcoming women's oppression.

OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY SCHOOLS OF FEMINISM

Just as there is no single definition of feminism, there is no single feminist theory (Bouchier, 1983; Cott, 1986; Tong, 1989; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Besides the newly emerging African feminism which will be considered in the next chapter, there are other more established schools of feminist thought such as: liberal, psychoanalytic, radical, lesbian, socialist/Marxist, Black, and postmodern/poststructuralist theories (Beasley, 1999; Cott, 1986; Tong, 1993; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Liberal feminism attributes women's oppression to sexism and argues that the sexual division of labour and separation of the public (economic and political) sphere in which men are located, from the private (domestic) sphere to which women are confined maintains and perpetuates inequalities between the sexes (Bouchier, 1983; Elshtain, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Psychoanalytic feminism argues that women's oppression is rooted deep in their psyche and focuses on differences between male and female sexuality in infancy and childhood to explain the nature of women's oppression (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993).

Radical feminism attributes women's oppression to **patriarchy**: a system of interrelated social structures through which men exploit women (Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Walby, 1986). Lesbian feminism is a revolutionary branch of radical feminism which rejects all male-defined institutions, specifically that of heterosexuality (Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). Socialist/Marxist feminism encompasses liberal, radical, and psychoanalytic perspectives and argues that women's oppression is the result of capitalism, patriarchy, sexism and also rooted in their psyche (Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, .

1993). Black/ African-American feminism is specifically concerned with the oppression of Black women (in the Western nations) and attributes it to the multiplicative effects of “triple” discriminations based on race, class, and gender (Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981, 1984; King, 1988; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Postmodern/poststructuralist feminism rejects the notion of a women's “standpoint” and argue that this is not feasible since women's experiences are diverse and divided by class, race, and culture (Beasley, 1999; Tong, 1993). Having highlighted the main strands of feminist thought, the ensuing discussion will briefly present them in greater detail, paying more attention to those theories which are most applicable to the context of African women.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism is the most (publicly) well-known or “mainstream” brand of feminist thinking (Beasley, 1999; Ramzanoglu, 1989). It is concerned with women's role and equality between the sexes. Liberal feminists explain women's oppression in terms of gender inequality and argue that women are denied the opportunity and freedom to realize their true potential because of their gender (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Elshtain, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). According to liberal feminists, there are two elements obstructing women from realizing their true potential: namely the sexual division of labour and separation of the public sphere from the private sphere (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Elshtain, 1981).

Liberal feminists point out that money, power, status, and freedom are all located in the public sphere (public market place), which is predominantly a male preserve (Elshtain, 1981). Thus, they argue that because women are primarily located (confined) to the private sphere (domestic home), they are essentially denied the same opportunities and rights that are afforded to men to acquire money, power, status, and freedom (Elshtain, 1981). Hence, liberal feminism focuses on women's (legal) rights and equal access to the same structures and opportunities that men have i.e. obtaining equality with men in society (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Elshtain, 1981). For example, equal pay for equal work: often in the market place, women are paid less than men for the same kind of work or position (Elshtain, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Also, women are not provided with the same opportunities to scale the corporate ladder with the same ease that men do (Elshtain, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1989). For example, most companies do not adequately cater for maternity leave or child day care. So, whilst, a man's career can soar to great height, irrespective of the timing of fatherhood, this is not the case for women. Motherhood may mean, putting one's career on hold or foregoing a promotion. Similarly, there are barriers preventing women from scaling societal power structures (Elshtain, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1989). For example, some church denominations do not allow women into the priesthood or other power structures of the church. By the same token, social attitudes and "old boys" networks stand in the way of women ascending to positions of power in politics. This is probably the reason, why even in the most democratic states, women are still considerably under represented.

In terms of limitations, liberal feminism is usually criticized for being eurocentric and primarily concerned with white middle-class women

(Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). Also, liberal feminism is often criticized for being reformist, since it does not challenge the existing social order per se, but rather seeks to work within it i.e. it is not revolutionary (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). Critics point out that by seeking to work within the existing system of male dominance (patriarchy), liberal feminists are in effect accepting male values as human values (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Tong, 1989). Furthermore, liberal feminism is often criticized for valuing individual freedom over that of the common good and not focussing on the actual structures of oppression (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). That is, (white) liberal feminists are not concerned with changing or challenging the structures of oppression per se, rather they want a share of the proverbial pie. In spite of its shortcomings, liberal feminism has accrued a number of practical benefits for women such as the right to vote, equal access to education, and the right to work (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989).

Radical Feminism

Whereas liberal feminism focuses on sexism, radical feminism cites patriarchy (**sexual oppression** rather than sexual inequality) as the main cause of women's oppression (Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989; Walby, 1986). Radical feminists focus on women's oppression as women within patriarchal social structures and relations: namely the household, the workplace, the state, male violence, sexuality, and cultural institutions (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Walby, 1986). Within the household, women occupy a

subordinate position and women's work in the household as homemaker enables the husband to be free and go out into the public sphere (Walby, 1986). In the workplace, women are excluded from certain jobs and ranks; and treated differently than men; for example, unequal pay (Walby, 1986). The state is regarded by radical feminists as being both racist and sexist in that it has a systematic bias towards patriarchal interests in policies and actions (Walby, 1986). For example, government policy on rape tends to be biased in favour of the rapist and thus further victimises the victim (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Walby, 1986). Furthermore, convictions in such cases are usually few and far in between; and even then, the sentences seldom match the severity of the crime. Similarly, government policy on economic development, education, and housing, especially in the West (and during the apartheid era in South Africa) are/were heavily biased in favour of whites (Lindsay, 1980a; Wilson & Ramphela, 1989).

Male violence against women such as rape and sexual harassment is viewed as institutionalised and systematically used to remind women of their "place" in society (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Walby, 1986). Sexuality is regarded as a site of patriarchal relations where struggles occur because of the compulsory heterosexuality and double standard applied to both men and women's sexuality (Ramazanoglu, 1989; Walby, 1986). Lastly, cultural institutions such as religion and the media are regarded as sites of patriarchal relations because they tend to present women in a "patriarchal gaze" i.e. from a male or patriarchal-serving point of view. (Walby, 1986). According to radical feminists, all of the aforementioned structures and relations interact to maintain and entrench male domination in society. Hence, radical feminists regard the overthrow of patriarchy as the solution to women's oppression.

Lesbian feminism is a revolutionary offshoot of radical feminism, which advocates separatism from all male-defined structures, especially heterosexuality (Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). Lesbian feminists argue that if women sexually free themselves from men and lead lesbian or celibate life-styles, the resulting liberation of sexual behaviour would break the hold of the monogamous family, the source of patriarchal power (Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Radical feminists regard lesbianism as more than just a personal choice; they consider it an outward sign of an internal rejection of patriarchal sexuality (Tong, 1989). In fact a number of them, especially female separatists and supremacist argue that only lesbians can be true feminists, since only lesbians can be truly independent of men and thus free of apparently male dominated heterosexual practices (Bouchier, 1983).

Some female supremacists argue for the replacement of patriarchy with matriarchy (female domination) and propose the establishment of an all female and self-contained commune (McKay, 1994). However, this is not a view shared by all radical feminists. Nevertheless, all radical feminists regard women's bodies as crucial sites for women's sexual oppression and thus stress women taking control of their bodies/reproductive system as a key strategy for overcoming male domination (Beasley, 1999; McKay, 1994; Walby, 1986). Furthermore, radical feminists, like other feminists, advocate consciousness-raising, and women valuing and celebrating their bodies and biological difference (Beasley, 1999; McKay, 1994).

In terms of limitations, radical feminism is often criticized for being anti-male and regarding men collectively as the "main enemy" (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; Tong, 1989). Also, radical feminism's strong

emphasis on women's shared oppression or sisterhood is usually criticized for ignoring the differences that exist in women's experiences of their oppression e.g. class, race, and cultural differences (Beasley, 1999). Furthermore, critics point out that by focussing on patriarchy/sexual oppression as the source of women's oppression, radical feminists marginalise the experiences of working class (poor) women and that of women of colour, for whom class and race is more likely to be the main source of their respective oppressions (Beasley, 1999).

Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalytic feminists, like radical feminists are concerned with sexual oppression and differences between men and women in sexual power relations. There are two main strands of psychoanalytic feminist thinking: namely Freudian feminism and French feminism (Beasley, 1999; Tong, 1989, 1993). **Freudian feminism** is concerned with the impact of women's mothering responsibilities on the formation of subjectivities or sexually specific identities such as masculinity and femininity (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). Freudian feminists point out that men have a need to subjugate women in order to achieve deep psychological goals of "masculinity"; and argue that women's role and responsibilities as mothers may be a key site for challenging this innate need (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). In spite of their oppression, women as mothers are viewed as having the power to psychologically and culturally influence the construction of subjectivities and social relations; and thus contribute to the creation of a new psychological order, free of the innate male need to control women (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). Hence, Freudian feminists advocate the "feminising" of men

by intervening in the psychological development of male children during the formation of their sexual identity and personality (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993).

French feminism like Freudian feminism rejects the existing masculine psychological order and challenges the way in which women are exclusively viewed and construed from the language and culture of male dominance i.e. they challenge masculinity or the notion of men as the yardstick from which femininity or the notion of women is measured (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). French feminists argue that the notion of women or femininity cannot simply be construed as “other” since it provides an alternative context/position from which the existing masculine psychological order can be critically re-evaluated and assessed (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). Hence, French feminists propose subverting cultural notions of the concept women or femininity and using femininity as the yardstick from which men are measured instead of the existing patriarchal conceptual order which uses men as the measuring yardstick (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989). French feminists argue that by exploring the possibilities of the previously marginalised concept of women, the existing culture of male dominance is fragmented and in the process a number of other possibilities will open up (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989). However, French feminists do not specify what constitutes femininity or womanhood since they believe that doing so would be following in the footsteps of patriarchal imperatives, which have always dictated womanhood i.e. telling women what they are and how they should be as women (Beasley, 1999; Tong, 1989, 1993).

In terms of limitations, all strands of psychoanalytic feminism are often criticized for putting too much emphasis on psychology by treating patriarchy from an exclusively psychological perspective, and ignoring the social aspect or dynamics of patriarchy (Beasley, 1999; Tong, 1989, 1993; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Also, psychoanalytic feminists are usually criticized for ignoring other elements of women's oppression such as race, class, and the social context in sexual identity is experienced (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Despite the aforementioned shortcomings, as will be seen in the chapter on poststructuralism (chapter four of this volume), the psychoanalytic concept of subjectivity has contributed greatly to the theorizing of individual consciousness in poststructuralist accounts of the emergence of consciousness.

Socialist/Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminism per se i.e. the analysis of women's oppression from a class perspective, is no longer in vogue and has instead been replaced by strands of socialist feminist thinking, which synthesize Marxian ideas of class/capitalism with radical feminist ideas of patriarchy to explain women's oppression (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). Hence the double alternating terminology.

Marxist/socialist feminism cites capitalism as the main cause of women's oppression and explains women's oppression in terms of their experiences in patriarchal/capitalist structures: namely the family and the workforce or labour market (McKay, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989, 1993). Socialist/Marxist feminists argue that women's oppression in

the family renders them vulnerable to capitalist exploitation (Beasley, 1999; Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Furthermore, they argue that because of this, the State views women as being financially supported by their husbands and thus the capitalists exploit women and pay them a much lower salary, whereas men are given family wages (McKay, 1994). Under capitalism, women's work within the household is unpaid and trivialized. Hence socialist feminism proposes the socialization of domestic labour, the purpose of which would be to make society realize the necessity of such work (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). When this happens, Marxist feminists argue, there will no longer be grounds for society's oppression of women as parasitic people of inferior value since women would be paid for their work within the household (Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989).

Marxist/socialist feminists view the lack of women's economic position as being crucial to their oppression (Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994; Ramazanoglu, 1989). They point out that the relegation of women to the private sphere is beneficial to capitalists in a several ways. First and foremost, women's role as unpaid wives and mothers is not borne by the capitalist system (Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994). This state of affairs provides the capitalist system with an extremely cheap female labour force that can be exploited more than men (Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994). Also, women's subordinate role benefits patriarchy since men are free to be out in the public sphere and dominate society (Bouchier, 1983; McKay, 1994). Furthermore, housewives are the biggest consumers of capitalist goods and thus they can be regarded as unwitting supporters of the capitalist system (McKay, 1994). Hence, Marxist/socialist feminism advocates the overthrow

of both capitalism and patriarchy and replacing these structures with socialism as the solution to women's oppression.

In terms of limitations, up until recently Marxist/socialist feminists have failed to acknowledge the element of race in their analysis of women's oppression; and thereby ignored the social reality of Black/Third World women (Beasley, 1999; Bhavnani & Coulson, 1986; Bouchier, 1983; Ramazanoglu, 1989; Tong, 1989). Similarly, the rejection of the family as patriarchal and oppressive to women is highly questionable from a Third World/African perspective since historically (during slavery, colonialism, and apartheid) the family has played a key role in the resistance to oppression (Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989; Bhavnani & Coulson, 1986; Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990). Also, criticism has been levelled at Marxist/socialist's arguments that socialism will free society of gender oppression (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Critics acknowledge that whilst socialism may free society of class oppression, scepticism has been expressed over whether or not this will necessarily translate into freedom from gender oppression (Beasley, 1999; Ramazanoglu, 1989).

Black/African-American Feminism

As mentioned earlier, Black/African-American feminism is particularly concerned with the oppression of Black/Third World women living in the West. Like other brands of Third World feminism, Black/African-American feminism seeks much more than (just) sexual equality between the sexes (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Brewer, 1993; Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983; Davis, 1981, 1984; hooks, 1984; Johnson-

Odim, 1991; King, 1988; Ramazanoglu, 1989). It is a *humanist* movement since it encompasses the socio-political and economic struggles of all Black people, particularly those living in the West (Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983; hooks, 1984). By humanist is meant a concern for the struggles of *all* (Black/Third World) people, not just Black women, but also Black/Third World men, children, and communities (Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983). It is the belief that the struggles of all Black/Third World people are intertwined, as opposed to detached from one another. The term *womanism*, coined by African-American feminist writer Alice Walker, is sometimes used instead of feminism to denote this (broader) humanist nature of Third World women's struggles [(Charles), 1997; Collins, 1990; Johnson-Odim, 1991]. Some Black/Third World feminist writers prefer the label womanist instead of feminist [(Charles), 1997; Collins, 1990; Johnson-Odim, 1991].

Black/African-American feminism or womanism cites race, class, and gender as the main causes of Black/Third World women's oppression and explains these three elements as interlocking systems of discriminations with multiplicative effects (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Brewer, 1993; Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1984; King, 1988; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Black feminists point out that racism is as pervasive as (if not more so than) classism and sexism in the lives of African-American/Third World women (Brewer, 1993; CRC, 1983). It is difficult to distinguish these three sources of oppression from one another since they are usually experienced simultaneously by Black/ Third World women (Brewer, 1993; Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983).

*Her*storically, Black/African-American women have opted for the fight against racism and basically left the fight for gender equality to white

women (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Brewer, 1993; Davis, 1981). This would seem to suggest that Black women's experience of sexism (in the West) has traditionally been overshadowed by experiences of racism. However, it must be pointed out that there is no one single source for Black women's oppression (Brewer, 1993; Carby, 1982; CRC, 1983; King, 1988).

Furthermore, it must be pointed out that Black/Third World women, even those living in the same country, experience the "triple" effects of racism, classism, and sexism differently (King, 1988; Lindsay, 1980b). In some instances race may be more of a factor in Black women's oppression, whereas in others, gender and/or class may be more of a factor (Carby, 1982; CRC, 1983; King, 1988). For example, classism would be more of a factor in the oppression of a poor (working-class) Black woman than it would be in the oppression of a middle-class Black woman. Alternatively, a middle-class Black woman may not experience racism and sexism in the same way that an underprivileged (working-class) Black woman would. Nevertheless, variations in the role of any one factor in Black women's oppression aside, the fact remains that the "triple" discriminations of racism, classism, and sexism create an interlocking and multiplicative oppression for Black/Third World women to which white women, (both working-class and middle-class, especially the latter), are not subjected.

As a movement which seeks to empower and inform Black/Third World women, womanism deals with a number of central themes and issues which articulates the multiple realities of Black/African-American women's lives. The **struggle for survival** is the most recurring theme in Black/African-American feminism and is directly tied to core issues such as **racism** and **poverty** which emanate from the historical oppression of Black people in the Western world (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Carby, 1982; Collins,

1990; CRC, 1983; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1984; Stack, 1981; Terborg-Penn, 1987). Throughout the centuries, women of African descent in the diasporas have had to **network** with one another to ensure their very own survival, that of their **family and community** (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983; Davis, 1981; Stack, 1981; Terborg-Penn, 1987). Networking in the name of survival has fostered **female solidarity** amongst women in the African diasporas (Amos & Parmar, 1984; Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990; CRC, 1983; Davis, 1981; Stack, 1981; Terborg-Penn, 1987).

Another central theme in Black/African-American feminism is that of **motherhood**: a valued and important role in African diasporic societies, which provides a site where Black women learn the importance of **self-reliance, autonomy and independence** (especially single mothers or female-headed households) [Amos & Parmar, 1984; Carby, 1982; Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; James, 1993; Stack, 1981; Terborg-Penn, 1987]. Closely linked to the central theme of motherhood is that of **other mothering**, whereby Black women help one another with the responsibilities of motherhood (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; James, 1993; Stack, 1981; Terborg-Penn, 1987). **Sexual liberation** is another central theme in Black/African-American feminism: it deals with issues such as **reproductive rights and sexuality (lesbianism/ heterosexism)** [Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981]. Whilst lesbianism is an issue in Black/African-American feminism, Black feminists are **anti-separatist** and do not advocate gender separatism as championed by the (white) lesbian revolutionary branch of radical feminism (CRC, 1983; hooks, 1984). Instead Black feminists encourage solidarity with progressive Black men (CRC, 1983; hooks, 1984)

It must be noted that although motherhood provided a context in which Black women defined and expressed themselves, Black motherhood has also served as a context in which **controlling images** of Black women have been forged (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Staples, 1981). Controlling images such as *mammy* (faithful domestic worker), *matriarch* (psychologically castrating or emasculating/strong woman), and "*hot mama*" (sexually "loose" or available woman) have been used to disguise and manipulate the socio-economic reality of Black women (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; Staples, 1981). These controlling images are a Black feminist issue because they appear to legitimise Black women's oppression by presenting racism, classism, and sexism as a normal way of life for Black women (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Staples, 1981).

The manipulation of the perception of the Black woman as emasculated/matriarch can be interpreted (against the "yardstick" measure of white womanhood) as meaning that she is not a "real" woman and thus should be treated accordingly (sexism). Or, the perception of the Black woman as emasculating may be interpreted as an abnormality (not in synch with "true"/white standards of womanhood), which renders her subhuman [racism]. Also, as a faithful and obedient domestic servant, the Black woman's poverty is inevitable; and thus, she should be treated accordingly (classism). Furthermore, as a "loose" woman, she deserves to be sexually preyed upon (sexism), as was argued during slavery and apartheid. Other controlling images of Black women pertain to *prescribed white standards of beauty* such as straight hair and light skin tone (Collins, 1990; Weekes, 1997). These controlling images are a Black feminist issue because they foster a negative self-image and contribute to some Black women's

internalised oppression about not measuring up to externally prescribed standards of beauty (Collins, 1990; Weekes, 1997).

In terms of limitations, Black/African-American feminism is criticized by some feminists (especially liberal feminists) as being too political (Beasley, 1999; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1984; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Other (radical) feminists are critical of Black feminists' focus on race, claiming that it is divisive (Beasley, 1999; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Ramazanoglu, 1989). Given the relevance of Black/African-American feminism to the present research paper, the remaining part of this discussion will consider its limitations vis-à-vis other Black/Third World women. Although Black/African-feminism offers Black women an alternative view or standpoint and understanding of the dynamics of "triple" oppression, Black/African-American feminism is limited in terms of its applicability to other Black/Third World in a number of ways.

First and foremost, there are differences in the way in which different groups of Black/Third World women (irrespective of the geographical location) experience the multiplicative effects of race, class, and gender discrimination (King, 1988; Lindsay, 1980b). Similarly, there are differences between the way in which women in the ethnic Diasporas and women in the Third World experience "triple" oppression (Lindsay, 1980b). For instance, whereas racism is a way of life for the majority of Black/Third World women in the West, poverty (classism) is a way of life for the majority of women living in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Although Black/African-American feminism is not entirely applicable to the social reality of women living in the Third World, its theory on Black women's oppression is nevertheless relevant to the oppression of women in the Third

World. [For more on this discussion see the last section of the chapter on African feminism in this dissertation].

Postmodern/Poststructuralist Feminism

As previously mentioned, postmodern/poststructuralist feminism is more concerned with a plural or multiple account of women's individual experience than a unitary or universal ("standpoint") account of women's oppression as a group (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Flax, 1987; Tong, 1993; Waugh, 1992). [The terminologies postmodernism and poststructuralism are interchangeable and denote some feminists' disillusionment with "mainstream" liberal and radical feminism (Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994). However, as will be seen in chapter four, poststructuralism can also be defined as a subset of postmodernism (Beasley, 1999); whereby a different approach is used to **deconstruct** or unpack perceived (social) meanings and theorize individual consciousness (Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994)].

Postmodern/poststructuralist feminists reject universal notions of women's shared oppression and argue that such unitary accounts of women's oppression marginalise that which is perceived as different by making similarity in women's experiences the norm i.e. the measuring yardstick by which all experiences that are different and do not conform to the "norm" are deemed abnormal and thus negatively viewed or ignored (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Flax, 1987; Waugh, 1992). Postmodern/poststructuralist feminists point out that by offering unitary or universalised accounts of women's oppression as the norm, feminists run the risk of reproducing

patriarchal practices of rejecting that which is deemed different (i.e. women) as abnormal and subordinate; and viewing men's experiences as the yardstick measure for normality (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Flax, 1987; Nicholson, 1994; Waugh, 1992).

Not only do postmodern/poststructuralist feminists challenge universalised accounts of women's oppression, but they also challenge the very category of women and the content of this category; arguing that there is no given content or distinguishing feature in the category "women" to constitute feminism and be studied as such (Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994; Waugh, 1992). Furthermore, postmodern/poststructuralist feminists challenge other "fixed" categories such as sex, class, and race or ethnicity, around which subjects identify and regard as the essence of their being – **identity politics** (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994; Waugh, 1992). The politics of identification entail a constituency or group politically organising or mobilizing themselves in terms of their common/shared identity or interest and striving for a common goal (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994; Waugh, 1992). For instance, politically organising as Black women against gender discrimination and racial discrimination.

In terms of limitations, postmodern/poststructural feminism's fluid/multiple account of women's oppression is often regarded as going against the grain of a feminist framework which focuses on women as group and puts the category "women at the centre stage of the analysis (Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994; Waugh, 1992). This, according to feminist critics, borders on rendering women obsolete and wiping out feminism itself (Alcoff, 1988). Also, postmodern/poststructural feminism's rejection of notions of universal truths about women's oppression has been criticized

because it in effect dismisses the mobilization or organization of women as a group for political struggles: an important aspect of most strands of feminist thought (Alcoff, 1988; Waugh, 1992).

SUMMARY

As evident from the above discussion, although the various contemporary schools of feminism all share a common bond of being concerned with women's oppression, they have different themes, priorities, and strategies on how to go about fighting women's oppression. For the purpose of this research, of the theories considered in the above discussion, only elements of Marxist/socialist and Black/African-American feminist theories will feature in the theoretical framework of this study. The theoretical framework of this research will be underpinned by African feminism, which is concerned with the oppression of women in sub-Saharan Africa; and poststructuralist feminism, which is concerned with theorizing the emergence of feminist consciousness. In closing, it is hoped that the above discussion has underscored the fluidity and diversity of feminism and demonstrated the difficulty in defining this term and why no single outlook/perspective on feminism can be presented as *the* defining feature of feminism.

PART II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

AFRICAN FEMINISM: “BREAD, BUTTER, AND POWER ISSUES”

DEFINITION AND CHARACTERISTICS

African feminism is a new brand of feminism that is slowly emerging throughout sub-Saharan Africa and is concerned with the oppression and survival imperatives of African women. This newly emerging Black feminism is *inclusive*, distinctly *heterosexual*, *pronatal*, and firmly rooted in “bread, butter, and power issues” (Mikell, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). By *inclusive* is meant that it is concerned with issues affecting women as well as other members their respective communities (including men) i.e. it is group oriented (Mikell, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). As for African feminism being distinctly *heterosexual*, what is meant is that most women on the continent are pro-marriage and regard lesbianism as a non-issue (Dolphyne, 1991; Mikell, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). By *pronatal* is meant that the newly emerging Black feminism embraces motherhood (Mikell, 1995, 1997a, 1997b). As for the new Black feminism being rooted in “bread, butter, and power issues”, what is meant is that it is pragmatic to the extent that it is concerned the politics of survival and gaining access to basic amenities e.g. shelter, food, water, and sanitation (Dolphyne. 1991; Mikell, 1995, 1997a, 1997b; Steady, 1981b, 1987).

Another striking characteristics of African women's engagement with feminism is that it is *less antagonistic* or non-confrontational: African women, like other Black women in the Diasporas, do not regard Black men as their enemy (Steady, 1981b). Rather, it is oppressive socio-economic forces (at local, national, and international levels), which subjugate both Black men and women, as well as children that are perceived as the enemy (Steady, 1981b). African feminism, like other brands of Third World feminism, is much more than “just” a struggle for women's equality or sexual liberation (Dolphyne, 1991; Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mikell, 1995, 1997a; Steady, 1981a, 1981b, 1987). It is a *humanist* struggle for survival that is connected and committed to the social, political, and economic struggles of all people in society (Mikell, 1995, 1997a; Steady, 1981b, 1987). Hence, **African feminism** may be defined as *an ideology of how life should be for women (and men) in sub-Saharan Africa: a life free from multiple and complex interlocking dimensions of oppression based on racial, (neo)colonialist/ imperialist, political, sexual, cultural, and class biases* (Steady, 1987).

ROOTS OF OPPRESSION

The multiple roots of African women's oppression are directly tied to the historical oppression of the entire Black race (Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Steady, 1981b, 1987). Ogundipe-Leslie (1993) likens the roots of African women's oppression to mountains and points that African women have six mountains on their backs, namely: colonialism and neo-colonialism; poverty/class and lack of education; oppressive traditional practices; men/sexism; racism; and African women's own inferiority complex.

1. Colonialism and Neo-colonialism

Colonialism was the process through which Africa was “integrated” into the Western capitalist system to serve as a reservoir of raw materials, mineral resources and cheap labour for European nations (Lindsay, 1980a; Robertson & Berger, 1986; Steady, 1981b, 1987). Contrary to popular (Western) beliefs, colonialism did not liberate women on the African continent or elsewhere in the Third World (Amadiume, 1987; Cutrufelli, 1983; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Mullins, 1976; Ogun-dipe-Leslie, 1993; Qunta, 1987a; Steady, 1981b). As a matter of fact, it did the exact opposite since it eroded the role of African women and drastically altered their status in society (Amadiume, 1987; Cutrufelli, 1983; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Mullins, 1976; Qunta, 1987b; Steady, 1981b). For example, prior to the arrival of Christianity (via colonialism) i.e. before the 1840s, titled Igbo women of eastern Nigeria or “Ekwe” women, enjoyed economic, social, and political powers as (chosen) messengers of the goddess Idemili -- an indigenous African (Igbo) deity (Amadiume, 1987). The title “Ekwe” was bestowed upon women who were deemed by their communities to be possessed by the spirit of the goddess. As such, these women exercised considerable socio-political power as well as religious/spiritual authority. However, the advent of Christianity, which is patriarchal in structure and administration, eroded the powers of the “Ekwe” titled women – religious as well as socio-political power since the two were intertwined in Igbo society (Amadiume, 1987).

Women's position may not have been equal, parallel, or dominant in pre-colonial African societies as suggested by some social scientists; and indeed they may have occupied a subordinate position in most parts of the

continent (Chazan, 1989; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a, 1980b; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Mullins, 1976; Rivkin, 1981). But in pre-colonial African societies, African women had a defined and valued role in the social, economic and political aspects of traditional life (Amadiume, 1987; Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Qunta, 1987b; Rivkin, 1981; Steady, 1981b; Sudarkasa, 1987).

Under traditional self-provisioning agricultural modes of production, African women had more access to the product of their labour and were thus in a less dependent economic position (Amadiume, 1987; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a; Lovett, 1989; Mullins, 1976; Robertson & Berger, 1986; Steady, 1981b; Sudarkasa, 1987). The introduction of commercial farming and wage employment under colonial rule changed this since African women had very little access to the means of production, .i.e. socio-economic resources, and no control over the product of their labour, .i.e. sale or income generated from their labour (Amadiume, 1987; Cutrufelli, 1983; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a, Lovett, 1989; Mullins, 1976; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Robertson & Berger, 1986; Steady, 1981b).

The marginalization of African women in the process of production eroded their role in society since it placed them in a more dependent economic position and lead to new attitudes of male social and economic superiority (Amadiume, 1987; Cutrufelli, 1983; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a; Lovett, 1989; Mullins, 1976; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Robertson & Berger, 1986). It is difficult to ascertain the degree to which African women were economically independent and had a say in the social and political affairs of pre-colonial African societies (Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a; Mullins, 1976; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993). However, most

social scientists agree that colonialism/capitalism (with its own brand of European sexism) stripped African women of the prerogatives and rights they previously enjoyed, drastically altered their status, and exacerbated already existing traditional ideologies of male superiority (Amadiume, 1987; Chazan, 1989; Hafkin & Bay, 1976; Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Mullins, 1976; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Rivkin, 1981; Robertson & Berger, 1986; Qunta, 1987b; Steady, 1981b; Sudarkasa, 1987).

Neo-colonialism is the modern day outgrowth of colonialism and refers to the (continued) domination and exploitation of former (African) colonies by their former (European) colonizers (Cutrufelli, 1983; Lindsay, 1980a; Steady, 1989). Under neo-colonialism, the same economic, socio-cultural, and political relationships found during colonialism are preserved (Lindsay, 1980a; Steady, 1987). In essence, the former colonies continue to serve as reservoirs of mineral resources and cheap labour for the profit of Western capitalism (Steady, 1987). Thus, although the former colonies are all now sovereign nations, they are underdeveloped and economically dependent on their former colonizers (Lindsay, 1980a; Steady, 1987). Meaning that the same problems perpetuated by colonialism continue to persist in the former colonies. Hence, African women continue to face the same oppressive socio-economic and cultural subjugation experienced during colonial rule; intensified by increasingly impoverished conditions.

2. Oppressive Traditional Practices

Oppressive traditional practices refer to certain aspects of our traditional heritage, still prevalent today, which keep African women in

subjection (Cutrufelli, 1983; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993). However, it must be pointed out that traditional structures and practices as they are known today cannot be purist in the sense that “culture” is not static and the fact that colonialism had an impact on all aspects of traditional African societies, including culture. Hence, what is often referred to today as “traditional culture” or heritage is more likely than not bound to be a product of the interaction between colonial/Western culture and the “original” traditional culture of the colonized and the way it has evolved (survived?) throughout the years (Qunta, 1987a).

There are a number of traditional practices that keep African women under subjection in modern day African societies: for instance, bride-wealth and female circumcision (Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; Mikell, 1997a; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Thiam, 1986). *Bride-wealth* refers to the practice whereby the man pays the family of the wife-to-be for their permission to marry her (Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; Qunta, 1987c; Russell, 1989). According to Dolphyne (1991) and Russell (1989), the practice of bride-wealth, in and of itself, is generally not perceived by African women as oppressive. But rather it is its misinterpretation and abuse by modern-day African men that makes this practice oppressive (Dolphyne, 1991; Qunta, 1987c; Russell, 1989). “Traditionally”, the practice of bride-wealth was regarded as an exchange of resources, compensating the woman's family for the loss of her services (Dolphyne, 1991; Russell, 1989). It was a marriage contract between the two families, which acknowledged the prospective wife's worth in terms of the services that she would render to her new family: namely procreation and labour power (Amadiume, 1987; Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; Russell, 1989). But the introduction of a cash economy and the subsequent decline in socio-economic conditions resulted

in the practice of bride-wealth being misinterpreted, abused and exploited (Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; Russell, 1989).

The abuse and exploitation of the practice of bride-wealth has led to disturbing male attitudes of ownership, whereby the man equates the payment of bride-wealth with “buying” his wife (Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; Russell, 1989). Such attitudes leave African women very vulnerable to all sorts of marital abuse with very little recourse since the bride-wealth would have to be returned to the husband's family if she left him (Dolphyne, 1991). Given the large sum of money usually involved, the wife's family would refuse to take her back since they would not be able to repay the money (Dolphyne, 1991). So, most women who find themselves in abusive marriages suffer in silence. [With the exception being in instances where the bride-wealth was a small sum, in which case the wife's family would take their daughter back since they would be able to return the money (Dolphyne, 1991)].

Female circumcision refers to an initiation rite that is practised in some African societies to mark passage into womanhood, marriage, or to uphold the moral standards of the girl as a future wife (Dolphyne, 1991; Thiam, 1986). This practice tends to be very traumatic and poses a lot of health hazards including excessive bleeding and infections such as tetanus, which can be fatal (Dolphyne, 1991; Thiam, 1986). Furthermore, this operation can lead to later complications for the woman especially during childbirth (Dolphyne, 1991; Thiam, 1986). Many (Western) feminists deplore this practice as genital mutilation and argue that its main function is to suppress the woman's sexuality and make her faithful to her husband (Dolphyne, 1991; Thiam, 1986). For African women in societies where this

practice continues, it is difficult to break away from this custom as it is deeply entrenched in their societies: women who are not circumcised often face rejection and ridicule (Dolphyne, 1991). So, outright banning of this practice is unrealistic. However, opposing this practice on health grounds may receive a more favourable response and lead to a modification of the practice or reduce it to a symbolic operation (Dolphyne, 1991; Thiam, 1986).

Besides the above mentioned, there are many other traditional practices which continue to keep African women under subjection. For instance, *widowhood rites*, *child-marriage*, *polygamy*, and *purdah* – Islamic practice which requires women, upon marriage, to stay indoors during the day (or veil themselves if they have to go out before dusk) since they should not be seen by any other man than their husband (Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; Mikell, 1997a). All such “traditional” practices that keep African women in subjection need to be carefully scrutinized and either moderated or eradicated.

3. Poverty/Class and Lack of Education

Of all the mountains on African women's backs, poverty is the tallest. Poverty is the most oppressive aspect of African women's oppression (Mikell, 1997a, 1997b) since it affects many aspects of African women's lives and casts an all-encompassing oppressive net over African women. Most African women, the majority of whom live in rural areas, are poor and struggle on a daily basis for their very existence and that of their children and communities (Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Lewis, 1980; Steady, 1981b).

African women's poverty is inextricably linked to the poverty of the masses on the continent and is a product of colonialism and neo-colonialism [see part one of this section] (Amadiume, 1987; Pala, 1981; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Steady, 1981b).

The effects of colonialism and neo-colonialism on African women can be seen in a number of social, economic, and educational patterns of inequality. For example, under colonial rule, Zairean women, like women elsewhere on the continent during this era, were excluded from the modern economy (MacGaffey, 1988). By the same token, the (colonia)l educational was heavily biased in favour of men. Meaning that during this period women's education was virtually non-existent and restricted to domestic training (MacGaffey, 1988). As a result, women in post-colonial Zaire found themselves (and still are) lagging behind men in education and thus unable to compete on an equal footing in the formal market sector (MacGaffey, 1988). This in turn put women at a disadvantage in the political landscape of the country. It is such colonial outgrowth of economic, political, and educational marginalization that provide the backdrop for African women's current socio-economic condition throughout the continent.

Most African women live in impoverished conditions and lack access to basic amenities such drinkable water, adequate nutrition, proper shelter, electricity, sanitation, and primary health care (Aidoo, 1996; Dolphyne, 1991; Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell, 1997b; Steady, 1981b). Also, African women have fewer employment opportunities and are continuously denied access to economic resources (Lewis, 1980; Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b). Furthermore, African women have fewer educational opportunities and tend to have lower literacy rates (Lindsay, 1980a; Mikell,

1997a, 1997b). All of these deprivations combine to put African women at the bottom rung of the national and international socio-economic ladder. With the end result being that everyday is a struggle for survival.

4. Men/Sexism

Throughout Africa, whether in patrilineal societies (descent is traced through the father) or matrilineal societies (descent is traced through the mother) women occupy a subordinate status and in many ways are discriminated on the basis of their gender (Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Ogun-dipe-Leslie, 1993). For instance, they are under represented in (modern-day) politics and thus effectively excluded from decision-making executive bodies (Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Parpart & Staudt, 1989). For example, in Kenya between 1980-1990, a period which was marked by an increase in women's movements in the country, the (male-dominated government) enlisted overt and covert socio-cultural measures to deter women from participating in (national) politics and decision-making bodies of the government (Nzomo, 1997). This ranged from appealing to "traditional" values to employing the queue voting method, whereby would-be voters lined up behind the poster of the candidate that they intend to vote for at the election poll (Nzomo, 1997).

The queue voting method was effectively put to use in the 1988 Kenyan general elections. Men/husbands were able to successfully exercise control over their wives as well as other family members' voting preferences by ordering them *not* to line up behind the poster of a female candidate (Nzomo, 1997). Some women were even battered by their husbands/male

relatives because they insisted on exercising their right to vote for a female candidate. The net effect of the queue voting method was that, despite the fact that women make up the majority of Kenya's population, only two female candidates were elected to Kenya's parliament (Nzomo, 1997). This in turn ensured that the government remained male-dominated and decision-making powers firmly in male hands since women were grossly outnumbered in parliament.

The aforementioned scenario is not limited to urban areas only. Modern-day "traditional" social structures in the rural areas also tend to be male-dominated (Amadiume, 1987). African women experience sexism in both private and public aspects of their lives. For instance, in the marital home, irrespective of the type of marriage i.e. customary or legal, African women occupy a subordinate position (Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991). The husband is the head of the house and has the final word on all (major) household decisions; and the wife is responsible for all household chores and the rearing of children. [It must be pointed out that, at present, shouldering the responsibility of household chores is not an issue for most African women (Dolphyne, 1991). There are much more important life threatening issues to contend with such as access to basic amenities that fighting for a change in current domestic arrangements seems peripheral (Dolphyne, 1991). I suppose it's a case of knowing how to pick one's battles.] Concerning the issue of sexism, it must be pointed out that emancipation or women's right for African women goes beyond sexual liberation and encompasses issues pertaining to national development such as poverty, and the redistribution of wealth, power, privilege and property (Dolphyne, 1991; Lindsay, 1980a; Lewis, 1980; Mikell, 1997a, 1997b; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993).

5. Racism

Most African women on the continent do not directly experience racism or discrimination on the basis of their skin colour (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Steady, 1981b). [The exception being those women who live in racially diverse parts of the continent such as southern Africa, where racism is a direct source of women's oppression. For example, in South Africa, especially during the apartheid era, the socio-economic status of the majority of Black women was and still is directly tied to racism, as well as gender and class: domestic workers in the country experienced (and continue to do so in the aftermath of apartheid) the full brunt of women's oppression in South Africa: as Blacks, as women, and as members of the working-class (Cock, 1980, 1988)]. However, at the international level racism is an issue that (indirectly) affects all women in sub-Saharan Africa since the world economic order is stratified along racial and class lines (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Steady, 1981b, 1987). Meaning that the international economic market and global profits are heavily skewed in favour of people with white skins at the expense of those with darker or Black skins. Furthermore, race plays an important role in neo-colonialism and dictates (in terms of economics and politics) the relationship between former colonies and their former colonizers (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993; Steady, 1981b, 1987). In essence, the element of race in an exploitative/ capitalist international economic system further compounds the poverty of African women.

6. African Women's Own Inferiority Complex

African women's own negative self-image, cultivated by centuries of being socialized as a subordinate contributes to African women's oppression (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993). Many women have to a large extent internalised patriarchal ideologies; and thus tend to respond negatively to calls (by other African women) for change in traditional practices or structures that are oppressive to African women (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1993). For example, women in a Tswana community (in South Africa) studied by Kinsman (1983: 1) regarded themselves as “beasts of burden” due to the brutal nature of their oppression. By accepting one's “lot in life”, some African women unwittingly participate in their own oppression and betray African women's struggle for a better deal in the social, economic, and political spheres of African societies. Thus, what is needed are educational programs which inform African women about their positions and the true causes of their oppression; thus enabling them to make a more informed decision as to whether or not they want to join the struggle for a better deal.

CENTRAL THEMES AND ISSUES

From the above discussion on African feminism, one can draw a number of intertwining central themes and issues that are of concern to African women. The **struggle for survival** is the most reoccurring theme and **poverty** the most common issue, from which a host of other issues emerge. The struggle for survival amongst African women encourages **female solidarity** and fosters an ideology of **self-reliance**: poor African women rely on one another, share resources and **network** to ensure their

own survival, that of their children/**family** and their **community** (Donaldson, 1997; Robertson & Berger, 1986; Steady, 1987). For example, women in Kenya have long used (from traditional, to colonial, and modern times) female solidarity groups to address socio-economic issues affecting women, which have been marginalized by the government's patriarchal decision-making structures (Nzomo, 1997). The struggle for survival for single poor African women (i.e. female headed household), fosters a sense of **autonomy** as they are making their own decisions which have a bearing on themselves, their children, and the household (Donaldson, 1997; Steady, 1987).

Another central theme is **motherhood**: the majority of African women (and men) are fiercely pronatal (Amadiume, 1987; Cutrufelli, 1983; Dolphyne, 1991; James, 1993; Mikell, 1995, 1997b; Steady, 1981b). African societies place a great value on children because they ensure the continuity of the respective ethnic groups and provide links between the living, the dead, and the unborn (Amadiume, 1987; Dolphyne, 1991; Mikell, 1995; Steady, 1981b). Furthermore, children are regarded as a form of insurance against poverty in old age (Dolphyne, 1991). Motherhood is held in such high esteem that **multiple/other mothering** --the ability to nurture a mother/child relationship with children that are not one's own (e.g. stepchildren, nieces and nephews)-- is a greatly admired and respected virtue in African women (Dolphyne, 1991; James, 1993; Steady, 1981b). **Kinship ties** or strong bonds between female kin are a sub-theme, which plays an important role in multiple/other mothering; and encourages greater **cooperation** between female kin (James, 1993; Steady, 1981b; 1987).

The centrality of children in African societies is reflected in the fact that motherhood confers much greater respect and status upon a woman than **marriage** -- another central theme in African feminism (Dolphyne, 1991; Mikell, 1995, 1997b; Steady, 1981b). Closely linked to the themes of motherhood and marriage is the issue of **high fertility**. African women's impoverished conditions and the high level of infant mortality resulting from such conditions, compels most African couples/women to have many children (six or more) just to ensure that some of them will survive into adulthood (Dolphyne, 1991; Steady, 1981b).

LIMITATIONS OF THE NEW BLACK FEMINISM

Although inclusive, the newly emerging brand of African feminism acknowledges differences in class, nationality, and regional/cultural practices amongst African women (Mikell, 1995, 1997a; Steady, 1981b, 1987). Furthermore, the new Black feminism is limited in terms of its applicability to (other) Black women in the African diasporas. Although both Black women on the continent and the African Diasporas experience multiple oppression and struggle for survival, there is a difference in the nature of their oppression. For the majority of African women, poverty is a way of life; whereas for women of African descent in the diasporas (especially those living in industrialized nations in the West), racism is a way of life (Steady, 1981b; 1987). This is not to say that African women do not experience racism or that Black women in the African Diasporas do not experience poverty. Rather, this is to simply point out that there are differences in the degrees to which Black women on the continent and those

in the African Diasporas experience the multiple dimensions of their oppression.

Whilst the majority of African women, by virtue of living in the rural areas, lack access to the most basic necessities of life such as water, electricity, and sanitation; the majority of Black women in the African diasporas, who live in urban areas, do not experience such deprivation. The reverse is true in the case of racism. Black women living in the West constantly experience racism at personal, local, and national levels. Whereas most Black women on the continent, with the exception of South Africa (due to a not so distant apartheid past), do not directly experience racism since racial oppression on the continent occurs at international/global levels in the context of neo-colonialism and imperialism. Besides differences in terms of the way classism and racism are experienced, African feminism is not applicable to women in the African diasporas in terms of its theory on sexism.

As previously discussed, African feminism explains the sexism experienced by women in sub-Saharan Africa as a product of the interaction between oppressive traditional practices and colonial/European sexism. Granted, women in the African Diasporas are also subjected to sexism. But oppressive traditional practices most certainly do not figure into Black/African-American women's experience of sexism. Black women's experience of sexism in the West is closely intertwined with racism and manifested in sexist and controlling views of the Black women, such as: mammy, matriarch, sensuous whore, "strong" or emasculated (Collins, 1990; Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981; Staple, 1981). Some of these images, especially that of the "strong" black woman, have also been internalised by

Black men, albeit mostly in a well-meaning manner (Collins, 1990). However, such a view is sexist because it gives the impression that the Black woman can be subjected to all sorts of hardships and abuse since she is “strong”.

Although both African feminism and Black/African-American feminism are humanist in their outlook and approach, sexual liberation is for the most part peripheral to African women's struggle on the African continent, whereas for women in the African Diasporas it is an important issue. For instance, reproductive rights and sexual orientation are issues in Black/African-American feminism, whereas in African feminism, they are virtually non-issues. However, differences in theory and issues should not overshadow the fact that Black women on the continent and in the Diasporas, by virtue of a common African heritage and common oppression, have a lot more in common than they have differences. All Black women, irrespective of their geographical location, experience multiple interlocking dimensions of oppression. Furthermore, nearly all of the central themes in African feminism are applicable to women's oppression in the African Diasporas and vice versa. So, it really boils down to a difference of degrees of oppression and not actual dimensions of oppression.

In closing, the newly emerging brand of African feminism holds out a lot of prospects for women on the continent as an effective tool for fighting against oppression. However, it must be pointed out that one of the biggest challenge facing this new Black feminism is the lack of a legal (democratic) apparatus that can be used to in the struggle against poverty, especially in terms of policy, development projects, and implementation. This coupled with the ever-present threat of civil war means that every gain

made under any given government is sidelined with the coming to power of a new government.

With the exception of the new South Africa, where a stable legal (government) apparatus is available, most African governments are the preserves of men with very little or no representation of women in politics, let alone executive decision-making bodies (Chazan, 1989; Mikell, 1997b). This by far is the biggest challenge to African women's engagement with feminism, since the struggle against poverty cannot be exclusively fought at grass root levels: the development and implementation of policies and projects cannot take place in the absence of a stable legal (political) framework. Given that "(t)he denial of women's rights and opportunities is at the very root of... mass poverty [and underdevelopment]..." (Helvi Sipila quoted in Lindsay, 1980a: 1), African governments committed to national development need to urgently redress women's exclusion from politics, specifically decision-making bodies and provide political stability.

In closing, an important key issue continuously coming to the fore in this discussion is the timing of the emergence of the new Black feminism on the African sub-continent. It begs to be asked why now? African women have battled with similar economic and social struggles for decades, why did this new Black feminism not emerge earlier? What if anything, is so significant about this particular point in time? Why are these same survival struggles that have been encountered throughout the years only now prompting African women to engage with feminism?

In addressing this issue, Steady's (1987) argument about Black women being the original feminists comes to mind. As the original

feminists, Black women have always engaged with feminism because of their survival imperative. Granted this practical engagement with feminism may not always have been labelled, recognised, or theorised as such; but it's always been there. The only difference between then and now is that this Black feminism is now being articulated; it is being given a voice and a "name". Hence, one could argue that what is really emerging is the articulation of Black women's engagement with feminism on the African sub-continent, and not a new Black feminism per se.

The emerging voice or articulation of African women's (historical) engagement with feminism in South Africa can be attributed to factors ranging from the new political changes which swept across the country to cross-cultural interaction and exposure to different ideas via the press, community groups, education, and more options being available to African women in terms of social roles. So, it is not a matter of one era such as the post-apartheid era entailing more suffering than before. But rather, a case of the post-apartheid era, providing a political platform through which, a number of issues can be articulated and thus come to the fore. For instance 40 years, in the absence of a migrant labourer husband, single motherhood was sanctioned by the community with the understanding that the husband was away. But nowadays, as witnessed in van der Vliet's (1984), some women "escape" their submissive roles as wives by actively seeking out single motherhood without risking the wrath of the community or any sanctions against them. At the risk of sounding cliché, the newly emerging (articulation of) Black feminism on the African sub-continent, especially in South Africa, at this particular point in time is simply a reflection of the changes of the times and the political changes sweeping across landscape.

POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINISM: THEORIZING INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION

Poststructuralist feminism is a body of theory, which appropriates concepts from poststructuralism to understand existing power relations and prescribe strategies for overcoming women's oppression (Weedon, 1997). Poststructuralism is a complex body of theory comprised of various theoretical perspectives ranging from Ferdinand de Saussure and Emile Benveniste's theory on the structure of language i.e. structural linguistics, to Louis Althusser's Marxist-based theory of ideology, to psychoanalysis as theorized by Jacques Lacan's reading of Freud (Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). Also, poststructuralism is informed by Jacques Derrida's theory of difference and Michel Foucault's theory of discourse and power (Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). All theories of poststructuralism are concerned with language and the way in which it constructs social meanings i.e. gives meaning to the world (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997). Poststructuralists posit that language, far from just expressing or reflecting meaning i.e. describing the world, constitutes meaning/social reality (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). Language is the site where social structures and practices,

and their social and political consequences (e.g. power and individual consciousness) are defined and contested (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997).

As previously mentioned, the body of poststructuralist theory is vast; thus this paper will not concern itself with all of the concepts that this body of theory encompasses. Rather, this paper will only consider some of the main principles of poststructuralism, which are pertinent to feminism. Also, the present chapter will consider the limitations of poststructuralist feminism as a theory for women's oppression. Then, in the following chapter, this dissertation will apply some of the main concepts of poststructuralist feminism to the meta-analysis examining the emergence of a South African womanist consciousness.

MAJOR THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

There are a number of poststructuralist concepts, which are useful for analysing women's oppression and have been appropriated by feminists. They include language/subjectivity, discourse (power/ resistance), difference, and deconstruction (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). For the purpose of this paper, only the first two sets of the aforementioned concepts will be considered in detail; the remaining two concepts will be briefly considered.

Language/Subjectivity

Language is central to all forms of poststructuralism. In poststructuralist analysis, the term language means much more than just words, vocabulary, or grammatical rules used to express or reflect meaning (Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990). Borrowing from Saussure's theory, poststructuralists define *language* as a system or set of historically specific practices through which "meaning is constructed and social practices organized" (Scott, 1990: 135). Language constitutes meaning or social reality because our understanding of the world, who we are, and the way in which we relate to others is shaped by specific contexts and cultures (Beasley, 1999; Weedon, 1997). These contexts and cultures are not imbued with fixed meaning; and therefore subject to historical change (Beasley, 1999; Weedon, 1997). For instance, the meanings of womanhood and manhood differ from culture to culture and from language to language.

For feminist poststructuralists, language is central to understanding women's position in society since the meaning of existing social and institutional structures and subject positions --ways of being an individual or seeing oneself-- which these socially constructed definitions offer women are contextualized and produced in language (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). The analysis of the relationship between language, social structures/relationships, and the individual is important because it provides an understanding of power relations i.e. it reveals how power is constituted and exercised in society (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). An understanding of the process through which language constitutes meaning opens up new ways of understanding and interpreting social reality (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). Hence, feminist poststructuralists regard language as the site of

political struggle over meaning through which political change can come about (Weedon, 1997).

Besides meaning, language is also the site where *subjectivity* or our sense of ourselves (conscious/unconscious thoughts and emotions) and the way in which we interpret our lived experiences is constructed (Beasley, 1999; Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997). The way in which we make sense or meaning of our life experiences is context and culture-specific (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997). Hence, subjectivity is fragmented and constantly changing: it is not unified or fixed (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997). Subjectivity is constructed within a range of social structures (e.g. school, family) and practices (religion, culture); whose meanings are constant sites of struggle over power (Beasley, 1999; Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997).

Subjectivity as conceived in poststructuralist analysis is politically significant to feminists because by regarding subjectivity as having no inherent essential meaning and rejecting unitary or fixed notions of women's oppression, subjectivity opens up the possibility of change since it offers various subject positions (Beasley, 1999; Weedon, 1997). Through the acquisition of language, the individual learns to give meaning to her experience and to interpret it according to particular ways which are contextually and culturally specific and pre-date her entry into/acquisition of language (Weedon, 1997). The manner in which the individual understands or thinks about her lived experiences constitutes her consciousness, and the positions with which she identifies as a subject construct her sense of herself or subjectivity (Weedon, 1997).

Discourse (Power/Resistance)

In poststructuralist analysis the term discourse does not refer to language or a text nor does it just refer to ways of constituting knowledge or thinking/producing meaning (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). Borrowing from the work of Foucault, *discourses* are systems of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs which structure society, social practices, individual subjectivity, and power relations inherent in the production of knowledge (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997).

Discourses are historically, socially, and institutionally specific: they are contained or expressed in texts (written and spoken words), social institutions/ organizations and social practices of everyday life (Scott, 1990). For example: libraries, documents, schools/education, legal courts, prisons, hospitals, families/social relationships, churches/ religion or beliefs, and relations such as race, class, and gender. It is through discursive fields such as the aforementioned that social meaning is produced and contested.

Discursive fields tend to overlap and compete with one another for social power and authority (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). The most powerful discourses are those contained in social institutions. Their power (to control) comes from their claims of some form of “truths” or knowledge i.e. scientific, social, spiritual, etc... (Scott, 1990). These “truths” are perceived as objective and beyond dispute (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). The discursive constitution of subjectivity (both amongst compliant and resistant subjects) is part of a wider social quest for power (Weedon, 1997). By *power* is meant relations within discourses and the ways in which discourses constitute and control subjectivity (Beasley, 1999; Weedon, 1997). Within

poststructuralist analysis “power” is not located in a privileged group or location; nor does it revolve around a singular principle (Beasley, 1999). Rather power is multiple and exists in all social relationships: it structures relations within and across discourses (Beasley, 1999; Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997).

Although discourses offer preferred forms of subjectivity, the very fact that social meaning is constantly challenged within discourses, imply the possibility of change and thus alternative subjective positions i.e. reverse discourse (Beasley, 1999; Weedon, 1997). The reversal of discourse “...enables the subjected subject of a discourse to speak in her own right” (Weedon, 1997: 106). In doing so, reverse discourse implicitly challenges the meaning and power of the dominant discourse; and thereby enables the production of new resistant discourses (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997). The individual subject's resistance to the dominant discourse is the first stage in the production of alternative forms of knowledge (Weedon, 1997). By *resistance* is meant rejection of and challenge to the dominant; resulting in the production of alternative discourses.

Resistance to the dominant discourse is produced when there is a discrepancy or conflict between the subject position offered by the dominant discourse and individual interest (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997). Where alternative discourses already exist, then resistance at the level of the individual subject is the first stage of winning individual subjects over to these alternative forms of knowledge (Weedon, 1997). By winning individual subjects over, in time, alternative discourses increase their social power (Weedon, 1997). The extent to which alternative discourses are able to increase their social power depends on the wider social context of

interests and power within which resistance to the ruling discourse takes place (Pringle & Watson, 1992; Weedon, 1997).

Difference

Borrowing from structural linguistics, the concept of *difference* refers to the notion that meaning is constructed within language through a process of infinite difference and deferral (Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). The “truth” or (positive) meaning of any unitary concept is established through explicit or implicit negation, opposition, repression and or exclusion of another term (Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). For instance, the definition of “woman” rests in binary or double opposition to “man”. The concept “woman” as it is socially defined is the opposite or contrast of the concept “man”: “woman” is defined as “other” by deferring to “man”. Because meaning/truth is made through difference and deferral, poststructuralists argue that meaning/ truth or language is never neutral or objective (Beasley, 1999; Scott 1990; Weedon, 1997). They also point out that meaning can never be fixed since its construction is governed by current interests and questions of power: all meaning is temporary and relative (Weedon, 1997).

Since meaning is constituted through difference by exclusion and repression, what it means to be a man or a woman is tied to cultural representations (Alcoff, 1988; Scott, 1990). These cultural representations, in turn, establish terms by which relations between the sexes are organized and understood in society (Scott, 1990). Thus when analysing meaning, close attention must be paid to the context in which it is produced.

According to poststructuralists, meaning made through difference hide the degree to which concepts/terms that are presented as oppositional are in fact interdependent (Scott, 1990). These concepts/terms actually derive their meanings from being contrasted and represented as antithetical, and not because they are inherently oppositional per se (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). The interdependence of binary oppositions (meaning made through difference) operates hierarchically with the one term dominant and the opposite one subordinate (Scott, 1990). However, the “dominant” term actually derives its meaning from the “subordinate” term since the former's definition rests on the negation of the latter (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). For example, the definition of “strong” is premised on the negation of “weak”: “strong” denotes everything (good and right) that “weak” is not. Similarly, the definition of the term “white” depends on a negation of the term “black”: “white” is juxtaposed against “black” and defined along the lines of goodness, virtuousness, cleanliness etc...; whereas “black” is subordinated to the opposite of white and defined accordingly e.g. evil, bad, or dirty.

Deconstruction

Amongst certain poststructuralist theorists, the term deconstruction loosely refers to dismantling or “unpacking” meaning (Beasley, 1999; Scott, 1990). More specifically, borrowing from Derrida's work, the term *deconstruction* refers to the process of analysing the relationship of difference between different texts and the ways in which meanings operate in text (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). This form of poststructuralism locates meaning in texts: it is the relationship between written texts, instead of that

between social structures, which provides the discursive context (Weedon, 1997). As a text-based theory, deconstruction focuses on the plurality of meaning and its never-ending and constant deferral (Weedon, 1997). Deconstruction rejects notions of universal subjectivity and posits that the (reading) individual or writer is not in control of meaning (Weedon, 1997). The process of deconstruction involves two steps: the reversal of binary oppositions and their displacement (Scott, 1990). The first step, that of reversal refers to scrutinising the negations or difference of seemingly fixed oppositional terms and revealing their actual interdependence (Scott, 1990). And “displacement”, refers to analysing the ways in which the meanings of oppositional representations are made to work in specific historical contexts (Scott, 1990).

LIMITATIONS OF POSTSTRUCTURALIST FEMINISM

Although poststructuralist feminism is a very useful body of theory for theorizing individual consciousness and understanding women's oppression, it is not without limitations. Scholars such as Alcoff (1988) and Nicholson (1994) are critical of the poststructuralist emphasis on deconstructing everything and constructing nothing, completely rejecting the construction of the individual. Alcoff (1988) argues that poststructuralism renders the concept of woman nominal: she points out that in poststructuralist terms, the category woman is a non-entity which feminists must dismantle since it does not really exist (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999;

Nicholson, 1994). This poststructuralist view is problematic because it goes against the grain of feminism, which places the category woman at centre stage (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994). In short, deconstructing the female subject literally means stripping feminism of its core; thus rendering it nominal and virtually bordering on wiping out feminism itself (Alcoff, 1988; Beasley, 1999).

Critics also point out that poststructuralism makes it impractical for women to organize as a movement since it entails a wholly negative feminism: consumed with only and always being against everything (in society) that is fixed, structured, infinite and laden with meaning (Alcoff, 1988; Nicholson, 1994). This according to Alcoff (1988) renders feminist politics ineffective since it is not realistic (in the long term) to expect individuals to mobilize themselves around a wholly negative struggle with no positive alternative to look forward to. In the same vein, critics point out that poststructuralism's emphasis on diversity and difference amongst women renders feminist politics ineffective since it does not allow for any form of generalization whatsoever or common interest around which women can mobilize and identify with (Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994). Also, many feminists are sceptical of the poststructuralist view that abandoning the category/identity woman would destabilize or dismantle male hegemony (domination) [Beasley, 1999]. They argue that abandoning the category woman as a form of resistance in the existing state of society whereby the female subject is already marginalised would simply leave the current (male focussed) status quo intact (Beasley, 1999).

Besides the aforementioned, criticism has also been levelled at the poststructuralist view pertaining to the plurality of meaning (Nicholson,

1994). Many feminists point out that poststructuralist ideals of infinite meanings, possibilities, interpretations, and constant deferral of meaning leave the feminist subject in limbo without ground to stand on (Beasley, 1999; Nicholson, 1994). She is in a constant state of flux in a destabilized world, shifting from one perspective to another and always suspicious of all that is structured and finite (Nicholson, 1994). Also, some feminists question the poststructuralist deconstructive view on meaning being located in text (Nicholson, 1994; Weedon, 1997). Aside from making primary assumptions of non-universal/unitary subjects who are not in control of meaning since meaning is socially and historically context specific, deconstruction does not take into account the political implications of the text for the reading subject (Weedon, 1997). In doing so, poststructuralism fails to acknowledge the particular ways in which (temporary) fixings of identity and meaning (in text) politically impact on the individual and the role such texts play in constructing subjectivity in a given period and context (Weedon, 1997).

The above critique on the shortcomings of poststructuralism should not be construed or mistaken as a statement against the usefulness of poststructuralist concepts for understanding women's oppression. Poststructuralism theorizes power relations and helps us understand our position as individuals (women as well as men) in society (Weedon, 1997). More specifically, poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, and power explain the mechanisms of oppression in all its manifestations; and account for the relationship between the individual and social structures (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). Most importantly poststructuralism enables us to articulate alternative ways of being individuals (Scott, 1990; Weedon, 1997). This body of theory as appropriated by feminism, has the power to

explain the social structures and relations which oppress us as women and explain why some of us participate in our own oppression, whilst some of us resist (Weedon, 1997). Not only does poststructuralism theorize individual consciousness, it also theorizes the production of meaning and addresses the ways in which society is organized and how social structures gain power i.e. 'cultural' value (Weedon, 1997).

PART III: CONTEXT OF ENGAGEMENT

**HERSTORY: THE RECORDED HISTORY OF AFRICAN
WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT WITH FEMINISM: SUCCESSFUL
WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS/ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA**

INTRODUCTION

The emancipation of women on the African continent and elsewhere in the Third World only became an issue in articulated form after the International Women's Year Conference held in 1975 in Mexico City, Mexico (Dolphyne, 1991; Lindsay, 1980a). The details of the Mexico Programme of Action adopted at the 1975 International Women's Year Conference clearly demonstrated the importance and relevance of feminism to African/Third World women (Dolphyne, 1991). One of the key speakers at the conference, Mexican President Luis Echeverria, drove this point home. He pointed out that whilst inequalities between the sexes in the developed nations could not be ignored, Third World women (three-quarters of the entire world's female population) have to struggle for their very existence and that of their children since they do not have access to basic amenities such as water, adequate nutrition, shelter, and basic health care (Lindsay, 1980a).

The International Women's Year Conference in 1975 culminated in an endorsement by the United Nations General Assembly of 1976-1985 as

the United Nations Decade for Women (Dolphyne, 1991). And it was only after this endorsement, that a number of women's rights organisations spawned in different parts of sub-Saharan Africa (Dolphyne, 1991). [With the exception being countries such as South Africa and Mozambique, which were still fighting for national liberation; the majority of South African women's political activism at that time was primarily anti-apartheid politics (Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989; Klugman, 1994).]

THE EMERGENCE OF AFRICAN FEMINISM

Although women's rights on the African continent only became public debate after 1975, African women like women elsewhere in the Third World "...have always engaged with feminism" (Mohanty, 1991: 7). African women's historical engagement with feminism stems from the fact that the Black woman's oppression here and in the African diasporas is tied to the history and oppression of her people (Steady, 1981b, 1987). From the time of the imperial onslaught up to the present, African women (and men) have been involved in numerous struggles for survival and liberation, ranging from colonialism, neocolonialism, apartheid/racism, to exploitation and poverty. It is through these various yet interlocking humanist struggles for the survival and liberation of one's race that African women's and other Third World women's feminist consciousness initially sprang from (Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989; Gilliam, 1991; Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mohanty, 1991; Steady 1981a, 1981b, 1987).

A case in point would be the emergence of (Black) feminist consciousness under the apartheid regime in South Africa, which is the

focus of this thesis and will be considered in detail in the next chapter. The present/current discussion will consider the recorded history of African women's engagement with feminism.

SUCCESSFUL WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS/ORGANISATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Given the gravity of the oppression experienced by the Black majority under apartheid, the issue of women's rights in South Africa has historically been subordinated under the broader issue of human rights (Bernstein, 1985; Klugman, 1994; Lapchick, 1981). The rationale being that national liberation was seen as a prerequisite for women's liberation (Lapchick, 1981). As a result, most women's movements in the country have always operated within the framework of the national liberation movement (Bernstein, 1985).

The leadership of the national liberation movement was overtly male-dominated (Bernstein, 1985; Klugman, 1994; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). This is probably one of the main reasons why most women's organisations and initiatives have been excluded/omitted from written history (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). It is only recently that the crucial role played by women's movements/organisations in the national liberation struggle has received recognition (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981).

1. Bantu Women's League/ANC Women's League

The Bantu Women's League, forerunner of the African National Congress (ANC) Women's League by 35 years, heralded the earliest form of political organisation amongst (South) African women (Bernstein, 1985). It was founded by pioneer Charlotte Maxeke in 1913, a year after the ANC was founded (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). The early work of this organisation was characterised by women organising in a "traditional" or supportive capacity such as catering for conferences and fund-raising (Bernstein, 1985). As auxiliary members of the ANC, women in the League could not vote until 1943 and were limited in terms of scope and activities due to entrenched patriarchal ideologies (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981).

Women in the League encountered many difficulties stepping outside of their "traditional" roles (Bernstein, 1985). Besides patriarchal rule, the women had to contend with apartheid-imposed restrictions/banning on political organisation of any kind by anyone or group (Bernstein, 1985; Klugman, 1994). Furthermore, African women were more economically vulnerable than men and less politically secure (Bernstein, 1985; Klugman, 1994). [It was in this regard that trade unions made the greatest contribution to the (subsequent) organising of women since they provided a training as well as spawning ground for women organisers (Lapchick, 1981). It was in trade unions that women first rose to positions of prominence in the country (Lapchick, 1981).]

It took some years for the Women's League to step outside of its "traditional" role and become an effective organisation (Bernstein, 1985).

This culminated into a successful alliance or federation in the 1950s with other anti-apartheid women organisations in mobilising women for the national liberation struggle and women's rights (Bernstein, 1985; Davies, O'Meara, & Dlamini, 1984; Klugman, 1994; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989).

2. Federation of South African Women

The formation of the Federation of South African Women (FSAW) heralded an unprecedented period of expansion for women's political activism in South Africa (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). Founded in 1954, it was the first broad-based organisation to take up women's struggle for equality as an issue in its own right (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989). The Federation was initiated by leading women of the Congress Alliance such as Lilian Ngoyi, Ray Alexander, Hilda Bernstein, Florence Mkhize, Rahima Moosa, Elizabeth Mafekeng, Helen Joseph, and Frances Baard (Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). A number of the leading Federation women such as Lilian Ngoyi, Ray Alexander, and Elizabeth Mafekeng were trade union activists (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). [The Congress Alliance embodied the co-ordinated politics of various anti-apartheid organisations/movements, led by the ANC (Davies et al, 1984)].

The FSAW consisted of about 230,000 members, largely drawn from the Congress Alliance, particularly from the ANC Women's League (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Klugman, 1994; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). The Federation was mainly concerned with two objectives:

namely, the struggle for national liberation and non-racialism, and the struggle for women's liberation (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989). Before its formation, women's organised action tended to be sporadic and unco-ordinated (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984). But all this changed when the FSAW came into existence since it provided a platform for women's organised action on a continuing basis (Bernstein, 1985).

During the decade following its formation, the FSAW participated in and or conducted some of the most important political movements of the era, such as the Bantu education campaign, the bus boycott campaign, the Cato Manor uprising, and the anti-pass campaign (Lapchick, 1981). The *Bantu education campaign* was the movement against the apartheid imposed legal inferiorization of education for Africans (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). This movement, initiated in December 1954, entailed boycotting government controlled schools (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989).

The FSAW's participation was key to the movement against the Bantu educational system (Bernstein, 1985). They organised on a house-to-house basis and along with member constituencies, attempted to provide alternatives to government controlled schools in the form of "cultural clubs", whereby children attended school out in the open (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). The women of the Federation, especially its leaders, were constantly under threat by the apartheid government. This ranged from house arrests, to imprisonment, to outright banning .i.e. being banished to isolated rural areas and forbidden from participating in any form of political organising (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1982; Lapchick, 1981;

Russell, 1989). Although, this campaign was initially successful as an effective form of protest, it eventually collapsed when the government announced that failure to return to school by a certain date would result in expulsion (Lapchick, 1981). [The Soweto uprisings, which took place some twenty-two years later was partially sparked off by protest against the Bantu educational system by South African youths (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989)].

The *bus boycott campaign* was first initiated in 1943, and then in January 1957, in protest of a one penny bus fare increase by the public department transportation department, which affected residents of Alexandra, Sophiatown, and Lady Shelbourne townships (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). Over 40,000 African women and men walked up to a total of nearly 29 kilometres a day to and from work in the city, i.e. "white areas", in support of the bus boycott (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). The movement was mainly organised by women of the Federation under the leadership of Florence Mposho who was then the secretary of the ANC Women's League in Alexandra (Lapschick, 1981).

The apartheid regime responded in a typical and severe manner: violence and mass raids, leading to the arrest of over 6,000 Africans (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). The government even threatened to permanently cut-off all public transportation services to the townships (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). But still, the FSAW and the residents of the townships continued to campaign against the bus fare increase. After five months of protest, the campaigners were victorious: the government passed legislation which rolled back the fare increase (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989).

The *Cato Manor uprising* refers to the demonstrations and clashes which took place in the urban township of Cato Manor, near Durban, between the police and the residents from time to time (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). For instance, when the provincial government tried to ban the sale of traditional home-brewed beer, which provided an important source of income for women in the township, conflict erupted (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). This conflict came to boiling point when in June 1959, 2000 women marched in protest of the provincial government's attempt to ban the sale of home-brewed beer (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981). But these women were not simply protesting against the ban on home-brewed beer (Rivkin, 1981). They were also protesting against the abject poverty in the township and other socio-economic effects of apartheid law on their community and family life (Rivkin, 1981).

The march in June 1959 led to a violent confrontation between the women protesters and the police. The women organized a beer boycott of non-traditional beer and provincial beer halls (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Rivkin, 1981). The beer boycott led to a number of other uprisings throughout the then province of Natal, now named KwaZulu-Natal (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Rivkin, 1981). Overall, it is estimated that 20,000 women participated in the campaign against the provincial government in 1959 in Natal (Lapchick, 1981; Rivkin, 1981). Of these women, over 1000 were arrested and convicted (Lapchick, 1981).

Of all the struggles waged by South African women against apartheid, the *anti-pass campaign* highlights women's overall participation in the national liberation struggle and the FSAW's organisational prowess

(Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981). The movement against the issue of passes or passbooks to African women was a campaign against the apartheid's government attempt to legally restrict and control the movement of African women, as it had (successfully?) done with African men (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). This campaign was an ongoing movement, which dated back to as early as 1913 and was taken up by various groupings of women organisations across the race/ colour line (Lapchick, 1981).

The most well-known anti-pass campaign was the one organised by the FSAW (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). This campaign reached its peak on 9 August 1956, when 20,000 women, the majority of whom were African, marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to see the prime minister to air their grievances (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). [The date of this march has subsequently been designated women's day in South Africa (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989)].

A number of measures were taken by the apartheid government in a vain attempt to prevent the march to Pretoria from taking place (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). These ranged from cancelling buses, to overcharging on already expensive train fare tickets, to banning marches in Pretoria (Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). As a result, the women could not march as a group to the Union Buildings. Rather, they had to walk in groups of two or three at a time until all 20,000 of them converged at the Union Buildings (Lapchick, 1981). The prime minister refused to see (ran away from?) the women,

whose leaders in turn left petitions containing over 100,000 signatures in his office (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989).

Although, the women's march in protest of passes on this particular day was peaceful, more often than not the anti-pass movement was confrontational and met with police brutality (Lapchick, 1981). For instance, three months later in a similar protest in the Western Transvaal, when police arrived to issue passes, they were confronted by over 1000 women who refused to be registered for passbooks (Lapchick, 1981). The confrontation escalated into a baton charge by the police and the women retaliated by throwing stones (Lapchick, 1981). The police then opened fire, killing two women (Lapchick, 1981).

Although the women valiantly defied the pass laws for years, bureaucratic coercion eventually forced more and more women to carry passbooks (Bernstein, 1985; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). However, it must be pointed out that it took the government over ten years to effectively impose the pass laws, which it had initially attempted to pass in 1952 (Bernstein, 1985). By the time it became mandatory for women to carry passbooks (February 1963), the FSAW had become non-viable since the government had banned, arrested, imprisoned, or forced into exile most of its leadership (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). Thus, making it virtually impossible for the Federation to function.

The Federation itself was never formally banned or dissolved. It simply ceased to effectively exist and operate as a result of massive state repression [see Table 2 for an estimated breakdown on the figures of women arrested under the pass laws] (Bernstein, 1985;

Davies et al, 1984; Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). Many people,

within and outside the then defunct FSAW, felt that the anti-pass campaign was a failure since women were eventually forced to carry passbooks (Russell, 1989). But Helen Joseph, one of the Federation's founding leaders pointed out that the campaign was a resounding success because through the movement, the women "inherited a legacy of hope and defiance and passed it on" (Helen Joseph, quoted in Lapchick, 1981: 245).

[The FSAW re-emerged in the 1980s and picked up from where it left off. Re-inventing itself under a new acronym FÉDSAW, which still stands for its previous name, the Federation continued in the path of the original Federation: mobilizing women around issues of national liberation

Table 2: Women Arrested Under The Pass Laws (1979-1983)*

	<i>Number of women arrested for the whole country</i>	<i>Number of women arrested in the main urban areas</i>	<i>Total number of women & men arrested for the whole country</i>
1979	20209	13823	203266
1980	14653	16794	158355
1981	14038	21508	162022
1982	16532	27991	206022
1983	27096	17651	262904

*Source: Bernstein (1985)

**Note: These figures do not represent the total numbers arrested since figures for some of the other urban areas were not available.

and women's liberation (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Klugman, 1994). After the fall of apartheid, FEDSAW shifted its focus squarely on women's rights and other general political issues which are of concern to women such as unemployment, education, domestic violence, rape, motherhood and family life (Klugman, 1994).]

3. Black Women's Federation

The Black Women's Federation (BWF) was formed in December 1975, and comprised of 41 organisations representing various groupings of Black women (i.e. African, Indian, and "Coloured") [Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989]. Although, the BWF had the same roots and objectives as the Federation of South African Women, its membership was exclusively Black (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). The reason being that the organisation was based on opposition to apartheid legislation governing Blacks (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989).

Unlike its predecessor, the Federation of South African Women, the BWF reached out to women in both urban and rural areas (Lapchick, 1981). The BWF was concerned with educating and empowering women to help them to realize their true potential (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). This was carried out by implementing literacy programmes, and other useful educational programmes in nutrition and health (Lapchick, 1981). The BWF had also made plans in terms of housing and rural development and legal assistance for Black women. But none of these plans ever materialized because the apartheid government wasted no time in squashing the BWF (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). The government attacked the BWF

leadership, by banning its president and a number of other key leaders within the organisation (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989). Then in October, 1977, less than two years after its formation, the BWF was altogether banned, along with all the other Black organisations (Lapchick, 1981; Russell, 1989).

4. United Women's Organisation/United Women's Congress

The United Women's Organisation (UWO), forerunner of the United Women's Congress (UWCO), was formed in 1981 by, amongst others, Mama Zihlangu and Mildred Lesia (Bernstein, 1985; Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989). [This organisation had been operating (unofficially) since 1979; but was officially launched two years later (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989)]. The objective of the UWO was to mobilize women against gender oppression within the broader context of the national liberation struggle (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989). The UWO also sought to root out sexism within national liberation movements and organisations (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989).

The UWO was concerned with issues and projects that were important to the people in their various branch areas (Russell, 1989). For instance, educating women, and getting involved in squatter campaigns (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989). [Squatters were people who lived illegally in makeshift homes in areas designated for whites only (Russell, 1989)]. The UWO was also active in organising and providing child care for working women in the townships (Russell, 1989). In addition to the aforementioned, the UWO was also concerned with uniting women in the

struggle against apartheid and had links with the member constituents of the Federation of South African Women (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989). Also, the UWO was active celebrating women's achievements and held public functions such as Commemorative meetings on South African Women's Day (Davies et al, 1984; Russell, 1989).

In March 1986, the UWO merged with Women's Front --a small township-based African women's organisation-- to become the United Women's Congress (UWCO) [Klugman, 1994; Russell, 1989]. The UWCO was the largest nonracial women's organisation in Cape Town with an exclusively female membership (Russell, 1989). It set about to consolidate this representativeness by seeking out alliances with other women's organisations (Russell, 1989). This culminated in the revival of the Federation of South African Women, FEDSAW, in the mid-1980s (Klugman, 1994; Russell, 1989).

OTHER SOUTH AFRICAN WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

The above mentioned women's organisation were the most prominent in terms of mass mobilization of women within the context of the national liberation struggle (Bernstein, 1985; Klugman, 1994). But there were other (less prominent) women's organisations with similar aims and objects (Bernstein, 1985). For instance the *Natal Organisation of Women*, which was formed in 1983, was concerned with mobilising women for the struggle against apartheid as well as the struggle against gender oppression (Bernstein, 1985; Russell, 1989).

Another women's organisation which deserves to be mentioned in this category is the *Black Sash*. This organisation was initially established in 1955 for the sole purpose of campaigning against the government stripping "Coloureds" of their voting rights (Bernstein, 1985; Russell, 1989). Gradually, the Black Sash shifted its focus to the broader campaign for a nonracial and democratic South Africa, and eventually included women's rights on its agenda (Russell, 1989). The membership of this organisation was initially exclusively white and female, before opening its membership to women of other races and men in the mid-1980s (Bernstein, 1985; Russell, 1989).

Of all the women's organisations in South Africa, *Rape Crisis* was the most significant feminist organisation in the sense that it was exclusively concerned with women's oppression (Klugman, 1994; Russell, 1989). This organisation was founded in 1976 by Anne Mayne and four colleagues (Russell, 1989). It was mainly concerned with rape, and domestic violence (Klugman, 1994; Russell, 1989). Rape Crisis was initially established by white feminists, but eventually became a multiracial organisation (Klugman, 1994; Russell, 1989). The organisation worked with other community-based organisations in its endeavours to provide support and counselling to rape survivors and battered women and to campaign against violence towards women (Klugman, 1994; Russell, 1989).

In the mid-1980s, Rape Crisis aligned itself with the national liberation struggle whilst maintaining its commitment to feminism and the anti-rape movement (Russell, 1989). This was evidenced by the development of a battered women's shelter as part of Rape Crisis's training section (Russell, 1989). Also, this was evidenced by the creation of

Campaign Against Sexual Abuse, an organisation initiated by Rape Crisis in 1985 (Russell, 1989).

During this period (the mid-1980s), a number of other similar organisations with a primarily feminist agenda, sprang up (Klugman, 1994). For instance, *Women Against Repression* (WAR).

WAR was founded in 1986 by Rozena Maart and four friends (Russell, 1989). WAR was exclusively concerned with gender oppression and women's rights (Russell, 1989). Its activities entailed picketing against sexual abuse and campaigning for the eradication of violence against women (Russell, 1989). As part of its campaign, WAR drew parallels between state violence and violence against women and sought to make communities aware of women's plights as a gender group (Russell, 1989).

SUMMARY

As evidenced from the above discussion, (South) African women were politically active in a number of organisations in the context of the broader movement for national liberation. Granted, with one or two exceptions, most of these organisations were based in the urban areas. Nevertheless, these organisations, via their resistance to apartheid, played an important role in politicising Black women and enhancing their stature; thus laying a foundation for the newly emerging African womanist consciousness.

CHAPTER 6

**THE EMERGENCE OF AN AFRICAN WOMANIST
CONSCIOUSNESS: META-ANALYSIS OF CASE STUDIES FROM
SOUTH AFRICA**

INTRODUCTION

According to Klugman (1994: 644), in so far as women's rights are concerned, feminism as a movement "passed South Africa by". The majority of South African women (who are poor and African) generally abstained from organisational politics because of patriarchal attitudes, and thus shied away from women's rights groups (Klugman, 1994). As for those women who participated in organisational politics, their activism (depending on their race and or personal convictions) revolved around issues of national liberation or maintaining white minority-rule and not women's rights per se (Klugman, 1994). However, this should not be construed as there being a lack of awareness, at least on the part of the African women majority, of their oppression as women in addition to their racial oppression. The ensuing discussion, using poststructuralist concepts, will examine the emergence of a South African womanist consciousness with particular reference to a number of socio-historical contexts: namely women's involvement in the struggle against apartheid; the migrant labour system; and poverty and the struggle for survival.

WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN THE STRUGGLE AGAINST
APARTHEID

"...the thing about South African women is that they learn
about their feminism through their involvement in politics."

-- [Hilda Bernstein quoted in Beall,
Hassim, & Todes, 1989: 33]

The political activism of women in the struggle against apartheid provided the context in which many Black women "learned" about their feminism (Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989; Kimble & Unterhalter, 1982; Russell, 1989). African women's political involvement in the national liberation struggle conflicted with the forms of subjectivity offered by the dominant "traditional" discourse on Black womanhood in South African society.

Many of the

	<p>Box. 1 (Russell, 1988)</p> <p>60 South African female activists, the majority of whom were Black*, most of them African, were interviewed about their experiences as women within the national liberation struggle. All of the Black women recounted similar experiences ranging from sexual harassment within the movement to peculiarly gendered experiences of violence whilst in police custody e.g. sexual terrorism, rape, etc... Also, some told of being confined to the marital home and prevented from attending meetings by jealous husbands. Others recounted experiences of having their contributions as activists within the national liberation movement undermined on the basis of their gender. Some of the women told of how despite being as committed to the struggle as their male comrades, the leadership was overwhelmingly male and women were expected to assume a supportive role. The majority of the Black female activists interviewed cited their their feminism.</p> <p>*Within the South African context, the term Black includes Africans, Indians, and "political activism as the source of their learning about Coloureds" i.e. people of mixed races.</p>
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women activists interviewed by Russell (1989) [see Box. 1 for a summary] told of contradictions between the subject positions offered by the dominant “traditional” discourse and their individual interests i.e. actual involvement in and contributions to the struggle. Their roles as activists in the struggle conflicted with the meaning given to the concept “African woman”. For example, they took the same risks as their male comrades, but they were still expected to comply with the “traditional” role of African women and be subordinates to their male comrades. Another example is that many activists, especially those who have been in detention, felt that they were not “good” mothers and were often perceived as such by some sectors of the community because of the demands of their roles as activists. (Motherhood is a defining feature of the [“traditional”] meaning given to the concept African women).

Although reluctant to label themselves as feminists, these women noted the discriminations they faced as women within the national liberation movement. Irrespective of their leadership position, many women activists faced an uphill battle organising men and were constantly sexually harassed by their fellow male activists because of their gender (Russell, 1989). Furthermore, although they were equally committed to the struggle and faced the same risks (e.g. torture, detention, and murder) as their male comrades, not to mention sexual terrorism and more often than not rape, female activists were expected to assume a “traditional” role in the national liberation struggle and let the men lead the way (Russell, 1989).

Prior to the 1950s, the content of the “traditional” roles (i.e. mothers, wives) which female activists were expected to assume in the national liberation movement was not questioned (Kimble & Unterhalter, 1982). But meaning is never fixed and constantly deferred, and the content of these “traditional” roles began to be questioned and challenged as a result of women's political

Box. 2 (Beall et al, 1987)

The involvement of African (Zulu) women in the Durban struggle during the period 1985-1986 is examined. The study focuses on how African women's involvement in the struggle lead to a transformation of roles; whereby these women stepped out of their traditional role. More specifically, the study examines how these women, who were initially drawn into the struggle because of encroachments upon their ‘traditional’ roles as mothers and protectors of the family home. For example forced removals and the arrest and detention of their children. The women would stage sit-ins in protest of forced removals and they would hold night vigils to protect their children from police arrest. The women's resistance to apartheid incursions upon their “traditional” roles helped build their stature. And thus, through the course of conflict, the women came to transcend these roles and challenge their subordinate status.

activism. For instance, at the 1959 African National Congress (ANC) conference in Natal, Zulu women parted with the “tradition” which forbade women from public speaking (Kimble & Unterhalter, 1982). The political activism of African women in the anti-apartheid movement was mainly geared toward national liberation (Klugman, 1994), meaning that women's organisations in the movement were primarily concerned with mobilising other women around issues of *racial* oppression, which affected *both* men and women (Beall, Hassim, & Todes, 1989). The feminist content of women's political activism in the national liberation movement becomes questionable, especially when one takes into consideration the fact that women in the struggle tended to fight for issues which encroached upon their terrain as mothers and keepers of the family home, such as forced removals and the safety of their children (Beall, Passim, & Tides, 1989; Rifkin, 1981).

One could argue that such an engagement, in and of itself, is not necessarily feminist in content, and may in fact be interpreted as fighting to maintain the “traditional” African patriarchal status quo. But, Beall et al (1987) in their study of African women in the Durban struggle during 1985-1986 [see Box. 2 for a summary], found that although women were usually drawn into conflict because of encroachments upon their “traditional” terrain, in the course of conflict, women transcended their “traditional” roles and began challenging their subordinate status. The dominant “traditional” discourse on women's positions offered socially prescribed forms of subjectivity on the basis of which women were initially drawn into conflict. But the very fact that social meaning is constantly challenged within discourses offers the possibility of change: in rejecting and challenging the dominant discourse, an alternative discourse was produced. Thus women's political activism resulted in the social meaning of traditional discourses on ways of being an African woman being challenged and alternative subject positions being produced.

THE MIGRANT LABOUR SYSTEM

The migrant labour system refers to the apartheid system whereby the influx of Blacks in urban areas or so-called “white areas” was controlled (Manona, 1980; Wilson & Ramphela, 1989). South Africa's African majority were forcefully removed from their land and banished to virtually non-arable pockets of land or “homelands”, then forced to seek employment in the cities or “white areas” (Manona, 1980; Rivkin, 1981; Wilson & Ramphela, 1989). The migrant labour system destroyed the social fabric of African family life. Having been dispossessed, the way of life for this traditionally cattle herding and agrarian people changed drastically: from enacting their lives in one environment to leading dual lives (Manona, 1980; Rivkin, 1981). Able-bodied men had to migrate to the cities to sell their labour in the mines or factories, whilst women stayed behind to care for

children and the old-aged in the “homelands” (Rivkin, 1981). Men were often gone for long periods of time leaving women with the burden of providing for their children without any assistance (Rivkin, 1981; Russell, 1989).

With very limited resources, African women shouldered the responsibility for ensuring not only their very own existence and that of their children, but also that of their communities. Under very trying conditions and circumstances, women had to obtain food and shelter, educate their children, maintain the household, protect their communities, and deal with political violence (Klugman, 1994). The migrant labour system was equally hard on single or widowed women, since *they* had to leave their children behind and seek employment as domestic servants in white homes or factory workers in the textile industry. So, the migrant labour system entailed both male and female migrant labourers: either way, this system was harsh on African women and family life.

Male Migrant Labour and Family Life

The migration of men to the cities in search for work provided a context for feminist consciousness because it forced women out of their “traditional” roles or subject positions as mothers and wives. In the prolonged absence of their husbands, women also had to take on the role of father and in essence became heads of the household by *de facto*. As *de facto* heads of their homes, women had

Box. 3 (Donaldson, 1997)

This study examines the networks used by African (Tswana) women in Tshunyane --a rural community in the northwest province of South Africa-- to make health-care decisions. The study analyses how these women went about making household decisions vis-a-vis their health and that of their children in the prolonged absence of migrant labourer husbands. More specifically, the study focuses on how these women went about doing this, whilst subtly, yet forcefully asserting themselves in spite of cultural limitations on their roles and authority as women. Also, the study examines how these women went about exercising this “new” found prerogative even upon the return of their husbands, who were designated by custom as the sole decision-makers in the household. The study documents the non-confrontational nature of these women’s resistance.

unheralded autonomy within the household and made decisions on matters pertaining to their own welfare and that of their children. This was something previously unheard of in African societies since patriarchal rule was central to customary family life, and household decision-making the prerogative of men (Mayer & Mayer, 1971; Preston-Whyte, 1978; Rivkin,81).

Donaldson (1997) in her study of African women networks vis-a-vis health-care decisions in the rural community of Tshunyane, in the northwest province of South Africa, [see Box. 3 for a summary] found that as *de facto* heads women made household decisions about their health and that of their children and continued to have a say in household decisions even upon the

return of their husbands, albeit they would go about it in a round-about, if not deferential manner. As one of the women interviewed mischievously remarked: "It is really both of us. This is the way it is, but he does not think so" (Donaldson, 1997: 267).

As one can see from this study, the impact of the vacuum left by male migrant labour on family life certainly provided a context for feminist consciousness. The absentism of male heads was a catalyst in redefining socially constructed meanings of womanhood, resulting in a reversal of discourse which implicitly challenged the dominant "traditional" discourse: instead of assuming their subordinate "traditional" roles, African women were running the show! The women as *de facto* heads of the home asserted themselves with the full knowledge that they were going against the patriarchal grain of their culture, but did so any way because of their survival imperative (Donaldson, 1997). And even when their husbands (the "rightful" heads of the home) returned, they continued to resist the dominant "traditional" discourse and had their say in household decisions by manipulating patriarchal customs. Resistance to the dominant discourse resulted in alternative forms of subjectivities and ways of being women .e.g. asserting oneself as opposed to being subordinate.

Publicly, the women in Donaldson's study (1997) gave in to custom and deferred to their husbands (when present), but in practice they subtly, yet forcefully, asserted themselves. This non-confrontational form of resistance is one of the striking features of the newly emerging African feminism. Dominant "traditional" discourses are rejected and challenged in a manner that appears to reinforce the women's "traditional" role as docile and deferential. Ramphele & Boonzaier, (1988) wryly commented that most women on the continent know that they stand a greater chance of getting a better deal in their social relations with men by responding to this "traditional" dictum. As one Ugandan women in a similar study by Obbo (1980: 104) put it: "What men want is a softly spoken woman, who can

kneel at their feet while serving them. I have many pairs of stockings worn through kneeling. I don't know why I do it.”

In her study, Donaldson (1997) also found that the daily struggle for survival also fostered a strong sense of solidarity amongst African women. They consulted one another and networked to ensure their collective survival, that of their children and their communities. Whether or not this “women-centred” solidarity should be interpreted as feminist consciousness is debatable since it directly stemmed from the women's acute awareness of their poverty (or class) and the need to network and share their resources in order to survive. Walker (1990) points out that just because working-class women are aware of their oppression as a class (manifested in women-centered solidarity and resource sharing), does not necessarily mean that they are also aware of their oppression as women. Thus, one could argue that the strong sense of solidarity found amongst the women studied by Donaldson (1997) may in fact be a manifestation of class consciousness. However, Berger (1986) in her study on sources of class consciousness amongst working-class African women in South Africa, found that there was a fine line between poor African women's consciousness of themselves as a class and women since most of them saw their poverty as an obstacle to fulfilling their roles as women: namely ensuring the survival of their children and communities.

Once again, one could argue that African women's strong concern with family life and providing for their children may in fact be the reflection of a very conservative ideology, which seeks not only to preserve, but also consolidate the “traditional” societal discourse and women's position within it (Berger, 1986). Granted the prevalence of this ideology amongst African women cannot be denied. However, Berger (1986) cautions that a distinction must be made between ideology, no matter how widely accepted, and the actual role that family relations play in the daily lives of African women. Berger (1986: 233) goes on to explain that African women's strong concern

with family life and providing for their children is not so much "...a longing for an idealised past but (rather) the expression of a concrete, present need." Considered from this point of view, one can see how such issues may come to be articulated alongside women's issues and class issues on the African continent.

Female Migrant Labour and Exploitation

The migration of women (mostly single, or widowed) to the cities in search of work provided a context for feminist consciousness for several reasons. The first and most obvious being that it freed women from patriarchal customary rule (enforced by senior male adults) in the rural areas (Cock, 1980). Secondly, labour migration to the cities afforded African women some sort of economic emancipation

Box. 4 (Mayer & Mayer, 1971)

The migration of African (Xhosa) labourers (both male and female) is studied. Part of the study included a section on female migrant labourers. This particular section of the study analysed the reasons why African (Xhosa) women came to town and stayed in town. The study found that these women initially came to town for financial reasons i.e. to get job. But upon obtaining financial freedom of some sort, most of these women stayed in town to escape from patriarchal customary rule in the rural areas. Under customary rule in the rural areas, the women were subject to male rule and senior female rule. Whereas in town, they were free from such rule. The study documented that the women enjoyed both the financial and cultural emancipation that town life afforded them. This was underscored by the fact that they based themselves in town and only seasonally returned to the rural areas.

since as wage earners, they were financially free in their own right, and did not depend on men for shelter and or access to economic resources as is the case in the rural areas (Cock, 1980; Preston-Whyte, 1978). Mayer & Mayer (1971) in their study of Xhosa migrant labourers [see Box. 4 for a summary], found that most female migrant labourers felt that town or city life gave them more independence and freed them from male rule as well as

subjection to senior older women in the rural areas as dictated by traditional customs. City life gave these women alternative options: subject positions or ways of being women. And once in town these women only seasonally returned to the rural areas: they liked being “free”, “(financially) independent”, and “...away from the rule of the people (men) at home” (Mayer & Mayer, 1971: 234). In short, female labour migration provided these women with a semi-permanent escape not only from rural poverty, but also from patriarchal customary rule.

The labour migration of women seeking work in the cities also provided a context for feminist consciousness in the specific case of domestic workers. As earlier mentioned, most African women sought work in the cities to escape rural poverty and male domination. Given the few employment opportunities available to poor African women, most female migrants ended up as domestic

Box. 5 (Cock, 1980, 1988)

This study examines the exploitation of Black domestic workers in white homes. The study considers the complex nature of this exploitation in terms of the racial, gender, and class dynamics. The study documents African women’s oppression from all these three angles and specifically focuses on the intersection of the dynamics of racial, gender, and class oppression. Also, the study examines African women’s own insight into these dynamics of their oppression in the domestic service. The study documents that contrary to popular beliefs, Black domestic workers are well aware of and resentful of their exploitation and oppression as women, and not just as Black or workers. Also, the study highlighted and underscored the vicious nature of the interlocking dynamics of racial, class, and gender oppression and pointed out that most nearly 1 million African women are “trapped” in this intense oppression as domestic workers.

workers in white homes. Cock (1980, 1988), in her study on exploitation in the domestic service [see Box. 5 for a summary], found that domestic workers were “trapped” in a vicious interlocking cycle of racial, class, as well as gender oppression and were well aware of it. All of the African domestic servants interviewed were aware of and resentful of their

oppression as women, and not just Blacks or workers. A number of remarks were made in this regard, such as:

Our men treat us badly. Our marriages end like paper fires.

We work hard like men, but we are paid less.

No white woman would work for R9 a month as I do.

A white woman can tell you to move a wardrobe. Because you are Black she does not think that you are a woman.

-- [Cock, 1980: 115]

As the feminist content of these remarks attest, this most marginalised group of women had deep insight into Black women's multifaceted oppression. Contrary to popular beliefs (amongst whites) of domestic workers as deferential and obedient workers who accept their subordination, most domestic workers (personally) rejected their subordination and deliberately put on a deferential mask to hide their real feelings (Cock, 1988). This resistance was manifested in the ideology these women transmitted to their children (Cock, 1988): that of resistance and aspiring to higher goals .i.e educating their children so that they may have a chance to escape the 'inevitable' (domestic servitude).

In this particular scenario, one can see how conflict between the dominant discourse and individual interest produces resistance. One could argue that domestic workers gender consciousness stemmed from their awareness of their exploitation as workers. But as earlier mentioned, there is a fine line between African women's class consciousness and gender consciousness. Furthermore, there is the overshadowing and all encompassing element of racial oppression. The oppression of domestic workers in South Africa is really a reflection of the collective oppression of all African women, whose oppression as women, workers, and Blacks was and still is directly tied to the history and oppression of the country's African majority by white minority rule under apartheid.

POVERTY AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL

"I feel that women in the township are very strong... I think that women become strong because they have to cope with so much: home, job, families and how to make the money last."

– [Anonymous African woman quoted in Klugman, 1994: 640]

The poverty of Black women in South Africa is directly tied to the legacy of the apartheid system, which literally engineered the poverty of the country's entire Black majority (May, 1999). Before considering poverty as a context for the emergence of feminist consciousness, some facts about the socioeconomic hardships of Black women in South Africa need to be stated. The majority of African women lack access to basic amenities such as water and electricity: 80% of poor rural African walk long distances on a daily basis (spending about 4 hours) to fetch water and gather firewood (Klasen, 1997). Whilst, it is not possible to precisely measure the number of Black women living in poverty since most surveys look at households and not individuals, 52% of working-age African women are unemployed (Statistics South Africa, 1996). The fact that African households have the highest poverty level (61%) in the country and women are more likely to be poor than men, places African women amongst the poorest of the poor (May, 1999).

It is through such struggles against poverty that many African women, in S.A. and the continent as a whole, come to learn about their feminism. In a newspaper article highlighting a number of case studies on poor rural/urban women conducted by the South African Commission on Gender Equality (Sithole, 1998) [see Box. 6 for a summary], it was found that 53% of the women attributed their poverty to

Box. 6 (Sithole, 1998)

This study highlights a number of case studies on poor rural/urban African women conducted by the South African Commission on Gender Equality. It focuses on discriminatory cultural norms and values and the role these play in excluding Black women (specifically in the province of Kwazulu-Natal) from local decision-making structures; and thus impeding their access to basic resources and economic development. This study also documents the dissatisfaction of many rural women with the current discriminating nature of rural patriarchal decision-making body structures. Women are excluded from such bodies, even when the issues at hand directly involves and affects women, it is the men who decide. Also, the study documents women's call for all such discriminating structures as well as discriminatory cultural norms and values to be challenged, modified, or repealed.

patriarchal male-dominance and felt that there were many cultural norms and values which prevented them from having access to basic resources and these values/norms needed to be challenged (Sithole, 1998). Many of these women, especially those in the rural areas still had to walk long distances to fetch water, collect wood or gain access to primary health care because they had no say on matters of development in the local male-dominated institutional structures, which were resistant to change (Sithole, 1998). Most of the women interviewed felt that patriarchal rule, specifically their exclusion from local decision-making structures was at the root of their oppression.

From this particular case, one can see how the fact that social meaning is never-ending and constantly challenged, opens up the possibility for change and alternative subject positions. Furthermore, one can see how language provides a site for (political) struggle over meaning i.e. what it

means to be a woman (or a man) and the forms of subjectivity this “traditional” definition of womanhood entails. For example, not having a say in decision-making structures.

In the struggle for survival against poverty, many women adopt a number of strategies such as staying single. Van der Vliet (1984) in her study of single Xhosa women [see Box. 7 for a summary], found that most of the women refused to marry and viewed staying single as a method of controlling their reproductive capacities and indirectly controlling their economic position. Traditionally, Xhosa men exercise considerable restraints

Box. 7 (van der Vliet, 1984)

This study is concerned with African (Xhosa) women who opt to stay single as a strategy against poverty. More specifically, this study analyses why some of these women view staying single, especially in the case of single mothers, as a viable strategy against poverty. The study found that staying single was an effective strategy against poverty in two ways. The first being staying single allowed the women to directly control their reproductive capacities and indirectly control their economic position. For example, how their money should be spent and whether or not to have children and how many children to have. The second way in which staying single was an effective strategy against poverty was that the women adopted the strategy of multiple (sex) partners to generate more income for their upkeep and that of their children. Also, this study examines how the struggle for survival against poverty leads to many of these women rejecting their submissive roles.

over their wives, including control of their income and reproductive rights (van der Vliet, 1984); for example, a man telling the wife how to spend her money or how many kids to have or forbidding her to use contraceptive (van der Vliet, 1984). In their struggle against poverty many of these women come to reject their socially prescribed (submissive) roles because they come to realize that they are capable of making their own decisions and asserting themselves. And thus most of them deliberately opt to stay single as a means of (financially and socially) remaining in control of their lives.

Besides staying single, other women also adopt the strategy of multiple (sex) partners, whose gifts and money generate more income for the women's upkeep and that of their children; whilst ensuring that the women do not "lose (their) freedom" (van der Vliet, 1984). In a similar study, Ramphele and Boonzaier (1988) [see Box. 8 for a summary], found that many poor African women

Box. 8 (Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988)

This study is concerned with the socioeconomic position of African women in South Africa. More specifically, this study examines the survival politics of (poor) African women and how this manifests or translates into a womanist consciousness. More specifically, the study examines the politics of gender in hostels in Cape Town. The study documents how single African women, in their struggle for survival, exploit their sexuality and reproductive capacities to gain access to economic resources and shelter. (Some of these women deliberately refused to marry or remarry so as to be able to exploit their single status and manipulate their sexuality and reproductive capacities). The hostels in Cape Town, during the apartheid era were the preserve of male migrant labourers and women could only gain entry into them by virtue of their relations to registered male residents either by blood or marriage/partnership.

deliberately refused to marry or remarry and exploited their single status by manipulating their sexual and reproductive capacities in their struggle for survival. For instance, many women interviewed used their sexual capacities to gain access/entry into the hostels, which were the preserve of male migrant labourers. Women could only gain access to these hostels by virtue of their relations to registered male residents as wives, girlfriends, offsprings, or siblings (Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988). Some of these impoverished women who found themselves (due to death or desertion) unemployed with the sole responsibility of providing for their children "...literally jumped from bed to bed to survive" (Ramphele & Boonzaier, 1988: 163). One of the women interviewed summed it up when she commented that relationships were a matter of convenience: one took what one could get and moved on to the next male prospect.

SUMMARY

In closing, there's no doubt about (certain) African women's engagement with feminism being borne out of their "survival imperative". However, question marks surround the content of this engagement with feminism (Walker, 1990). Is it feminist? African women's day-to-day living consists of various forms of resistance to the dominant "traditional" discourse on women. These various forms of resistance tend to be manipulative instead of oppositional. Where does one draw the line between opposing and manipulating the patriarchal order? Does one need to draw that line? If not, then which of the various forms (manipulative and or oppositional) resistance, do we label as feminist? When we talk about an emerging feminist consciousness on the continent, what criteria do we use to assess the feminist content of the various forms of resistance? What does the nature of engagement have to be for it to be considered feminist in content? These are the key issues to be addressed in the ensuing and concluding chapter of this volume.

CONCLUSION

As evidenced in the previous chapter, the new Black feminism that is slowly emerging on the African continent is firmly rooted in the politics survival. There is no doubt that for certain (South) African women, the daily struggle for survival within a number of socio-political and historical contexts translated into a womanist consciousness. However, question marks surround the content and nature of (some) African women's engagement with feminism. One of the questions is: is it feminist?

For the majority of (poor) women on the continent, exploiting one's (hetero)sexuality and reproductive capacities are part and parcel of the survival kit. Survival is indeed the name of the game. The end may even justify the means, but are the means feminist? The current state of African women's engagement with feminism is one of two extremes. On the one hand, women are individually advancing themselves by manipulating the patriarchal order; and on the other, women are collectively/politically organising to oppose the patriarchal order for the good of all women. Is manipulating the patriarchal order for one's own end the same as (collectively) opposing it for the good of all women? These are some of the issues surrounding the nature of African women's engagement with feminism that need points of clarification.

Although clarification on the content and nature of African women's engagement with feminism is really beyond the scope of this study, I would like to briefly offer some points which need to be taken into consideration for future research on this issue. The first is that one must always bear in

mind the fluidity and diversity of the field we call “feminism”. There is no true existing definition of feminism: any given definition of feminism at any particular point in time is influenced and shaped by the needs and priorities of a given constituency of women (Bassnett, 1986; Offen, 1988). For women on the African continent, engagement with feminism is born out of a “survival imperative” (Steady, 1987). This is what propels most African women’s engagement with feminism and shapes their needs and priorities: survival. Not domestic arrangements i.e. responsibility for household chores, sexuality, joining an exclusive all male club, or climbing the corporate ladder. (Albeit, personally I think there are many other African women who would find the latter most desirable).

Besides the above mentioned, future research on the nature and content of African women’s engagement with feminism needs to also bear in mind what constitutes a feminist action. A properly feminist action, amongst other things, encompasses three key elements/criterion: gender relations, consciousness, and collectivity (Beasley, 1999; Delmar, 1986; Spencer, 1986). By **gender relations** is meant that the action changes or challenges the underlying gender relations responsible for the individual’s oppressive condition (Beasley, 1999; Delmar, 1986). Note that the action is directed towards the underlying gender relations causing the oppressive condition, and not the individual’s condition per se.

The element of **consciousness** refers to the individual being conscious of the nature and implications of her action (Delmar, 1986; Spencer, 1986). It means, she is conscious of the fact that she is challenging existing gender relations. Note that consciousness is not merely assumed as

part and parcel of the action. Rather, it is the reflection of a conscious decision to challenge the ruling social order.

By **collectivity** is meant that the nature of the action is group-oriented (Beasley, 1999; Delmar, 1986). The nature of the action is collective and involves working with other women for the purpose of achieving a common goal (Delmar, 1986). It means that a purely individual act, which does not enable women to work together, cannot be regarded as a properly feminist action.

Strictly adhering to the letter of what constitutes feminist action, I acknowledge that there is ground for criticising certain African women's engagement with feminism as un-feminist. However, evaluating the feminist content of African women's engagement with feminism on the basis of a set of prescriptive ("one size fits all") elements/criterion may in and of itself be problematic since these criterion do not necessarily take into account the needs and priorities of African women. I suppose it boils down to what is more important: the net effect of the (feminist) action or the means by which it is achieved? This is also another issue which needs clarification in future research.

SUMMARY

The findings from this study suggest that the new Black feminism that is slowly emerging on the African continent is rooted in the politics of survival. Furthermore, the findings from this study indicate that three socio-political and historical contexts provided contexts in which (South) African

women learned about their feminism. They are women's involvement in the national liberation struggle, the migrant labor system, and the struggle against poverty. African women's daily struggle for survival in these three socio-political and historical contexts translated into a womanist consciousness. Also, the findings from this study suggest that the current state of African women's engagement with feminism is one of two extremes. On the one hand, women are individually advancing themselves and on the other women are collectively/ politically organizing for the good of all women. A balance needs to be struck, so that both collective and individual acts can effectively benefit the growth of the newly emerging Black feminism.

This study therefore adds to and addresses a fundamental question in feminist social psychology about how feminist consciousness emerges and manifests itself in the lives of those espousing it. Also, this study adds unto the existing body of literature on feminist social psychology, specifically literature on the newly emerging African feminist consciousness. The implication of the findings from this study is that (poor) African women's daily struggle for survival leads them (through their actions) to engage with feminism. This in turn sets the stage for an emerging African womanist consciousness.

Several (other) issues for future research emerge from this study. These include exploring the range of roles offered by (other) various belief systems that are "available" in South Africa and comparing them with those currently being rejected or vacated by certain African women⁴. Another issue for future research is examining the (new) roles that certain African women are moving into. After all, an individual cannot altogether stop being

a person or being acceptable within a culture or society. Otherwise, there would be social anarchy, not to mention identity crises.

Although African women have always historically engaged with feminism, the notion of African women moving out of their socially prescribed or “traditional” roles is a relatively new phenomenon. So, another issue for future research is exploring new social roles that African women can move into which are compatible with African womanist concerns/values such as family, marriage, and motherhood. Also worthy of future research is a comparative study of the contexts of the emergence of a womanist consciousness in South Africa to that of another Third World country with similar socio-demographics, either on the continent or elsewhere in the Third World. Another line of future inquiry is to conduct interviews/field work on the topic of this dissertation so as to obtain first hand information on the emergence of a South African womanist consciousness. The aforementioned suggestions for future research are by no means exhaustive. There are a number of other issues in feminist social psychology, pertaining to African feminism which must be researched in order to better understand and fully articulate the newly emerging Black feminism.

Note:

*This line of future inquiry was suggested by Mr. Crispin Pemberton-Pigott, through electronic correspondence and discussion pertaining to my research.

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