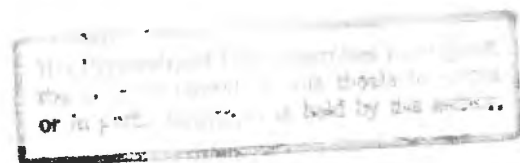


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**The Madness of the Black Man On His Own:  
An Analysis of the Silences of History,  
In Search of *Herstory***

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**Submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

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The primary purpose of this thesis is to examine the autobiographical works of three Black South African women -- Mamphela Ramphele, Bessie Head, and Ellen Kuzwayo -- to see if and how they were impacted by the masculine discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), which was articulated in terms of "the Black *man*" and *his* struggle. One of the first points I make and use as a premise throughout the thesis is that the term "man" is neither inclusive nor universal; it, instead, refers specifically to men and cannot refer to both men and women.

What could have motivated the use of this masculinist language, particularly in light of the fact that the Nguni and Sotho languages of South Africa do not have a gender differentiation system for the third person pronoun? This question led me to an examination of the English language since English was the language chosen by the activists to conduct the business of the Movement. But, there was yet another factor to consider besides the language. The Black Consciousness Movement took place through the 1960s and into the late 1970s, during the latter part of an era of many other Black nationalist struggles around the world (Négritude, the U.S. Black Power Movements, liberation struggles of many of the other African countries). So, I look specifically at men's writings from Négritude and the Black Power Movements and compare them to a sample of writings from male writers in the Black Consciousness Movement, showing that all of these writers articulate employ this masculinist language. The significance of the timing of Black Consciousness (BC) is that it emerged into an international context with a ready-made nationalist discourse of the liberation of Black people and the struggle of Black men.

That discourse, however, might not have emerged if the usage of the masculine as universal were not already an acceptable practice the English language. Thus, the first chapter is an examination of the masculinity of the English language, primarily through feminist, poststructuralist, psychoanalytic, and Marxist theories/theorists. The analysis begins from the premise that masculinity is a system of domination that requires femininity, a small, enclosed space designated for women. Key to the existence of masculinity and femininity is the facade that they are *natural*, i.e., inherent to the male

and female bodies, respectively. Thus the chapter is largely a deconstruction of that assumption, and the 18th century European assumption of a direct link between hysteria and femininity. I argue that at the base of female hysteria is a much more pervasive and normalised male hysteria, driven by the either/or binary logic of Western philosophy that shows itself in the English language. Indeed, it is masculinity, not femininity, that is irrational, illogical, and mad in its obsession for understanding and control. I move from that assertion into an analysis of how capitalism works to create femininity through Marx's structure of the non-producer, the labourer (to whom Marx consistently refers as *he*), and the product to examine the relationship between men and women, the masculine and the feminine.

After establishing the madness of masculinity and its place in the English language, I move into how this examination of a Western context correlates to the Black Consciousness Movement. I argue that when the male BC activists entered into the English language, they simultaneously entered into its legacy of masculinity, and they adopted that masculinity. Thus their absencing of women was driven by the very same madness of masculinity.

In the midst of this oppressive madness called masculinity, how, then did Black women conceive of themselves as agents? Of the three women, only one, Mamphela Ramphele, was an activist in the BCM. She is the *only* woman activist from the BCM who has written her autobiography, or who has written a sizeable body of material on her experience in the Movement. She is also the only of the three who never engages in the masculinist discourse of the Movement. I also look at Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography, *Call Me Woman*, which is dedicated to documenting the contributions of other Black women to the liberation of South Africa, despite which there are curious moments in the text when she slips into masculinist discourse in talking about the BCM and the importance of the Black man's struggle. The third is Bessie Head and her novel, *A Question of Power*, which I use as an autobiographical text on the basis of her own admission that it is largely grounded in her own life experiences. Hers is an important text for the framework of madness it provides. I conclude that, true to my previous analyses, she is driven into madness by the hysteria of masculinity.



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# CONTENTS

\* \* \*

Introduction	1
<i>Chapter One :</i>	
The Madness of Masculinity: An Exploration into Male Hysteria	29
Reading Absence	32
Hysteria	34
Absence of Woman/ Overbearing Presence of Man & Femininity	42
The Other of Reason	47
The Great Mother	50
Spectres of Marx	55
Visible Invisibles	59
"The Black Man"	70
<i>Chapter Two :</i>	
Testimony to Radical Subjectivity: Agency as Transgression	82
Unnamed Experience	88
The Violence and Depravity of Masculinity	96
Absence	100
Am I My Sister's Jailer?	102
Storytelling: Re-Membering Herstory	104
Black Women Speak	110
Conclusion	128
Appendix: Interview with Dr. Mamphela Ramphele	133
Bibliography	139

## *Introduction*

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The existence and perpetuation of systems of domination hinge on "hidden" structures of power, on the ability to appear invisible, indeed to not appear at all. Patriarchy, for example, is based on masculinity and notions of its naturalness to the male body, its natural superiority, and hence the inherent naturalness of the superiority of the male body. The 1990 *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th Edition, defines masculine as: 1) of or characteristic of men; 2) manly, vigorous; 3) (of a woman) having qualities considered appropriate to a man; 4) gram.: of or denoting the gender proper to men's names. The first definition equates masculinity with the male body, and the second identifies the characteristics of masculinity as vigour and manliness, again locating the male body as the site of masculinity. In identifying masculinity as a biological state, the definition hides the ideology of masculinity by not acknowledging the psychology of masculinity, which has little to do with physiology or anatomy, and is instead, as Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard argue in *Sexism, Racism and Oppression*, "a system of domination" (1984:181)<sup>1</sup>. Systems of domination are oppressive. Brittan and Maynard quote Marilyn Frye from *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (1983) to clarify and analyse the meaning of oppression:

The root of the word 'oppression' is the element 'press'. The press of the crowd, pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button. Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gasses or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilise. Reduce (Brittan & Maynard 1984:1).

Oppression is the systematic pressing of a person or people <sup>regarded as</sup> decidedly less than fully human <sub>^</sub> into a tiny space around which boundaries are drawn by those in power in order to restrict.

Masculinity is paraded as a biological trait of the male body, yet that is immediately recognisable as false in light of the fact that what is masculine shifts from one culture to

another:

Masculinity is infinitely variable. What is regarded as being manly and assertive in one context, is regarded as bogus in another. In other words, this alternative makes masculinity relative, just as it makes gender in general relative. How men define themselves depends on where they find themselves. But this apparent diversity of masculine ideologies and identities does not obscure the fact that men stand in a dominant relationship to women in most of the diverse settings (Brittan & Maynard 1984:188).

What is exposed in identifying masculinity as a standard relative to cultural context is the phallacy that masculinity is a trait natural to the male body. Though concepts of what is masculine may shift, what remains consistent and necessary to the sustenance of masculinity is the concept of femininity. And neither masculinity nor femininity are inherent to a male or female body; yet both exist as if they were corporeal, physiological realities, as are genitalia, or as if such "biological facts" are the impetus for *a* nature, *a* personality, *a* coherent identity. As Judith Butler argues in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, gender is the fabrication of a fantasy of coherence and naturalness:

Gender ought not to be construed as a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts follow; rather, gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*. **The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.** This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (Butler 1990:140-41, bold emphasis mine).

Throughout the thesis, I argue that femininity is the binary opposition of masculinity, which concept I address in more depth in Chapter One. As such, femininity is understood in relation to masculinity, but as the subordinated term. Femininity, equally equated to the female body as masculinity to the male body, is understood by what it is *not*: it is everything masculinity is not. Julia Penelope makes this point in her book *Speaking Freely: Unlearning the Lies of the Fathers' Tongues*:

Obviously, boy and man are [+male]. Not so obviously, girl and woman are [-male]; that is females are non-men. We are, in English, 'those without penises', because the penis is the basis of the semantic contrast. Terms that are so marked indicate the speaker's sense that without an explicit feature the word might otherwise be misinterpreted as referring to the default, unmarked category, that is, [+male] (1990:102).

The lines of masculinity demarcate the boundaries of femininity in a way that compresses the feminine into a small space, where actual women are pressed, immobilised, molded into feminine beings and taught to believe that femininity is natural. Assumed to be located in the female body, femininity offers women the margins of power. As men establish masculinity as the norm by which human standards are judged, the feminine, and thus the female body, come to represent all that is deviant from that norm. The point that Penelope makes is the same point that I will follow throughout the thesis in relation to the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) in South Africa -- that this masculine/feminine split is embedded in the English language and integrated into Black Consciousness (BC) ideology.

The Black Consciousness Movement evolved out of a political vacuum following the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC) in 1960. In his article, "The Emergence of Black Consciousness: An Historical Appraisal" in *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko & Black Consciousness*, Siphso Buthelezi argues that, in the Black community, a period of political complacency followed that allowed white liberals to speak for and represent Blacks in the midst of their silence. While several organisations related to the Black Consciousness Movement emerged, the South African Students' Organisation (SASO) founded in July 1969 at University of the North, Turfloop, was the first and remained the central organisation for Black Consciousness. Steve Biko was elected its first president (Pityana, Ramphela, Mpumlwana & Wilson 1991:24).

It was a movement significantly different from other liberation struggles in South Africa in its emphasis on Black psychological empowerment that required a degree of self-reliance and separatism from whites that was antithetical to the nonracialist ideal of the

ANC, which, from its inception on January 8, 1912 "always evoked 'multiracialism' in its opposition to white supremacy" (Fatton 1986:3). Fatton defines multiracialism as "a strategy bent on uniting all anti-racist forces - irrespective of their colors - in a common fight against white supremacy" (1986:3). Contrary to this, Black Consciousness was "bent on" cultivating self-reliance in which there could be no space for whites:

Logically the oppressed cannot expect those who oppress him deliberately to aid him in his struggle.

**The oppressed therefore, is forced upon his own resources and facilities. He must become increasingly reliant upon himself and therefore increasingly confident of his own ability** (Naidoo 1972:18, author's emphasis).

The BCM worked toward nonracialism as a goal for South African society in the future, not as a reality of the present:

Our only hope lies in our solidarity, and the philosophy of Black Consciousness is a strong foundation for this. It is a workable solution or means towards the attainment of a non racial democracy...

The NIC will at no time channel Black Consciousness into Black Racism as we do not consider it as an end in itself but merely a means towards the attainment of a society where every citizen has an equal opportunity to attain happiness (Naidoo 1972:20, author's emphasis).

The rejection of whites certainly echoes the Africanist view of the PAC:

Africans, in the PAC's Africanist view, were to no longer understand their position through European lenses, nor were they to borrow the language and practices of white liberals in their quest for liberation; rather, they were to formulate their own vision of the world and select the ways to transform it. Africans had to free themselves from their cultural and economic dependence; they had to become independent and autonomous agents (Fatton 1986:4).

But, the philosophy of the BCM differed significantly from that of the PAC in its conception of Black solidarity. The PAC perspective appears to have been that "Africans had to regroup as Africans and reject cooperation with representatives of other races" (Fatton 1986:5). The Black Consciousness Movement, however, encouraged solidarity among all races oppressed by apartheid, such that "Black" included those classified African, Coloured, and Indian. Yet, Blackness was also a state of mind, and being African, Coloured, or Indian did not automatically make one Black: "the fact that we are all *not white* does not necessarily mean that we are all *black*. Non-whites do exist" (Biko 1978:48). Key to the

conception of Blackness was a dedication to Black solidarity and anti-apartheid thought: "Merely by describing yourself as black you have started on a road towards emancipation, you have committed yourself to fight against all forces that seek to use your blackness as a stamp that marks you out as a subservient being" (Biko 1978:48). More than the existing political movements in South Africa, BC had an encompassing and inclusive notion of Blackness and an inwardly focused objective of looking toward the ways in which Blacks could take responsibility for their own empowerment and psychological liberation, in addition to finding in the self value and worth that apartheid had worked to erase.

In the same way that patriarchy works to convince women that they are naturally inferior, apartheid worked to convince Blacks of the same thing:

The African condition under apartheid, Africanists argued, generated not just defeatism and poverty but also moral degradation and self-hatred. Africans developed such an acute sense of inferiority that their color had become a symbol of sin, their history an episode of savage barbarism, and their culture a badge of backwardness and ignorance (Fetton 1986:5).

Because of the assault on the psyches of Blacks, Black Consciousness "placed great emphasis on freedom from the constraints of psychological oppression, which was a 'result of 300 years of deliberate oppression, denigration and derision' (*SASO Newsletter*, August 1970)" (Buthelezi 1991: 123).

The philosophy of self-reliance translated into a similarly introspective activism of community development projects that spanned the "fields of health, education, leadership training, publications, home industries and child care " (Ramphela 1991a: 157)<sup>2</sup>. Dr. Ramphela discusses in detail the relationship between the philosophy of psychological liberation and the activism of community development programmes in her article "Empowerment and Symbols of Hope: Black Consciousness and Community Development"<sup>3</sup>. She argues that:

Goals of development for the BCM were articulated as the practical manifestations of the Black Consciousness philosophy, which not only called for a critical awareness of social relations amongst the oppressed, but for the need to translate that awareness into active programmes for liberation from white domination. Among the goals set for such programmes was the development of self-reliance in the black community. This implied

that projects had to be initiated, directed, implemented and evaluated by blacks themselves (1991a:157).

She continues that the BCM came under attack for its focus on development "from those claiming to offer a more radical analysis of social relations in South Africa," who argued that the BCM approach "delay[ed] the revolution by providing outlets for poor peoples' frustrations" when poor people should have been "left as they were in their poverty so that they could build up sufficient anger against the system and eventually revolt" (1991a:173). Her response to such criticism and "romanticisation of 'the poor'" is that "it is ironical that most of these radicals condemned others to hunger and sickness from the comfort of their privileged positions" (1991a:174). She further argues that the value of the BC community development programmes was their role as

important affirmative statements to the oppressed people - a concrete way of saying that they mattered because they were people. It was argued that people who had known nothing but scorn and humiliation, needed symbols of hope to lift them out of despair and to empower them to liberate themselves (1991a:157).

Despite accusations that the BCM was playing into the hands of right wing conservatives by refusing to be nonracial by including whites in the Movement, proponents of Black Consciousness held fast that:

a non-racial society could only come about with the overhaul of the socio-economic system which apartheid had built and sustained over many decades. It was argued, therefore, that the only people who had a genuine interest in and commitment to this objective were the victims of the system. This observation led SASO to declare that 'in all matters relating to the struggle towards realising our aspirations, Whites must be excluded' (Black Students' Manifesto) (Buthelezi 1991:123).

Yet, despite the ideological and activist emphasis on introspection, some whites appear unable to grasp the notion that Black Power in the context of the Black Consciousness Movement means Black empowerment and not Black power over whites. For example, in her essays, Dorothy Driver repeatedly discusses "simple reversals" (1991:347) as a fundamental principle of Black Consciousness. In her article, "M'a-Ngoana O Tšoare Thipa ka Bohaleng ~ The Child's Mother Grabs the Sharp End of the Knife: Women as Mothers, Women as Writers", Driver asserts: "In a comparable way the



apartheid model posits black and white as distinct categories, with black as the negative of white, a position that becomes reversed in Black Consciousness" (1990: 251-52). This is a position she maintains in her article, "Imagined Selves, (Un)imagined Marginalities" in her discussion of Caesarine Makhoere's autobiography and her alignment of Makhoere with Black Consciousness, when she states:

[I]t is clear that her strategy for psychic survival is the fundamental strategy of Black Consciousness: **she systematically reverses the Manichean self-other dichotomies formerly controlled by white authorities, and assumes the ascendant position,** whereby the white antagonist takes the place of 'other', and 'other', correspondingly, becomes 'white' (1991:351, emphasis mine).

Perhaps Driver aligns the Black Power aspect of Black Consciousness with White Power, which has always centred on asserting white privilege at the expense of others' rights to humanity, as it is used in a Nazi context, the Ku Klux Klan, or perhaps even in the context of the AWB in South Africa. Black Power, however, is not about simply reversing power structures and subjugating others, but about empowering the Black subject to believe in his or her own value as a human being. Thus the separatism urged by BC that excluded the involvement of whites was not about the subjection of whites to a Black domination, and "[n]ot because we wish to be or are racialists, the other way around, but because it is now time for us to re-assess our own significance, our own relevance to our dilemma imposed on us and not of our own making" (Naidoo in *SASO Newsletter* 1972:18). Indeed bell hooks' statement in *Killing Rage: Ending Racism* is an appropriate response to Driver's assertions:

Concurrently, all social manifestations of black separatism are often seen by whites as a sign of anti-white racism, when they usually represent an attempt by black people to construct places of political sanctuary where we can escape, if only for a time, white domination (1995:155).

If Black Consciousness sought to reverse anything, it was "white culture's zero image of blackness as absence" by "investing blackness with presence" (Dubey 1994:28).

Contrary to Driver's position, Mamphela Ramphele emphasises in her autobiography the psychological/introspective and developmental/empowering aspects of

the BCM:

The 1970s was a developmental phase under the Black Consciousness Movement. In those years development became a tool for **conscientising and organising oppressed people**. Some people criticised the BCM for this approach and charged that we were delaying the struggle by getting poor communities to believe that they could develop themselves out of their misery. For these critics the answer lay in the overthrow of the apartheid regime. They were substantially correct in their analysis, but failed to take cognisance of the historical fact that chronic poverty has rarely fired people to rise against their oppressors (1995:213-14, emphasis mine).

Further, in "The Impact of Black Consciousness" in *Bounds of Possibility*, Kogila Moodley argues that:

[i]n South Africa, **Black Consciousness was seen as a tool to prepare people for equal participation in a transformed society** reflecting the outlook of the majority (Motlhabi, 1984:115) Psychological liberation was sought through a return to African values of communalism, shared decision-making and more personal communication styles, in contrast to the impersonal individualism of white consumer society (1991:147, emphasis mine).

As the name "Black Consciousness" suggests, the central idea of Black Consciousness is coming to consciousness, coming to an awareness of what it means to be dominated on the basis of being Black and learning to value the very thing the dominant culture uses to devalue our<sup>4</sup> humanity. If, as bell hooks states in *Killing Rage*, "[m]ired in negativity and denial we [Blacks] are like sleepwalkers" (1995:162), then Black Consciousness is fundamentally about taking the responsibility to uplift and disentangle ourselves from the negativity and denial of our oppression by awakening from the slumber of passivity and unawareness. It is no coincidence that the wake up call of Black Consciousness came during a period of political slumber in the country.

Even though the purpose of the Movement was to awaken the collective Black consciousness to the simultaneous fact of its subjugation to psychological assault and its value, the Movement was conducted and documented in English. All publications related to the BCM were published in English, including the *SASO Newsletter* and Steve Biko's column "I Write What I Like", published under the pen name Frank Talk in the newsletter. *Black Review* produced by Black Community Programmes (BCP), an organisation of the BCM and affiliated with SASO, was also published in English. The first issue was

"designed" by Biko but was published under Bennie Khoapa's name because of Biko's banishment orders at the time, which stipulated that he could not publish (Ramphele 1995:67-68). Biko argues that English was chosen because in a country where "we have something like ten languages[,] [w]e cannot speak all ten at one meeting; we have got to choose a common language" (Arnold 1979:28), and "with a lot of people who speak several languages ... at least they can commonly speak English. Not to any degree of sophistication but to some degree" (Biko 1978:117).

In using English, the activists entered into a language, which like all languages, is inescapably linked to culture, that is laden with many systems of domination<sup>5</sup>. I will focus on three of those systems -- patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism because "[c]lassism, sexism, racism cannot exist in independent conceptual ghettos for the simple reason that in the real world they tend to cohere together" (Brittan & Maynard 1984:22). Consequently, my analysis is launched from a womanist perspective. Womanism is a space that privileges the connectedness of race, gender, and class in considering the oppression of women of colour. Instead of centring on a woman that is too often presumed to be white and middle class as feminism has historically tended to do<sup>6</sup>, womanism centres on the simultaneity, the inseparability of being Black and female, of having to struggle with being pressed into a specific space because of race and gender: "It is this simultaneity which pinpoints the experiential dimension of black and third world women, and it is this which is left out of so much white radical and feminist literature" (Brittan & Maynard 1984:6)<sup>7</sup>. Though Zoë Wicomb criticises womanist theorist Chikwenye Ogunyemi for her "failure to examine the categories of race and gender in terms of their discourses" (1990:36), the tension created from considering race and gender in terms of their separate discourses is precisely what womanism seeks to relieve; for, Black women are not one day Black only (which translates into Black male because male is normalised as unmarked/normal so that the female body must be specified) and the next day woman only (presumed to be white, for the white body is privileged as the unmarked, de-

racialised body). Indeed Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith capture that tension perfectly in the title of their work *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave*. Being Black and female is not just a matter of added oppressions, as Brittan and Maynard argue:

[The] 'additive' approach is simply unacceptable. It is untenable because of the implication that gender and 'race' simply *increase* the degree of oppression which is involved, with no understanding that they qualitatively change the *nature* of that oppression. Black women are not simply subjected to more disadvantage than their white sisters, their oppression is of a qualitatively different kind .... We would argue then that the arithmetic approach confounds the fact that it is not a question of degree but one of *kind* that is involved here (1984:69).

For, as Nellie McKay argues, "there is no such thing as racial-sexual oppression that is neither wholly racial nor wholly sexual, but as inseparable as the racial-sexual self" (1992:277-78).

Because of this attention to simultaneity, womanist theory is "[c]ommitted to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female" (Walker 1983:xi, emphasis mine). It is not dedicated to promoting Black patriarchy.

And yet, womanism is significantly different from Black feminism only in its refusal to be marginalised. The modifier "Black" works to marginalise Black women within a feminist space. Consequently, "Black feminism" is a term that simultaneously criticises white women for seeing themselves as the only subjects of feminism and works to maintain their position as such. Though she identifies herself as a Black feminist, Carol Boyce Davies recognises the value of re-naming:

The name *zami* becomes a renaming of the self as "Black lesbian" (i.e., lesbian as a white-identified, Greek-originated term has to be qualified with the adjective "Black" or latina or Asian, for example, or renamed). The deploying of the etymology and meaning of *Zami* is a similar move to find new language and starting-points from which to express a reality, as is, for example, Alice Walker's definition of "womanist" as another term of meaning for "Black feminist" (1994:121-22).

My position as a womanist is similar to Lauretta Ngcobo's, in that my womanism is not an eternal condemnation or rejection of feminism (indeed one necessarily has a feminist consciousness as a womanist):

[It] is ... undeniable that the movement in the West enlivens our own consciousness, but at the same time we are at the point when we have not decided fully to follow the line that the Western movement is taking. We feel that first of all, they have not sorted out their solutions well enough. And we think that they have not consolidated it through their own structures. We find that the movement is restricting itself to a certain class. They are failing all together to penetrate the working class. And for us that wouldn't work at all. Their solutions of male exclusion we feel are not solutions .... We don't think at this point that would be our line but that does not mean we do not recognize the fight that white women are putting up, that we do not recognize the possibilities that there are for us within the feminist movement .... So we recognize the possibilities in the feminist movement and whilst we disagree on certain points we are not denigrating feminism (Petersen 1988:185).

My position is as "separatist...periodically, for health" (Walker 1983:xi). Separation is sometimes necessary for the sake of health, stability, sanity and recuperation from attack. Similarly, within the context of race bell hooks argues:

[C]oming home to black neighborhoods that were not controlled by a visible white presence provided black people the necessary space to recoup and regain a measure of sanity. The power of these segregated communities was that they were places where black folks had oppositional world views that helped us sustain our integrity (hooks 1993:54, emphasis mine).

A space separate from the one that silences and marginalises is precisely what womanism is for Black women<sup>8</sup>.

English is problematic given these three systems of domination embedded in and perpetuated by the language. For, as Paul John Eakin asks in *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*: "How can language be made the instrument of identity when it is instrumental in the denial of identity?" (1985:262).

Throughout the thesis, I will be examining the role of English in maintaining and perpetuating these systems of domination, particularly patriarchy as it is relevant to the context of Black Consciousness; for, "most women [and men] remain unconscious of how English forces us to repeat the structures that deny us stature and agency in the world and of the role of language in our oppression. Thinking about how we think is hard" (Penelope 1990:xiv). The relationship between language and consciousness is that language is an outsider's only window into a person's thoughts and consciousness. Thus to study the language is a means of trying to understand what certain language reflects about the

speaker's consciousness and perceptions of the world. As Wallace Chafe states in his *Discourse, Consciousness, and Time: The Flow and Displacement of Conscious Experience in Speaking and Writing*, "[w]hen it comes to studying the mind, language provides the richest possible fund of publicly observable data of a relevant kind" (1994:15). Along with Penelope, I am motivated toward this analysis by the hope and assumption that "we're capable of unlearning patriarchal assumptions and values and are equally capable of creating different descriptions of the world, and I'm assuming that understanding the ways English perpetuates patriarchal description initiates these changes" (1990:xxxv). Why? Because, as Chafe says, "when consciousness is verbalized in overt language, we can at least examine the flow of things that are talked about and perhaps sharpen our understanding of why a speaker chose those things and not others" (1994:34).

Why did activists in the Black Consciousness Movement choose to enter into a masculinist discourse of the "Black man's struggle"?<sup>9</sup> Noticeably, the language of BC is male dominated -- consistently burdened with masculine pronouns and references. "Black", as a noun, becomes synonymous with "the Black man" and is represented by "he". An issue of the *SASO Newsletter* (Jan./Feb. 1972) offers a number of such examples:

Finally Council pledges itself to the realisation of the worth of **the Black man** and to promoting consciousness, unity and self-reliance in our community (3, emphasis mine).

Black suspicion and hatred of White supremacy is justified and understandable. **The Black** demands and must be in a position of real power in the government as **his** only safeguard against external and undesirable forces - but the White has threatened and bullied **him** (8, emphasis mine).

It is one of the ironies of social determinism that in spite of all degradations, the enslavements, the insults, **the Black man** is still aware of beauty (14, emphasis mine).

In response to this, one may be tempted to argue that in English "man" is synonymous with "people". Therefore, when BC activists speak of "the Black man", it should be understood as "Black people". "Man" is not the equivalent of "people" in English, nor is it equivalent in the discourse of the BCM Penelope points out that:

The issue of pseudo-generic *he* is the most visible part of male dominance in

English .... Early prescriptive grammarians didn't state explicitly that *man* and *he* were generic in their reference, but in practice they consistently replaced *man* and *mankind* and other nouns, such as *child*, *student*, *youth*, and *writer* with *he*. In fact, men used three devices to establish *he* as a pseudo-generic. The first two were "grammatical" arguments; the third was legislation, an 1850 Act of Parliament (Penelope 1990:115, author's italics).

Similarly, Carole Boyce Davies argues that "Black men have often claimed the space of speaking only in terms of their race with the assumption that their gender remains unmarked. But their manhood is often frontally identified in their assertions" (1994:8).

In Chapter One, I analyse the history of man and masculinity in English as directly related to the history of hysteria. My position is that "man" does not reflect woman at all. Part of the reason that it cannot include woman is that it is based on the concept of manhood, which is based on masculinity, the antithesis of a woman's designated femininity under patriarchy. For example, in *I Write What I Like*, Steve Biko states:

Hence thinking along lines of Black Consciousness makes the **black man** see **himself** as a being, entire in **himself**, and not as an extension of a broom or additional leverage to some machine. At the end of it all, **he** cannot tolerate attempts by anybody to dwarf the significance of **his manhood**. Once this happens, we shall know that **the real man in the black person** is beginning to shine through (1978:68, emphasis mine).

If one is tempted to suggest that Biko is using "man" interchangeably with "people", that becomes impossible the moment he mentions "manhood". He continues in the last sentence to talk about the "real man in the black person". It is clear that he is indeed speaking specifically about Black men on the basis of what Black people suffer.

The language of Black Consciousness repeatedly absents Black women and consequently denies their existence in and contribution to the Movement. Dimza Pityana states that "women were involved in Black Consciousness as blacks but not as *black women*" (Pityana et al 1991:36), which suggests a prioritising of race over gender, indeed a denial of gender. Penelope then is certainly accurate in her argument that, "[b]eing a revolutionary may not be generally regarded as a prestige occupation, but political activity is assumed to be within the male experiential domain" (1990:109). The masculinist discourse of the BCM clearly reflects this sentiment, and it absents Black women in the

same manner that English has historically excluded women:

The role of women in nationalist discourses is an important issue, for historically women have expressed nationalist zeal and patriotism, although, often, they have been dispossessed in the documenting of nationalist struggles and/or in the shaping and reconstruction of new societies (Boyce Davies 1994:51).

In the second chapter, I examine the autobiographical works of Black women either directly involved in the BCM as activists or influenced by its discourse -- looking specifically at *Call Me Woman* by Ellen Kuzwayo, *A Question of Power* by Bessie Head<sup>10</sup>, and *Mamphela Ramphele: A Life* by Mamphela Ramphele. The purpose of relying on these works is to utilise a forum in which they speak. Further, I argue that the autobiography represents an effort on the autobiographer's part to rectify the lies of history and document *herstory*, to re-present herself in a story of the past from which she has been erased. For example, in his introduction to *Soweto Poetry*, Michael Chapman speaks only of the "spokesmen" of BC -- Steve Biko, Nyameko Pityana and Onkgopotse Tiro (1982:17) -- and does not mention the women active in the leadership of the Movement. Asha Moodley argues that:

[m]ention was made of the writings on the history of the Black Consciousness Movement which will always of course, tell you about Steve Biko, Harry Nengwekhulu, Barney Pityana, etc etc - in short, the founding 'fathers' of the Movement. There is barely any mention of the very many dynamic women who played a prominent role in building up this movement in its early days - women like Debs Matshoba, Nomsisi Kraai, Mamphela Ramphele, Bridgette Mabandla, Vuyi Mashalaba etc. How many people know and remember that the first president of the Black People's Convention was a woman - and a very able one at that - Winnie Kgwere? (Moodley 1993:46).

Undoubtedly, as James Olney states, "[t]he objective space of history is always a projection of the mental space of the historian" (1980:44-45), and it is fairly obvious from the absence of Black women in historical texts that there have not been an abundance of Black women historians. Concurring with Olney's characterisation of history, Penelope further posits that "[h]istory is largely a chronology of the lives of 'a small class of selected men'" (1990:73).

The lack of a gender consciousness within the nationalist context is ironic in the nationalist attempts to deconstruct one system of domination while simultaneously



reinforcing another. The moment the BCM activists entered into English, they entered into its dominating systems as well. This is not to argue that patriarchy was a form of domination alien to African cultures; however, it is important to point out that the Nguni and Sotho languages do not have the gender differentiation system that English has<sup>11</sup>. So, what happens to motivate the switch to the masculinist discourse in English? It is of significance that at the time of the Black Consciousness Movement, the activists had available a ready-made masculinist discourse that had been used by many Black nationalist struggles in other parts of the world, particularly Négritude and the U.S. Black Power Movement. C.R.D. Halisi argues in *Bounds of Possibility* that Biko recognised that "ideological and political developments are part of an ongoing social dialogue .... [and that] even a revolutionary ideology always consists of elements drawn from previous radical interpretations" (in Pityana et al 1991:106).

In addition to reading South African writers of the time, such as Mafika Gwala, Mongane Wally Serote, Njabulo Ndebele, Strini Moodley, and Saths Cooper, as well as older South African writers such as Es'kia Mphahlele, Alex LaGuma, Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Nat Nakasa, and Bloke Modisane (Wilson in Pityana et al, 1991: 29), the activists were also reading the writings of activists from other Black nationalist movements around the world. In Dr. Ramphela's article, "The Dynamics of Gender Within Black Consciousness Organisations: A Personal View" in *Bounds of Possibility*, she notes that "Fanon, Césaire, the Black Panthers, Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were the popular authors, orators and heroes of the times" (1991:218). On the basis of an interview with Mandla Langa, Lindy Wilson supports this:

Biko discovered many of the books and authors. One of the most significant writers he read and passed on was Frantz Fanon. It seemed coincidental that Fanon's work was published in English for the first time in 1968 .... Another important writer was James Cone, the black American theologian, while Malcolm X, the 'Black Consciousness' counterpart to Martin Luther King's liberal integrationist stance, had published his autobiography in 1965. The SASO group had twelve records of his speeches .... Mandla Langa recalls that there was also a resonance with the kind of cultural awakening expressed by the Black Panthers and 'consciously or unconsciously there was a lot of borrowing, which is why you find the poetry of that time became very

derivative really' (ML to LW, 1989) (1991:29).

Kogila Moodley also acknowledges that "[p]hilosophically, Black Consciousness was also broadly influenced by the writings of Senghor, Memmi, Fanon, Cleaver, Carmichael and Freire" (in Pityana et al 1991:146). In his poem "The Seed and the Saints", Mongane Serote pays homage to those who have been of influence:

I'm the seed of this earth  
 ready with my roots to spread deep into reality  
 I've been a looked after  
 black seed; by black saints and prophets  
 by Sobukwe Mandela Sisulu  
 Fanon Malcolm X George Jackson  
 (1982:68, ll. 1-6).

In addition to the South African activists -- Robert Sobukwe, Nelson Mandela, and Walter Sisulu, Serote acknowledges Fanon and U.S. nationalists Malcolm X, affiliated with the era of Civil Rights Movement, and George Jackson, affiliated with the Black Power Movement of the 1960s and early 1970s, specifically the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The timing of the Black Consciousness Movement was such that the activists were able to draw from the resources of other Black nationalist uprisings taking place around the globe.

In the spirit of the 1960s world-wide, with the end to colonial rule in Africa, the emergence of Black Power in the United States, and the student revolts in Europe, the Black Consciousness Movement emerged to transform the minds of black South African students, thereby generating a lifestyle which eventually resisted oppression on a massive scale (Wilson in Pityana et al 1991:23, emphasis mine).

The place of Black Consciousness in the international context of Black nationalism is particularly marked by the number of Black men that BC activists were reading as well as by the masculinist discourse adopted by Black Consciousness and all of the writers that Dr. Ramphele names.

The language used by Fanon, Césaire, Malcolm X, Dr. King, and male activists of the Black Power Movement in the U.S. is characterised by a masculinist bias in the discourse. The Negro or the Black becomes synonymous with the Black man. The Black man's suffering becomes the suffering of the whole race, perhaps because they believed, as James Cone argues in his *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*, that "black

males were victimized more than black women" (Cone 1991:276). His struggle can be assumed to be representative of the race not only because he may perceive his experiences to be more harsh, but also because he has access to a wider discourse and consciousness that "[i]n English, all persons are assumed to be male unless otherwise specified" (Penelope 1990:103). Not only is "the Black man" and his struggle continually reinforced in these Black nationalist discourses, but masculinity as an overarching system of domination allows Black men recourse to a discourse in which they can silence Black women by both erasing our struggles, pain, and existence, and by actually stating that women have no place in the space of political activity and leadership and should remain silent on such issues. As Boyce Davies argues:

We may want to go further and ask, as a number of feminist scholars are beginning to do, if the concept of "nation" has not been a male formulation. This may explain why nationalism thus far seems to exist primarily as a male activity with women distinctly left out or peripheralized in the various national constructs (Boyce Davies 1994:12).

Nationalist spaces marginalise women in much the same way that most political spaces in patriarchal societies marginalise women. As part of the larger political framework of patriarchal structures, nationalism replicates the same dominating structure, so that, as Penelope argues, the revolutionaries and anything political are considered to be of the male domain.

The language used by Black men in the nationalist struggles of the time point to a consciousness not of the uplift of the race but of returning the Black man to his "rightful" place as patriarch, which really meant becoming equal to white men because they always had recourse to their "rights" as patriarchs. Empowerment was for Black men at the expense of Black women.

For example, this is shown in Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks*:

The black is a black man (1970 [1952]:8).

[N]ot only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man (1970 [1952]:77).

[O]ne is no longer aware of the Negro but only of a penis; the Negro is eclipsed. He is

turned into a penis. He *is* a penis (1970 [1952]:120, author's italics).

Similarly, Aimé Césaire in *Discourse on Colonialism*.

For my part, if I have recalled a few details of these hideous butcheries, it is by no means because I take a morbid delight in them, but because I think that these heads of men, these collections of ears, these burned houses, these Gothic invasions, this steaming blood, these cities that evaporate at the edge of the sword, are not to be so easily disposed of. They prove that colonization, I repeat, dehumanizes **even the most civilized man**; that colonial activity, that colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for **the native** and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change **him** who undertakes it; that **the colonizer**, who in order to ease his conscience gets into the habit of seeing **the other man** as an *animal*, accustoms **himself** to treating **him** like an animal, and tends to objectively transform *himself* into an animal (1972 [1955]:19-20, bold emphasis mine).

In the U.S., the discourse used by both Black Power activists and Malcolm X was the same as that used by Fanon and Césaire. At several points in a January 23, 1963 speech at Michigan State University, as a Minister of the Nation of Islam, Malcolm X displays his masculine bias in the language he uses:

I am speaking as a **Black man**. And I'm letting you know how a **Black man** thinks, how a **Black man** feels, and how dissatisfied **Black men** should have been 400 years ago (Perry 1989:27, emphasis mine).

And the only thing that makes **white people** completely satisfied and **Black people** completely satisfied, when they're in their right mind, is when the **Black man** has his own and the **white man** has his own (Perry 1989:33, emphasis mine).

James Cone argues that:

[f]ollowing his split with the Nation of Islam and his subsequent trips to the Middle East and Africa, Malcolm made an about-face regarding his view on women's rights, as he began to consider the issue not only in the context of religion and morality but, more importantly, from the standpoint of mobilising the forces needed to revolutionize society (Cone 1991:279).

Yet, this "about-face" is not at all evident in the masculinist language Malcolm X continued to use in his speeches after his split from the Nation. In a February 15, 1965 speech he delivered in New York, he not only continued to absent women in the masculinist language, but he devalued that which he associated with women and femininity, while he privileged that which he associated with men and masculinity:

Uncle Tom Negro Leaders stand up and **fight like men** instead of **running around here nonviolently acting like women** (Perry 1989:126).

And as fast as **the brothers** in Africa and Asia get their independence, get freedom, get strength, begin to rise up, begin to change their image from negative to positive - this African image that has jumped from negative to positive affects the image that **the Black man in the Western Hemisphere has of himself** (Perry 1989:127, emphasis mine).

As the African nations become independent and mold a new image - **a positive image, a militant image, an upright image, the image of a man, not a boy** - how has this affected **the Black man in the Western Hemisphere?** It has taken **the Black man in the Caribbean and given him some pride.** It has given pride to **the Black man in Latin America and has given pride to the Black man right here in the United States.** So that when the Black revolution begins to roll on the African continent it affects **the Black man in the United States and affects the relationship between the Black man and the white man in the United States** (Perry 1989:128, emphasis mine).

While Malcolm X was regarded by many, both Black and white, as more militant than Dr. Martin Luther King, James Cone quotes the latter using similar language in an August 29, 1965 interview on "Face the Nation":

The Negro man in this country ... has never been able to be a man. He has been robbed of his manhood because of the legacy of slavery and segregation and discrimination, and we have had in the Negro community a matriarchal family ... in the midst of a patriarchal society ... and I don't think any answer to that problem will emerge until we give the Negro man his manhood by giving him the kind of economic security capable of supporting a family (1991:277)

While he does not merge "people" into "man", he does identify the "matriarchal family" as a problem to be solved by the reinstatement of patriarchy, suggesting that it was non-existent, which he appears to equate with the liberation of Black people. Undoubtedly, activists of the Black Power Movement in the 1960s were influenced by both Malcolm X's and Dr. King's exclusionary rhetoric and ideals. For example, Kwame Ture (formerly known as Stokely Carmichael) and Charles Hamilton in *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* note:

Perhaps the most vicious result of colonialism - in Africa and this country [the U.S.] - was that it purposefully, maliciously and with reckless abandon relegated **the black man** to a subordinated, inferior status in the society (1967:23, emphasis mine).

At all times, then, the social effects of colonialism are to degrade and to dehumanize **the subjected black man** (1967:31, emphasis mine).

And, George Jackson in *Soledad Brother* says:

She [my mother] was saying that I should be indifferent about being used and abused

like a goat or milk cow or something. I understand her and all black women over here. Women like to be dominated, love being strong-armed, need an overseer to supplement their weakness. So how could she really understand my feelings on self-determination. **For this reason we should never allow women to express any opinions on the subject, but just to sit, listen to us, and attempt to understand. It is for them to obey and aid us, not to attempt to think** (1970:125, emphasis mine).

It becomes clear to Michele Wallace that she was not at all included in the phrase "the Black man" that most women perhaps want to believe is inclusive:

It took me three years to fully understand that Stokely [Carmichael] was serious when he said my position in the movement was "prone," three years to understand that the countless speeches that all began "the Black man..." did not include me ... and as I pieced together the ideal that was being presented for me to emulate, I discovered my newfound freedoms being stripped from me, one after another. No I wasn't to wear makeup but yes I had to wear long skirts that I could barely walk in. No I wasn't to go to the beauty parlor but yes I was to spend hours controlling my hair. No I wasn't to flirt with or take shit off white men but yes I was to sleep with and take unending shit off Black men. No I wasn't to watch television or read *Vogue* or *Ladies' Home Journal* but yes I should keep my mouth shut. I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies (Wallace 1982:6).

Similarly, while Mamphela Ramphele argues that "it could be argued that black women within BC ranks benefited as people, because they also became more liberated as individuals" (1991:217), it was also true that "[w]omen were important as wives, mothers, girlfriends and sisters, in fighting a common struggle against a common enemy - namely, white racism. Scant regard was given to their position as individuals in their own right" (1991:216). She further argues that women who "made themselves available for leadership and other meaningful roles, ... [and] made important contributions ... were accepted fully as colleagues by men" (1991:216); yet they were only a small number of the women involved in the Movement. While she argues that there certainly were benefits to the BCM, such as Black women being able to "fall in love with their dark complexions, kinky hair, bulging hips and particular dress style" (1991:217), the fact remained that there was a "sexism which reared its head at many levels" (1991:219). While she does not state women's marginalisation in the terms that Wallace does, it is clear that that same type of marginalising occurred in the BCM.

Indeed, in entering the international context of Black nationalism, Black

Consciousness activists entered into and adopted the discourse of that context. The BCM directly reflects the influence of these nationalist thinkers and leaders abroad in the male leaders, documenters, and proponents of Black Consciousness here, as is obvious in the following examples in addition to those from the *SASO Newsletter* provided earlier, which employ the very same masculinist language.

Steve Biko writes in *I Write What I Like*:

To a large extent the evil-doers have succeeded in producing at the output end of their machine a kind of black man who is man only in form. This is the extent to which the process of dehumanisation has advanced

**Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men .... But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood** (1978:28, emphasis mine).

Black people - real black people - are those who can manage to hold their heads high in defiance rather than willingly surrender their souls to the **white man**.

Briefly defined therefore, Black Consciousness is in essence the realisation by **the black man** of the need to rally together with **his brothers** around the cause of their operations (1978:49, emphasis mine).

There is no doubt that discrimination against the **Black man** the world over fetches its origin from the exploitative attitude of the **white man** (1978:49, emphasis mine).

And in *Black Review* 1975-1976:

By the end of 1975 Black Consciousness had become an undeniable force in **the Black man's quest** for an identity and in his need for a national consciousness (1977:107, emphasis mine).

While Mtutuzeli Matshoba in "Call Me Not A Man" states:

By dodging, lying, resisting where it is possible, bolting when I'm already cornered, parting with invaluable money, sometimes calling my sisters into the game to get amorous with my captors, allowing myself to be slapped on the mouth in front of my womenfolk and getting sworn at with my mother's private parts, **that component of me which is man has died countless times in one lifetime. Only a shell of me remains to tell you of the other man's plight, which is in fact my own. For what is suffered by another man in view of my eyes is suffered also by me. The grief he knows is a grief that I know.** Out of the same bitter cup do we drink. To the same chain-gang do we belong (Matshoba 1979:18, emphasis mine).

bell hooks points out that Black nationalism fails "to offer an inclusive complex understanding of black identity, one that is not sexist, homophobic, patriarchal, or supportive of capitalism, that render it suspect and politically problematic" (1995:246).

The problem of the masculinist discourse of the BCM specifically and of Black nationalist discourses in general is not just that it silences and erases Black women, but that it re-creates and imitates the very structures it seeks to dissolve: "The nationalist insistence that black identity must be 'saved' by our refusal to embrace various epistemologies (ways of knowing), cultures, etc., is not a movement away from Eurocentric binary structure. It reinscribes the dynamics of binary thinking" (hooks 1995:247).

Unfortunately, because of the timing of the BCM and its entrance into a global revolution with its own discourse, the Movement has been argued as a wholly imported ideology. C.R.D. Halisi argues that:

Biko was confident of his ability to interpret the relevance of other intellectual traditions, and in particular the recurring themes, questions, and debates unique to struggles for racial liberation. This led some of his critics to charge him with being contaminated with foreign ideas and to dismiss the **BCM as a parody of America's Black Power Movement** (in Pityana et al 1991:104, emphasis mine).

Michael Chapman appears to be one such critic who views the BCM as a parody of the U.S. Black Power Movement when he argues in his introduction to *Soweto Poetry* that :

The South African black youth was left without political organizations after the bannings at the time of Sharpeville, particularly of the African National Congress and the Pan African Congress. As a result, there has since been a tendency to seek an ideological framework in Afro-American Black Power politics of the sixties .... Black Consciousness, **taking its impetus from the Black Power Movement and its extension in the Afro-American Black Arts movement**, was tellingly disseminated before their bannings or exile by student spokesmen such as Steve Biko, Nyameko Pityana and Onkgopotse Tiro (1982:17, emphasis mine).

Perhaps this may not be as blatant or strong a charge as that in the 1975-76 issue of *Black Review* that the "State maintained its basic stand that the Black Consciousness philosophy was an imported idea taken from the United States Black Power" (1977:107), but while it is true that there was an "ideological framework" available for BC activists in the model of the U.S. Black Power Movements, it is also true that the very same framework was available in Négritude or other struggles throughout Africa. To argue that BC took its *impetus* from that model denies the power of the circumstances in South Africa that gave rise to Black Consciousness, and it also denies Black South Africans consciousness and



awareness of the severely oppressive circumstances created and maintained by apartheid. What was an opportunity to learn from those who have gone before was twisted into an imported ideology. Such attacks on people's integrity forces, presses, them into a corner in which they must defend the autonomy and value of their political struggles. In other words, they are forced into a binarism of either imported or not, in which relationship there is no room for solidarity across geographical borders because acknowledging that kind of solidarity is translated into an importation of ideas.

This seems to be the corner into which Mafika Gwala feels pressed when he argues that the influence of the Black Power Movement was minimal. For example, he states that:

English, especially in the youth stage, is spoken with lots of American and Afrikaans slang. So where I had what sounded American in my poems it is not because of the influence of Black American literature, as Nadine Gordimer so readily concluded in her book, *The Black Interpreters*. It's just that American movies, American comics and paperbacks, American advertisements came down on us in typical imperialist fashion. And we discovered ourselves to be a part of it all, for better or for worse (in Chapman 1982:174).

Quite interestingly, he rejects the possibility of Black American influence but accepts the influence of American imperialism, which suggests that he correctly perceives Black America to be something different from America. Presumably, in the latter part of his statement, America actually means "white America". But yet, it is unclear why, as a proponent of Black Consciousness, he would acquiesce to being influenced by American imperialism but would adamantly reject the notion of being influenced by those who were similarly struggling against the very same white supremacy at the base of American imperialism. Ironically, Black Americans have been subjected to American imperialism in much the same way Gwala is arguing Black South Africans "discovered [themselves] to be a part of it all, for better or for worse." Thus instead of criticising Nadine Gordimer for what he appears to interpret as her ready willingness to suggest that Black South Africans could not have possibly thought of Black Consciousness on their own, he quite puzzlingly rejects the solidarity with Black Americans in a struggle against the domination of white supremacy. It seems as pointless an endeavour to argue that the BCM was minimally

influenced by the U.S. Black Power Movement as it is to argue that the BCM was wholly influenced by it, particularly when neither is what I am trying to establish and when BC activists have written that they were indeed reading the works of leaders around the world. I am arguing that the Black Power Movement was only part of the international Black nationalist context from which BC activists could draw. Indeed I am arguing, as Dr. Ramphele does, that:

[a] distinction needs to be drawn between self-reliance and insulating oneself from important sources of information and resources for the successful implementation of whatever task one has at hand. The latter tendency ultimately leads to atrophy because of the lack of any cross-fertilisation of ideas and strategies. Self-reliant development does not preclude creative and enriching interaction with other people in the same or allied fields of interest. BC activists of the 1970s opted for creative interaction with a wide spectrum of people nationally and internationally (Ramphele 1991a:170).

It appears that those who perpetuate and benefit from systems of domination need to believe that notions of liberation engaged in by those dominated must have been imported, much like many Black men need to believe that Black women have been brainwashed by feminism, an issue for white women only, or much like Southern white slave owners in the U.S. who needed to believe that their "Nigras was happy" before the Northerners came down and started "agitatin". Such denial is an effort to de-humanise, to justify the need to treat a person or group of people as less than human, as deserving of unequal treatment. To refuse someone consciousness is to refuse that person's agency. Indeed that line of thinking is oppressive in its refusal and subsequent inability to acknowledge the other's consciousness, which oppressors do by subjecting another person to an objectifying gaze. To deny consciousness is to press someone into a space, to define for someone else the boundaries of his or her life, stripping that person of a sense of agency.

The question that motivates this examination then is one of how Black women impacted by the Black Consciousness Movement chose agency in a movement that pressed them into a particular space of silence via a discourse, perhaps indicative of a collective consciousness, that denied their existence and rendered them absent. How do Black

women choose agency over madness when exposed to a language whose cultural history contains periods like the "Renaissance, a time, ironically, when men boasted of being enlightened and women were still being burned as witches all over Europe" (Walker 1996:40)? Madness becomes a central concept in analysing the relationship of Black women to consciousness and language in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchal society that systematically assaults the consciousness of those it dominates largely through "linguistic colonization" (Penelope 1990:xvi).

The first chapter is an analysis of the history and role of hysteria in the European context, at the end of which I conclude that women's hysteria is driven by the neurotic obsessiveness of domination, or rather by the hysteria of masculinity. The second chapter works from the basis of the theoretical exploration in the first chapter, but shifts from a focus on the systems that dominate women and how, to a focus on the ways in which Black women see oppression and how they choose agency when the price is madness. Consequently, I have chosen the autobiographical as the form in which I seek their own representations of their choices. Most notable in the analysis is the overwhelming lack of autobiographies written by Black women who were activists in the Black Consciousness Movement. To date, Dr. Mamphela Ramphele is the only one who has chosen to write an autobiography. Yet, I also look at two other Black South African women, Ellen Kuzwayo and Bessie Head, whose autobiographies offer vivid and ironic moments of the pervasiveness of the masculinist discourse of the BCM. Additionally, the second chapter is significant in its examination of the impact of such masculinist discourse on the shaping of the history of the BCM. The autobiographical works of these women become both testimony and vehicle for inserting themselves into a history from which they have been absented and would perhaps remain so if they did not offer their own testimonies. James Cone argues that:

The focus on "manhood" was one of the main reasons for the low visibility of black women in civil rights and black nationalist organizations, including Martin's and Malcolm's. In an Albany "jailhouse diary," for example, Martin recorded that "Ralph

Abernathy and I were arrested again in Albany at 3:15 p.m. .... We were accompanied by Dr. W. G. Anderson, Slater King, the Rev. Ben Gay and seven ladies." Identities, with names and titles, were given to the men, but the women were rendered invisible even though their number was larger (1991:277).

The white supremacist capitalist patriarchal structure of South African societies creates the context for a similar occurrence here<sup>12</sup>.

Dr. Ramphela has been the most prolific contributor to keeping women activists from obscurity and invisibility. Black South African women's autobiographies serve as historical documents that testify to their active involvement in the struggle for liberation. And, Black women must continue to write, otherwise the oppressiveness of masculinity will press us right out of the annals of history. For, as bell hooks argues: "As long as sexist thinking informs public discourse around the role of black intellectuals, as long as black men dominate the discussion, the voices of black female intellectuals will not be heard" (1995:237).

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### *Endnotes*

1. Throughout this thesis, I use the terms "masculine" and "masculinist" as meaning oppressive. Therefore, it is redundant to speak of an oppressive masculinity. My point is that masculinity as practice, conception, and ideology is, at base, necessarily oppressive.
2. The activist goal of the BCM was community development. But, it is also important to remember that there was a lack of resolution regarding the role of armed struggle within the BCM. In their article, "Towards the Armed Struggle" in *Bounds of Possibility*, Keith Mokoape, Thenjiwe Mtintso, and Welile Nhlapo argue that while the "cornerstone of Biko's thinking was that black people must look inwardly at themselves, reflect on their history, examine the reasons for past failures, and ask themselves, in the circumstances of the time, to use his phrase: 'What makes the black man fail to tick?'" there was "a strong recognition of the need for armed struggle" "within informal sessions" (in Pityana et al 1991:138) in the Movement. They argue that "[o]ne tendency which developed strongly ... involved a shift to the ANC", because the organisation would not "accept for military training individuals who were not ANC members" (1991:139). They conclude that "[b]y the 1980s, it is our estimate that more than 60 per cent of active members of BC organisations were to be found in the ranks of the ANC or MK" (1991:142).
3. For a more detailed account of the various community development programmes of the BCM, refer to Ramphela's article.
4. When I speak of issues pertaining to circumstances that include me, I intentionally use the first person. I do not pretend for this thesis to be an objective, scientific study. The

issues that I examine pertain directly to my life and my being in this world. Therefore, I, like "womanist science", speak "unapologetically and authoritatively in the first person" and resist "the excessive canonization that would suggest that science and scholarship are essentially exclusive or objective pursuits" (Phillips & McCaskill 1995:1011). Within the matrix of white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy, national borders are not necessarily of primary significance because "it is not solely a question of physical geography, but location or subject position in their wider senses in terms of race, class, gender, sexuality, access, education and so on" (Boyce Davies 1994:20-21). Thus for me to attempt to represent in an objective manner issues that pertain to me directly, and to pretend that I am unaffected by such systems of domination would not only be dishonest, but would work to recreate in my work the very same systems of representation (of speaking for, of perpetrating an objective gaze) that I am critiquing.

5. Mafika Gwala conversely argues that "[w]e use English as a language medium. Our identity does not rest within the English cultural context, though we are conscious of the English sub-culture" (in Chapman 1982:171). Despite his position, I argue a direct link between the masculinity dominant in the English language (and embedded in English culture) and the masculinity dominant in the discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement. Therefore, while his identity may not rest within the English cultural context in terms of the way BC authors struggled to create new literary forms and transform the language, the fact remains that BC was articulated in a way that its involvement in the English cultural context becomes painfully obvious and pertinent to the examination of the erasure of Black women as valuable contributors, who were as worthy of freedom from the oppression of apartheid and injustice as was the "Black man".

6. For a more in-depth discussion of this point, see my article, "To Be [Feminist] or Not to Be? That is Not *The* Question: A Womanist Critique" in *InterAction 6*. See also Desiree Lewis' article, "Feminisms in South Africa" (1993) in *Women's Studies International Forum*, 16 (5):535:42.

7. While class is an indisputable factor in the lives of women of colour who live in white supremacist capitalist patriarchies, it is not a determining factor in a womanist space, largely because race and gender are marked on the body itself, while class is a form of oppression that cuts across race and gender, rendering it a different kind of oppression of no lesser or greater importance. Womanism is a space delineated on the basis of being simultaneously subjected to racist and sexist domination. Therefore, a poor white woman operates outside of a womanist space because race and gender oppression are not a part of her experiential realm. This does *not* presuppose that poor white women have nothing in common with women of colour. Womanism operates on two basic assumptions in relation to class: 1) that many Black women are unemployed, working class, or adversely affected by capitalism precisely because of their race and gender, and 2) that many Black women who are middle or upper class do not escape the evils of patriarchy and white supremacy because of their class. It is important also to understand that a womanist space does not presuppose unity on any level across boundaries, but suspects commonality of experience. In other words, there is not the presumption that women of colour do not experience class differences that act as divisions. And yet, there also is not the assumption that there will necessarily be divisions on the basis of class differences.

8. Race and gender domination differ across geographical boundaries in *how* they are manifested, but the fact of their existence across geographical lines renders a psychic space that transcends physical space both possible and necessary.

9. While I tend to use "language" and "discourse" interchangeably throughout the thesis, I

useful analysis of the relationship between the two:

As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered (Butler 1990:145).

Accordingly, my point here is that the masculinist language of the Black Consciousness Movement evolved into a discourse common to Black nationalism across geographical boundaries, and that discourse converges with the discourse of masculinity/patriarchal conceptions of gender that pervade the English language.

10. Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* is classified as a novel. Yet, "by her own admission an autobiographical work, and therefore pivotal in any examination of her life and work" (MacKenzie 1989:4). The fact that it is considered a novel and not an autobiography, does not diminish the autobiographical content and nature of the novel, "which is most conspicuously drawn from the life experiences of the author" (MacKenzie 1989:14):

It would seem that the reconciliation of opposites, whether psychologically or in social relationships, is something she [Head] contemplates with difficulty. Such a conflation of writer and implied author is, of course, risky, more often than not mistaken, and perhaps intrusive. But Head has repeatedly stressed that *A Question of Power* is autobiographical: "a private philosophical journey to the sources of evil" ... ; "my only true autobiographical work" (Gardner & Scott 1986:12).

Its status as a novel is insignificant to my analysis. It remains central to my analysis because of the framework it provides for madness, and the support it offers for my position that madness is a mental state induced by being/feeling pressed into a tiny space by some form(s) of domination. Further, my reason for utilising the autobiographical -- to use a format in which these women speak, and are not spoken for -- is equally applicable to *A Question of Power*. Thus I refer to the novel as an "autobiographical work" throughout the thesis.

11. This point is further supported by a quote from Dr. Ramphela at the beginning of Chapter One. But "he" and "she" do not exist in either the Nguni or Sotho languages. For example, in Sesotho, the third person subject is indicated by "o" and in isiZulu by "u", and gender is understood from the context.

12. Refer back to the argument I presented earlier in the introduction with a quote from Asha Moodley on page 10.

## Chapter One

\* \* \*

### *The Madness of Masculinity: An Exploration into Male Hysteria*

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... be/ become, have/ not have sex (organ), phallic/ non-phallic, penis/ clitoris or else penis/ vagina, plus/ minus, clearly representable/ dark continent, logos/ silence or idle chatter, desire for the mother/ desire to be the mother, etc. All these are interpretative modalities of the female function rigorously postulated by the pursuit of a certain game for which she will always find herself signed up without having begun to play. Set between - at least - two, or two half, men. A hinge bending according to their exchanges. A reserve supply of negativity sustaining the articulation of their moves, or refusals to move, in a partly fictional progress toward the mastery of power. Off-stage, off-side, beyond representation, beyond selfhood.

-Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*

What connection could there be between the history of a European language and the voice of Black women in the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa? There is a rather crucial relationship between the English language and the absence of Black women from the male-centred discourse of the BCM. As discussed in the introduction, English was the language in which the philosophy and activities of the BCM were articulated and documented, and it was from the English representations of BC ideology that women were excluded, denied existence, which Dr. Ramphele points out in a recent interview:

The language didn't have space for women, partly because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens. It's very interesting actually that African languages don't have this very strong sexist exclusive notions. That does not mean that African cultures are not sexist. It simply is an interesting observation, because, in a way, to say "Black man you are on your own," which was the rallying cry of the Black Consciousness Movement, was in a sense a translation of what, if an African language had been used, would not have had the connotations. It would not have said, for example in Xhosa, "Ndodemnyama ume wedwa." It would have said, "Mnt'omnyama," which is much more inclusive. It is interesting how metaphors borrowed from one language get translated or transformed by the language that you use to express yourself in a way that would not have had the same impact if you had actually said it in a different language environment (Ramphele 1996<sup>1</sup>: 133).

It is significant that English is a foreign language of a Western colonial power, a white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist society (or rather, white supremacist capitalist

patriarchy, to use bell hooks' phrase) that believed in its own superiority. As Ramphela points out, there is an intricate, if not inextricable, link between language and culture: the minute one agrees to enter into a foreign language, one enters into the history of the culture the language represents.

In examining the reasons for the absence of Black women from the masculinist English discourse of the BCM, it becomes necessary to examine the ways in which the English language (and culture) has worked to situate, press, restrict, and mould women, and the reasons why the language is binding, forcing people to live "in" it, within its constraints. Julia Penelope argues that:

English does more than hinder and hurt women: it proscribes the boundaries of the lives we might imagine and will ourselves to live. The many ways the language obstructs our ability to conceive of ourselves as agents in the world or as capable of rebelling against male tyranny go beyond mere hurt to emotional, intellectual, and physical immobility that keeps us men's easy prey. We find it difficult to think outside of the categorical grooves made by men, and, even as we learn the courage and the necessity of speaking for ourselves, our thoughts still conform to the structures that perpetuate male dominance. Even as we demand the right to live and breathe independent of men and their dependence on us, our ideas slip into the grooves worn by repetition .... [M]ost women [and men] remain unconscious of how English forces us to repeat the structures that deny us stature and agency in the world and of the role of language in our oppression. Thinking about how we think is hard (Penelope 1990:xiv).

Continuing along the same lines of Penelope's argument, it is important to examine language because it does shape how we conceptualise the world, ourselves, our agency or lack of it. For:

[w]hat we say is not an insignificant 'issue.' Neither are the words we hear .... *Nigger, fatty, wop, kike, spic, cripp, porker, birdlegs, queer* carve emotional wounds that don't heal. The point of those insults is clear: anyone who isn't white, anglo-saxon, thin, and stereotypically attractive is 'fair game' for the stupid and vicious (1990:xiii, author's emphasis).

Thus the absence of women in the discourse of the BCM is not trivial, but instead pivotal in understanding the role of Black women in the Movement, the representations of the Movement now, the legacies of who the heroes are, and how Black women constructed themselves in this foreign environment of a Blackman-centred English.

English situates not only white women, but all women subjected to white



supremacist capitalist patriarchy in English speaking societies. Consequently, I will examine in this chapter the ways in which those systems of domination work together to attempt to silence women and render them absent from the English language, with the aim of constructing a framework that enables me to look at how Black South African women perceive themselves to be affected by that absenting. To examine the history of the spaces constructed for women in the English language is to examine a system based on binarisms generated by a male psychoneurotic fear.

I use the term "woman" to signify "a concrete product of biology, society, and culture" (LaPin 1995:158). But, I will also use it to signify a space constructed for real women within which not all real women as concrete products of biology, society and culture live, that is a construction prevalent to and affecting our lives nonetheless. I also use it to simultaneously signify precisely that which exists within the woman subjected to domination, that which cannot be constructed because it is unrepresentable, unspeakable.

Both the unrepresentable and the invisible are different in their sameness. Both are woman before, underneath, beyond -- not in the sense of extension of, but in the sense that Levinas uses it, as "the break-up of presence, and, consequently, of synchronizable time" (1983:110) -- outside of femininity, of "woman" as the point of conceptual possibility. Following Derrida's argument, "woman" is a non-concept: if it is the site of possible concepts, it cannot itself be a concept.

Every concept is necessarily and essentially inscribed in a chain or a system, within which it refers to another and to other concepts by the systematic play of differences. Such a play, then - [woman] - is no longer simply a concept, but the possibility of conceptuality, of the conceptual system and process in general (Derrida 1973:140).

Yet, woman is not a word or a concept in a sense different from what Derrida would argue: if, according to Saussurean logic, words/concepts are understood negatively, i.e. in relation to one another, then to argue that something is *not* a concept or word, is a double negative, which mathematically creates a positive. I am not arguing, as Derrida does, that woman, like difference, "can refer to the whole complex of its meanings at once ... not only

when it is supported by a language or interpretive context (like any signification), but it already does so somehow of itself. Or at least it does so more easily by itself than does any other word" (1973:137). By asserting "woman" as a positive entity, I am suggesting that there exists "woman" as she is understood not in relation to man, not as his other, but in and of herself, which remains unrepresentable under white supremacist capitalist patriarchies because of the inability, and refusal to see, or conceive of woman outside of the space it constructs for her. I am not arguing for an essentialised or universal woman, but "woman" used to identify that which it cannot identify, that which for each woman is different, unnameable, invisible, truly unrepresentable.

### *Reading Absence*

In "The Psychological Mechanism of Forgetfulness," Freud argues that the origins of psychoneuroses exist even in "normal people": "the psychological symptoms of the psychoneuroses -- hysteria, obsessions and paranoia -- owe their origin" to the same pathological processes that lead to forgetfulness (Freud 1898b:295). Since forgetfulness is a process of losing control of language, of losing the ability to recall words because the unconscious overpowers the conscious in a process he calls repression, Freud argues that "[a]mong the various factors ... which contribute to a failure in recollection or a loss of memory, the part played by repression must not be overlooked; and it can be demonstrated not only in neurotics but ... in normal people as well" (1898b:295). Normality, then, appears to be characterised by the potential for psychoneurosis, and that exaggerated loss of control is what characterises psychoneuroses. In his case study on the Rat Man, Freud examines the Rat Man's obsession for understanding (1925 [1909d]:190). Because there is a trace of the neurotic in normal people, or rather because the origins of psychoneuroses exist in normal people, all of whom are then capable of being neurotic, there is a trace of the Rat Man in all of us: there is an obsession for understanding in all of us. Perhaps in "normal people" the obsession is to control, to understand, to be conscious, i.e. self-conscious, to keep the unconscious at bay. Neither the hysteric nor the obsessive subject is

able to hold the reins of the unconscious. The loss of consciousness is the loss of control.

In Freud's ability to read the patient is his ability to see what the patient does not see. Freud reads into the patient's absent understanding. As only one of many examples, Freud inserts a word into the Rat Man's account of a story for clarification. When the Rat Man is relating one of the commands he experiences: "No, it's not so simple as that. You must go and kill the old woman" (1925 [1909d]:187), Freud suggests in the footnote that the word "first" must be inserted after "must" in order to understand the sense of the command. Freud has shown the value of learning how to read the absences that engulf presence in order to make sense of presence, which is a useful tool despite his own inability to read himself and the absence of woman in his work.

Yet, the process of recognising absence is the very same point Althusser makes when he states that "we must abandon the mirror myths of immediate vision and reading, and conceive knowledge as a production" (1970[1968]:24). If "immediate vision" is a myth, then one must learn how to see, which explains his statement that knowledge is a production, a process. And, if abandoning those myths is a part of that process, then one must learn how to read absence. Presence is understood only in relation to absence, such that absence as a defining function, is more than non-presence. To refer to absence as non-presence suggests that absence is understood only by its lack, which privileges presence over absence. Such privileging is problematic because without absence, presence is indiscernable, i.e. "non-vision is therefore ... a form of vision and hence has a necessary relationship with vision" (Althusser 1970[1968]:21). Absence, therefore, is *not* non-presence, but a very form of presence, of sight. Just as Freud has shown with the Rat Man, what is not said is as much a tool in reading as what is said.

The neurotic male appears incapable of seeing his own neurosis. He cannot see that which is invisible to him, that which is absent from his vision. My goal, then, is to read what he cannot see and name his neurosis as neurotic.

*Hysteria**"Hysteria"*

As she laughed I was aware of becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth were only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill. I was drawn in by short gasps, inhaled at each momentary recovery, lost finally in the dark caverns of her throat, bruised by the ripple of unseen muscles. An elderly waiter with trembling hands was hurriedly spreading a pink and white checked cloth over the rusty green iron table, saying: 'If the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden, if the lady and gentleman wish to take their tea in the garden...' I decided that if the shaking of her breasts could be stopped, some of the fragments of the afternoon might be collected, and I concentrated my attention with careful subtlety to this end.

-T.S. Eliot

Conquering her, they've made haste to depart from her borders to get out of sight, out of body. The way man has of getting out of himself and into her whom he takes not for the other but for his own, deprives him, he knows, of his own bodily territory. One can understand how man, confusing himself with his penis and rushing in for the attack, might feel resentment and fear of being 'taken' by the woman, of being lost in her, absorbed or alone.

-Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa"

Shoshana Felman begins her article, "Woman and Madness: the Critical Phallacy", with the question: "Is it by chance that hysteria (significantly derived, as is well known, from the Greek word for 'uterus') was originally conceived as an exclusively *female* complaint, as the lot and *prerogative* of women?" (1975:132, author's emphasis). Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that the "patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization, into the very word, *author*, with which writer, deity, and *pater familias* are identified" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:4, author's emphasis). The hysteric is typically a woman, who loses control of language, who is unable to remain within the Symbolic, unable to connect the signifier to its signified, as Hélène Cixous argues: "[w]ithout him she'd remain in a state of distressing and distressed undifferentiation, unbordered, unorganized, 'unpoliced' by the phallus ... incoherent, chaotic, and embedded in the Imaginary in her ignorance of the Law of the Signifier" (1981:484). That undifferentiated, unbordered, unorganised state outside of the Law of the Signifier is hysteria. Julia

Penelope insightfully states, "What men deem unspeakable must also be unthinkable" (1990:16). The realm of hysteria to which woman is banished is outside of *his* symbolic, and therefore unrepresentable for him. For her to speak is for her to transgress those boundaries designating her space of silence and to be banished to the irretrievable realm of hysteria. If man sees himself as the progenitor of language, and hysteria is the loss of control over language, then it is not by chance that woman has been slotted as the hysteric, as the madwoman.

Is that to suggest that man cannot be hysterical, or that woman cannot control language? Indeed, his very fear is that there is every possibility of him being hysterical and her controlling language. That fear is what has motivated him to work indefatigably to enforce and maintain his position of privilege, to ensure that she will work as hard to enforce upon herself such regulations and repressions, to the point that it becomes difficult to detect the source of oppression or even to prove that oppressive forces exist. For, as Sandra Lee Bartky points out, "disciplinary power that inscribes femininity in the female body is everywhere and it is nowhere; the disciplinarian is everyone and yet no one in particular" (1988:74), including woman herself<sup>2</sup>.

According to Derrida's conception of binarisms, Western languages are founded on the hierarchical relationships of oppositions. Hélène Cixous argues that all binarisms relate to *the* couple, Man/Woman, on the basis of their relationship as active/passive, in which the privileged term corresponds to man, and the inferior term to woman. Accordingly, activity and aggression are decidedly masculine, which results in the repression of female activity/aggression such that if she asserts herself, she transgresses and infringes "laws of both social custom and constitution" (Irigaray 1985[1974]:20); she enters taboo territory.

For it is equally necessary to assign her a role in the function of the inside/outside pairing that turns up here in some way to intersect and sustain the active/passive opposition. As far as the "inside" goes - her own, of course - woman will thus tend to be destructive, since nothing authorizes her aggression or activity toward another "inside" or toward the outside .... **If activity or aggression there be in woman, it will hence be**

given the connotation of "masculine" or "destructive" (Irigaray 1985[1974]:20, emphasis mine).

The logic of binary oppositions "is, in fact, a subtle mechanism of hierarchisation which assures" the privileging of the "positive pole" and the "repressive subordination of all 'negativity'" (Felman 1975:135). If in Western patriarchal societies, the world is viewed in terms of polarities, and man is in a position of privilege, woman *must be* inferior. If she is not, then she would be the privileged and he the inferior. Consequently, if he does not conceive only her as hysterical, then it becomes possible for him to be so.

There is an absence of woman in Western philosophy and language, or rather phallogocentrism, that signifies her presence. Conversely, there is an overbearing presence of man and his conception and subsequent representation of woman, which I will call femininity. Why is she absent, invisible? Why, as many of the French feminists argue, is her sexuality/desire unrepresentable? And, what does that have to do with representation in language? There appears to be an oppressive male fear at the basis of Western philosophy (that shows itself in language) that drives man to force woman into positions of other and unrepresentable. The logic of binarisms is only part of the motivation. There still remains a question of what generates his fear, or rather, his binary logic. Cixous argues that:

By virtue of affirming the primacy of the phallus and of bringing it into play, phallogocentric ideology has claimed more than one victim .... [M]an has been handed that grotesque and scarcely enviable destiny ... of being reduced to a single idol with clay balls. And consumed, as Freud and his followers note, by a **fear of being a woman!** (1989[1976]:254, emphasis mine).

He is afraid, as Eliot writes, of "becoming involved in her laughter and being part of it, until her teeth [are] only accidental stars with a talent for squad-drill" (emphasis mine). The fear is not so much of *being a woman*, but of *being consumed by* and integrated into her, swallowed up by her lips and lost, rendering him powerless, small, and invisible. He is afraid of becoming lost in her, of no longer being able to be the master, father, controller of language and identity. He is indeed afraid of becoming absorbed into her and having to

occupy the inferior position he has created and called feminine. He is afraid of the possibility of becoming hysterical, the state that occupies the female body by virtue of his inscription on her.

Luce Irigaray critiques Freud's assertion that the female identity is based on the little girl's discovery that she is castrated. According to Freud, the little girl's subject formation and sexuality are determined negatively, dependent upon what she does not have, rather than what she does have. Indeed, Cixous appropriately asks, "[w]hat's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire" (1976:262). Perhaps his fear of being swallowed by her, lost in her is overshadowed by a fear of her absence, which would signify his inability to appropriate, represent, and construct her in his image. Her invisibility gives rise to his discomfort because it allows her to deconstruct that gross femininity he has constructed, which Irigaray argues is:

a "nothing to be seen," a something not subject to the rule of visibility or of specula(riza)tion, might yet have some reality, would indeed be intolerable to man. It would serve to threaten the theory and practice of representation by which he aims to sublimate, or avoid the ban on, masturbation. Auto-erotism has been permitted, authorized, encouraged insofar as it is deferred, exhibited in sublated ways. All this is endangered ... by a *nothing* - that is, a nothing the same, identical, identifiable. By a fault, a flaw, a lack, an absence, outside the system of representations and autorepresentations. Which are man's. By a *hole* in men's signifying economy. A nothing that might cause the ultimate destruction, the splintering, the break in their systems of "presence," of "re-presentation" and "representation." **A nothing threatening the process of production, reproduction, mastery, and profitability, of meaning, dominated by the phallus** - that *master signifier* whose law of functioning erases, rejects, denies the surging up, the resurgence, the recall of a *heterogeneity* capable of reworking the principle of its authority. That authority is minted in concepts, representations and formalizations of language which prescribe, even today, the prevailing theory and practice of "castration" (1985[1974]:50, bold emphasis mine).

He decides to repress female desire, aggression/activity, sexuality because the absence of passive femininity translates into the destruction, erasure of himself as a privileged, masculine subject. Her absence threatens his conception of order and truth in the world.

In fact, looking at Foucault's genealogy of sexuality in *The History of Sexuality* (v. 1), we find the "hysterization" of women's bodies happening at the same time as the "psychiatrization of sex" -- at the beginning of the eighteenth century, during which

period "normative" sexual behavior is distinguished from "anomalies":

Four figures emerged from this preoccupation with sex, which mounted throughout the nineteenth century - four privileged objects of knowledge, which were also targets and anchorage points for the ventures of knowledge: the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult (Foucault 1978[1976:105]<sup>3</sup>).

Normative behavior, versus the four "privileged objects of knowledge", is based on the procreative, biological functions of man and woman in heterosexual sex, which once accepted require specific roles of masculine activity and feminine passivity in sex as determined by reproductive organs:

[M]an is *the* procreator, that sexual *production-reproduction* is referable to his "activity" alone, to his "pro-ject" alone. Woman is nothing but the receptacle that passively receives his product, even if sometimes by the display of her passively aimed instincts, she has pleaded, facilitated, even demanded that it be placed within her. Matrix - womb, earth, factory, bank - to which the seed capital is entrusted so that it may germinate, produce, grow fruitful, without woman being able to lay claim to either capital or interest **since she has only submitted "passively" to reproduction** (Irigaray 1985[1974]:18, bold emphasis mine).

As passive, she becomes the object of his aggression. Penelope argues:

Any object restricted to male use and ownership is a 'tool,' whether it's language, a hammer, or a penis. Men speak of their penises as tools, and describe their activity in heterosexual intercourse as "screwing," "nailing," "banging," "reaming," "drilling," and "hammering" .... The essential distinction of PUD [patriarchal universe of discourse] is the one which identifies the FUCKER and the FUCKEE (Penelope 1990:44).

Because of her supposed passivity, she is the object of sex, the thing being screwed, nailed, banged, reamed, drilled, hammered, fucked. Sex is used to determine power relationships, to determine her as powerless, as an object to be acted upon.

Connected to the notion that biological roles in heterosexual sex determine particular characteristics, such as woman as *naturally* passive, is the idea that sex need only take place within the confines of marriage, within which space unspoken rules governing sexuality could be administered and easily regulated. Consequently, gendered identities, i.e. what constitutes "masculine" and what constitutes "feminine", evolve out of these biologically determined roles and are crucial to the existence and maintenance of patriarchy. As Toril Moi notes:

Patriarchy has developed a whole series of 'feminine' characteristics (sweetness,



modesty, subservience, humility, etc.) .... It is after all patriarchy, not feminism, which has always believed in a true female/feminine nature: the biologism and essentialism which lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarchs (Moi 1989:123-24).

Patriarchy depends on an unquestioning belief in the naturalness of the direct correlation between femininity and women and masculinity and men. Arthur Brittan and Mary Maynard argue that:

masculinity as an ideology becomes generalized in society. Those who are objectified, who are dominated, come to see the world through male eyes. The male epistemological stance becomes everybody's stance. Women and other objectified groups define their realities through the perspective of their oppressors. **Hence, the naturalization of 'race' and gender is collectively sedimented in the consciousness of oppressors and oppressed"** (1984:204, emphasis mine).

Consequently, the masculine view of the symbiosis between gendered identities and biologically determined roles becomes "common sense", which is:

what everybody knows - everybody knows that women are emotional .... It [common sense] is absorbed and internalized without ambiguity; **it is not questioned because it appears to be natural knowledge. In other words, what everybody knows about 'race' and gender is perceived and experienced as having the quality of inevitability and universality. Racist and sexist beliefs are given the same status as scientific knowledge** (Brittan & Maynard 1984:182, emphasis mine).

Based on the notion of her "natural" feminine characteristics, she is taught and expected to be sexually restrained, while simultaneously learning to believe that this is her natural state.

There are significant gender differences in gesture, posture, movement, and general bodily comportment: women are far more restricted than men in their manner of movement and in their spatiality. In her classic paper on the subject, Iris Young observes that a space seems to surround women in imagination that they are hesitant to move beyond: this manifests itself both in a reluctance to reach, stretch, and extend the body to meet resistances of matter in motion - as in sport or in the performance of physical tasks - and in a typically constricted posture and general style of movement. Woman's space is not a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized but an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined. **The "loose woman" violates these norms: her looseness is manifest not only in her morals, but in her manner of speech and quite literally in the free and easy way she moves** (Bartky 1988: 66, emphasis mine).

Presumably, the "loose woman" is also loose with her sexuality, which she allows to be unrestrained, unrestricted. A woman with a loose sexuality must be one who allows her sexuality "a field in which her bodily intentionality can be freely realized", and does not

compartmentalise her sexuality into "an enclosure in which she feels herself positioned and by which she is confined." Bartky goes on to argue that "[f]eminine movement, gesture, and posture must exhibit not only constriction, but grace and a certain eroticism restrained by modesty .... [T]oo much display is taboo" (1988:67-68).

During the 18th century when sexual behaviours were being categorised as either normal or deviant, it would seem that feminine aggression was deemed not only oxymoronic, but abnormal, whorish, unladylike, and unnatural. Interestingly, Foucault makes two points that would appear to lead to such a conclusion: 1) the hysterization of women's bodies was "a threefold process whereby the feminine body was analyzed ... as being thoroughly saturated with sexuality" (1978[1976:104]); and 2) in the nineteenth century, the regulation of sexuality became an issue of "state management of marriages, births, and life expectancies; sex and its fertility had to be administered" (1978[1976]:118). What Foucault does not state explicitly is that the combination of a sexually saturated female body and the implementation of state regulations on sexuality and fertility, would have likely resulted specifically in harsher regulations and suppression of the female body and sexuality: if fertility needed to be controlled, then that goal would be achieved by targeting the problem of the oversexed female body and regulating *her* body. It seems to be of consequence that this control of female sexuality coincides with the hysteric's lapse into silence. Female desire is suppressed, erased, pushed out of the realm of the normal and acceptable, and becomes unrepresentable, outside of language.

If Freudian psychoanalysis posits the beginning of the formation of the female subject as recognition of lack, of castration, then woman's identity and entrance into language is based on what she has not, not on what she has, and she accepts her role as passive, conquered, receptive/receptacle. What Freud rather conveniently does not consider is a male recognition of his lack of a vagina and womb, a lack of infrastructure for giving birth. Consequently, he fails to theorise a male fear of inadequacy, inability to produce life. As Irigaray points out:

But, it seems all the same, that one might be able to interpret the fact of being deprived of a womb as the most intolerable deprivation of man, since his contribution to gestation - his function with regard to the origin of reproduction - hence asserted as less than evident, is open to doubt (1985[1974]:23).

This failure is revealing if one considers some creation myths, particularly the dominant Christian mythology, in which the worship figure is created only from the woman. For example, Mary conceives and reproduces without the help of mortal man. Though impregnated by a spirit designated as male, as the Father, her pregnancy goes against the laws of nature, that indeed it takes both a man and woman to create a child. In this situation, it takes only a woman, without the assistance, "activity" of a mortal man, and there is no comparable male counterpart. His fantasy then becomes the desire to be a sole progenitor, and he compensates for his lack, for his inability to reproduce, by claiming authorship, which proves his envy. In fact, Zeus "birthing" the goddess of wisdom, Athena, only serves to reinforce the notion that Western man is so consumed by a desire to control knowledge that he is willing to appropriate that which he lacks in order to achieve that goal. But, in order to appropriate it, he must realise that he lacks it. As Gilbert and Gubar assert:

In patriarchal Western culture, therefore, the text's author is a father, a progenitor, a procreator, an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. More, his pen's power, like his penis's power, is not just the ability to generate life but the power to create a posterity to which he lays claim .... In this respect, the pen is truly mightier than its phallic counterpart the sword, and in patriarchy more resonantly sexual (1979:6).

Gilbert and Gubar further argue that, "[i]f male sexuality is integrally associated with the assertive presence of literary power, female sexuality is associated with the absence of such power .... [W]omen exist only to be acted on by men, both as literary and as sensual objects" (1979:8).

By positing woman as hysterical, man has created a space to maintain his position of control and mask his fear in her forced subservience and passivity. She is silenced while he continually asserts himself as the father, author, controller of language. His recognition of his lack reveals his envy of her, and the necessity of rendering her impotent and silent

in order to feel some sense of control.

*Absence of Woman /  
Overbearing Presence of Man & Femininity*

Saussure argues that language is arbitrary, in the sense that a given signifier attached to its signified is unmotivated. The signifier itself has no intrinsic value, "no natural connection with the signified" (1959:69). Thus language is a representation of thought. Wittgenstein similarly argues in *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* that:

Language disguises the thought; so that from the external form of the clothes one cannot infer the form of the thought they clothe, because the external form of the clothes is constructed with quite another object than to let the form of the body be recognized (1922:63).

The paradox is that while language makes thoughts communicable, thought remains unrepresentable. Language as a mirror, picture, system of signs can only represent concepts and objects. It is an imitation of the real, and therefore not the real. Thus the task of philosophy is never-ending, since as Wittgenstein argues, "[t]he object of philosophy is the logical clarification of thoughts" (1922:77). Yet, it is not only the thoughts that need to be clarified, but the language that clothes them. There is always in language that which remains unrepresentable, or rather, there is that unrepresentable which always lies outside of, behind, or underneath language. The unrepresentable exists in its absence, its silence. As Wittgenstein says in this early work, "[w]hat can be said at all can be said clearly; and whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent" (1922:27).

Though women participate in language, as users of signs, woman occupies a curious space in language often as object, to which she may not necessarily consent.

Cixous argues that:

as soon as we exist, we are born into language and language speaks (to) us, dictates its law, a law of death: it lays down its familial model, lays down its conjugal model, and even at the moment of uttering a sentence, admitting a notion of "being," a question of being, an ontology, we are already seized by a certain kind of masculine desire, the desire that mobilizes philosophical discourse (Cixous 1976:482).

What Cixous describes is an inescapable onslaught of masculine desire that is embedded in

Western phallogocentrism. It is a system in which woman must enter whether she consents or not. Her only other option appears to be the silence of hysteria in which the arbitrary, yet understood, union of signifier and signified becomes disjointed, useless, and unrecognisable. For, even when she is present in language, she is present as object or sign; when she is present, she is absent. Actually, it is not her that is present, but the constructed re-*presentation* of femininity that is present; thus *she* is necessarily absent.

The discrepancy, the tension, and the constant slippage between Woman as representation, as the object and the very condition of representation, and, on the other hand, women as historical beings, subjects of "real relations," are motivated and sustained by a logical contradiction in our culture and an irreconcilable one: women are both inside and outside gender, **at once within and without representation** (deLauretis 1987:10, emphasis mine).

Since language clothes and hides the concept or object it represents, and since the sign "woman" has no intrinsic value, *she* remains unrepresentable, shrouded in femininity:

'Femininity' is a cultural construct: one isn't born a woman, one becomes one, as Simone de Beauvoir puts it. Seen in this perspective, patriarchal oppression consists of imposing certain social standards of femininity on all biological women, in order precisely to make us believe that the chosen standards for 'femininity' are *natural*. Thus a woman who refuses to conform can be labelled both *unfeminine* and *unnatural* (Moi 1989:122-23).

The clothes become confining, and woman is imprisoned in this femininity in which she has been inscribed:

Authored by a male God and by a godlike male, killed into a "perfect" image of herself, the woman writer's self-contemplation may be said to have begun with a searching glance into the mirror of the male-inscribed literary text. There she would see at first only those external lineaments fixed on her like a mask to conceal her dreadful and bloody link to nature. But looking long enough, looking hard enough, she would see ... an enraged prisoner: herself (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:15).

Under patriarchy, femininity is natural, but Gilbert and Gubar argue that femininity hides and separates woman from nature, that femininity is what is unnatural. The reflection she sees of herself in the male text is the same image she will see of herself in language. This passage also suggests that there is a woman underneath, before, prior to, outside of femininity, outside of language. There is a woman underneath the mask: "the woman writer acknowledges with pain, confusion, and anger that what she sees in the mirror is

usually a male construct, the 'pure gold baby' of male brains, a glittering and wholly artificial child" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:17-18). Though Gilbert and Gubar are speaking specifically of the woman writer, there is no difference between the positioning of woman on the basis of her vocation. In an interview with Adeola James, Ama Ata Aidoo argues that the literary world is merely a microcosm in terms of women:

Well, the question of the woman writers' voice being muted has to do with the position of women in society generally. Women writers are just receiving the writer's version of the general neglect and disregard that woman [sic] in the larger society receive. I want to make that very clear. It is not unique (James 1990:11).

Thus the implications of texts, of language on woman who is not writer, are the same because all are subjected to language, "born into language" as Cixous says, over which man sees himself in control as author, creator. He establishes his control over language in much the same way he maintains his control over woman: "Men fuck language, just as they fuck women, impregnating<sup>4</sup> words with meaning, stuffing it with their ideas" (Penelope 1990:32). What she sees in the mirror is a male construct; what he sees in her reflection in the mirror is himself. For,

[t]he desire for the same, for the self-identical, the self (as) same, ... and ... for the auto ... the homo ... the male, dominates the representational economy. 'Sexual difference' is a derivation of the problematic of sameness, it is, now and forever, determined within the project, the projection, the sphere of representation, of the same (Irigaray 1985[1974]:26-7).

He must ensure his reflection of himself in her, so he accuses her of "penis-envy":

For the "penis-envy" alleged against woman is ... a remedy for man's fear of losing one. If she envies it, then he must have it. If she envies what he has, then it must be valuable .... The very standard of all value. Woman's fetishization of the male organ must indeed be an indispensable support of its price on the sexual market (Irigaray 1985[1974]:53).

His very existence is affirmed and grounded in his belief that she wants what he has, that she is sorry that she is "lacking". His narcissism therefore creates her anti-narcissicism:

Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies to mobilize their immense strength against themselves, to be the executants of their virile needs. They have made for women an antinarcissism! A narcissism which loves itself only to be loved for what women haven't got! (Cixous 1975:248)

Her absence from language relegates her to a position of speechlessness, so that

even when she is participating in the linguistic system, she is silent because she is not speaking the same language. The "same" language is spoken from different vantage points, from different positions within a particular structure of power, in which his use of language is privileged over hers:

We may "speak" English, but men rarely feel that what we say is worth listening to. Certainly, our words are forgotten as quickly as they're uttered or written down, historical ephemera buried under men's debris. Indeed, the language itself is hostile to women's perceptions and thinking; an entire subset of the verbs that describe 'talk' characterizes women's speech as insignificant and worthless: *chatter, prattle, gossip, nag, wheedle, babble, chat, prate, natter, gush, cackle, blather, dither, blab, blabber, gibber, jabber*. Used as nouns, these verbs are often modified by *hare-brained* or *empty-headed*, as though to emphasize the disregard they indicate (Penelope 1990:xiv, author's emphasis).

Subsequently, what Lyotard calls "différend" occurs:

I would like to call *différend* the case wherein the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes on that account a victim. If the addresser, the addressee, and the meaning of the testimony are neutralized, everything takes place as if there were no injury. A case of *différend* between two parties takes place when the "regulation" of the conflict which opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the injustice suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom (Lyotard 1984:5).

Victimised by patriarchal oppression, she no longer speaks the same language.

Communication between the two is potentially deferred and different, differant. Yet, this suggests that woman speaks another language from man. Indeed, she speaks the same language, remaining within the same systematic chain of signs, but because her position within that system is different from his on the basis of her gender, she is essentially speaking a different language. He is speaking a language that reflects his narcissicism and empowers him. She also speaks a language that reflects his narcissicism and empowers him; it does not empower her because they speak from different positions.

Further signifying a différend are the notions that différend is impossible to prove.

For, how does one prove the oppressiveness of a power that emanates at once from nowhere and from everywhere? As Bartky argues:

[T]he disciplinary power that is increasingly charged with the production of a properly embodied femininity is dispersed and anonymous; ... it is ... invested in everyone and in no one in particular. This disciplinary power is peculiarly modern: it does not rely upon violent or public sanctions, nor does it seek to restrain the freedom of the female body to

move from place to place. For all that, its invasion of the body is well-nigh total: the female body enters "a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it" (Bartky 1988:80).

That silence generated from the inability to prove and articulate a single locus of oppressive power is necessarily the place of the victim of a *différend*: "The *différend* is signaled by this impossibility to prove. He who lodges a complaint is heard, but he who is a victim, and who is perhaps the same, is reduced to silence" (Lyotard 1984:6).

Lyotard's point, however, is problematic. His notion of a *différend* rather nobly counters Habermas' assertion that there is a universal consent to and expectation of conversation proceeding logically which precedes all communicative acts, by suggesting that Habermas is also assuming that each individual involved in the communicative act is speaking from the same vantage point, is speaking the same idiom. He raises the point that not all are able to enter into the communicative speech act if the idiom of one is not signified by the dominant idiom of the other. Ironically, however, Lyotard produces a *différend* by using "he" as a universal term. If the victim is woman, then she is further silenced by the assumption that "he" signifies all. That assumption emphasises the narcissicism of man: he assumes all to be represented and encompassed in the masculine. He refuses to acknowledge her presence, in fact silences and effectively kills her, still wanting her to smile, much like the duke in Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess".<sup>5</sup>

Lyotard further argues that it is necessary to maintain that which is unrepresentable while searching for a communicable idiom for the victim of a *différend*.

The *différend* is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put in phrases cannot yet be. This state includes silence, which is a negative phrase, but it also calls upon phrases which are in principle possible .... What is at stake in a literature, in a philosophy, in a politics perhaps, is to bear witness to *différends* by finding new idioms for them (1984:7, emphasis mine).

Though it is unclear who Lyotard is suggesting should be responsible for finding the new idiom, it is important that he conceptualises the possibility of a new idiom being found. If that unrepresentable does not exist, there is totalitarianism, because the space of the unrepresentable is a site of perpetual possibility. One important possibility is that of



subverting the represented and silenced.

Unrepresentable and invisible is woman naked, devoid of the clothing of language's male narcissism, "a nakedness starker than any other" (Levinas 1983:109). Because of the presence of masculine narcissism donned in femininity, woman is always deferred. Finally, "[i]t is thus, in all exactitude, unrealizable to *describe the being of woman*" (Irigaray 1985[1974]:21).

### *The Other of Reason*

"The subject of feminism is en-gendered there. That is to say, elsewhere".

-Theresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*

Man sees himself as the creator of language, in which he envisions her as having no place, rendering her effectively absent, silent, invisible. Thus,

precisely because a woman is denied the autonomy -- the subjectivity -- that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture (whose emblem might well be the pen) but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysterious and intransigent Otherness which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:19).

Subsequently, in his fear of losing control of language, he creates her as an other of himself, a mirror, an extension of the same where he can control her: "in the patriarchal or male-centred frame of mind, the female form is a projection of the male's, its complementary opposite, its extrapolation -- Adam's rib, so to speak. So that, even when it is located in the woman's body ... sexuality is perceived as an attribute or a property of the male" (de Lauretis 1987:14). He casts her into the classical representation as emotional, close to nature, "sensitive - intuitive - dreamy, etc." (Cixous 1975:248), as the other of Reason.

'The other of reason is nature, the human body, fantasy, desire, the feelings -- or better: all this insofar as reason has not been able to appropriate it.' Thus, it is directly the vital forces of a split-off and repressed subjective nature, it is the sorts of phenomena rediscovered by Romanticism -- dreams, fantasies, madness, orgiastic excitement, ecstasy -- it is the aesthetic, body-centered experiences of a decentered subjectivity that function as the placeholders for the other of reason (Habermas 1987:306, emphasis mine).

The "other of Reason" is effectively all that had been classically identified as feminine, which is reflected in the British Romantic rejection of the classical ideas, and the Romantics as a group of male poets who tried to recover the imagination, the spirit, the fantastic, the feminine. The implication of occupying the position of the other of reason is that "the other of reason remains the mirror image of reason in power" (Habermas 1987:309, emphasis mine). She is reflected in his image. In summarising Luce Irigaray's argument, Felman states:

Theoretically subordinated to the concept of masculinity, the woman is viewed by the man as *his* opposite, that is to say, as *his* other, the negative of the positive, and not, in her own right, different, other, otherness itself (1975:135-6).

Woman as the other of reason, as *his* other, follows directly from the notion that the domain of reason and logic was to be and could only be occupied and mastered by man: they were not women's places. It is an ideology to which too many women have actively subscribed.

The question then becomes why she perpetrates upon herself her own victimisation. Perhaps "it could be argued that women assent to a male domination because they have been convinced (conditioned) that it is in their best interests to do so" (Brittan & Maynard 1984:219). It is in their best interests to do so because compliance with self-victimisation is safe, and it is rewarded. Dissent brings punishment, as Alice Walker argues:

[P]eople who have been made to depend on the approval of the powerful grow afraid of criticizing themselves, because the powerful may hear, amplify their distress, and hold them up to censure and ridicule. The powerful can also manipulate people, and pass horrible, repressive laws (Walker 1996:33).

Sandra Lee Bartky argues that women enforce such disciplines on themselves because under the eye of surveillance, one begins to police oneself:

In the regime of institutionalized heterosexuality, woman must make herself "object and prey" for the man: it is for him that these eyes are limpid pools, this cheek baby-smooth. In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous

patriarchal Other (1988:72).

Woman polices and regulates her own body, and is convinced that she cannot master language (and there is no such thing as to "mistress" language) partially because she understands that her boundaries of femininity do not intersect at any point with those of reason: "[t]here is no pure reason that might don linguistic clothing on in the second place. Reason is by its very nature incarnated in contexts of communicative action and in structures of the lifeworld" (Habermas 1987:322). If woman is the other of reason, and reason is necessarily inherent in language, and man is the master of language as it reflects himself, woman can only be incapable of "mastering" language since its premise is reason, which is not her place. Further how can she be master of a system in which she is a slave, or of something from which she is absented? She is therefore forced into silence, into a *différend*, into a state of hysteria as punishment, because the only other option (as he apparently sees the world in terms of polarities) is for him to be hysterical, to lose control, to be consumed by her. Indeed, she haunts him.

It is *not* her fear of castration that promotes her deference as Freud asserts:

The discovery that she is castrated is a turning-point in a girl's growth. Three possible lines of development start from it: one leads to sexual inhibition or to neurosis, the second to change of character in the sense of a masculinity complex, the third, finally, to normal femininity (quoted in Roszak 1969:22, emphasis mine).

It is instead his fear of castration that he sees in her, his reflection, his extension that motivates him to obsessively control, for his castration would result in her absence, invisibility, which I have already argued is subversive in its threat to masculinity. He fears castrating her: desperately needing her, yet desperately needing to control her. Western man seems to be neurotic in his obsession for control, for understanding, which directly corresponds to the phallogentrism of Western philosophy as the constant search for the clarification of language, which must always necessarily be obscure and different from the concept or object it represents by virtue of its existence as representation.

In the same way that Hamlet's father is hidden behind the visor, woman is hidden

behind the guise of man. The paradox, however, is that the visor, the male form, is the very thing that makes the invisible visible, very much in the same way that language clothes concepts. The invisible -- that which lies outside of, beneath, under, beyond -- always remains unrepresentable, in the sense that it is always truly invisible. It *is* representable, however, in the sense that that is exactly the purpose of the visor, of languages, i.e. to represent, to re-present that which is always already absent. The picture, the mirror, the signifier are all representations of the real, imitations, simulacra in a sense, that can never be the real, but can only re-present the real. Thus, "woman, as subject of desire or of signification, is unrepresentable; or, better, that in the phallic order of patriarchal culture and in its theory, woman is unrepresentable except as representation" (deLauretis 1987:20).

### *The Great Mother*

Asserting man as a *controller* of language, however, may still appear to be slightly problematic in light of Saussure's assertion that language "exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community," and that it is not "complete in any speaker [since] it exists perfectly only within a collectivity" (1922:14), but he further clarifies that "language furnishes the best proof that a law accepted by a community is a thing that is tolerated and *not a rule to which all freely consent*" (71, emphasis mine). Choice for woman becomes consent to her own victimisation or silence if she does not consent to being subjected to language. To say that she has a real choice in the matter is the same as suggesting that the labourer offers services of his/her own free will. To do so is to ignore the fact that there are systems of power in place that force the body to subject itself. It appears that like ideology, as Catherine Belsey argues, the oppressiveness of language "has no creators ... since it exists necessarily" (1985:46).

Perhaps it is as dangerous for feminists to argue that woman is always already alienated from language from the minute she enters the signifying system as it is for patriarchs to assert that women are incapable of reason, logic, rationality. If we accept

Saussure's assertion that the sign is arbitrary, i.e. unmotivated, then there is no reason to believe that language is inherently oppressive. There is nothing inherent in actual men and women that merits the privileging of the sign "man" over the sign "woman". Indeed Cixous argues patriarchy is constructed, unnatural, something to be taught and learned:

And so, supposedly, she misses the great lack, so that without man she would be indefinite, indefinable, non-sexed, unable to recognize herself: outside the Symbolic. But fortunately there is man: he who comes ... Prince Charming. And it's man who teaches woman (because man is always the master as well), who teaches her to be aware of lack, to be aware of absence, aware of death. It's man who will finally order woman, "set her to rights," by teaching her that without man she could "misrecognize." He will teach her the Law of the Father (Cixous 1981:483).

At some point, however, must not the feminist theorist who posits the argument of woman as absent from language be cognisant of the fact that that very argument feeds into the stereotype of woman as incapable of mastering language, i.e., reason, logic, etc.? Or is that precisely the point? Is it that woman is indeed incapable of such, or that in the walling up of "woman" in the private domain and forbiddance from the public, she has been taught that she is incapable of logic, reason, and subsequently language, because she is too emotional, too whimsical, etc.? There is a distance *created/constructed* between woman and language, a gap. She does not see her reflection in language, and she is, in that way, absent from language; "[s]he is there not recognizing: the sphinx doesn't recognize herself, she it is who poses questions" (Cixous 1981:486).

Shoshana Felman criticises Irigaray in light of these very same questions, arguing that in positing the construction of identity as a conception of "a solely *masculine* sameness, apprehended as *male* self-presence and consciousness-to-itself" (1975:135-6), Irigaray does not create a space for herself, as woman, to speak, in which she can theorise. In response, Felman asks, "Is she speaking as a woman, or *in place of* the (silent) woman, *for* the woman, *in the name of* the woman?" (1975:137). She then goes on to suggest that if indeed Irigaray is speaking for, then she is merely enmeshing herself in the age old problematic of representation for which Irigaray critiques Western logocentrism (phallogocentrism):

Is it not a precise repetition of the oppressive gesture of *representation*, by means of which, throughout the history of logos, man has reduced the woman to the status of a silent and subordinate object, to something inherently *spoken for*? To "speak in the name of," to "speak *for*", could thus mean, once again, to appropriate and to silence (Felman 1975:137).

It is a nasty bind patriarchy has created: if we attempt to articulate the marginalisation and silence of women under patriarchy, we *appear* to enter into the very same problematic of representation, stepping into the position of agents who silence other women. How do we extricate ourselves? The answer certainly is not in remaining silent and not attempting to see and articulate systems of domination and how they work. But, the question still remains as to whether we actually do enter into the *same* problematic of representation. What Felman does not articulate is that in the masculine economy of representation, the goal is to veil and hide oppression and its agents. In feminist and womanist spaces, the goal is to unmask oppression and its agents. That difference is significant because it is the same difference, for example, as that between Black women as represented (or rather, not represented and instead absented) in history that has generally been written by white men, and Black women as represented in their own autobiographies. The autobiography is also a representation, but it is a format in which the self re-presents herself, *voices* herself. Indeed the very act of autobiography is a refusal to and rejection of silence. She is the agent of her representation, and in the space of the autobiography, she can create an image different from the representation imposed on her by an objectifying gaze and created on the very basis of her silence. In her representation of herself, she has the *opportunity* to try to find her way out of a *différend* and create her own idiom that does not silence her. This is not to argue that the sole purpose of Black women's autobiography is to unmask oppression and its agents (or even to argue that there is any one purpose), and unveil a coherent and unproblematic presence, but to argue that the autobiography is *a site of possibility* for voice, for coming to voice and finding a new idiom. Thus, for her to represent herself in her own voice is antithetical to the representations that silenced her and ignored her contributions to history. That Irigaray does not theorise a space for her

own voice is unfortunate, but does not necessarily enmesh her in the *same* problematic of representation she seeks to dismantle. Irigaray's work has been an important starting point, but theorists like her must be careful not to conceive of patriarchy or men as all-powerful gods. An argument that woman is beyond selfhood under patriarchy enters woman into a discourse of victimhood in which she feels powerless, gives up before she even begins, becomes unable to conceptualise herself as an agent and simultaneously gives up her power to that which she perceives as all-powerful. Hence the need for a continued process of questioning and subsequent growth, of maintaining the unrepresentable that is a site of possibility.

There is yet another problematic: despite acknowledging that he creates feminine space to satiate his own narcissicism, the question of why he is afraid still remains unanswered. Even if his fears are accounted for and examined, the *source* of his fear is not identified. If femininity is natural and woman is naturally passive and incapable of reason, logic, language, why should he go through such great pains to ensure her position there? If woman is overly susceptible to madness, to hysteria, and he *is* the progenitor of language, and subsequently reason, why is he obsessive in his understanding of language? Because he recognises that femininity is indeed a construct and not at all natural. Indeed, Erich Neumann argues in his work, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archtype* that:

The positive femininity of the womb appears as a mouth; that is why "lips" are attributed to the female genitals, and on the basis of this positive symbolic equation **the mouth, as "upper womb," is the birthplace of the breath and the word, the Logos.** Similarly, the destructive side of the Feminine, the destructive and deathly womb, appears most frequently in the archetypal form of a mouth bristling with teeth .... This motif of the *vagina dentata* is most distinct in the mythology of the North American Indians. In the mythology of other Indian tribes a meat-eating fish inhabits the vagina of the Terrible Mother; the hero is the man who overcomes the Terrible Mother, breaks the teeth out of her vagina, and so makes her into a woman (Neumann 1963:168, bold emphasis mine).

The fears represented in Native American mythology are reflected in Western man. It appears that he is not only acutely aware of his lack of a womb, his inability to birth, but also of his distance from language:

But, the very fact that one can metaphorise the mouth as a womb, the Word as the child

of female power, implies that women need not experience any ontological alienation from the idea of language as we know it. If the female does have a crucial linguistic role, moreover, isn't it also possible that the primordial self/other couple from whom we learn the couplings, doublings, splittings of 'hierarchy' is the couple called 'mother/child' rather than the one called 'man/woman'? If this is so, isn't it also possible that verbal signification arises not from a confrontation with the Law of the Father but from a consciousness of the lure and the lore of the mother? (Gilbert and Gubar 1989[1985]: 97-98).

Western man, then, recognises that he, not woman, is alienated from language. The "meat-eating fish," the teeth in the mouth of the laughing woman that threatens to draw and inhale this hysterical man into the "dark caverns of her throat" ("Hysteria"), which signify an abyss from which he will be unable to extract and recollect himself, also signify that there is indeed a fear, not just of being absorbed and lost, but of being viciously and voraciously devoured, destroyed, decapitated, *killed*. To be consumed by nothingness, absence, darkness, is both a fear and a motivation. A motivation to conquer, control, tame, colonise.

In this proliferating desire of the same, death will be the only representative of an outside, of a heterogeneity, of an other: woman will assume the function of representing death (of sex/organ), castration, and man will be as sure as far as possible of achieving mastery, subjugation, by triumphing over the anguish (of death) through intercourse, by sustaining sexual pleasure despite, or thanks to, the horror of closeness to that absence of sex/penis (Irigaray 1985[1974]:27).

Woman is the combination of: 1) the mouth as a metaphorical womb, 2) the birthplace of logos and woman as his other, and 3) an extension of himself, mirror image of himself. As such, she represents for man (through his own construction) the phallus he fears may be castrated. If she is castrated, he loses his position to Truth, for, as de Lauretis argues: "Woman's skepticism, Nietzsche suggests, comes from her disregard for truth. Truth does not concern her. Therefore, paradoxically, woman becomes the symbol of Truth, of that which constantly eludes man and must be won, which lures and resists, mocks and seduces, and will not be captured" (1987:31). There is the additional concern that if she is castrated, ironically, he will have no way of reassuring himself that his penis is still there: "the 'penis-envy' attributed to woman soothes the anguish man feels about the coherence of his narcissistic construction and reassures him against what he calls



castration anxiety" (Irigaray 1985[1974]:51).

Therefore, she is not the victim of penis-envy; he is. "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:3). Apparently, the pen is the vehicle for the "outpouring of ... aesthetic energy" (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:7). The pen translates the spoken word to the written. If he sees her as an extension of himself and recognises the mouth as a metaphorical womb, he envies her. The pen is envy: penis envy<sup>6</sup>. He is insecure in his inability to reproduce, generate. If he recognises woman as originator of language, he is completely powerless; he is the hysteric.

\* \* \* \*

### *Spectres of Marx*

Derrida's argument in a chapter of *Specters of Marx* is rooted in a quotation from the first chapter of Marx's *Capital*, vol. 1:

[A]s soon as [the table] emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness. It not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other commodities, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will (Marx 1867:163-64).

In light of the fact that Derrida's analysis is embedded in *Capital*, it is interesting to go back to earlier works of Marx, particularly the 1844 Manuscripts, which Marx never published. In those early works, women are rather conspicuously absent from Marx's conception of the labourer and his critique of capitalism.

In reading excerpts of Marx's works from the 1844 Manuscripts through *Capital*, the description of the labourer as "he" becomes glaringly apparent. Indeed, the labourer is male. Of course, one may be inclined to overlook the absence of women as a mere convention of nineteenth century men to use the masculine as a universal term for "mankind", yet, as already argued, to do so effectively kills woman. The absence of woman from Marx's theory of the labourer in his critique of capitalism is rather curious in light of two particular facts: 1) during the industrial revolution, there were growing numbers of women in the proletariat entering the workforce, and 2) when Marx does refer to women,

he mentions them as "communal property" or when he is discussing the "natural division" of labour. Looking at the absence of woman in Marx's theories provides a point of entry into the peculiar position woman occupies in capitalism and how that system, much like systems of masculinity and femininity, work to imprison and bind both women and men. After looking at how and why English, a representation of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, is used to objectify woman and to deny her agency, it becomes necessary to examine what role capitalism, part of that alien environment to which Black South African women were subjected, plays in rendering her absent from the discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement.

In *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory*, Lise Vogel discusses the treatment of women in the early works of Marx and Engels: "[i]n their early writings, Marx and Engels evidence a commitment to the importance of the problem of the oppression of women" (1983:54). Yet, Vogel says this after a chapter of quoting *Engels* on women. Marx seems to be starkly absent from her chapter, with the exception of his discussion of prostitution, relating it to the larger problem of prostitution by the capitalist of the labourer in general:

Marx himself follows this tradition when, in a footnote in the "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," he reduces prostitution to a rhetorical metaphor of exploitation. "Prostitution is only a *specific* expression of the *general* prostitution of the *laborer*, and since it is a relationship in which falls not the prostitute alone, but also the one who prostitutes -- and the latter's abomination is still greater -- the capitalist, etc., also comes under this head" (quoting Marx from *Collected Works*) (Vogel 1983:44).

Throughout the chapter, in which Vogel notes Marx glossing over an issue that specifically affected women, she quotes Engels addressing the issue of denigration of women at length. Though some of Engels' notions are certainly outdated now because they "reflect conventional nineteenth-century assumptions" (Vogel 1983:46), the fact is that he shows a much stronger interest in the plight of women than does Marx<sup>7</sup>:

Women sometimes became the main earner in working-class households, and this epitomized, to Engels, the apparent tendency toward family dissolution. Confused as well as struck by this trend, he experienced it as a "complete reversal of normal social

relationships," and therefore a betrayal of the "normal structure of the family." In shocked tones he observes that "very often the fact that a married woman is working does not lead to the complete disruption of the home but to a reversal of the **normal division of labour within the family**. The wife is the breadwinner while her husband stays at home to look after the children and do the cleaning and cooking" .... Such a situation" **deprives the husband of his manhood and the wife of all womanly qualities** .... It is a state of affairs shameful and degrading to the human attributes of the sexes" (Vogel quoting Engels from *The Condition of the Working Class in England*) (46, emphasis mine).

What is of particular significance in this passage is the reference to a "normal division of labour" within the family. Whenever either Marx or Engels discusses woman, it appears to be within the context of the family. For example: In *The German Ideology*:

The first form of ownership is tribal ... ownership. It corresponds to the undeveloped stage of production, at which a people lives by hunting and fishing, by the rearing of beasts or, in the highest state, agriculture. In the latter case it presupposes a great mass of uncultivated stretches of land. The division of labour is at this stage still very elementary and is confined to a further extension of **the natural division of labour existing in the family** (Marx and Engels 1845-46:44, emphasis mine).

Both make reference to labour division in the family being based upon the "natural" division of labour, which refers back to the notion I discussed earlier of biological determinism, slotting man as active and woman as passive on the basis of reproductive organs in a heterosexual context (the penis that actively penetrates the receptive vagina/womb). What is also interesting about this particular passage is the first sentence regarding the first form of ownership. It is an issue that resurfaces:

Marx's view of the natural character of divisions of labor by sex and age leads him to the corollary that servile relations naturally constitute the internal organization of all families in class society. Along with most of his contemporaries, including Engels, he assumes that a single male adult, the husband and father of subordinate family members, ordinarily and naturally heads the family household in all societies. Hence, he observes, "in private property of every type the slavery of the members of the family at least is always implicit since they are made use of and exploited by the head of the family." As early as "The German Ideology," Marx and Engels had used the notion of "latent slavery" to represent internal relations in the family .... Indeed it is clear that "latent slavery" in the family, though still very crude, is the first form of property ... The image of slavery in these statements flows, in part, from assumptions about the natural character of the division of labor within the family, and tends to present a picture of women and children as passive victims rather than historical actors (quoted from *Collected Works*) (Vogel 1983:61).

The idea of latent slavery is dependent upon the opposition of active/passive, the head (of

the family) as active and the rest of the family as passive, yielding to, and perhaps encouraging, the ownership by the head. Yet, the idea of a will to passivity, a willing complicity on the part of the subjected suggests a desire to be subjected, enslaved. Marx speaks of "the family", i.e., the wife/mother and children, but of course the children are really not at issue here since children often do not have a choice as beings subjugated to the wills of their parents. Therefore, the one particularly impacted by this notion of latent slavery is the woman, the wife. The implications of this theory of the "natural division of labour" are such that the result is as unnatural as can be. Yet, it is ironic, in light of his belief in a natural division of labour apparently grounded in the sexual act, that Marx does not consider in his account of the mistreated and alienated worker, the notion of woman as labourer (in the sense of child-bearer) becoming an anonymous worker within the patriarchal system:

[H]e will mark the product of copulation with *his own name*. Thereby woman, whose intervention in the work of engendering the child can hardly be questioned, becomes the anonymous worker, the machine in the service of a master-proprietor who will put his trademark upon the finished product (Irigaray 1985[1974]:23, author's emphasis).

The discursive relationship Irigaray outlines can be translated into the relationship between the labourer and the non-producer: the non-producer owns and enjoys the benefits of the finished product, while the labourer remains anonymous and alienated from his product.

The issue of Marx placing lesser value on issues that specifically concern and affect women, even if they are embedded in the family, again arises:

In the extracts of *Ancient Society* he made in the "Ethnological Notebooks," Marx revised Morgan's sequence of presentation...[of] evolution of the arts of subsistence, and then ... the parallel development of government, family, and property...[Marx] reduced by half the discussion of the arts of subsistence, and by a third the section on the family. At the same time, he extended, proportionately, the space given by Morgan to the consideration of property and government. In sum, Marx's notes rearrange Morgan's material as follows: arts of subsistence (reduced); family (reduced); property (expanded); government (slightly expanded) (Vogel 1983:81, emphasis mine).

In the same manner he blanketed the growing phenomenon of female prostitution under the larger schematic of prostitution of the labourer by the capitalist, Marx sacrificed space

on the family (which was where issues concerning women would most likely appear) for an expanded discussion of property and government. Engels, however, kept a larger portion of *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* focused on the family. This appears to be yet further indication that Engels was more aware of the inequalities regarding women than was Marx.

It appears that Marx was quite blind to the spectres of woman that haunted him, and it becomes extremely clear that a feminist reading of the absence of woman in his theory of the labourer and the commodity in capitalism is urgently necessary.

*Visible Invisibles*

Spectres, Derrida argues, are not visible until they are made visible. They can only be seen, like the ghost of Hamlet's father, *behind* a mask, a visor. But, according to Derrida, the spectre is exactly what Marx wants to be finished with:

One must have the ghost's hide and to do that, one must have it. To have it, one must see it, situate it, identify it. One must possess it without letting oneself be possessed by it, without being possessed of it .... But ... [i]s not to possess a specter to be possessed by it, possessed period? To capture it, is that not to be captivated by it? (Derrida 1994:132).

The spectres are the "visible invisibles". They cannot be seen until we know what we are looking for, and we cannot look for them without first learning how to see, as Freud did to an extent. We cannot see the ghost until we are first conscious of looking for the ghost. Therefore, we do not know we are haunted until we first know we are looking for that which haunts and then know *how* to look for it. Then Derrida is right in suggesting that Marx cannot be blamed. It appears that Marx was not looking for, was not chasing, his own ghosts, the spectres of his own consciousness, but was instead concerned with the collective Spirit, the spectre that haunts the commodity, the man.

Marx equated the commodity to man, arguing that the "worker produces capital and capital produces him, which means that he produces himself; man as a *worker*, as a *commodity*, is the product of this entire cycle" (Marx 1844:335). Yet, the labourer, who produces himself, and the non-producer, who exists because of the labourer, are both

men. Women's place in society under a "natural division of labour", subjected to latent slavery in the family is as an object, whether as the object of the labourer's alienated labour, or as the property of the non-producer. Though woman is not actually, physically an object, in the sense of a chair, a pencil, or phone, the potential for woman to be an object is as open as the literal object's potential to come to life and assert itself, its exchange-value in the arena of competition. If, as Catherine Belsey argues, "[s]ubjectivity ... is linguistically and discursively constructed and displaced across the range of discourses in which the concrete individual participates" (1989:48), then it can certainly be the case that woman can be discursively constituted as object: "[t]he discourse of the sciences of man constructs the object as female and the female as object" (de Lauretis 1987:45).

Further, she is, undoubtedly, objectified by the male gaze for whom she perpetrates upon herself the disciplines of femininity<sup>8</sup>. Even Marx acknowledges woman as a form of property, object, something to be owned, in his assertion that latent slavery is implicit in the family in every society and that tribal ownership is the first form of ownership. Indeed, Elizabeth Cowie in her article "Woman As Sign", argues that it is woman's role as object of exchange within exogamous kinship structures that determines her as a sign:

Within kinship structures of exchange, however, woman must be a sign, and not a symbol, inasmuch as "woman" does not represent any notion intrinsic to what is communicated in exchange, that is, to what Levi-Strauss argues as a "social contract." The term "woman" is part of a semiotic chain of communication with a sender and a receiver and an object of exchange - woman - which is the sign produced, signifying the "social contract" (1990:125).

Though the exchange of women between kinship structures may appear to be an outdated form of exchange in Western societies today, existing only in "primitive" cultures, the common practice in traditional Christian weddings is for the father to "give away" the bride to the groom, so that she passes from the hands of one man to another. Moreover, according to Marx, not only is family the first form of ownership, but marriage is the bestial form of private property because of its exclusivity. In all fairness to Marx, the basis of bourgeois marriage *is* ownership in the guise of monogamy. Similarly, Toni Morrison

argues throughout her novels and in interviews that possessive love destroys because the beloved is the coveted, the thing possessed, the object of love. She states, "[y]ou own somebody and then you begin to want them there all the time, which is a community law. Marriage, faithfulness, fidelity; the beloved belongs to one person and can't be shared with other people" (Stepo 1976:477). The beloved becomes exclusive private property. Morrison's conception, however, suggests that the object of possession, the beloved, the coveted, is not necessarily female. Marx specifies the ownership of women, when he argues that in communism, "women become *communal* and *common* property" (Marx 1844:346). The suggestion is that with the advent of communism, women will no longer be the property of individual men, no longer *private* property, but they will be property still. As property, by definition, they must belong to someone other than themselves. That someone must be male, be he the owner of the object or the labourer alienated from his product. So it seems that Marx's conception of communism does not change the dynamics of women's position in society as objects.

Therefore, woman as object can be read in Marx's critique of capitalist bourgeois society as a commodity. Or rather, woman is the object and femininity is the commodity she becomes, the product/object of his labour: "the fact remains that a connection has been established in which not only have women's bodies become commodities themselves (for instance prostitution) but the association between them and consumerism has more generally taken hold" (Barrett 1985:70). Marx's delineation of the relationship between the labourer (man) and the commodity is thus the same as that between man and woman. Both the commodity and the woman are seen as objects, yet in trying to possess the object, the labourer becomes possessed by it. The labourer recognises his lack of control and tries to assert control over women. Particularly with the increase of women in the workforce as the breadwinners of the family and of men at home, in a "state of affairs shameful and degrading to the human attributes of the sexes" as Engels says (Vogel 1983:46), the labourer sees himself in a patriarchal society unable to fulfill his duty as a man, as the

head of the household, provider/protector. He compensates for that lack by filling the empty space of property with his wife. She now becomes object, property. Marriage becomes his only option for owning "property". So, he pursues her, tries to possess her. In possessing her, he becomes possessed by her. And in an effort to maintain selfhood, self-consciousness, control, he becomes obsessed with understanding; he becomes the hysterical man about whom T.S. Eliot writes in "Hysteria".

Both the commodity and woman are at first objects of man to be possessed; however, once they begin to assert their exchange-value, i.e. when they dance like the table when placed in competition with other objects, other women, they become commodities. The spectre that men chase arises. The spectre of the woman possesses the man. Like the Rat Man whose obsession for understanding is sparked by his "lady" (*sic*), like Eliot's hysterical man who becomes involved in the woman's laughter, thinking he can once more gain control of himself if only the "shaking of her breasts could be stopped" ("Hysteria"), the labourer must work to keep from becoming absorbed into her, to keep from being integrated into, incorporated into, and subsequently *negated* by her. Yet, according to Derrida's discussion of the spectre and the subject, it would be the woman who becomes negated, for she is the object pursued, the object to be possessed. In being possessed, *she* becomes integrated and incorporated into the man, and her identity, her spectrality is subsequently negated

by the very subject [man] of the operation who, claiming the uniqueness of its *own* human body, then becomes, according to Marx as critic of Stirner, the absolute ghost, in fact the ghost of the ghost of the specter-spirit, simulacrum of simulacra without end (Derrida 1994:127).

Yet, how can this be, since as Marx argues, estranged labour "estranges man from his own body, from nature as it exists outside him, from his spiritual essence ... his *human* essence" (Marx 1844:329), rendering *him* the absolute ghost? If, in becoming a commodity, the object moves into the position of subject, i.e., gaining control of language by her very position, how can it be that she becomes negated when he is the one estranged from his



own body, his own spiritual essence? Is it not the hunter, the pursuer, the possessor who becomes possessed, who now moves into the position of object? Indeed, Derrida later argues that "[t]hese ghosts that are commodities transform human producers into ghosts" (Derrida 1994:156). Human producers, i.e. labourers, i.e. men, are transformed into ghosts by the commodity's spectre, the thing that mystically moves from object to subject/agent, from possessed to possessor.

The value that the commodity asserts in its relation to other products has nothing to do with "its 'physical nature' or with the 'thingly ... relations' that arise from it" (157). Indeed, the very point at which the object becomes the commodity is when the spectre arises:

[W]hen a piece of merchandise ... seems to enter into a relation [i.e. to assert its exchange-value in competition with other objects turned commodities], to converse, speak ... and negotiate with another, corresponds *at the same time* to a naturalization of the human socius, of labor objectified in things, and to a denaturing, a denaturalization, and a dematerialization of the thing become commodity, of the wooden table when it comes on stage as exchange-value and no longer as use-value (157, author's emphasis).

*At the same time* the ghost loses its ghostly form, *at the same time* it negates itself by being incorporated into the human form, the male form, she imposes her spectrality on the subject, rather the subject turned object. By analogy, femininity is labour reified, "embodied and made material in an object ... the *objectification* of labour" (Marx 1844:324); it is congealed labour.<sup>9</sup> So, at the same time she, as an object, becomes a commodity, at the same time she becomes a spectre, at the same time femininity appears, the commodity is declared denaturalized, dematerialized. Femininity, as the commodity, is recognised as distinct from the object "woman". Femininity is indeed recognised as that which is de-naturalised, stripped of its nature, removed from nature, unnatural.

If the commodity is the object denaturalised by virtue of its assertion of exchange-value, it is no wonder that its creator, the labourer, is alienated from his product. He is alienated from the product, while the non-producer enjoys and owns the product.

The worker places his life in the object; but now it no longer belongs to him, but to the object. The greater his activity, therefore, the fewer objects the worker possesses. What

the product of his labour is, he is not. Therefore, the greater this product, the less is he himself. The externalization ... of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an *external* existence, but that it exists *outside him*, independently of him and alien to him, and begins to confront him as an autonomous power; that the life which he has bestowed on the object confronts him as **hostile and alien** (Marx 1844:324, bold emphasis mine).

The very life that he creates becomes a threat. She absorbs him, yet she seems to him hostile and alien. There is an irony in his belief in femininity as natural and his feeling that his product is alien, but once the spectre of the commodity possesses him, he becomes indistinguishable from her, and she exists in his image, as his other. The question then becomes to whom does this alien life belong? Underlying the equation of alien to hostile is the assumption that the labourer *should* feel some connection to the object he creates, that he should not be alienated from it. But, he does not own it, and clearly the object cannot own itself. The non-producer owns the object since all that the labourer creates is made for his benefit, advantage, and luxury. As a man, surely the labourer has as much right, if not more, than the producer to own. Yet, the labourer does not own the object; instead, "the worker becomes a slave of his object .... The culmination of this slavery is that it is only as a *worker* that he can maintain himself as a *physical subject* and only as a *physical subject* that he is a worker" (Marx 1844:325). Literally translated, he becomes a slave of his object -- femininity, which, it must be remembered, does *not* translate into him becoming a slave of woman. And because femininity is itself the product of masculinity, the labourer becomes a victim of masculinity:

The masculine ideology is the ideology of objectification. As such, it naturalizes the distinction between subject and object. In so doing, it distinguishes between the agency of man the maker, and the passivity of nature. The pacification of nature involves the pacification of women, **as well as the subordination of other men** (Brittan & Maynard 1984:201-02, emphasis mine).

Marx accounts for the labourer as the only victim because, of course, he does not theorise the object as a living being; therefore it cannot be victimised. The benefit, however, of understanding the male labourer as victim is that it suggests that it is not in the best interest of either man or woman to perpetuate the myth of femininity as womanhood,

which harkens Cixous' point that "phallocratic ideology", masculinity, takes two victims -- both man and woman, for he is chained to idolising his genitalia.

Marx does not account for woman as victim, and the big bad devil is the non-producer. Everyone loses, except the non-producer because he appears to benefit from the creation of femininity. He sits on top of the world as king of the hill, untouchable. But surely the non-producer does not live free of all the implications of the phallocratic ideology. As the impetus for the creation of femininity, as the force behind the labourer's oppression, the non-producer must suffer some repercussions. Since the labourer "does not confirm himself in his work, but denies himself, ... does not develop free mental and physical energy, but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind ... [h]is labour is therefore not voluntary but forced, it is *forced labour*" (Marx 1844:326). Thus, because the worker's labour is *forced and not of his free will*, the non-producer is complicit in the production of whatever object the labourer creates. It is the non-producer who forces the labourer. Marx, ultimately, asks and answers the question of to whom the product of labour belongs, and he concludes that:

The *alien* being to whom labour and the product of labour belong, in whose service labour is performed and for whose enjoyment the product of labour is created, can be none other than *man* himself.

If the product of labour does not belong to the worker, and if it confronts him as an alien power, this is only possible because it belongs to *a man other than the worker*. If his activity is a torment for him, it must provide *pleasure* and enjoyment for someone else. Not the gods, not nature, but only man himself can be this alien power over men (Marx 1844:330-1, author's emphasis).

This man other than the worker "for whose enjoyment the product of labour is created" is the very same man who has been the force behind inscribing femininity on woman. Some men are unwitting accomplices in the creation of femininity and the perpetuation of masculinity; others are agents of such oppression. The active oppressor (all the more masculine for his assertion of action) is the same man who sees himself as progenitor of language:

The roots of "authority" tell us, after all, that if woman is man's property then he must have authored her, just as surely as they tell us that if he authored her she must be his

property. **As a creation "penned" by man, moreover, woman has been "penned up" or "penned in."** As a sort of "sentence" man has spoken, she has herself been "sentenced": fated, jailed, for he has both "indited" her and "indicted" her. As a thought he has "framed," she has been both "framed" (enclosed) in his texts, glyphs, graphics, and "framed up" (found guilty, found wanting) in his cosmologies (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:13, emphasis mine).

Recalling Wittgenstein's assertion that language and the world reflect each other, and Saussure's assertion that words are only understood in relation to each other, Marx's assertion that man only understands himself in relation to other men is quite logical:

"[m]an's estrangement, like all relationships of man to himself, is realized and expressed only in man's relationship to other men" (Marx 1844:330). In woman, man sees himself. In other men, man sees himself. He inevitably evaluates the position of other men from his own point of subjectivity. So, "[w]hen man confronts himself, he also confronts *other* men" (Marx 1844:330). Therefore, when man sees his construction, his product, his reflection crumbling around him because of how removed from nature it is, it is both the labourer and the non-producer who are implicated:

Man's home has indeed become these/his theoretical elaborations, by means of which he has sought to reconstruct, in an impossible metaphorization, the matrix and the way that would lead to or back to it. **But by wishing to reverse the anguish of being imprisoned within the other, of being placed inside the other, by making the very place and space of being his own, he becomes a prisoner of effects of symmetry that know no limit.** Everywhere he runs into the walls of his palace of mirrors, the floor of which is in any case beginning to crack and break up. This in turn serves, of course, to sublimate his activity, leading him to new tasks which for a time will abstract him again from his specular imprisonment. A diversion for the depths of his **madness**, pretext for an increase in attentiveness, vigilance, mastery (Irigaray 1985[1974]:137, emphasis mine).

Thus, "if the product of labour is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation" (Marx 1844:326), which reinforces the active/passive binarism: the labourer is active while the "object" is passively created, alienated from the worker and from itself. Indeed, Cixous' assertion that "it might be said that man works very actively to produce 'his woman'" (Cixous 1981:484), i.e., the object, resounds with familiarity. For, even Marx himself asks, "what is life but activity?" (1844:327)

The fact remains, however, that to move into a position of subjectivity, of control, the commodity must first be possessed, must first give up her identity (the identity before denaturalisation, before the construction, woman before femininity, the wood as it was before it became a table, and certainly before it starts dancing), only to assert her new found position of "control", of "power" in the form of that which is visible, while she remains invisible, unrepresentable. Her spectrality is visible only in the visor of the male form. Though it is her ghost that transforms him into a ghost, she becomes visible only in him. Or rather, he becomes the visible guise, while she remains the invisible shadow. She haunts, but is not seen. She is:

[t]he invisible ... defined by the visible as its invisible, its forbidden vision: the invisible is not therefore simply what is outside the visible..., the outer darkness of exclusion - but the inner darkness of exclusion, inside the visible itself because defined by its structure (Althusser 1970[1968]:26).

What then happens to Marx's assertion that the labourer is himself a commodity? The capital that the labourer produces is femininity, which in turn produces an estranged and alienated self for the worker that is now a spectral self. Consequently, how can he become a commodity? The commodity is the object haunted, the object whose spectre arises in the process of asserting exchange-value, of transforming into the commodity. It is a never-ending spectral cycle: in entering the labour market, in asserting his value as a labourer, yet another spectre arises. He is now truly the "ghost of the specter-spirit, simulacrum of simulacra without end" (Derrida 1994:127). In his relationship to the non-producer, as the capital of his own labour, he becomes a commodity.

Yet, the question still remains of how she can be the invisible behind the visor, how it is that she haunts but is not seen, when indeed *he* pursues *her*. He becomes involved in her. He can only gain control of himself once the shaking of her breasts stops. As the spectre who ultimately possesses the possessor, she absorbs him. He negates himself. He is incorporated and integrated into her and relinquishes his power, his position in language. He is now as much controlled by language. Can he extract himself? He tries to by

regaining consciousness, a self-consciousness that he loses in becoming absorbed in her. He, like the Rat Man, becomes obsessed with understanding, with language, with concentrating his attention "with careful subtlety to this end" ("Hysteria"). In his obsession to understand, in his struggle to be conscious, he, like the Rat Man, loses himself further. Can he extract himself? Can the ghost be exorcised? Once possessed, he cannot exorcise the ghost because, like Marx, he does not see her. He does not acknowledge her haunting, so he cannot even begin to look for her, to learn how to see her. How can he see her once she possesses him? He has become the spectre of all spectres who cannot see himself, whose image is not reflected in the mirror. Yet, according to Derrida, that is precisely how one recognises a ghost:

There is a mirror, and the commodity form is also this mirror, but since all of a sudden it no longer plays its role, since it does not reflect back the expected image, those who are looking for themselves can no longer find themselves in it. Men no longer recognize in it the *social* character of their *own* labor. It as if they were becoming ghosts in their turn. The "proper" feature of specters, like vampires, is that they are deprived of a specular image, of the true, right specular image (1994:155-56, author's emphasis).

So, the ghost is recognised by the very fact that it cannot recognise itself. Perhaps that is more easily said than done, something that works theoretically but not in reality, for it raises too many questions. If one is expected to recognise oneself by one's absent image, does one look for that absence? How does the labourer render the invisible visible and know what not to see and thereby see, if he cannot see anything? If he *is* the visor, how can he ever see the invisibility he himself is disguising? If when she looks into the mirror, she sees what he has created, how can her image/existence ever be autonomous? Furthermore, how does she ever recognise herself since her specular image is always invisible? How can her absence actually signify her presence? And yet, absence is precisely that which makes presence visible.

The spectre of the commodity appears to give the object control, but the fact remains that in asserting exchange-value, the commodity is asserting its willingness to be exchanged by the non-producer, to be an object. Likewise, the woman who haunts the

labourer appears to be in a position of control but is instead only asserting her willingness to be exchanged. In his relationship to woman and as producer of an estranged product, the labourer becomes the double object of spectral possession. Derrida states that the "autonomy lent to commodities corresponds to an anthropomorphic projection" (157). The perceived autonomy of the spectre is itself spectral; it is not real, not autonomy, if it is lent, because there is no longer any form of agency or control. Further, the "autonomy" is *lent*, i.e. temporary. The word "projection" is particularly useful in a reading of the labourer as male and the commodity as female: the autonomy lent to the female corresponds to a *projection* of himself onto her. (Only he projects.) Likewise, even as he produces himself, there is no true autonomy in his assertion of himself as a commodity. Ultimately, there is no distinction between the labourer and the woman in terms of who possesses and who is possessed; for they are both controlled by the non-producer who is himself reflected in the labourer in his complicity in the construction/production of the commodity. Theoretically, the capitalist society then is indeed a spectral one.

How can man possibly know that he is possessed? Could he know by the fact that she does not appear in his world of the labourer? Is he to "see [her], situate [her], identify [her]" (Derrida 1994:132) in her absence and know that she has possessed him?

If the Queen's looking glass speaks with the King's voice, how do its perpetual kingly admonitions affect the Queen's own voice? Since his is the chief voice she hears, does the Queen try to sound like the King, imitating his tone, his inflections, his phrasing, his point of view? Or does she "talk back" to him in her own vocabulary, her own timbre, insisting on her own viewpoint? (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:46).

According to Freud and Derrida, absence in itself is a text to be read. Yet, as Saussure asserts, "speakers are largely unconscious of the laws of language; and if they are unaware of them, how could they modify them?" (1959:72). If man is unaware of her absence, how can he re-present her? Indeed, since he is the one responsible for absenting her, the question remains whether he can be trusted or expected to re-present her. She must do that herself. The absence of women can be read as his own haunting which, of course, he can never recognise. How does he recognise his own loss of consciousness, his hysteria?

\* \* \* \*

*"The Black Man"*

There is a similarity between the labourer in the Western context and the male Black Consciousness activist. And yet, while the male BC activist may not have been a labourer in a crude Marxist sense, i.e., forced by the non-producer into creating an object from which s/he will be alienated, it is important to recognise that as a Black person in apartheid South Africa, he was also denied access to owning any means of production. Thus, the Black male BC activist can be substituted into my previous arguments as the labourer whose product is a femininity; however, that femininity is different from the one created for white women because of the difference in race, and the subsequent differences in both cultural traditions and positions in white supremacist capitalist patriarchies. It is therefore essential to examine race, gender, and class as interlocking factors in the oppression of Black South African women.

The tendency to reduce everything to a particular class model means that different forms of oppression are subsumed beneath one overarching schema. In addition, dichotomization, because it can only properly take account of one dimension, leads protagonists to argue that one form of oppression can be given priority over the others. The economic, gender and 'race' dimensions are all given primacy in this way by their various supporters. However, ... we would argue that since all three clearly operate simultaneously and in a fairly complicated way it is necessary to move beyond 'class', however defined, and away from a binary classification to an analysis based on the possible interrelationship and divergence of the three hierarchical forms (Brittan and Maynard 1984:70).

During the years of the Black Consciousness Movement, Black men *and* women were subjected to capitalist exploitation on the basis of their race, which means that Blacks were generally denied access to the ownership of capital and that Blacks were forced into positions as labourers. Thus, capitalism and racism were systems dependent on each other, and it certainly is not inconceivable that European colonisation brought with its capitalist exploitation a disposition for racism:

Winthrop Jordan, for example, very persuasively argues that whites' first contact with Africans was through foreign travel and expeditions and was not in fact structured by the labour exploitation of slavery .... He suggests that there cannot be a simple deterministic relationship between racism and capitalism, since existing western



European culture already contained a predisposition to negative evaluations of people with darker skin, via its preoccupation with such things as dirt, sin and the nature of a civilized society .... In fact, rather than being a simple consequence of the capitalist mode of production, it appears that aspects of racism already had a place in white culture prior to colonialism and slavery (Brittan and Maynard 1984:41-42).

How then does patriarchy intertwine with white supremacy and capitalism? Ramphela argues that:

[t]he most devastating impact of apartheid on **poor black South Africans** has been the destruction of people's faith in themselves as agents of history. Their life experiences are scarred by survival strategies which destroy trust and faith in their fellow human beings (Ramphela 1995:212, emphasis mine).

While Black men were appropriated in the migrant labour system, Black women as wage earners in urban areas were largely occupied in the private realm as domestic workers:

"For black women the predominance of domestic work was especially marked. Almost 65 per cent of all African women workers and 85 per cent of 'Coloured' were in domestic service" (Walker 1982:15). And yet, the BCM was articulated in terms of *his* struggle despite the fact that both Black men and women were subjected to and psychologically abused by apartheid. Why?

The fact that English was the chosen language of the Movement is significant, particularly since the African languages do not employ a gender differentiation system in the third person pronoun. Therefore, what prompts this continuous, rigorous exclusion of Black women in the language of the Movement if that type of distinction is not common to the African languages? The reason appears to be a male hysterical fear of an irretrievable loss of a *sense* of manhood, much like the hysteria of Western man. And, women were discursively excluded on such a regular basis that one must wonder if the men in the BC context could have possibly seen their own blindness. Since masculinity is dependent upon femininity, the stakes of femininity increase as the stakes of masculinity increase. In other words, as his masculinity became more outrageous and monstrous, the boundaries of femininity for her shrank so that the space designated her in the name of the feminine became more confined and restricted: an increase in femininity (and masculinity) signifies a decrease in space for women. The entrance into English appears to have marked

a corresponding entrance into the English cultural background of the hysteria of masculinity.

How, then, did Black men conceptualise masculinity and manhood? Forced into the mines and into the position of labourer in a capitalist system, Black men could define themselves and their masculinity not in terms of what they could provide for their families, but in terms of what they could own. And yet, as labourers, their access to the ownership of the means of production was essentially nonexistent, except within the family where, perhaps one could argue, they could struggle for the ownership of the means of reproduction, which effectively translates into the ownership and control of women. Consequently, within the patriarchal framework embedded in African traditions, he still had a right to ownership of his wife and children. That claim to the ownership of his family was the only *thing* left to demarcate his masculinity.

Cherryl Walker argues that "women in the pre-conquest societies had had a clear economic function" (Walker 1982:13) with which came a level of autonomy and independence not afforded European women in the context of the bourgeoisie. African women belonged to "a cultural tradition that had allowed women a great deal more independence and authority than Western society considered either 'natural' or 'respectable' at the time" (Walker 1982:33). On the other hand, there is no doubt that patriarchy was deeply entrenched in African traditions. For example, Dr. Ramphela consistently refers to the sexism within the Black Consciousness Movement, which arose from a cultural context that granted legitimacy to patriarchy: "But also, [there were] the expectations [that] because we were women, when we went to a SASO conference, we were supposed to do the cooking and the preparing of food and so on" (Ramphela 1996:134). In her autobiography, she also discusses in detail the patriarchal tradition within the African context as related to: what was expected of a newlywed daughter-in-law, who was "often reminded that ... a woman's only real value lies in the fruits of her labour, including her reproductive labour" (1995:14); mothers soon after giving birth,

who were expected "to return to domestic chores three days after delivery of their babies" (15); and "the slaughtering of animals, from which women were excluded because their potential for pollution was thought to pose a threat to the generative capacity of livestock" (15). She also discusses her grandfather, who "[l]ike most of his contemporaries, ... an authoritarian patriarch," owned a homestead, the size of which "signified ... [his] success as a patriarch" (1995:13). Yet, the reason she mentions these aspects of patriarchy is to frame a discussion of her mother's transgressive acts, which sometimes "liberated both men and women in the extended family" (15). Thus it appears that even within the traditional patriarchal space, women could manoeuvre and negotiate a level of independence without punishment that was generally inaccessible to the bourgeois European woman expected to live up to the standards of being a lady.<sup>10</sup>

With the advent of colonialism and capitalism, however, Black woman's existence under patriarchy appears to qualitatively change: she becomes subjected to an objectifying gaze that strips her of any right to agency by classifying her a perpetual minor, which point Christine Qunta argues when she says, "European colonization of Azania had a dramatic impact on the lives of African women. From being respected members of society with a defined and valued economic, social and political role, they were reduced to landless farm labourers, domestic servants and perpetual minors" (Qunta 1987:80). "European colonization" is marked by its subjection of African women to "either Roman-Dutch common law or what is purported to be customary law" and its ruling that "the African woman shall be considered in law a minor, no matter what her age actually is" (Qunta 1987:83). Christine Walker supports Qunta's assertion<sup>11</sup> when she says:

Within the tribal [sic] economy women had always taken an active part, but with the expansion of the migrant labour system this grew enormously, so that they came to bear the main brunt of keeping the subsistence economy operating.

The state, therefore, was not anxious to see a widespread migration of women from the reserves to the towns. Nor was it anxious to see greater equality between the sexes. It had a vested interest in preserving **women's traditional junior role within the African family**, since this was one of the basic institutions of tribal society and tied them to the rural areas. The subordinate status of women was accordingly entrenched in the system of customary law applied to Africans. Under it, **women were deemed**

**perpetual minors, always under the guardianship of their nearest male relative, regardless of their age, marital status or any other consideration .... Sexual discrimination was thus built into the system of labour exploitation from the start (Walker 1982:6-7, emphasis mine).**

Black women's subjection to patriarchy, however, is not the sole result of either capitalism or the English language because both *intersect with* traditional spaces carved by patriarchy for Black women only to create a space even more bound, but in a way that "it is not at all easy to disentangle the indigenous from the exogenous dimensions of oppression" (Brittan and Maynard 1984:208):

**Conservative men, reared in a strongly patriarchal tradition, the early ANC leaders aspired to full partnership within a parliamentary democracy with the whites. They had embraced the system of values of the dominant group within society, the white middle class. In the process they adopted without questioning its views on the subordinate place of women, views which did not conflict with their own patriarchal tradition (Walker 1982:26, emphasis mine).**

In returning to my earlier definition of "femininity" as a space not at all inherently natural (indeed quite unnatural), but constructed for women as subordinate to men, it is important to note that Black women were also expected to occupy a feminine space, but those parameters were not entirely the same as those drawn for white women. What the English language and capitalism are accountable for is providing structures that not only allow for, but legitimate the absenting of Black women from a discourse supposedly about Black *people*; for, "the Western projection judges other social and cultural contexts in terms of its own cognitive and analytical categories ... [W]e are maintaining that 'Western scientific discourse' is universalized as the yardstick of understanding and investigation" (Brittan and Maynard 1984:208) .

The English language and capitalism reinforce, intersect with, his traditional relationship to woman but distort his relationship to other men: men subject him and by doing so, deny him the "manhood" he sees as his agency.

**Black people under the Smuts government were oppressed but they were still men .... But the type of black man we have today has lost his manhood. Reduced to an obliging shell, he looks with awe at the white power structure and accepts what he regards as the "inevitable position". Deep inside his anger mounts at the accumulating insult, but he vents it in the wrong direction - on his fellow man in the township, on the**

property of black people .... In the privacy of his toilet his face twists in silent condemnation of white society but brightens up in sheepish obedience as he comes out hurrying in response to his master's impatient call .... His heart yearns for the comfort of white society and makes him blame himself for not having been "educated" enough to warrant such luxury .... All in all **the black man has become a shell, a shadow of man, completely defeated, drowning in his own misery, a slave, an ox bearing the yoke of oppression with sheepish timidity** (Biko 1978:28-29, emphasis mine).

Though it is contestable that Black men under the Smuts government were "still men" as Biko argues, what is of import here is the language he uses. He begins the passage talking about Black people, but in the very next sentence he shifts to the masculine in a manner that unmistakably specifies the experiences of Black men through his usage of "manhood", which necessarily excludes women. The "people" are collapsed into "the Black man," and *he* is the one who is struggling, who is "on his own", who is denied his rights as a man to all that white men have. She is hidden by, perhaps buried beneath his guise. She is rendered invisible by the very thing -- the inclusive claim of Black "people" -- that should make her visible. In being possessed by the femininity he creates, and in her absence, he is "feminised" in his oppression:

In the colonial world, the emotional sensitivity of the native is kept on the surface of his skin like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent; and the psyche shrinks back, obliterates itself and finds outlet in muscular demonstrations which have caused certain very wise men to say that **the native is a hysterical type** (Fanon 1963:44, emphasis mine).

He wants desperately to elevate, raise himself from such lowly depths which only women should occupy. He wants back his manhood.

Desiree Lewis argues that:

at the centre of Black Consciousness thinking was an emphasis on the emasculation of black men and their need to recover a positive masculine identity. It is this that explains the marginalising of women in its rhetoric, and the ways in which women were appealed to mainly as psychological and material supports in male-oriented struggles (Lewis 1994:168-69).

Thus it is significant that "Western definitions of masculinity appear to celebrate male 'civility' while simultaneously denigrating the natural as the province of women, and wild and savage out-groups" (Brittan and Maynard 1984:197). Nature, as opposed to Reason, corresponds to woman and femininity in a masculine conception of the world. Because

masculinity seeks to subordinate women as well as other men "perceived as potential rivals" (Brittan and Maynard 1984:202), the man who is subordinated, pressed into the realm of the natural, is feminised, by being emasculated and denied that which constitutes his manhood at a very basic level. The word "emasculate" comes from the Latin *emasculare*, in which the prefix "e-" means "out", and "masculare" means "male", so that *emasculare* literally means "out of maleness". *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (1961) defines "emasculate" as "to castrate", "to deprive of masculine vigor or spirit, to weaken" (emphasis mine). To take a man "out of maleness", then, is to weaken him by cutting off his testicles, his balls, which are central to his manhood because they signify his ability to give life, *and* they serve as the source of his courage, strength, and "masculine vigor". What the dictionary shows is the general unquestioning mapping of masculinity onto the male body. Manhood is *defined* by masculinity, and emasculation is therefore defined by a lack of masculinity. Indeed the phallogocentric notion of masculinity as centred on balls is essential to this conception of emasculation. Yet, if we de-phallicise the notion of manhood and reconceive it as a mental state of responsibility and accountability reached by an adult male, then emasculation takes on a very different meaning. If it is no longer entrenched in biological determinism and based on a biological part of a man that has been allowed mythic proportions, then the psychic state of manhood need not rely on bravado or macho. If we castrate manhood and make it equivalent to the psychic state of womanhood, we are not weakening it as masculine fear of chaos suspects, but instead showing up the phallacy of gender, which is an act<sup>12</sup>.

Adulthood, versus childhood, is fundamentally about being able and willing to take responsibility for one's actions and choosing to be accountable for them. Childhood then is a state in which one has not yet attained such rights. Therefore, one can be a child at any point along the continuum of life, despite age. This means, unfortunately, that many never actually reach a psychic state of adulthood and instead remain perpetual children. By redefining manhood in this way, "to emasculate" would now mean to forcibly deny a

biologically adult male his right to responsibility and accountability, or rather to perpetually treat an adult male as if he were a child. For example, every time a white man refers to a Black man as "boy", he is emasculating him, which Fanon also notes when he states that "a white man addressing a Negro behaves exactly like an adult with a child and starts smirking, whispering, patronizing, cozening" (Fanon 1970[1952]:23). Imprisoning a people in a perpetual childlike state is one of the manifestations of racism based in the idea that we Blacks are incapable of taking care of ourselves, i.e., not intelligent enough to do so and therefore needy of whites to look after us, make decisions for us, study us (and then tell us about ourselves), etc. But because Black women in South Africa were legally conceived of as perpetual minors, they were supposed to be taken care of and decisions were supposed to be made for them. Significantly, there is no such word in the English language indicating deprivation or a lack for either rendering a woman masculine or forcing her into a childlike state, partially because in a masculine conception of the world, she *is* a child (which is as demeaning and patronising for Black women as for Black men). For example, in a fairly recent issue of *Drum* magazine, in response to an article on abuse in the October 1995 issue of *Drum*, a man states:

Women are not abused, they are punished.

For instance my wife is like the eldest daughter in our household, and if she does wrong she deserves to be punished as one of my children would be.

While some may argue that this is an extreme view, I argue that masculinity is the impetus for such an attitude, and the fact that there is no corresponding word for "emasculatation" for women renders the English language an accomplice.

(Not surprisingly then, the discourse of Black Consciousness was motivated by a fear of emasculation, and the Black men in the Movement were perhaps more concerned with their struggle to gain full access to patriarchal rights within a capitalist society than with the liberation of all Black people, i.e., the equality of all Black people, not just with whites, but with each other. This, however, is not to argue that BC was entirely detrimental to Black women. While Dr. Ramphela fully acknowledges and condemns the sexism within

the Movement, she also argues that "[o]ne of the enormous benefits of having been steeled in the furnaces of Black Consciousness activism is that I have been liberated psychologically. I feel that I belong in any part of my country " (1995:183). Instead, I submit that the language of the BCM signifies a greater concern by the men in the Movement for their own agency than for that of the collective. "The Black man" so effortlessly discusses his struggle that he appears oblivious to the rather glaring absence of woman in his language. In his obsession with his own agency, he is unable to see her, her absence, or the madness of his masculinity. }>

### *Endnotes*

1. Throughout the thesis, all quotations referenced as "Ramphela 1996" are extracted from the interview conducted by Pumla Gqola and myself with Dr. Ramphela in June 1996. The interview is included at the back of this thesis from pages 133-138 as the appendix.

2. I have used passive verbs throughout the following argument, which is by no means an attempt to erase the agency of men in their oppression of women. It is instead an acknowledgement that it is too simplistic to implicate only men in the oppression of women, as they are not the only perpetrators. Patriarchy is of course a system of power established by men in their own interests, but women are often complicit in upholding its standards and ideals. If women were not complicit, patriarchy could not exist.

3. For a more in depth discussion of this point, see Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, v.1, pp. 104-105 especially.

4. Note that men "impregnate", an indication of action, while women either "get pregnant" or "fall pregnant", an indication of passivity. Men "do" while women are "done". In this way, men can conceive of themselves as the ones who are actually responsible for reproduction, which appears to me to be yet another sign that he does in fact recognise his lack of a womb and in language he can attempt to rectify that inadequacy and make it a positive: if he controls language, he can give birth and accomplish precisely what he wishes he could do physically.

5. Perhaps, one may feel compelled here to raise the point that this quotation of Lyotard is taken from a translated text; however, it is probably the case that the pronoun appeared as "il" in the original French text. "Il" is used more commonly in French to signify neutrality than in English because in French, there is no neutral "it". That, however, problematizes the point even further, because "il" is also specifically masculine, and unless the person or object that the pronoun signifies is specifically feminine, the pronoun used is masculine. The fact remains though that in both languages, "he" is used as a default "universal" term to refer to both men and women.



6. I am indebted to Angelo Fick for this connection.

7. Further, it is important to keep in mind that Engels has dedicated an entire work, *The Origin of The Family, Private Property and the State*, to the examination of the role of the family in relation to the State, and the role of women within the family. In her 1985 introduction to the book, Michele Barrett clarifies that "Engels's book is not about 'the family'; it concerns itself with the emergence of the state in class society as it is related to monogamous marriage" (Engels 1884:22-3). Yet, she later states that Engels "explains the development of the monogamous family as the consequence of the assembling of private property, classically relating the explanation of a 'superstructural' phenomenon (the family) to its economic 'base'" (27).

8. The notion of congealed labour is one that Marx uses to identify the product of labour not just as a commodity, but as the physical object in which labour is materialised:

The use-values coat and linen are combinations of, on the one hand, productive activity with a definite purpose, and, on the other, cloth and yarn; *the values coat and linen, however, are merely congealed quantities of homogenous labour* (Marx 1867:135-36, emphasis mine).

The idea of congealed labour also refers back to my earlier discussion of Sandra Lee Bartky's exposition of the disciplines particular to the female body that render it docile, in her article, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" in *Feminism & Foucault*. The labourer works to produce femininity, and his labour is manifested in "the stylization of [her] body" through "bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds [which] constitute the illusion of an abiding ... [feminine] self" (Butler 1990:140).

9. But, even if Marx does take into account the female labourer, femininity is still the product and the female labourer is still estranged from the congealed labour by virtue of her own labour. The feminine space in Western societies would not allow for labour. Therefore, it is necessarily a space from which the female labourer is restricted and alienated.

10. Foucault argues in *The History of Sexuality* (vol. 1), that at "the end of the eighteenth century .... there emerged a completely new technology of sex .... [S]ex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance" (1976[1978]:126). Yet, as Bartky indicates he does throughout his analysis, he does not specify how that surveillance specifically affected women.

Foucault treats the body throughout [*Discipline and Punish*] as if it were one, as if the bodily experiences of men and women did not differ and as if men and women bore the same relationship to the characteristic institutions of modern life. Where is the account of the disciplinary practices that engender the "docile bodies" of women, bodies more docile than the bodies of men? Women, like men, are subject to many of the same disciplinary practices Foucault describes. But he is blind to those disciplines that produce a modality of embodiment that is peculiarly feminine. To overlook the forms of subjection that engender the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed (Bartky 1988:63-64).

Foucault goes on to argue that the new focal points of this new technology of sex were "that of pedagogy, having as its objective the specific sexuality of children; that of medicine, whose objective was the sexual physiology peculiar to women; and last, that of demography, whose objective was the spontaneous or concerted regulation of births" (116). Despite the fact that the latter two focus on women, Foucault does not indicate that women's bodies were perhaps more subject to surveillance than men's. Femininity is itself a disciplinary practice that rendered the female body docile, and that disciplined, docile body was that of the "lady".

Foucault also discusses the differences in the construction of sexuality across class lines and argues that that from "the mid-eighteenth century on" the bourgeoisie was occupied "with creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a 'class' body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race: the autosexualization of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body" (1978[1978]:124). He makes clear that this preoccupation with the body and its sexuality was specific to the bourgeoisie. Consequently, one can deduce that the construction of "lady" was also likely a creation of the bourgeoisie, and the result of increased surveillance of and preoccupation with the female body and its sexuality. Yet, like this new technology of sex, the construction "lady" was particular to the bourgeoisie but eventually infiltrated the working class:

There is little question that one of the primordial forms of class consciousness is the affirmation of the body; at least, this was the case for the bourgeoisie during the eighteenth century. It converted the blue blood of the nobles into a sound organism and a healthy sexuality. One understands why it took such a long time and was so unwilling to acknowledge that other classes had a body and a sex - precisely those classes it was exploiting. The living conditions that were dealt to the proletariat, particularly in the first half of the nineteenth century, show there was anything but concern for its body and sex: it was of little importance whether *those* people lived or died, since their reproduction was something that took care of itself in any case .... [T]here had to be established a whole technology of control which made it possible to keep that body and sexuality, finally conceded to them [the proletariat], under surveillance (schooling, the politics of housing, public hygiene, institutions of relief and insurance, the general medicalization of the population, in short, an entire administrative and technical machinery made it possible to safely import the deployment of sexuality into the exploited class; ... it would remain the instrument of the bourgeoisie's hegemony). Whence no doubt the proletariat's hesitancy to accept this deployment and its tendency to say that this sexuality was the business of the bourgeoisie and did not concern it (1978[1976]:126-7).

In infiltrating the proletariat, the bourgeoisie effectively makes its values pervasive throughout the fabric of Western societies, including its construction of the feminine docile body -- the lady.

11. Interestingly, it is of note that Christine Qunta, an Africanist, and Cheryl Walker, a white liberal, draw the same conclusions. Also, I use them as sources in a thesis that is opposed to white liberalism and the nationalism of Africanists because what they have to say regarding the position of Black women in South Africa is valuable. I do not reject what they have to say here because of their primary ideological positions. Indeed, I agree with Carole Boyce Davies when she says:

In this model of offering courtesies to visitors, which comes out of several African and African-based cultures, the host goes a "piece of

the way" with friend or visitor, the distance depending on the relationship.

In using this formulation, then, I want to engage all these theories as visitors. This comes from the recognition that going all the way home with many of these theoretical positions - feminism, postmodernism, nationalism, Afrocentrism, Marxism, etc. - means taking a route cluttered with skeletons, enslavements, new dominations, unresolved tensions and contradictions. Following many of the theories/theorists "all the way home" inevitably places me in the "homes" of people where I, as a Black woman, will have to function either as maid or exotic, silenced courtesan, but definitely not as a theoretical equal. Going all the way home with them means being installed in a distant place from my communities (Boyce Davies 1994:46).

Thus, while I am agreeing to go a piece of the way with Walker and Qunta, that does not necessarily mean that I will go all the way home with them and their theoretical positions, which is not inconsistent with the approach I use throughout the thesis: I rely on Walker and Qunta for the same reasons that I use white male theorists in a thesis about the agency of Black women, or white feminists in a thesis written from a womanist perspective. I go a piece of the way with a quite a few theorists whom others may decide are inappropriate because I have gleaned from their works points that are particularly valuable and insightful.

12. For a detailed discussion of gender as performance, see Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

## *Chapter Two*

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### *Testimony to Radical Subjectivity: Agency as Transgression*

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Black self-determination is that process by which we learn to radicalize our thinking and habits of being in ways that enhance the quality of our lives despite racist domination.

-bell hooks, *Killing Rage*

[I]f you have to move from silence, to be heard you literally have to scream ....

-Dr. Mamphela Ramphele, 1996  
Interview

When entering into the English language, the Black Consciousness activists also entered into the legacy of binarisms embedded in the language: either the Black man was empowered, or he was subjected, and since patriarchy is deeply entrenched in African traditions, the latter was certainly not an option. Indeed it could not be, for his very struggle was to take back his manhood from the "white man", the purpose of which was not to then hand it over to the Black woman. They entered into an atmosphere of general male hysteria, fear, and obsession. The woman who seeks to reject the status quo, who transgresses and chooses agency and empowerment is translated, in masculine logic, into the woman who seeks to subjugate and dominate men. That is why she is punished with the isolation and silence of madness.

\* \* \*

How did the masculinist discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement impact the female activists? What do the women have to say about the liberation of "the Black man"? Did they feel any sense of exclusion because of the discourse, or did they also adopt the masculinist language? In attempting to answer this question, the lack of writing by Black women involved in the BCM presents an awesome silence. Not only are they not writing now, but one is hard pressed to find any writing by them during their years as activists.

Dr. Mamphela Ramphele is the only woman to have written a sizeable body of literature on her experiences in the Black Consciousness Movement. Indeed, she is also the only woman activist involved in the BCM to have written an autobiography. There is a noticeable lack of writing from her female peers of the time -- Nomsisi Kraai, Debs Matshoba, Vuyi Mashalaba, and Thenjiwe Mtintso. Dr. Ramphele offers three different possible reasons for the lack of writing by Black women activists:

I think it's a reflection of several things. First, Black people just didn't write -- period! One of my great sadnesses is that Steve's huge intellect has not left a deeper imprint on the South African landscape that he could have. And it's partly because there wasn't a culture of writing -- period .... So it's a kind of a general lack of focus on the written word, which I think is fair to say Black South Africans are only waking up to that. It wasn't really part of what people did ordinarily.

The second thing is that obviously there were very few women who had the public platform to speak, let alone write. But also, women don't create space for themselves to write because they don't have wives, they don't have this, they don't have that.

And, thirdly, there are a lot of women who even today disagree with the fact that I have written my autobiography because they think that there are certain things that shouldn't be said publicly (1996:137).

Perhaps that gaping silence is in itself an absence to be read, i.e., perhaps conclusions could be drawn on the basis of an interpretation of the silence. But, representing what these women's perceptions of gender issues in the movement were when they have, generally speaking, remained silent on the issue is not a desirable task. Indeed, that could not be done without recreating and imposing on them the very same systems of representation, domination, and silence that work to maintain Black women in positions of silence.

After identifying and analysing how certain systems of domination work to position Black women in white supremacist capitalist patriarchies, it is essential to look at how Black women have managed to assert agency under these conditions; for, as bell hooks states: "Without agency we collapse into passivity, inertia, depression, and despair" (1993:8). Dr. Ramphele defines agency of the oppressed as the ability "to overcome psychological oppression by taking charge of their own definition of themselves" (1996:133). Carol Boyce Davies talks about the agency of Black women in terms of

"migrations of the subject":

Migrations of the subject refers to the many locations of Black women's writing, but also to the black female subject refusing to be subjugated. Black female subjectivity then can be conceived **not primarily** in terms of domination, subordination or "subalternization," but in terms of slipperiness, elsewhere. Migratory subjects suggests that Black women's writing cannot be located and framed in terms of one specific place, but exist/s in myriad places and times, constantly eluding the terms of the discussion. It is not so much formulated as a "nomadic subject," although it shares an affinity, but as a migratory subject moving to specific places and for definite reasons (1994:36-37, emphasis mine).

Boyce Davies is articulating the very unrepresentability of Black female subjectivity. Existing as "other", outside of the norm defined by the dominant, Black female subjectivities remain ever elusive. Boyce Davies continues her argument: "As 'elsewhere denotes movement,' Black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates and so re-claims as it re-asserts" (1994:37). She will necessarily journey and migrate as she moves to assert agency and transcend borders demarcated by people other than herself. One of the tasks for this chapter is to look at how Black women have found ways to be agents under systems of domination, the goals of which are to destroy that agency and render one a victim.

An agent is one who exerts power or has the power to act. The autobiography, as a self-representation, is a format in which one is an agent of the representation of one's own history and has the opportunity to present the self as conceived in one's own imagination.

Dabi Nkululeko asks:

Can an oppressed nation or segment of it, engaged in a struggle for liberation from its oppressors, rely on knowledge produced, researched and theorized by others, no matter how progressive, who are members of the oppressor nation? The same question put in another way is: can the right of a people to self-determination in the production of knowledge be overlooked and liberation attained for them through knowledge produced by others? (Nkululeko 1987:88)

Indeed it is oxymoronic to conceive of one determining and liberating the self reliant upon knowledge produced by others. It is for this reason that I turn to the autobiographical works of Black South African women to see how they present their agency. Do they choose to adopt the masculinist discourse of the BCM, or did they recognise that discourse as

oppressive? The discourse of masculinity was so pervasive that it infiltrated the most unexpected works. Interestingly, that discourse is adopted by two women who were *not* activists in the BCM -- Bessie Head and Ellen Kuzwayo, which perhaps attests to the power and appeal of Black Consciousness at the time, as well as to the pervasiveness of masculinity. Consequently, I will be examining their autobiographical works, *A Question of Power*<sup>d</sup> and *Call Me Woman*, respectively, in addition to the autobiography of the one woman who was a BC activist -- Dr. Mamphela Ramphele.

I assert that a central function of autobiography for Black women (writers and readers) is as testament to our agency, to our ability to find ways to be agents and choose empowerment when so many forces are working at ever-varying levels and intensities to position us not only as victims but as madwomen, coercing us into *believing* that we are indeed mad. Consequently, it is necessary to examine and interrogate madness and its role as an escape from the Symbolic, and it is equally important not to romanticise madness. Shoshana Felman, in her article "Women and Madness: the Critical Phallacy", argues that, "[d]epressed and terrified women are not about to seize the means of production and reproduction: quite the opposite of rebellion, madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protest or self-affirmation" (1989:134, emphasis mine). The pain that Bessie Head conveys in *A Question of Power* through her protagonist, Elizabeth, is certainly not a desirable state. It is instead quite clearly a debilitating state that isolates and imprisons her. Further, as Boyce Davies argues, "All deviants occupy challenging positions in cultures. However, the madness does not change the structures .... The hysteric interrupts phallic mastery but does not change it" (1994:77, emphasis mine). Madness/hysteria, cannot change the structure of masculinity because it, like femininity, is a space constructed by masculinity. A woman presses out of one space only to be pressed into another. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the ways in which Black women have staved off madness and have managed to assert what bell hooks calls a "radical subjectivity". In white supremacist

capitalist patriarchies, agency, not madness, is radical and revolutionary for Black women: "A non-subservient black woman is by definition a transgressive - she is the ultimate outsider" (Ramphela 1995:181).

Contrary to agency and transgression is victimhood -- a state in which one feels absolutely powerless and incapable of agency: "To name oneself a victim is to deny agency" (hooks 1995:58). bell hooks cautions against defining the self in terms of being a victim because the "thinking of oneself as a victim could be disempowering and disabling" (1995:51). There is a distinction between naming oneself a victim and recognising that there are systems of domination that sometimes victimise us. In the context of the latter, one still believes in the possibility of agency. What further distinguishes the two is that a necessary condition of being a victim is the compliance with her/his own self-imprisonment<sup>2</sup>: the body becomes the jail cell and the victim becomes his/her own jailer or warden<sup>3</sup>. Women like Dr. Mamphela Ramphela and Ellen Kuzwayo refused to be their own jailers. That refusal, that assertion of agency, can have severe consequences, for madness as an imposed construct is often determined by people other than the one deemed mad. Madness, a form of silence in its existence outside of the Symbolic, is a punishment for women who choose to transgress victim status.

Many women have identified the pattern of isolation and madness as punishment when choosing to speak against the dictates of patriarchy. Dr. Ramphela discusses the repercussions of choosing agency, a transgressive act for a Black woman, when she states:

But at the end of the day, to be as transgressive as I am, transgressing so many boundaries and taboos and so on, is a very lonely life. Lonely, not in the sense that I'm bored and I don't know what to do, not that, because I am lonely in the midst of crowds in a way. **It's this little madness.** You always have a sense of needing to have peers that you could really take for granted, say things that are taken for granted instead of having to defend each and every thing that you say (1996:136, emphasis mine).

Julia Penelope argues that "[t]hose of us who refuse to 'adjust' to the demands of patriarchy are labeled crazy, misfits, malcontents, freaks" (1990:xxxiv), as well as hysterics and madwomen. Alice Walker argues that "[s]ocieties all over the world fear woman's critique,



a critique now crucial to the survival of the planet" (1996:40). The result of that fear of her voice is the punishment of silence for the crime of speaking. Walker continues:

[T]he methods used to silence us, whether verbal or physical, are as crude today as they were during the Renaissance, a time, ironically, when men boasted of being enlightened and women were still being burned as witches all over Europe (1996:40).

Also using the Renaissance as an example of women being punished for voicing themselves, for attempting to be independent agents, Julia Penelope argues that:

Still unknown numbers of women were tortured, raped, and burned at the stake. Because they were female; because they were, according to the "wise men," wild, impure, carnal, and defiant of male authority (1990:22, emphasis mine).

In defying male authority, i.e. masculinity, women were punished for refusing to be jailed in femininity or serving as their own jailers. Their defiance of male authority was likened to a defiance of Christian authority and therefore labelled heresy: "For their 'heresy,' those who refused to acknowledge xtian authority were beaten, raped, tortured, publicly humiliated, dismembered, and burned at the stake" (Penelope 1990:24).

In discussing Ama Ata Aidoo's play, "Anowa", Carol Boyce Davies establishes Anowa as a woman who refuses to imprison herself when she states: "Anowa chooses exile over 'home' in its dual sense. She refuses to accept the given terms of 'home' as equated with female domesticity" (1994:65). Boyce Davies goes on to more clearly connect madness to transgression when she notes that "[i]n calling Anowa a witch or madwoman in the end, she is allied with everything evil, but also everything transgressive, because she refuses to participate in Kofi Ako's [her husband's] wealth" (76). Her refusal of female domesticity as a transgression does not earn her respect but rather banishment to the realm of madness and silence. "And yet there is no healing in silence" (hooks 1993:25).

The autobiographies of Black women, then, serve as testimony to the possibility of voice, resilience, and transgression. bell hooks argues that "[r]eading inspirational writing is an essential part of self-recovery. We are sustained by one another's testimony when we find ourselves faltering or falling into despair" (1993:189, emphasis mine). Like Baby Suggs, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, who urges Black folks to love their flesh in a society

that hates it, devalues it, burns it, and teaches us to do the same, the autobiography can serve to teach us to value our ideas, our voices, our potential and agency in a society that consistently tells us we exist for the purpose of serving everyone else, everyone but ourselves: "It seemed to me that if folks in this society have been socialized via racism and sexism to see black women as existing to 'serve,' it often follows that folks feel we should continue to serve even if we are sick, weary, or even near death" (hooks 1993:89).

### *Unnamed Experience*

John Eakin asks: "How can language be made the instrument of identity when it is instrumental in the denial of identity?" (1985:262) Yet, there is value in being able to name, having a language with which to identify something. A name validates the existence of its referent, despite the fact that it has no intrinsic value. Likewise, the lack of a name allows people to ignore or deny its existence. Thus without a name, it becomes difficult to acknowledge the existence of a pain and impossible to try to talk about it in order to develop ways of healing, which is the case with the gaps and silences in psychoanalytic discourses surrounding the pain of racism. bell hooks argues:

Traditional therapy, mainstream psychoanalytical practices, often do not consider "race" an important issue, and as a result do not adequately address the mental-health dilemmas of black people. Yet these dilemmas are very real. They persist in our daily life and they undermine our capacity to live fully and joyously (1993:15).

Because of this, both naming the pain and talking about it are vital to our healing and self empowerment, "for the telling of our stories enables us to name our pain, our suffering, and to seek healing" (hooks 1993:17). In talking about an illness that she had, Alice Walker makes a similar observation: "I still had no idea what was wrong with me. Nor was I even able to talk about it, since it had no name" (1996:28). Her point reinforces the power of language by identifying the near impossibility of being able to heal when there is no language to even describe what is wrong: "Unnamed experience remains unrecognized and inchoate" (Penelope 1990:xxxiii). In talking about the issue of solidarity among women in the Black Consciousness Movement, Ramphela states:

But, it was a solidarity that was rather loose and fragile, and there were no real continuities because you must understand that **there wasn't really a theoretical understanding of what was going on** with us, or a theoretical understanding of Gender Equity or inequity. It was all a question of experiencing things and trying to interpret them as best we could. I only got to read feminist literature in the '70s long after my activist days were gone. So then I could retrospectively understand why I felt the way I did and some of the arguments I could have used instead of screaming and telling them they're talking rubbish (1996:136, emphasis mine).

Her statement that they did not have a theoretical understanding suggests that there was no discourse in which to frame the issues of gender inequality that the women experienced in the movement. With no language to name their particular struggles within the movement, it was possible for people, male and female, to deny that gender inequality existed, and there was no way of generating discussion or seeking ways of healing. When she did gain access to a language, to a theoretical understanding, through her exposure to feminist literature, she gained an understanding of ways she could have engaged with the men in the Movement to work toward a more equitable order. In other words, with this "theoretical understanding", she indicates she felt she could have begun a process of addressing and healing the problems of sexism in the Movement because she would have had a language with which to confront the issues.

The point that bell hooks makes is that there is no psychoanalytic discourse on the trauma of race oppression. In *Killing Rage*:

Sadly, by now there should be an incredible body of psychoanalytical and psychological material, written from a progressive standpoint, about black mental health that looks at the connection between concrete victimization and mental disorders, yet this work does not exist (1995:141).

Part of the reason there is no large body of works on such a topic is that the system of white supremacist domination hinges on the insignificance, inferiority, and invisibility of Black people:

There has been little publicly expressed concern about psychological abuse in black life. When structures of domination identify a group of people (as racist ideology does black folks in this society) "mentally" inferior, implying that they are more "body" than mind, it should come as no surprise that there is little societal concern for the mental health care of that group. Indeed, by perpetuating and upholding domination, **society invests, so to speak, in the ill health of certain groups, all the better to oppress and exploit them** (hooks 1993:70, emphasis mine).

As long as Black people are denied consciousness as objects of a dominating gaze, we can be denied humanity. The gaze is so dominating that we begin to censor ourselves:

Reduced to the machinery of bodily physical labor, black people learned to appear before whites as though they were zombies, cultivating the habit of casting the gaze downward so as not to appear uppity. To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity, equality. Safety resided in the pretense of invisibility (hooks 1995:36).

Maintaining that invisibility became a survival tactic for Blacks. "When black psyches are daily bombarded ... it makes sense that many of us begin to internalize racist thinking" (hooks 1995:117). Black psyches have been daily bombarded with our insignificance. If one's existence is not acknowledged and valued outside of its capacity to serve, then one's voice also is not heard. Being rendered invisible is being rendered silent. If invisibility becomes self-imposed as a survival tactic, so does silence. Thus, to speak would also assert subjectivity, equality. Indeed, it was only for the eyes of whites that Blacks subverted their gaze, or for that matter, only for men that women subvert their gaze.

In actuality, the invisibility is achieved through a hyper-visibility. Seeing is an effect of agency, and being seen the effect of subjugation: one is subjected to the gaze of those who see. It creates an unequal relationship in which those who dominate see, and can therefore choose *not* to see the humanity of those they see, effectively rendering them invisible as subjects, as agents. This cycle of visibility and invisibility is one Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish* in his explanation of the effects of the Panopticon<sup>4</sup>:

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary ... in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers (Foucault 1977[1975]:201, emphasis mine).

The effect of self-imprisonment, self-censorship is the result of a panoptic gaze, and panopticism works only on two conditions, one of which is the fact that those who see cannot in fact be seen by those subjected to the gaze:

And, in order to be exercised, this power had to be given the instrument of permanent,

exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance, capable of making all visible, as long as it could itself remain invisible. It had to be like a faceless gaze that transformed the whole social body into a field of perception: thousands of eyes posted everywhere (Foucault 1977 [1975] :214).

The other factor is the requirement that those subjected to the gaze are always aware of a perpetual gaze, which effects self-censorship and self-imprisonment:

[S/]He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; [s/]he makes them play spontaneously upon [herself or] himself, [s/]he inscribes in [herself or] himself the power relation in which [s/]he simultaneously plays both roles; [s/]he becomes the principle of [her/]his own subjection (Foucault 1977[1975]:202).

Indeed, Emma Mashinini says of her jailers: "Nobody ever says anything. These people have fine ways of torturing you. They let you torture yourself" (1989:65).

There exists a sense of safety in imprisoning oneself because there appears to be no risk of punishment. The irony, of course, is that the self-imprisonment is punishment in itself. Judith Butler argues that we comply with the constrictions of gender because we fear that there will be punishment for not believing in them. I submit that we also fear that external punishment is more harsh than any we can impose on ourselves.

Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions is obscured by the credibility of those productions - **and the punishments that attend not agreeing to believe in them;** the construction "compels" our belief in its necessity and naturalness (Butler 1990:140, emphasis mine).

Thus, agreeing to believe in "the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality" (Butler 1990:136) can be an act of self-imprisonment, of denying the self the fullest possibilities of agency. That there is safety in imprisoning themselves explains why people agree to enact their own oppression, why people engage in their own victimisation.

Besides self-hatred, another dangerous result of Panopticism is that in taking the responsibility to become one's own jailer, the agency of domination is hidden. hooks

asserts that "[i]t is useful for white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to make all black rage appear pathological rather than identify the structure wherein that rage surfaces"

(1995:29). People are able to perpetuate systems of domination because of their very invisibility. One of the traumatic effects of racism is the repression of Black rage:

The rage of the oppressed is never the same as the rage of the privileged ....  
Public focus on black rage, the attempt to trivialize and dismiss it, must be subverted by public discourse about **the pathology of white supremacy, the madness it creates**  
(hooks 1995:30, emphasis mine).

Black rage is visible, while the pathology of white supremacy that gives rise to such rage remains hidden. hooks' statement serves two important functions: 1) to hold accountable by naming and identifying white supremacy for what it is -- pathological, and 2) to make the point that the privileged consider the expression of emotions a privilege. By naming white supremacy, hooks refuses to engage in the masquerade of its invisibility and hence nonexistence. As long as white supremacy remains hidden, it cannot be targeted as the impetus for Black rage, and the latter continues to be punished. What is the punishment for expressing rage as an act of agency? Madness. Part of the facade of domination is not only keeping the source of domination invisible and hidden, but also keeping its utter irrationality and madness hidden. For, "in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (Foucault 1977[1975]:202). Of course the one in the central tower sees everything except his/her own irrationality and madness. Indeed, it is useful for white supremacist capitalist patriarchy to label "others" as mad when we choose to no longer be our own jailers rather than to identify its own inherent insanity. Being in jail and having acknowledged that those who dominate know what they are doing "when they lock you up" because you end up torturing yourself (1989:90), is what Emma Mashinini articulates in her autobiography:

I did not know anything about the psychological effect of trauma. There are only things I've learnt about since coming out of hospital. I thought instead that I was going mad. Really going mad. And I was fighting very much against it because now I could read in the newspapers that people were going into psychiatric hospitals and I

didn't understand that you could go mad from being arrested. I just thought I was sick (1989:86).

Because of a lack of a psychoanalytic discourse around the issue of race and the traumatic effects of racism, Mashinini, like Alice Walker, was unaware of the source of her trauma. She shifts all agency to herself and there is no acknowledgement on her part of the people and systems that subjected her to a panoptic gaze. She could only hold herself accountable for her madness because white supremacy remained hidden and unnamed as pathological. Just as unnamed experience remains inchoate and unrecognised, unnamed systems of domination remain hidden and unrecognised.

In line with this, understanding masculinity as an ideology of domination that thrives on the binary relationship between a male/female, masculine/feminine dichotomy, "the see/being seen dyad" (Foucault 1977[1975]:202) offers insight into the madness and blindness of masculinity -- its absolute irrationality. The trauma of oppression, of being the object of hatred, offers the potential for madness. For example, Elizabeth in *A Question of Power* becomes "stark raving mad" in response to the madness of both Dan's masculinity and the marginalisation she feels from "Africans" because of her mixed race heritage. Not surprisingly, she describes madness in terms of its oppressiveness, in terms of the sense it gives her of being pressed into a space:

It is a sustained pressure of mental torture that reduces its victim to a state of permanent terror, and once they start on you they don't know where to stop, until you become stark, raving mad (1974:137).

Though this passage is embedded in her analysis of the "social defects of Africa" (137), the "they" is applicable to anyone who oppresses.

Elizabeth's madness is intensified by Dan, "the king of women" (149), and his insistent sex-exploiting, penis-wielding character. Not only does Elizabeth feel severely oppressed by his sexual conquests, but also by his merciless abuse of her, which he parades as love:

When he talked of love to her there was a pathetic appeal in his tone. His love was exclusive, between her and him alone. They ought to be silently wrapped up in it,

with no intruders. The pathetic appeal had a corresponding appeal in her. He'd flung a hook right into her pain- and feeling- centre. This he was to use as he pleased: 'Now cry, now laugh, now feel jealous.' And he adjusted the button to suit his needs (117).

He uses love as a mask for his depravity, as a point of entry into her emotions. Ultimately, he uses "love" to press Elizabeth into a state of "permanent terror" with complete control over her emotions. And, not accidentally, she is repeatedly haunted by the power of Dan's penis, which he uses in sexual conquests of other women in front of Elizabeth:

Naked women were prancing wildly in front of her and there was Dan, gyrating his awful penis like mad. She swallowed six bottles of beer and six sleeping tablets to induce a blackout. She had a clear sensation of living right inside a stinking toilet; she was so broken, so shattered, she hadn't even the energy to raise one hand (14).

[H]e thrust black hands in front of her, black legs and a huge, towering black penis. The penis was always erected. From that night, he kept his pants down; after all, the women of his harem totalled seventy-one (128).

Dan kept on revolving his penis in her face. There was no escape from Dan (175).

There is no escape from Dan, and there is little hope of escape for Elizabeth from the madness of his masculinity. In the end, we learn from Sello that Dan himself "went mad. He saw that he could break and bend all life to his will" (198). His madness is perverse in his desire and will to dominate. In a patriarchal system, men gain power from their madness; they gain greater power to "break and bend all life" to their wills and their conception of order which they parade as the only logical and rational way of ordering and seeing the world. That very ruthlessness appears to be a virtue as a heightened, deeper, superior masculinity, and indeed it is. His dominating madness gives rise to Elizabeth's.

In her book *The Gendering of Melancholia: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Symbolics of Loss in Renaissance Literature*, one of the points Juliana Schiesari makes is that melancholia, though a "pathological fixation on an imaginary sense of loss, a neurosis whose symptom indicates the persistence of something repressed deep in the subject's unconscious" according to Freud (1992:5, emphasis mine), becomes a form of heightened creativity when applied to men:



In other words, depression became translated into a virtue for the atrabilious man of letters. And it is significant that melancholia - at least this form of it - became an elite "illness" that afflicted *men* precisely as the *sign* of their exceptionality, as the inscription of genius within them (7, author's emphasis).

She cites the "great melancholics" to be "Petrarch, Ficino, Tasso, Rousseau, Chateaubrand, Hölderlin, DeQuincey, Nerval, Dostoevsky, Walter Benjamin" with a "notable absence of women, an absence that surely points less to some lack of unhappy women than to the lack of significance traditionally given women's grief in patriarchal culture" (3-4). Women in this European context were urged to suppress their grief for the same reason Blacks are expected to suppress rage -- because even the expression of emotion is a privilege. While hysteria banishes woman to a realm of silence and imprisons her in a painfully isolated space outside of the Symbolic, melancholia is a sign of a "superiority" in "his privileged understanding" which produces an "exceptional marginalisation or alienation that grants him cultural legitimacy" (10). Her marginalisation displaces her from centres of power, while his places him at the centres of power:

Although, of course, both women and men can be depressed, the discourse of melancholia has historically designated a topos of expressibility for men and has accordingly given them a means to express their sorrows in a less alienated way, while relegating women to an inexpressive babble whose only sense (at least for the doctors of melancholia) is their need for a good man .... [M]elancholia is at best made available to woman as a debilitating disease and certainly not as an enabling ethos (15).

Just like his melancholia, his marginality works to grant him cultural legitimacy. Indeed, not only is his madness culturally legitimate in its depravity, but in its elevation of his status, it becomes the norm, the "logic" toward which all others must aspire. He normalises his madness, in which case, according to an epistemology of binarisms, hers is not only subordinated, it is cast out. The power and agency of his madness becomes invisible to the extent that he is not recognised as a madman or held accountable for his role in her madness. Masculinity, which requires a "natural" femininity, creates the environment for her madness if she sees that femininity is not inherent in the female body. The nature of the Panopticon is such that the jailer in the central tower remains invisible, but if she dares to look into the central tower and through the jailer to his utter insanity, she is discarded

as mysteriously falling victim to a "debilitating disease ... not ... an enabling ethos."

Though not all women who see past the facade of masculinity (and femininity) to its phallacy become stark raving mad as does Elizabeth, there are degrees of madness. A woman can be pressured to question her sensibilities when she chooses to transgress the boundaries designating femininity and her as a supposedly feminine being. There is an isolating effect in questioning one's own perceptions and logic; it becomes a process of the self making the "constraints of power ... play spontaneously" (Foucault 1977[1975]:202) on itself. This sense of isolation in transgressing is the entrance into the "little madness" Dr. Ramphele refers to in her interview.

### *The Violence and Depravity of Masculinity*

Masculinity, like all dominating systems, is necessarily violent. The nature of oppression is such that:

[t]oo often the feelings of a victim are not taken into account. He [sic] is so disregarded by the torturer or oppressor that for centuries evils are perpetrated with no one being aghast or put to shame (Head 1974:98).

The "victim" is subjected to the will of the torturer, the oppressor who sees the imposition of his/her will as a way of maintaining order in the universe. In *Metaphors of the Self*, James Olney discusses Einstein's notion of free conceptual construction:

This "free conceptual construction" is the only way man has of making the universe stop pounding and washing away at his little light of consciousness; it is the only means he possesses of **imposing the order of his own creative shape on chaos**. In his free act man creates a significance in the universe that would otherwise not be there (1972:16, emphasis mine).

How can man be threatened by the universe if he sees himself as connected to the universe? If he feels threatened by the power of the universe, then he acknowledges that his power is lesser, meagre, merely a "little light of consciousness". So, he feels the need to impose order on the world (as evidenced, for example, in language through naming, labelling, cataloguing, restricting), for if he does not, there will be chaos. This fear of his own smallness appears to explain much of the logic of men's, particularly the history of white men's, domination: anything "men perceive ... as unruly objects they must tame and

control" (Penelope 1990:15). If he does not control and tame woman, she will be wild and unruly. If he does not conquer the land by taming it, landscaping it, it will be wild and chaotic. If he does not civilise the wild and savage Africans, there will be chaos. Chaos, then, is merely the absence of *his* power and sense of order. Judith Butler quotes Mary Douglas providing insight into the relationship between oppression, order, and imposition:

[I]deas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose system on an inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male and female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created (Butler 1990:131).

Thus, it appears he sees his imposition of "order" as manifest destiny, his duty in life. Yet, his "imposing the order of his own creative space" is inevitably, as history has repeatedly shown, oppressive and ultimately illogical. As suspected, white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is the manifestation of his fear in the face of the certainty of his smallness.

Imposing his will, his order is a way of keeping his madness at bay -- a preventative measure rather than a reactive tactic. And, the fact that they "break and bend all life" to their will is not only *not* deviant, perverse, evil, abnormal, or violent in their eyes, but it is the norm, and as such, unrecognisable by all who accept and live according to the status quo. That fear that Olney dangerously and innocently heralds as "imposing the order of his own creative space", encroaches upon the freedom of others, indeed denies freedom to others and is consequently oppressive. It is necessarily violent in its forceful invasiveness of others' spaces regardless of what that other individual wants.

The denigration of others raises the question of why difference becomes a negative thing to be controlled. Butler argues that hatred of others arises because:

[t]he "abject" designates that which has been expelled from the body, discharged as excrement, literally rendered "Other." This appears as an expulsion of alien elements, but the alien is effectively established through this expulsion. **The construction of the "not-me" as the abject establishes the boundaries of the body which are also the first contours of the subject** (Butler 1990:133, emphasis mine).

Thus the very act of designating an other and expelling that other is one of subject formation. If one asks again the question of why there is a need to dominate others in

order to assert subjectivity, the answer again appears to be a fear of becoming absorbed, erased, effectively killed by the other. So, in the binary logic, one dominates before one is dominated.

Interestingly, however, for expulsion to take place, the thing expelled must have once been part of the body. Leroy Vail and Landeg White argue that the mid-nineteenth century marked a "growing preoccupation of European intellectuals with defining borders between peoples" (Leroy and Landeg 1991:2) such that "racism was a lens through which most educated Westerners perceived the world and their place in it" (1991:2). They continue to argue that the notion of evolution became an organising principle in the delineation of boundaries and the hierarchisation of people:

That races with a common origin could possess fundamentally different cultures and ways of thinking was soon explained in terms of one of the major organizing ideas of the last half of the nineteenth century, evolutionism. The findings of the new science of archeology had transformed the Western perception of humankind's position in Time from biblical brevity to geological expansiveness. Human history thus could be thought of as a gradual evolutionary development through a set of stages. By being situated within the matrix of evolutionism, the old static hierarchy of races was given both a temporal dimension and a history. Some races were different from others because they had experienced greater cultural evolution from humankind's common origin than others (1991:3).

If Europeans graded humans on an evolutionary scale, deeming Africans as stuck in the past, and if they believed that people evolved from a "common origin", then logically, Europeans would have had to have evolved either from Africans or from the same point as Africans. This suggests that indeed Europeans did in some manner believe that the other was a part they needed to expel, and the delineation of boundaries was a part of that process of subject formation:

The boundary of the body as well as the distinction between internal and external is established through the ejection and transvaluation of something originally part of identity into a defiling otherness. As Iris Young has suggested in her use of Kristeva to understand sexism, homophobia, and racism, the repudiation of bodies for their sex, sexuality, and/or color is an "expulsion" followed by a "repulsion" that founds and consolidates culturally hegemonic identities along sex/race/sexuality axes of differentiation (Butler 1990:133).

If indeed those who oppress equate those they oppress with their own excrement, then it is

no wonder they can treat other human beings with such violence as to deny a person belief in self. Difference mutates into something repulsive, and the fear of being absorbed, erased, and killed by the other translates into a fear of being absorbed by one's own excrement and suffocating to death.

And though oppression has many different faces, it is always violent at base. It is a violence that pervades the fabric of patriarchal societies at every level:

[W]omen's oppression exists not only in the material, practical organisation of economic, social, medical, and political structures, but also in the very foundations of logos, reasoning, and articulation - in the subtle linguistic procedures and in the logical processes through which meaning itself is produced (Felman 1989:137-38).

These structures of domination, either material or linguistic, impact one another such that there really exists no gap between actions, consciousness, and language. The violence inserted into each functions as a thread that holds them together as one. For example, Elizabeth not only feels that she is being pressed into a space by the actions and expressions of a person, but that the space she occupies is invaded. A man moves into her soul with ease and possesses her space, violates it by forcing on her his own depravity:

It was one thing to adopt generous attitudes, at a distance. It was another to have a supreme pervert thrust his soul into your living body. It was like taking a walk on slime; slithering, skidding and cringing with a deep shame. It was like no longer having a digestive system, a marvellous body, filled with a network of blood-vessels - it was simply having a mouth and an alimentary tract; food was shit and piss; the sky, the stars, the earth, people, animals were also shit and piss. It was like living in the hot, feverish world of the pissing pervert of the public toilet - the sort of man who, in buses and cinema queues, pressed himself against a woman. And when a woman turned around and said: 'You shouldn't do that,' she looked right into a face with an uncomprehending smirk that said: 'But don't you like it? That's all I do. That's all I know. My whole life is my pissing vehicle. You're like that too. You're just pretending (138).

His facial expression conveys a sentiment that has the power to severely impact Elizabeth's reality. What he is thinking, he conveys on his face, which Elizabeth translates, and it effects for her a changed reality. There is a violent invasiveness in his actions and consciousness. Because of his desires, she becomes uncomfortable and feels a "deep shame".

Because of her sense that other souls, no matter how evil, walk into hers and

effectively change her by making her reality theirs with the added effect of terror, the pain Elizabeth feels in her madness often feels like physical pain: "She had no way of breaking the storm of evil - Dan was simply the extension of Medusa, and the torrent of hatred he felt for Elizabeth was hitting her daily such terrible blows she was barely alive" (168-69). She makes the point again of Dan's violence and the physical pain he causes her:

Dan was bashing in her head the moment she blacked out. He was right there beside her bed, wild, excited into a frenzy at her helplessness. He hacked her to death between blackouts. She had no defence. She simply lay there falling into death. The joy and ecstasy for him was the piecemeal job he was doing. He left a little part of her alive each time. It was most probably his major sexual erection; he attacked her head the way he had attacked the vaginas of the nice-time girls he'd displayed before her for a whole year (180).

The physical pain Elizabeth feels is significant in understanding the intertwining of domination of the body and domination of the mind. The assault on her consciousness feels like an assault on her body. bell hooks makes this connection in *Killing Rage*:

Embedded in all forms of nationalist thought is the acceptance and affirmation of sexist exploitation and oppression. To build nations and "pure" races the bodies of women must be controlled, our sexual activities policed, and our reproductive rights curtailed (1995:244).

Black nationalist consciousness is generally demarcated along the masculine perspective. The privileging of his coming to consciousness subordinates hers, and in so doing, assaults it as well. The assault on her consciousness is accompanied by a similar subordination of/assault on her body by controlling her body, policing her sexual activities and curtailing her reproductive rights.

#### *Absence*

By absenting Black women from the discourse of what Black people should gain in liberation from white supremacist oppression, Black men maintain the patriarchal standard of controlling the female body, though in relation to a supposedly liberating aesthetic. In other words, there is a contradiction inherent in his desire to continue controlling her body while simultaneously spouting rhetoric of how she should look to show that she is liberated from white psychological oppression. It is the very same point

Michele Wallace makes which I quoted earlier in the Introduction:

It took me three years to fully understand that Stokely [Carmichael] was serious when he said my position in the movement was "prone," three years to understand that the countless speeches that all began "the Black man..." did not include me ... and as I pieced together the ideal that was being presented for me to emulate, I discovered my newfound freedoms being stripped from me, one after another. No I wasn't to wear makeup but yes I had to wear long skirts that I could barely walk in. No I wasn't to go to the beauty parlor but yes I was to spend hours cornrolling my hair. No I wasn't to flirt with or take shit off white men but yes I was to sleep with and take unending shit off Black men. No I wasn't to watch television or read *Vogue* or *Ladies' Home Journal* but yes I should keep my mouth shut. I would still have to iron, sew, cook, and have babies (1982:6).

Erasure therefore is a form of abuse. The violence of absence is the result of masculinity, which in efforts to subsume woman and difference by relegating her to the realm of the same (as himself), that which is recognisable to him, renders her invisible. Shoshana

Felman argues that:

[m]adness and women, however, turn out to be the two outcasts of the establishment of readability. An ideological conditioning of literary and critical discourse, a political orientation of reading thus affirms itself, not so much through the negative treatment of women as through their total neglect, their pure and simple *omission*. This critical oversight, which appears as a *systematic* blindness to significant facts, functions as a censorship mechanism, as a symbolic eradication of women from the world of literature (1989:142, author's emphasis).

Unfortunately, the issue of the omission of women is not restricted or specific to the world of literature and critical discourse.

The frustration of being systematically omitted from history as framed by men, and subsequently silenced is one that Black women in white supremacist capitalist patriarchies have voiced many times over. For example:

Nellie Y. McKay:

And yet Anita Hill was not the first black woman to speak out in America. Contrary to what many others believe, black women in this country have never been silent, it is simply that **often, in a racist-sexist disregard and even denigration of them, others do not listen, and therefore almost never hear their voices** (1992:287-88, emphasis mine).

Patricia Hill Collins:

The shadow obscuring the Black women's intellectual tradition is neither accidental nor benign. Suppressing the knowledge produced by any oppressed group makes it easier for dominant groups to rule because the seeming absence of an independent consciousness in the oppressed can be taken to mean that subordinate

groups willingly collaborate in their own victimization (Fanon 1963; Friere 1970; Scott 1985). **Maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure** (1991:5, emphasis mine).

Barbara Smith:

Black women's existence, experience, and culture and the brutally complex systems of oppression which shape these are in the "real world" of white and/or male consciousness **beneath consideration, invisible, unknown** (1982:157, emphasis mine).

Ama Ata Aidoo:

**It is definite that anything that had to do with African women was, of all vital pieces of information, the most unknown (or rather unsought), the most ignored of all concerns, the most unseen of all the visibles, and we might as well face it, of everything to do with humanity, the most despised.** This had nothing to do with anything that African women themselves did or failed to do. It had to do with the politics of sex and the politics of the wealthy of this earth, who grabbed it and who held it (in Petersen 1988:156-57, emphasis mine).

Kimberlé Crenshaw:

[B]lack women are marginalized in feminist politics as a consequence of race, and they are marginalized in antiracist politics as a consequence of their gender. **The consequences of this multiple marginality are fairly predictable - there is simply silence of and about black women** (1992:405, emphasis mine).

To say, however, that women, Black women, have been silenced is not the same as saying that we have been silent. For, as Boyce Davies notes, "[s]peech, then, is as much an issue of audience receptivity, the fundamental of listening, as it is of articulation" (1994:21). That form of oppression -- silencing through systematic omission -- is no less maddening or traumatic than any other form. For, any kind of "domination demands ... self-negation" (hooks 1995:161).

### *Am I My Sister's Jailer?*

Internalising domination means being willing to negate our senses of agency, to police and censor each other. Within the context of a race framework, bell hooks makes this point at two separate moments in *Killing Rage* in terms of both class and gender:

Since most privileged-class blacks are not committed to radical and/or revolutionary politics they can effectively police the voices of those of us who speak from dissenting standpoints, making it difficult for us to gain a wider public audience (1995:168).

Empowered to be hostile towards and policing of one another, black female academics



and/or intellectuals often work to censor and silence one another (1995:231).

Thus far, I have talked about the subject that imprisons herself. But, the power of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy is so pervasive that not only does one learn to become one's own jailer, but one also learns to attempt to imprison other bodies similar to one's own. In the context of the U.S., that type of person is known as an "Uncle Tom", and in the context of Black Consciousness that person is known as a "non-white":

If one's aspiration is whiteness but his pigmentation makes attainment of this impossible, then that person is a non-white. Any man who calls a white man "Baas", **any man who serves in the police force or Security Branch is *ipso facto* a non-white** (Biko 1978:48, emphasis mine).

*Any man* who worked for the State chose the imprisonment of his brothers; in neither context is there a word specifically for Black women. Yet, the fact remains that there are Black women who work to imprison and silence other Black women, perhaps out of fear of reprisal. Or, perhaps there is no logic: in loyalty to the status quo such women must inevitably internalise the madness of masculinity, their souls invaded by depravity much like Elizabeth's. Dr. Ramphele notes attempts by Black women to silence her at two different times -- during the activist years of the BCM, and later regarding her autobiography. In the BCM:

The second difficulty of course is that other women also have difficulty with someone who is so insistent on challenging existing notions partly because they envy that you have the courage to speak, and they'll say, "Well, uzenza betere", "She thinks she's better" (1996:135-6).

In the interview Pumla Gqola and I conducted with Dr. Ramphele, she spoke about female resistance to her autobiography:

[T]here are a lot of women who even today disagree with the fact that I have written my autobiography, because they think that there are certain things that shouldn't be said publicly. I happen to disagree. Nobody thinks that there's anything wrong with Mandela writing his autobiography. Maybe they're right, I'm too young, but then I've done a lot for my age and I wouldn't be able to go on to the next stage of my life with the burden from the past. So many things had to be written. Of course I also knew that there would be people, young women like yourselves who would want to know what happened (1996:137).

Her last point here is an important one. With the overwhelming lack of writing by Black

women activists about their experiences as Black women in the BCM, with the exception of Dr. Ramphele, there would be no resources to which Black women after her could turn for examples of radical subjectivity, for how a Black woman is supposed to survive and claim agency in a white supremacist capitalist patriarchy. If she had not undertaken the responsibility to continue to write about the Black Consciousness Movement and issues of gender, there would be silence, a silence powerful enough to urge the silence of future Black women. That absence creates the space for Black women to continue to buy into a status quo that systematically omits us, that urges us to be our own censors and jailers. That type of self-denial and self-hatred is precisely what prompts the need for Black women to write autobiographies, to write Black women back into *history* and to generate a *herstory* of transgression, empowerment, and agency, "for the telling of our stories enables us to name our pain, our suffering, and to seek healing" (hooks 1993:17, emphasis mine), not only for the readers, but also for the authors who, as Dr. Ramphele says, need to write in order to "go on to the next stage of ... life."

### *Storytelling: Re-Membering Herstory*

Traditionally, certain roles of oral storytelling in southern African cultures are fulfilled by women. In her article "The Modern Grandmother: Storytelling Now and the Tension of Time", Pumla Gqola states in a footnote that:

[t]here is relative consensus around the situation of storytelling among scholars of African literature. Storytelling in African societies took place mainly around a fire with a **grandmother** telling the story to several grandchildren. See Soko and Moto's articles in Whittaker (1986), Satyo et al (1986) (1996:10, emphasis mine).

Regarding the role of women as storytellers, Jeff Opland, in his article "Nontsizi Mgqwetho: a stranger in town", states that "women are prominent participants in the tradition of *intsomi*, the Xhosa folktale" (1995:162). Through storytelling, African women use the language to become the bearers of the culture, its traditions and its values. The written autobiography serves a similar function as oral storytelling -- remembering:

For her ... remembering is what heals; the oral tradition is what mends and gathers the tribes back together. Remembering or the function of memory means re-membering or

bringing back all the parts together .... The process of re-membering is therefore one of boundary crossing (Boyce Davies 1994:17).

The autobiographical works of Head, Kuzwayo and Ramphele are a form of talking to each other, to other Black women, a way of sorting through the pain, as well as detailing the triumphs, in order to heal a community through the individual story, as reflected in Dr. Ramphele's statement that that her autobiography had to be written because she knew "that there would be people, young women ... who would want to know what happened" (1996:137). The autobiography works in community; it works as testimony to the history of an individual's strengths and weaknesses as the individual perceives them, in the face of the oppression of the communities to which the individual belongs. The acts/processes of writing and reading the autobiography are acts of re-membering, putting back together a collective past that has been systematically distorted or destroyed; for, every individual and her story is a part of a collective. Therefore, the autobiography is not merely a selfish act of confession as many prominent theorists of autobiography argue, but an attempt to articulate the struggle and survival of one individual who is exposed to the brunt of oppressions suffered by many.

Indeed, Georges Gusdorf argues in his article "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" that "the task of autobiography is first of all a task of personal salvation. Confession, an attempt at remembering, is at the same time searching for a hidden treasure, for a last delivering word, redeeming in the final appeal a destiny that doubted its own value" (Olney 1980:39). He argues this after already positioning the autobiographer as "consider[ing] himself a great person, worthy of men's remembrance even though in fact he is only a more or less obscure intellectual" (31). In his conception of autobiography, the autobiography becomes synonymous with confession and the autobiographer is a "he". In light of men's attempts to vainly construct the world in their own image, it is not surprising that Gusdorf perceives the autobiographical act as a necessarily vain one. Admittedly influenced by Gusdorf, James Olney argues that "the task

of autobiography is first of all a task of personal salvation. Confession, an attempt at remembering, is at the same time searching for a hidden treasure, for a last delivering word, redeeming in the final appeal a destiny that doubted its own value" (Olney 1980:39). Along the same lines, Stephen Spender argues that "the essence of the confession is that the one who feels outcast pleads with humanity to relate his isolation to its wholeness. He pleads to be forgiven, condoned, even condemned, so long as he is brought back into the wholeness of people and of things" (Olney 1980:120). Like Gusdorf, Olney and Spender conceive of the autobiography as a confessional mode. The "he" that Spender uses as synonymous with autobiographer provides insight into the fact that he is talking about particular autobiographers and not autobiographers in general. Consequently, their theory of autobiography does not apply to autobiographers in general, but specifically to the white male autobiographers they discuss.

Susan Stanford Friedman in "Women's Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice" notes that for Gusdorf "the consciousness of self upon which autobiography is premised is the sense of 'isolated being,' a belief in the self as a discrete, finite 'unit' of society. Man must be an island unto himself. Then, and only then, is autobiography possible" (1988:36). She goes on to argue that the problem with "Gusdorf's and other individualistic paradigms" is the "unconscious masculine bias" that "dismisses from autobiographical selves" the "very sense of identification, interdependence, and community that ... are key elements in the development of a woman's identity according to theorists like Rowbotham and Chodorow" (38). What is of particular importance about Stanford Friedman's critique is the lack of valuing identification, interdependence, and community. While I am wary of drawing distinctions of autobiography on the basis of gender, I will assert, however, that the white male theoretical tendency has been to herald the individual and disregard the value of the communal in their theoretical scope, and thereby ignore those groups (which could include Blacks, women, or more specifically, Black women) who, in general, have valued the autobiography as a reflection, expression, or piece of a

community. For example, Steven Butterfield in *Black Autobiography in America* takes the position that Black autobiography is not about:

an individual with a private career, but a soldier in a long, historic march toward Canaan. The self is conceived as a member of an oppressed social group, giving back the iron of its endurance fashioned into armor and weapons for the use of the next generation of fighters (Butterfield 1974:3).

He goes on to conclude that the "self belongs to the people, and the people find a voice in the self" (1974:3). What Gusdorf, Olney, and Spender fail to realise in their theories of autobiography is that "[i]ndividualistic paradigms do not take into account the central role collective consciousness of self plays in the lives of women and minorities. They do not recognize the significance of interpersonal relationships and community in women's self-definition" (56). Finally, Stanford Friedman argues:

To echo and reverse Gusdorf once more, this autobiographical self often does not oppose herself to all others, does not feel herself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community (56, author's emphasis).

Stanford Friedman captures the inapplicability of the individualistic paradigm to Black autobiography, particularly to Black women's autobiographies.

The autobiographical works of Mamphela Ramphele, Ellen Kuzwayo, and Bessie Head do not offer evidence of their purpose as confession, but they do serve to pay tribute to the resilience of subjects under oppression who manage to find and claim their own agency. Significantly, their stories are very much *a part of a community*, which is not to argue that the autobiographies are an accurate reflection of the whole Black, Black female, or South African communities. Head's tale is one of the painful isolation of madness in its severance from the community, indeed her suffering at the hands of her community, but it is also a tale of a journey back to the community, back to "belonging" (1974:206), the last word of the book.

In *Metaphors of the Self*, James Olney argues that our understanding of the world is ordered by our experiences, and thus we understand everything in terms of metaphors:

New sensory experiences ... must be formulated in the mind before one can grasp and

hold them, before one can understand them and add them to the contents of knowledge and the complex of self. To a wholly new sensational or emotional experience, one can give sufficient organization only by relating it to the already known, only by perceiving a relation between this experience and another experience already placed, ordered, and incorporated. This is the psychological basis of the metaphorizing process: to grasp the unknown through the known, or to let the known stand for the unknown and thereby fit that into an organized, patterned body of experiential knowledge (1972:31, emphasis mine).

What if there is no known experience to substitute for the unknown? How can oppression exist if we routinely substitute the known for the unknown? If indeed we actually made that substitution, oppression probably could not exist. Repeatedly throughout history, human beings have been perfectly comfortable to allow the unknown to remain so. For example, if Black men in general took what they *know* of racist oppression and substituted it for what is unknown to them -- sexist oppression, there is the possibility, even likelihood, that they might understand oppression to be painful at base regardless of its face, because, as Brittan and Maynard argue:

The practice of domination in one sphere is never insulated from its practice in another sphere. Those who exploit workers do not have much difficulty in exploiting black groups. Those who dominate their wives and children at home have no difficulty in dominating people at work. What we are saying here is that oppression is indivisible. Where there is oppression of women, we find oppression of out-groups; where we find economic oppression, we discover sexism and racism. Furthermore, all forms of oppression are expressed and reproduced at the ideological level as though they were natural processes (1984:180).

Yet, Black men too often do not see sexist oppression precisely because it is unknown to them -- to be restricted, systematically marginalised and compressed into a tiny space because of their sex and gender. That type of oppression often remains wholly unknown to Black men in its invisibility to them. Because they are not the objects of sexist oppression, but instead its agents and beneficiaries, sexism simply does not exist. What is real is what happens *to* them. Surely this is true not only for Black men but for anyone who chooses to oppress.

In part, Olney appears to be right: because subjection to sexism and misogyny are not part of Black men's experiential realm, they have no real basis for perceiving or understanding it unless they filter it through experiences they do know. The only way

they can make sense of it is to substitute that unknown with a known experience. What Olney does not account for, however, is the event of that subject arriving at some sort of order by simply rejecting, refusing to acknowledge that which does not fit into his/her "organized, patterned body of experiential knowledge." Instead of actually acknowledging the unknown and seeing difference, the unknown is relegated to the realm of the known by the erasure of its difference and the assumption of its sameness. By "seeing" the other as the same, one essentially refuses to see the other at all, but instead chooses to narcissistically see self only. One imposes on the other one's own sense of order and reality according to the world as it revolves around the self and its experiences. That imposition is oppressive in its denial of agency, consciousness, equality, and humanity to the individual subjected to the panoptic gaze.

But, do we understand the world only in relation to our own experiences? Dr.

Ramphele points out that:

There is something frightening about being in 'non-space' - unknown and amongst people with whom one has no real contact .... Many narratives of ex-detainees and ex-prisoners attest to the same overwhelming sense of **not feeling like a complete human being until one has made some contact with those to whom one is connected, those who in a sense define one's humanity** (Ramphele 1995:123, emphasis mine).

It is through connections to others that we understand a sense of belonging in the world; yet, we also understand the world through our own specific experiences. The result has been the writing of history through particular lenses, meaning that writers of history have written certain "others" out of history. Historians, who generally have been white males, have systematically left out the parts of history unknown to their experiences in the world:

If autobiography is in one sense history, then one can turn that around and say that history is also autobiography, and in a double sense: the makers of history, or those through whom history is made, could find in their autobiographies the destiny of their time achieved in action and speech; and the writers of history organize the events of which they write according to, and out of, their own private necessities and the state of their own selves. Historians impose, and quite properly, their own metaphors on the human past. **History, as almost everyone acknowledges, is not an objective collection of facts but one historian's point of view on the facts: a point of view that, taken as a sum of what he has experienced and understands, reveals to us the historian.** As readers we go to history, as to philosophy, to autobiography and poetry, to learn more not about other people and the past but about ourselves and the present

(Olney 1972:36-37, emphasis mine).

It is no wonder that many Black women have chosen to write themselves back into history via the autobiography. For, as the African proverb goes, "only when lions have historians, will hunters cease being heroes," or rather, only when those hunted/dominated have historians, or themselves become historians, will history cease to glorify those who hunt/dominate. Olney argues that "[w]hat one seeks in reading autobiography is not a date, a name, or a place, but a characteristic way of perceiving, or organizing, and of understanding, an individual way of feeling and expressing that one can somehow relate to oneself" (1972:37). While the latter may be true, it is not necessarily so at the expense of the dates, names, and places that have been left out of the history books, and it does not have to be an either/or dichotomy. In the case of Black autobiography, both are often important. For example, Ellen Kuzwayo's autobiography is a monument largely to the many Black women struggling for empowerment and liberation in South Africa, and she takes care to name all of the women she has encountered, worked with, and admired. So, her autobiography serves as an important historical document that names women lost to history. Similarly, as Dr. Ramphela recounts her activism in the Black Consciousness Movement, dates, names, and places are significant to the autobiography as an historical testimony.

### *Black Women Speak*

As a dominating system of power, the ideology of masculinity is pervasive.

Ironically, it impacts even women conscious of issues of gender inequality. For example, in "In Search of Books" in Michael Chapman's *Soweto Poetry*, Miriam Tlali weaves in and out of "Black people" and the masculine pronoun. In describing her experience at Wits Library for the first time, she states: "At last I could read what was relevant to my position as a black person" (1982:44, emphasis mine). The "black person" is simultaneously gender neutral and a reference to herself as a Black woman, but she does not overtly acknowledge her gender in this statement. She continues:



**The black reader** in South Africa today, the truly discerning one, demands that the kind of books **he** reads should reflect **his** true feelings and make **him** cogitate. **He** knows that **he** must place **himself** somewhere in the world today; **he** must decide **his** destiny. **He** wants to re-discover **himself**, to regain **his** dignity. **I am no exception to this rule.** Only those **people** who have rid themselves of the yoke of political, economic and mental enslavement can afford to read for pleasure and escape (45, emphasis mine).

The gender neutral "black reader" is repeatedly and consistently deferred in the gender specific male pronoun. She undoubtedly accepted the masculine pronoun as a "universal" one that included her as well, which is clear from the fact that when she does not use a pronoun, she reverts to a gender neutral identifier, such as "reader" or "people". Given the very same context, Black male activists tended to use masculine terminology even when they were not using the pronoun form, so that more often than not, they used the phrase "the Black man". Ironically, Tlali then states that she is no exception to this rule, and of course she is an exception by virtue of her identification of the reader as male versus herself as female. She then ends with an equation between the male pronoun and neutrality by using "people" after a string of male pronouns. Though talking about herself as a Black reader, she effectively denies herself the position of "black reader". Perhaps she used the masculine pronoun as a convenience, as do many English speakers, as a way of dealing with the inadequacy of English regarding gender neutral signifiers. In that type of context in which the point is about people in general, the masculine pronoun becomes the default, the norm in English. Or, perhaps her usage of the masculine pronoun attests to the pervasiveness of the masculine discourse of Black Consciousness, which is not inconceivable since she was writing during that time.

Unlike Tlali though, who in this excerpt used gender neutral terms when not using the pronoun, Ellen Kuzwayo and Bessie Head fall subject to using masculinist discourse, and fairly clearly taking their cues from the framework of the BCM rhetoric. Therefore, it is particularly interesting that a woman like Kuzwayo, whose autobiography is a testimony and tribute to the role of Black women in the liberation struggle in South Africa, becomes an agent of her own erasure.

Published in 1985, well after the Black Consciousness Movement, *Call Me Woman* is heralded by Bessie Head in the Foreword as "the true history of the land, a history that vibrates with human compassion and goodness", for "at the end of the book one feels as if a shadow history of South Africa has been written" (Kuzwayo 1985:xiii). Perhaps most notable about the autobiography is Kuzwayo's attempt to write a *herstory* of South Africa, refusing to let history swallow up, silence and negate these women's lives, voices and contributions. Kuzwayo acknowledges that her book is "a celebration of the women, whose achievement is exposed at the international level for people to know about" (James 1990:53):

[W]hen the publishing process of the book was coming to an end, I noticed that the publishers had edited so many women out. I had to tell them to push me out of my book and put the women in because those were the people who inspired me to write the book. Those were the women who gave me support right through the writing. Their lives became so powerful for me. Some of them have long been dead, but their lives are still very much felt in the community because of the impact and contribution they made (James 1990:53).

Not only is *Call Me Woman* testimony to the strength and activism of many Black South African women, but as an autobiography, it is also testament to Kuzwayo's strength and will to not be a victim, to not be marginalised or subordinated, such as when she decided to leave her abusive husband, certainly at a time when and within a culture where that just was not done. Because of the fact that she "went through both physical and mental sufferings" (124), she decided that the price of staying with her husband was higher than leaving, that if she did not leave him she would be risking her life:

It was here in Legkraal that I was able to assess my marriage and family situation with a minimum of subjectivity. The longer I stayed at Legkraal, the more distant and strained the ties between my husband and myself became. Any effort to restore a cordial relationship between us went unrewarded, and the naked truth came forcefully through: if I returned to Saulspoort, my life might terminate without warning, and my boys would be motherless at an early age. Nevertheless, I had to return temporarily .... Some time at the beginning of 1947 I resolved to leave Saulspoort. It was a very difficult decision to put into action but I had no choice. I would have to pretend that my children did not matter to me, or I would have to trust that an unknown, supernatural power would take charge of them in my absence. Taking them with me was out of the question, as they were too young to go on foot .... The only resort was to leave them behind (130-31).

Throughout the autobiography, she is clear in recognising the various systems of domination that affected her life, and the lives of Black women in general: "As I shall stress time and time again in this book, the majority of black women for too long have been discriminated against as women and as blacks" (32). She makes this same point in the interview with Adeola James, who asks: "To be black and to be a women is a double ill fate. What is your response to this?" To which she responds, "I don't know why you want me to answer this because I have every reason to believe that every woman, every black woman, particularly in Africa, is fully aware of this" (1990:55).

Consequently, her text shows time and again her awareness of this fact of life for Black women. She uses this theoretical position to launch into her critical analysis of the migrant labour system and the ways in which the white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist government of South Africa positioned Black women on the basis of race and gender:

The black woman, who through the centuries had been viewed by the white state as unproductive in industry, as totally dependent on her male counterpart, as helpless, unintelligent to the point of being useless and stupid - the woman who much against her will had resigned herself to being labelled a 'minor' by the state - was suddenly plunged into a situation of accepting numerous roles of responsibility. Without warning, training or any sort of preparation, she became overnight mother, father, family administrator, counsellor, child-minder, old-age caretaker and overall overseer of both family and neighbourhood affairs in a community which had been totally deprived of its active male population (12-13).

In critiquing these systems of domination, she expresses outrage at the status given her by the state as a minor:

I applied for a passport ... , and among the very first questions put to me at the immigration office was, who my male next of kin was. Without attaching any serious thought to the question, I disclosed that I was a widow, and I had my father and three sons. After establishing that I lived with my sons, the officer, quite unashamed, told me to take the forms he had given me to my oldest son so that he could sign them so giving his approval and permission for me to go overseas. He brushed aside my explanation that my son still lived with me at home, where I was in full control and responsible for everything, insisting that no progress could be made without my son's permission and signature.

In the frustration of having to be given permission by someone who usually needed permission from me, I was annoyed and very angry (240).

In the eyes of the state, she as a Black woman is reduced to a child-like state in which she is patronisingly viewed as incapable of making responsible decisions regarding her life.

Her outrage and frustration show that that form of combined racism and sexism is clear to Kuzwayo.

This is a book about the struggles of Black people in South Africa, but more specifically about the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of Black women, giving voice to the ways in which racism, sexism, and classism work together to make life for Black women particularly difficult, and there are countless other examples of Kuzwayo's dedication to identifying systems of oppression to which Black women are subjected and to naming specific Black women, including her tendency to end several chapters in salute to Black women<sup>5</sup>. Within the context of an analysis acutely aware of the issues and struggles facing Black women on the basis of race, class, and gender, it is particularly peculiar to read Kuzwayo conforming to the masculinist discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement and offering her full support. Her son, Justice Maloto, was an activist in the BCM (46), so she was not directly involved in the movement as an activist.

By this time he had been living with us in Soweto since December 1964, and it had become very clear to me then that he was dedicated to the cause of **liberation of the black man** in South Africa (184, emphasis mine).

As I reflected on the unexpected drama of that afternoon, I emerged with a spirit of triumph. I went home with a fresh determination to be committed to the struggle of **the black man** for as long as I live. This spirit of victory and achievement came from the courage my son portrayed during our last sharing before he was taken away by the police. We had communicated mutual support, mutual understanding and commitment for the cause of **the black man** in South Africa. Much as we accepted all our shortcomings and limitations as individuals, we still believed that a contribution by every member of the black community, no matter how humble or small, can add to the efforts and contributions of many others (189, emphasis mine).

The rest of the text lucidly articulates her intention not of oppressing Black women, but quite contrarily of uplifting, recognising, and re-*presenting* Black women. Why, then, does she slide into this language, and only in those two moments within the context of talking about Black Consciousness? There appear to be forces at work that allow Kuzwayo to accept the absenting of women in the phrase "Black man": 1) the general pervasiveness in the English language that masculine terminology is universal, representative of men and women, supported by Julia Penelope's argument that by "the beginning of the twentieth

century, pseudo-generic *he* was thoroughly entrenched as the only 'correct' singular pronoun" (1990:116); and 2) the appeal of Black Consciousness ideology in terms of its activist, self-empowering, and psychologically-oriented aims. The *issues* that the BCM addressed, regardless of how they were articulated, clearly applied to the situation of all Black people in South Africa irrespective of gender, and perhaps Black women decided that their absencing was not, indeed could not have been, intentional or in any way indicative of Black men's feelings about issues of power. Perhaps the inability to see their own absence was not even at that conscious a level. Whatever the logic of reasoning, it appears that the normality of linguistic masculinity and the power of Black Consciousness politics were pervasive enough to blind even a Black woman like Kuzwayo, who was bold enough to defy the arrogant invisibility of the jailer and look into the central tower to see the ways white supremacy, capitalism, and patriarchy work together to oppress Black women.

Bessie Head's text, *A Question of Power*, also presents such inconsistencies. The fact that it was published in 1974 could be of significance in terms of the power of Black Power ideology and rhetoric, particularly in light of the fact that Head, unlike Kuzwayo, uses the masculinist discourse consistently. Of the three women, Head's work is much more obviously affected by masculinist language, and the irony is that of the three women, Head was probably the most opposed to the BCM and the most distanced from it. Indeed, she states, "I knew some time ago that I am a useless kind of person in any liberation movement or revolution; I can't stand them, or the people who organise them" (quoted in Gardner and Scott 1986:9).

Thus, her integration of that language into her representation of her particular struggles with sanity and systems of domination as a Black woman is no less puzzling than in Kuzwayo's autobiography precisely because it is couched in a text about a Black woman who goes mad in part because of the stifling, silencing, and terrifying oppression of masculinity represented in the character of Dan. There is an even larger irony in Head's denunciation via Elizabeth of Black nationalism, and the ease with which she uses

masculinist rhetoric in the text. On the one hand:

'I don't like exclusive brotherhoods for black people' (132).

'I've got my concentration elsewhere .... It's on mankind in general, and black people fit in there, not as special freaks and oddities outside the scheme of things, with labels like Black Power or any other rubbish of that kind' (133).

'It seems an indignity to me to stick a fist in the air .... I couldn't do it. I'd feel ashamed' (133).

Any heaven, like a Black-Power heaven, that existed for a few individuals alone was pointless and useless. It was an urge to throttle everyone else to death (133).

While such masculinist language is certainly not restricted to Black nationalists, it is certainly characteristic of Black nationalism. And yet, she is able to turn around and slip so easily into the masculinist discourse employed in the BCM, which surfaces even in these denunciations, in her use of "brotherhoods for black people", or her argument that Black people, women and men, fit into the category of "mankind in general". It appears that when she criticises Black Power as a heaven existing for only a few individuals, she is referring to anyone Black who is a nationalist, regardless of gender. Yet, gender figures more significantly in a conception of a "Black-Power heaven", since it would likely have been conceived to exist for a few male individuals. Her simultaneous rejection of Black nationalism and mimesis of the masculinist discourse employed by the Movement is paradoxical.

At various moments throughout the narrative, Heads language is indistinguishable from Biko, Malcolm X, Fanon, or any other Black male nationalist with a masculinist bias:

There [South Africa] they said **the black man** was naturally dull, stupid, inferior, but they made sure to deprive **him** of the type of education which developed personality, intellect, skill (57).

She takes the inferiority of **the black man** so much for granted that she thinks nothing of telling **us** straight to **our** faces **we** are stupid and don't know anything (82, emphasis mine).

Why must racialists make an exception of **the black man**? Why must *she* come here and help **the black man** with a special approach ... ? (83, emphasis mine).

Was it the only area in the world where truthful statements could be made about **the**

**white man's hatred of the black man ... ? (83, emphasis mine).**

**The victim of a racial attitude cannot think of the most coherent and correct thing to do to change the heart of evil. He can scare them with violence. He can slaughter them; but he isn't the origin of the poison. It's like two separate minds at work. The victim is really the most flexible, the most free person on earth. He doesn't have to think up endless laws and endless falsehoods. His jailer does that. His jailer creates the chains and the oppression. He is merely presented with it. He is presented with a thousand and one hells to live through, and he usually lives through them all. The faces of oppressed are not ugly. They are scarred with suffering. But the torturers become more hideous day by day .... The victim who sits in jail always sees a bit of the sunlight shining through. He sits there and dreams of beautiful wonders. He loses his children, his wife, his everything. What happens to all those tears? Who is the greater man - the man who cries, broken by anguish, or his scoffing, mocking jeering oppressor? (84, emphasis mine).**

There are two noteworthy points regarding her use of "the victim" in the last quotation. Firstly, it is not the first passage I have quoted her using such terminology. But, in this particular passage, she appears oblivious to the fact that victim plays some role in jailing themselves by denying themselves agency. There is indeed more than one jailer. This point will become significant later in the analysis. Secondly, "The victim" is not gender specific, but the male pronouns are. Like Tlali, she appears to be using the masculine as a universal when in the second quotation, she uses "the Black man" to represent "we", which includes herself. But, in this last quotation, "the victim" is clearly not universal, for "he" has a wife (and given the time and her blatant heterosexism throughout the narrative, she is not likely to have considered a married lesbian couple), and a question arises of who is the greater man. She appears to be speaking specifically about Black men even though she obviously considers herself a victim of "a racial attitude".

Just as telling is a statement Head makes in her foreword to *Call Me Woman*:

Colleges such as Lovedale and Fort Hare were under the control of missionaries and the education was of a high quality. From this educated class of black people, both men and women, there are the first stirrings of political activity, but with a very broad base .... The women accepted a two-fold role, **to liberate themselves from a traditional heritage of inferiority and to support the men on issues of national liberation** (Kuzwayo 1985:xiv, emphasis mine).

Within the context of speaking specifically about women, the "traditional heritage of inferiority" must refer to patriarchy as it existed in traditional African cultures. How does

a woman liberate herself from patriarchy and simultaneously "support the men on issues of national liberation"? How does she avoid re-enmeshing herself in the traditional heritage of inferiority when she agrees to *support* the men, instead of joining them, on issues of national liberation? Yet, the desire to liberate herself from patriarchal oppression and simultaneously support the men on issues of national liberation appears to be the contradiction in which Head herself is caught.

Head's usage of the masculinist discourse suggests a greater willingness to self-erasure, self-censorship, and self-imprisonment than does Kuzwayo's usage. There are other symptoms of this in the text besides her mimesis of the masculinist discourse. For, not only is Elizabeth attracted to Dan precisely because of his power (she initially thinks he is God), but she also remains within the framework of a sex power structure that is masculine and consequently heterosexist:

[F]or how long had she watched quite close up the shameful display of Sello, the woman dominated effeminate slob, peeping round the skirts of Medusa? More than anything, the extreme masculinity of the man instantly attracted her (105).

How can a woman free herself from the oppressiveness of masculinity while being attracted to it and operating within the limitations and standards it sets? How can she fight the status quo and simultaneously embrace it? She cannot. Her perception of homosexuality as an abhorrent, deviant and perverse sexuality works within a masculine economy of sexuality in which a man is a man on the basis of his desire to actively penetrate women. Male homosexuality then is equal to passivity, the desire to be penetrated, feminine, or rather effeminate; it symbolises everything a man and masculinity are not. Gay men, like women, are defined in terms of lack. So deviant is homosexuality that, "Dan was a child-molester too, but much worse still, he went for other men like mad" (116, emphasis mine), or "[t]o sex, he added homosexuality and perversions of all kinds" (137). Elizabeth goes so far as to refer to a homosexual man as "the supreme pervert" (138). She remains within the boundaries of sex and gender roles rigidly defined by masculinity. Her attraction to Dan, synonymous with hysterical masculinity, and her



virile rejection of homosexuality is testimony to her making the masculinity that oppresses her play out on her own body; they are evidence of her being an agent of her own oppression, being her own jailer. Or, perhaps her acridness toward homosexuality is not an effect of her operating within a masculine economy, but the result of a personal betrayal that looms to haunt her in her struggle against masculinity and madness. For, her husband betrayed her with women and men:

Women were always complaining of being molested by her husband. Then there was also a white man who was his boy-friend. After a year she picked up the small boy and walked out of the house, never to return (19).

In his exploitation of women and his homosexuality, her husband appears to be much like Dan. Whatever the reasons for her perception of homosexuality as the worst of all perversions, she takes flight into madness where she is inundated with unbearable images and experiences. And yet there still remains an irony in her ability to recognise systems of oppression as capable of driving its victims mad, and her inability to reconcile herself with a conception of gender not conceived within the framework of masculinity.

She fully recognises oppressive power that itself inevitably turns maniacal, mad, illogical, and has the power to push others to the same fate. And she recognises that power, regardless of whether the dominating system is based on race, class, or gender. In terms of class, Head observes through the eyes of her omniscient narrator:

It was a Saturday morning when she [Elizabeth] arrived at the loony bin. The attendants there greeted lunatics with laughter. She was a big surprise. It was strictly for poor, illiterate Batswana, who were treated like animals. They seemed to be the only people who went insane in Botswana (180).

The insane asylum is reserved for the poor who are treated like animals *once* they get there, but they end up there because they are perhaps treated like animals *before* they get there. That lack of being treated with the respect humans in power offer other humans in power is precisely what drives them to the "loony bin". Neither poor nor illiterate, Elizabeth is there for another reason. So it appears that the poor are not the only ones who went insane in Botswana. What they had in common with Elizabeth was subjection to a

dominating gaze that dehumanises its object.

She hated the country [South Africa]. In spite of her inability to like or to understand political ideologies, she had also lived the back-breaking life of all black people in South Africa. It was like living with permanent nervous tension, because you did not know why white people there had to go out of their way to hate you or loathe you. They were just born that way, hating people, and a black man or woman was just born to be hated. There wasn't any kind of social evolution beyond that ... just this vehement vicious struggle between two sets of people with different looks; and, **like Dan's brand of torture, it was something that could go on and on and on.** Once you stared the important power-maniac in the face you saw that he never saw people, humanity, compassion, tenderness. It was as though he had a total blank spot and only saw his own power, his influence, his self. It was not a creative function. It was death. What did they gain, the power people, while they lived off other people's souls like vultures? (19, emphasis mine).

They, "the power people", gain immediate privilege. If there were no benefits to subjecting people to domination, there would be no reason to do it. Like misogyny, racism and classism can go on and on and on because the agents, the people who perpetuate such systems are able to maintain invisibility on two levels: they are able to both hide themselves and the evil of their doings *and* refuse to see, or rather consciously will a blindness regarding the humanity of those they dominate. Yet, knowing this, seeing through the central tower does not enable Elizabeth to escape the tension of trying to liberate herself from masculinity while still being attracted to it. She remains trapped, and even at the end of the story when she manages to find her way out of madness, she still uses masculinist language that allows her to erase herself, her space:

She had fallen from the very beginning into the warm embrace of **the brotherhood of man**, because when a people wanted everyone to be ordinary it was just another way of saying **man loved man**. As she fell asleep, she placed one soft hand over her land. It was a gesture of belonging (206, emphasis mine).

A gesture of belonging to what? The brotherhood of man? Even after a severe struggle with masculinity and madness, she still conceives of the world in terms of what Penelope calls a patriarchal universe of discourse (PUD):

A **universe of discourse** is the same thing as "consensus reality," and those who accept its terms assume that it is an accurate description of reality, that the model gives them all the information they need to move and act in the world, and that its assumptions can accurately predict behaviors even in novel situations. In fact, people can be so attached to "consensus reality" that its assumption and predictions override contradictory evidence. When speakers encounter a situation in which people or events do not fit the

categories provided by their model of reality, they are more likely to describe those people or events to make them "fit" the model rather than change or revise the model itself .... If a significant number of individuals reject the descriptions and values of important conceptual areas of a consensus reality, the model restructures itself to assimilate the dissidents or reinforce the dominant perspective (1990:37, author's emphasis).

Despite the fact that Elizabeth is able to see the evil of Dan and his masculinity, the ways in which language works to perpetuate the very masculinity she was battling remain invisible to her. That ability to remain invisible, or perhaps even transparent, as a system of domination is precisely what enables Elizabeth to continue working within a masculine conception of the world. It is here that the issue of Head using a discourse of victimhood becomes significant. She employs the rhetoric of victimhood and becomes a victim to the extent that one wonders whether she defined herself as one. Head talks in terms of lamenting victimhood, unlike Kuzwayo who talks in terms of celebrating agency. Though able to see systems of domination, Head appears to have lacked a sense of agency that would enable her to protect herself from madness in the first place. Elizabeth, and thus Head, conceptualises oppression in terms of being a victim, so perhaps her falling victim to a PUD is not at all surprising.

Interestingly, Mamphela Ramphele is the only one of these three women who was directly involved in the BCM as an activist, and the only one who never falls victim to using the masculinist discourse. But, there is a question of whether she saw the language as a medium of oppression. In response to the question of whether she recalls being aware of the absence of the women in the discourse of the BCM at the time, she replies affirmatively, but as she expounds on the point the evidence she offers shows that she had an unusual awareness of gender inequality in the movement but not necessarily an awareness of the language. She does indeed acknowledge a "sense of being silent, being invisible" (1996:133), but in talking about what the activists took from Frantz Fanon, a tension arises, for she does not acknowledge Fanon's consistent exclusion of women from his analysis of race oppression: "As for Frantz Fanon, what we benefitted from him was his

deep understanding of the psyche of the oppressed. That's what was very important for us" (1996:137). Indeed Fanon very clearly exhibits a deep understanding of the psyche of oppressed Black men, some of which could apply to Black women. His focus, however, was on the oppression of Black men. Because of such tensions in her writing, it is not apparent that she sees how systems of domination are perpetuated *through language*, though it is clear that she does see those systems of domination: "But equity could not only be seen in terms of blacks and whites, but had to include gender and class as important determinants of inequity in our society" (1995:207).

Her autobiography begins with her outlining for her readers the line of women she comes from and the legacy of their transgressions, with particular attention paid to her mother. Not insignificantly, her maternal grandmother was an historian:

Her extraordinary memory was an asset to the largely illiterate people among whom she lived, for in those days births and deaths were not registered by any authority. She was a mobile archive for the region. She could recall most birthdays, deaths and other important events in the life of the people of her village and surrounding areas. Children born in the locality used to come to her to find out when they were born, before going to register at school (2).

As part of the tradition of Africa, she remembered the history and passed it on orally, and it was as valid in that context as was the written word in western societies. From Ramphele's account, there is no indication that her ability and willingness to be a recorder of history was any less valued because of her gender, or that attempts were made to silence her on that basis.

From this woman came Ramphele's mother whose "independence bordered on stubbornness" (4). She describes her mother as a woman not afraid to challenge and transgress boundaries prescribed for women and offers several examples of such acts:

My mother fought many battles within this patriarchal family system. She walked a tightrope as she carved out space for herself to live with dignity within the extended family. She established a delicate balance between challenging those aspects of the many rigid rules about gender roles, lines of authority and the conduct of relations that violated her dignity, and avoiding actions that would undermine the system and thus create anxiety and instability (13-14).

Finding that balance while still managing to establish "boundaries beyond which she

would not allow anyone to go" (14), effected not just her individual liberation, but her acts "liberated both men and women in the extended family from an archaic custom" (15).

This same womanist notion of working toward the wholeness and liberation of the entire community comes through in Ramphele's worldview. It is the notion that no one is free until the oppressors are themselves aware of the ways in which their lives are also affected and restricted by their domination. It was part of BC ideology in terms of "white consciousness" :

The BCM contended that white South Africans who opposed apartheid should educate their racist brethren, should not attempt to control black organisations, and should learn to accept terms of interaction established by the black majority. This amounted to a call for a white consciousness movement that ran parallel to the activities of the BCM (Pityana & Ramphele et al 1991:105).

Ramphele articulates a pattern of liberation that requires the awareness and liberation on the part of the oppressor and the oppressed. Oppression does not disappear when only the oppressed become psychologically liberated. Ramphele argues that:

[W]e are not ever going to liberate women until we have begun to help men to see how imprisoned they also are by gender inequity. And so, in the same way that Black Consciousness spoke to Black people to liberate themselves, it also spoke to white people to recognise that the freedom of Black South Africans is as important to them because they can't be free until Black South Africans are free. Same thing: women can never be free until men are free of the prejudices they have in sexist terms (1996:138).

Her ability to be able to reach such conclusions is largely influenced by her family life during her formative years. Not only was her mother committed to living a life of relative equality, it appears that she also refused to perpetuate static and rigid conceptions of gender with her children:

There was a division of labour between the boys and the girls, but it was not rigid. My brothers had to fetch the water from the village tap just as we did, but they had the benefit of using a wheelbarrow, which could carry two twenty-litre containers. They also shared in the making of endless cups of tea for my mother and occasional guests. They made their own beds, and later when both my sister and I were away at boarding school or working, the younger ones learned to cook, bake, iron and so on. My mother was a pragmatist. Traditional gender roles were cast aside to make room for survival (19).

One is left to wonder, given this woman's refusal to be dominated, whether the disregard for gender roles was merely an issue of pragmatism and survival, or whether she would

have done the same thing if she had only two children.

In light of this woman's refusal to be dominated, it is not surprising that she married a man who appears not to have had a taste or desire for domination either. In addition to Ramphele's mother refusing to impose on her children strict, traditional gender roles, Ramphele's father seems to have been of the same inclination. Her father, a school teacher and principal, did not encourage her to be an underachiever because of her gender, but instead pushed her, as his child, to do her best:

Although I was his best student, few if any words of praise would come my way. He expected me to do well, and would show disappointment if I got anything wrong. He also seemed to be much stricter on me than on other children. Any mistake would unleash severe punishment. I had to be perfect (19).

The fact that she was a girl was not reason enough for either of her parents to discourage her from believing in herself and working toward her full potential. Indeed, she reminisces about her father: "It is noteworthy that my father did not question the suitability of my choice of [a medical] career on grounds of gender, but on rational, domestic, economic ones" (181). Though Ramphele argues that there was a time when she did not have a feminist consciousness, it is clear that she structures her life story within the framework of an awareness of gender inequality in the larger society, and the ways in which those conceptions did not play out in her family.

That background enabled her to believe in herself and go forward in life making her own choices, choosing agency. She appears to have been equipped with a belief in self that Head unfortunately did not have. She also appears to have had the benefit of a strong family unit and a connection to the women of her family and their legacies that provided with her a strong base and sense of self. Head did not have that type of stability in her life or connection to anyone in her family, nevermind a long legacy of strong women, as an orphan born in South Africa to the illegal union of a white mother who ended up in a mental hospital and a Black father she did not know (Head 1974:16-17). Perhaps that lack of connection did not provide Head with the armor against masculinity that Ramphele

appears to have had. It is perhaps important, however, to keep in mind that I am using *A Question of Power* as an autobiographical work, a source on her life, it is a novel in which she has the space to explore the life of a victim that may not necessarily be an account of herself feeling that she indeed was a victim.

Dr. Ramphele's background of believing in her worth as a human being prepared her to fight anyone who decided not to respect her on the basis of her humanity, that inspired her to continually refuse silence. On her own admission, she was perhaps overly vocal because "[a]s a woman, an African woman at that, one had to be outrageous to be heard, let alone taken seriously" (1995:71). Despite the fact that her outrageousness had an isolating effect, she remained determined because she "didn't need to be told I'm this or that", or rather she did not have a need to be told "that you are a wonderful person, that you are a beautiful person" (1996:135). Had she had the need "to feel affirmed", then she would not have been able to insist on speaking, on being heard. It appears that irrespective of the sexism within the movement, she gained invaluable insights that gave rise to a more liberated consciousness. For example, in her analysis of the purpose of banning orders, what she concludes was the desired effect is essentially the same as that of the Panopticon:

From the point of view of the security police the desired outcome was for banned people to become their own gaolers and effectively lead isolated lives for fear of arrest for breaking banning orders. Sadly, many South Africans spent miserable years imprisoned in their own homes (1995:93).

Her ability to see that this was the desired effect enabled her to resist that force when she was given banning orders: "Naturally the local security police were disappointed by my decision to leave Meetse-a-Bophelo Hospital, but I told them that they could not expect me to cooperate in my own imprisonment" (1995:125). Her belief in her worth as a person kept her from becoming involved in her own self-erasure, imprisonment, and censorship, on either a race or gender front.

Thus it is not surprising that her fate is much different from Bessie Head's. While

their lives were as different as any two people's could be, Ramphele, who repeatedly speaks in terms of agency and is able to place herself within the context of a legacy of "stubborn women", experiences only a "little madness" every once in a while, but because of her confidence in herself and her history of agency, she is able to transgress the boundaries of femininity as proscribed under masculinity, including madness. Bessie Head, whose family context is quite the opposite of Ramphele's in her isolation from her mother, speaks in terms of victimhood, and not surprisingly becomes a victim of masculinity in her madness, though fortunately she was able to recover her own sense of agency, rendering her text an important one in realising that masculinity is not all-powerful, and women can find ways of escape. Ellen Kuzwayo places herself within the context of women in her community, and like Ramphele, speaks in terms of agency. But unlike Ramphele, she was victimised by masculinity in an abusive marriage. Her formative years were in a much more gender rigid, traditional, rural environment, and that background appears not to have given her the armor against subjection to abuse. Yet, she was able to choose a path out of the mire of victimisation and bestowed upon herself a life of agency. Ultimately, the stories these women offer are crucial as testimony to the fact that Black women can choose agency and transgress the boundaries drawn for us. Their autobiographies are also important as records of the herstory of Black women's struggle, agency, and psychological liberation.

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### *Endnotes*

1. Please refer back to endnote #10 of the Introduction.
2. Perhaps latent in my use of the term "self-imprisonment" is the assumption that there is a unified self that can be imprisoned. I am actually using "self" as synonymous with a sense of agency. What is imprisoned, locked away, is the belief in one's own capabilities. Thus, this notion of self-imprisonment ranges from a self that once existed, i.e., a sense of agency that was once realised and has been suppressed, to the self that is never conceptualised:

Indeed, when the subject is said to be constituted, that means simply that the subject is a consequence of certain rule-governed discourses that govern the intelligible invocation of identity. The subject is not



*determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects .... "[A]gency," *then, is to be located within the possibility of a variation of that repetition* (Butler 1990:145, bold emphasis mine)

Thus, the self, in this sense, is a site of the possibility of agency, and the state of self-imprisonment refuses that possibility, rendering it impossible for one to actualise a sense of agency.

3. While I am drawing a fairly fundamental difference between recognising systems of domination by which one is victimised and defining oneself as a victim, I want to make clear that I am not arguing that the victim is to blame or to be held responsible for his/her victimisation. That, indeed, is antithetical to what it means to be a victim; however, I do maintain that believing in oneself as a victim and engaging in a discourse of victimhood is dangerous in its potential to erase potential agency.

4. The Panopticon is a prison designed by Jeremy Bentham, which "captures for Foucault the essence of the disciplinary society" (Bartky 1988:63). The physical layout of the prison is important in understanding its psychological effect on its prisoners:

[A]t the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. By the effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing out precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the cells of the periphery. They are like so many cages, so many small theatres, in which each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions - to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide - it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap (Foucault 1977[1975]:200).

5. For example, the end of Part One ends with: "This is an unusual but significant example of the invaluable contribution made by black women towards the development of their community and country" (52). Chapter 12 ends similarly: "They are an example of many other women with deep commitment in the service of their community in this Association and in many other women's organisations in the black community" (179). Chapter 13: "I have never been able to express adequately my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation, to those gallant women" (197). Chapter 15: "I look forward to the day when the chain of sisterhood shall develop the potential of black women of my country and of other black countries and countries abroad to its maximum, and thus enhance their dignity, integrity, self-reliance and independence both as individuals and as productive members of their community" (239).

## *Conclusion*

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In the Saussurean sense, "masculine" and "feminine" are signifiers whose referents are the male and female bodies, respectively. The nature of the signifier/signified is such that the relationship between the two is arbitrary because the signifier itself has no intrinsic value. By definition, a signifier does not correspond to anything inherent in its referent; its attachment to an object is attributed, constructed, assigned. In 1969, Betty and Theodore Roszak recognise that same arbitrary and tenuous relationship in their identification of gender as a game:

He is **playing** masculine. She is **playing** feminine ....

He is playing the kind of man that she thinks the kind of woman she is playing ought to admire. She is playing the kind of woman that he thinks the kind of man he is playing ought to desire ....

So he plays harder. And she plays...softer ....

Her femininity, growing more dependently supine, becomes contemptible. His masculinity, growing more oppressively domineering, becomes intolerable. At last she loathes what she has helped his masculinity to become. At last he loathes what he has helped her femininity to become.

So far, it has all been very symmetrical. But we have left one thing out.

The world belongs to what his masculinity has become ....

She is stifling under the triviality of her femininity. **The world is groaning beneath the terrors of his masculinity.**

He is playing masculine. She is playing feminine.

How do we call off the game? (Roszak and Roszak 1969:vii-viii, emphasis mine).

More than twenty years later, Judith Butler makes a similar point about gender, but instead of referring to it as a game, she refers to it as a performance, yet still implying that it is a process one learns, rendering the mapping of masculinity onto the male body and femininity onto the female body an arbitrary assignment; however, because it is a role people play, there is the possibility for change.

As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation (Butler 1990:140, author's emphasis).

That gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex and a true or abiding masculinity or femininity are also

constituted as part of the strategy that **conceals gender's performative character and the performative possibilities for proliferating gender configurations outside the restricting frames of masculinist domination and compulsory heterosexuality.**

Genders can be neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent, neither original nor derived. As credible bearers of those attributes, however, genders can also be rendered thoroughly and radically *incredible* (Butler 1990:141, bold emphasis mine).

Butler begins to move away from the Roszaks' notion that masculinity and femininity are merely roles in a game that are at some point symmetrical, by arguing that not only is gender a performance, but it is constructed for a reason, despite a general belief that it is natural, "essential", and "true". She suggests that such creations are part of a strategy to hide the very fact that it is not natural and that consequently, there are various "performative possibilities" outside of the realm of masculine domination and "compulsory heterosexuality" that require masculinity and femininity. Interestingly, she neither suggests some grand conspiracy nor indicates whose strategy it is. Perhaps, however, that is ultimately an impossible and unimportant task in spectral societies where oppression is pervasive, perhaps even evasive, and its sources always everywhere and nowhere. What is significant about both analyses is the identification of masculinity as something that invokes terror, that is dominating, that is everything oppression is. It is indeed a system of domination that wears a mask to hide its own deviance and depravity, the irony being that the mask is the very thing that enables its visibility.

Whenever a person uses masculine terminology as an inclusive term to refer to everyone, s/he is indeed being sexist by engaging in an act of exclusion, whether it is intentional or not. With no intention of being sexist or exclusive, men and women unquestioningly use masculinist language, and every time they do that, they are condoning, validating, normalising the acts of excluding, marginalising and ignoring women. Thus the lack of intentionality is precisely the point; for, it shows how pervasive the thought patterns of domination are. And, the horror of domination remains invisible because domination parades itself as truth, as nature. Its lifeline is the complicity and support of those it dominates, which is achieved by the very fact of its pervasive nature: its

invisibility coerces people to unintentionally and unconsciously perpetrate and perpetuate domination. And the fact is, the invisibility of masculinity is not real; it pretends to be invisible. Therefore, it *can* be seen; one must just *learn* how to see it and choose to do so.

Intentionality becomes important when people vehemently resist and adamantly reject arguments that masculinist language is not inclusive but is instead very much exclusive and therefore oppressive. Julia Penelope very plainly argues that:

[t]he story of English is intertwined with misogyny, elitism, and racism. Prescriptive grammar has served white men's purposes for centuries, and its rules have been used to keep economic and social power beyond the reach of the poor and working classes. The English language, accompanied by men's grammars, has also been an instrument of white imperialism, used to destroy the cultures of Native Americans and impose caucasian values and mores on conquered peoples. This linguistic colonization continues (Penelope 1990:xv-xvi).

The English language is a site of possibility for linguistic colonisation and that must be acknowledged by those who choose to believe that masculinist language is inclusive. Rather than entertain the possibility, many people appear to prefer the "comfort" they have established by not questioning. People can choose blindness exactly the same way they can choose gender. Freud did not see his own hysteria because he chose not to see it. The male activists of the Black Consciousness Movement chose not to see the madness of their masculinity. And people choose the status quo of domination because it is easier than being violently reprimanded for dissension. Any system of domination, such as apartheid for example, dogmatically and inhumanely requires the immediate extermination of any views contrary to its own via severe punishment.

Penelope goes on to argue that "[m]en resist ... efforts to change language because they know that language change indicates both social and cognitive changes" (1990:xxix). Unfortunately, it is not only men who resist linguistic and cognitive change. Under systems of domination, everyone is socialised, wooed, lulled into desensitisation and mental numbness. So people who live in capitalist societies are wooed into believing that human nature is such that we thrive on competition, and communism is therefore unnatural. People who live in patriarchal societies are lulled into a slumberous belief that masculine

and feminine posturing is natural, and anything outside of that framework, such as the butch lesbian, the effeminate gay man, or the transvestite, is unnatural. People who live in white supremacist societies are socialised to believe that whiteness is naturally and unquestionably a direct correlation to intelligence, beauty, virtue and all things good and right. It is a brutal socialisation that inevitably leaves in its wake psychic wounds, scar tissue, dead tissue, on those dominated and on those who dominate, and any effort to heal the wounds is painful, which is what Toni Morrison acknowledges in *Beloved* through Amy Denver, who says, "It's gonna hurt, now .... Anything dead coming back to life hurts," and through Denver who accurately characterises her namesake's words as a "truth for all times" (Morrison 1987:35). Dr. Ramphele also advises that:

**[t]here can be no healing without pain.** Some of us have already gone through our own painful journeys to find healing, and can therefore afford to let bygones be bygones. But for the countless destitute widows, mothers who have lost children, children who have been orphaned, and many others whose loved ones disappeared without trace .... [t]heir pain has to be publicly acknowledged, and some restitution has to occur in order to allow them to pick up the pieces and move on (Ramphele 1995:220, emphasis mine).

Likewise, to re-member something that has been dismembered, to remember something of yours that has been brutally slain by hands other than your own is inevitably painful. But, the re(-)membering has to take place in order to move forward, progress and not remain static, stagnant, which Dr. Ramphele articulates when she says that had she not written her autobiography she would not have been "able to go on to the next stage of [her] life with the burden from the past" (Ramphele 1996:137).

This is not to argue that systems of domination are all-powerful and that there is no hope of escape, liberation, or agency for those who are subjected to such systems. It is instead to argue that the pretention and belief in the omnipotence of domination is all the more reason for us to search inwardly for sites of possibility, for the ways in which we can be agents of our own lives. Despite the masculinist discourse of the Black Consciousness Movement, some women still found sites of liberation within that construction, perhaps because they believed in themselves as agents, not as victims. Thus the masculinist

discourse of the BCM was in no way omnipotent in its exclusion of Black women:

For the first time many black women could fall in love with their dark complexions, kinky hair, bulging hips and particular dress style. They found new pride in themselves as they were. They were no longer 'non-whites', but blacks with an authentic self, appreciated on their own terms. The skin-lightening creams, hot-oil combs, wigs and other trappings of the earlier period lost their grip on many women.

.... At a more particular level, it could be argued that black women within BC ranks benefited as people, because they also became more liberated as individuals. Having experienced being assertive as blacks, women claimed greater psychological space in which to assert themselves in both public and personal relationships. Black women also benefited from the intellectual stimulation they received in the course of their activism (1991:217).

The shedding of wigs and the rejection of skin lighteners and hot combs as isolated actions may not appear to be of much significance. But, what *is* significant is that those individual decisions are symptomatic of an awakening, a new consciousness that enables one to choose to see the victimisation and instead choose agency. Such actions identify a new consciousness arming itself against desires to shape, mould, press, oppress the self. The liberation gained through the BCM appears to have been invaluable as a stepping stone toward being able to see other ways in which we imprison ourselves but still manage to find sites of possibility to see through to our own psychological liberation.

People who choose blindness must be held accountable for their choice. Therefore, those subjected to systems of domination must become and remain cognisant, must be vigilant, and most importantly, must refuse silence, despite the madness, indeed precisely because of it.

## *Appendix*

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### *Interview with Dr. Mamphela Ramphela*

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Kimberley Ann Yates (KAY) and Pumla Dineo Gqola (PDG) interviewed Dr. Mamphela A. Ramphela (MAR) on 27 June 1996 at 11h00-12h00, in Room 205, Bremner Building, University of Cape Town.

KAY: In both your autobiography and in *Bounds of Possibility*, you discuss honorary male status, which seems to assume that as women, your voices and ideas weren't valued as much as men's, in that for your ideas to be valued, you had to be given an honorary male status. In line with that, it seems that much of the ideology of Black Consciousness was articulated in terms of "the Black man", "the Black man's struggle". My question following from that is: How do you recall being affected by the persistent reference to the Black man and his struggle?

MAR: I think it's important to realise that the Black Consciousness Movement came in a cultural environment where women, whether they were Black or white, didn't matter. It wasn't a peculiarity of the Black Consciousness Movement to focus on men. I think the focus on Black men had the unintended consequence of actually triggering in some of us the sense that we're more than just Black people who are oppressed; we were also Black women who were oppressed, both by the very system that oppressed Black men but also by the Black men themselves -- the very sense of being silent, being invisible.

The language didn't have space for women, partly because it was a language borrowed from a culture, English culture, which never accepted women really as full citizens. It's very interesting actually that African languages don't have this very strong sexist exclusive notions. That does not mean that African cultures are not sexist. It simply is an interesting observation, because, in a way, to say "Black man you are on your own," which was the rallying cry of the Black Consciousness Movement, was in a sense a translation of what, if an African language had been used, would not have had the connotations. It would not have said, for example in Xhosa, "Ndodemnyama ume wedwa." It would have said, "Mnt'omnyama," which is more inclusive. It is interesting how metaphors borrowed from one language get translated or transformed by the language that you use to express yourself in a way that would not have had the same impact if you had actually said it in a different language environment. So for me really the Black Consciousness Movement, by speaking of psychological oppression as being an integral part of any oppressive situation, and by identifying the agency of the oppressed in being able to overcome psychological oppression by taking charge of their own definition of themselves, their own self-reliance, actually enabled me to put into context how I, as a Black woman, could also overcome the psychological oppression of being a woman, and therefore being seen as "other", and therefore being seen as inferior. For me, that was very easy to do because I've never thought of myself as being inferior to any man. Where I grew up, in my family, everybody knew I wasn't inferior; everybody knew I was smart. So it was never a serious .... I didn't have the psychological scars of an inferiority complex as a woman, and in fact as it turns out, in school there wasn't a single boy who could beat me. It didn't even occur to me that they could think of me as being inferior. The jump for me was very easy because it simply fitted in with my own experience of myself as being somebody who is capable of holding her own in any set up.

So the question of an honorary man is an observation of what's happening. It's an observation of the impositions that one has even when one doesn't need the status, and I've written quite in depth about this question of political widowhood. (You've seen the article that came out in...*Social*, no, not *Social Dynamics*<sup>1</sup>. It's published in Boston, one of these prestigious international journals. Anyway, I'll remember. Just remind me at the end of the interview. I'll see if I still have the reprints of that.) Because, you see, the political widows are the ultimate embodiment of this honorary male status, whether you are looking at Benazir Bhuto taking on her father's role as former leader of Pakistan, or you're looking at the woman from the Philippines, Corrina [Aquino], who was here a few weeks ago, or looking at the woman in Sri Lanka who's now leading the government there because her husband got assassinated. If you're looking at any of these, the honorary male status is what's put them there. But when you look at those women in their own individual rights, they've got strengths and power and so on, which goes beyond the status that has been bestowed on them. The honorary male status is a reality, but I use the expression in order to challenge it.

KAY: You talk about the differences between English and the African languages. In English that difference is more explicit. Do you recall being aware of the absence of women in the discourse at the time?

MAR: At the time of Black Consciousness?

KAY: Yes.

MAR: Oh, of course I do, and I became one of the few women who really became a pain in the side of a lot of men who used to really think that we were there as decorations. They got shocked each time you challenged them in debates, and they'd try and silence you by making all sorts of remarks, wolf whistles, and all sorts of insinuations that, "Oh, it's very surprising that not only are you beautiful but you also have brains" -- that kind of childishness, and the kind of trivialisation of issues that one raised. But also, [there were] the expectations [that] because we were women, when we went to a SASO conference, we were supposed to do the cooking and the preparing of food and so on. If you said NO, there was something very funny about you saying NO. And in an interesting way, we played along with that until you were conscious of it. If you grew up in a home where the girls feed the men, and they do the cleaning up... in my own household, it wasn't as it was in other households. Nonetheless, boys were there to help us, not to participate in domestic chores, and so there was nothing funny about getting to a university and continuing to play, even in an organisational sense, that role, because it's what you were brought up to believe was your calling and your responsibility. But when one became conscious of the game that was being played and people started saying NO, people really took a dim view of it.

In my view, you know, one of the fascinating things about Gender Equity issues is that it doesn't matter how much people understand intellectually what's going on. The problem is to translate the intellectual understanding into a transformative behavioural change, which is very, very painful, for both sides incidentally. Women can scream and shout about not wanting to perpetuate the existing inequality, but there are women who enjoy, for example, the fact that they are in control of the household. They do this: It's my kitchen, my this, my that, and they derive pleasure out of feeding people, out of being

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<sup>1</sup> The article is "Political Widowhood in South Africa: The Embodiment of Ambiguity", *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 125 (1), Winter 1996: 99-117.



admired for what they do in that domain. And so taking that out is almost like taking what defines them as valued members of a household. And if you're not doing anything that also acts as a counter balancing definitional issue yourself, definition becomes a problem. So it's not easy to simply say, "Get the men to do this."

Even on the issue of bringing up children, a lot of women actually directly or indirectly exclude men from the domain of bringing up children, but then they complain about the burden of it. There needs to be a serious psychological examination of that. What is it about women that makes us *need* to do these things, *need* to feed, *need* to nurture? There's nothing wrong with that, provided you understand what you're doing in those roles; then you do it openly. You mustn't do it grudgingly. It's almost like being an alcoholic: you're hooked on the stuff but you don't acknowledge that you actually are hooked. And then you mouth these feminist slogans about not wanting to be tied down to the household and so on. But, if you're not sharing, you're not willing to share, you *have* to be tied down. And that's on the one side.

On the male side, it is a problem. I mean it's very comfortable. I must tell you that one of the smartest institutions ever created by patriarchy was having a wife -- the smartest thing ever! Nothing can ever beat a wife -- absolutely nothing, because you have somebody who loves you personally, who can attend to each and every one of your needs -- physical, emotional, sexual. I mean, if I can invent an institution, that's the one that I wouldn't mind. Therefore, it's not surprising that you'll find resistance among men who actually confront issues of Gender Equity. Who would want to do away with that convenience? Really, who would? You'd be nuts to want to do away with that. Unless you examine it in a way that allows you to realise that in fact you can have the love and the caring without necessarily having to dominate, and then you negotiate a new relationship where in fact the man benefits from having a wife, and the wife benefits from having a husband in the same kind of supportive role. It's a very, very, very difficult and tricky issue.

PDG: Dr. Ramphela, you have very actively challenged prescriptions on female behaviour then and now. What do you see as the difficulties or barriers, so to speak, that have been in the way of your successfully challenging the man-centred (the Black man-centred) discourse of Black Consciousness at the time?

MAR: I think the most important difficulty or the greatest difficulty one faces in any system in any part is that you become unpopular. And, therefore, if you are needing to feel affirmed, to be told that you are a wonderful person, that you are a beautiful person, you're this, you're that, then you can't actually do it. So that a starting point for one wanting to undertake the role of challenging existing popular traditional notions is that you've got to have a very strong sense of yourself and your worth, your dignity and be willing to risk all that. Now I could do that. I could afford it because I didn't need to be loved; I didn't need to be told I'm this or that. I knew what I was, and I was comfortable with the person I knew I was.

But I was also very lucky in that I was loved by one of the most powerful men in that movement. So it made it easier for me. I mean, we didn't agree. In fact, there were times when he had difficulty with my being so determined and so insistent, so vocal in my opposition to things because he thought I was overstating things. I probably was because if you have to move from silence, to be heard you literally have to scream. And I used to scream at those meetings, and they would want to silence me. I'd tell them, "You are talking rubbish," and they never forgave me for that. So, I was in that kind of fortunate role. But, I am quite sure that even if I wasn't having that relationship with him, I would still do it. I believed so deeply in the things that I was concerned about.

The second difficulty, of course, is that other women also have difficulty with someone who is so insistent on challenging existing notions, partly because they envy that

you have the courage to speak, and they'll say, 'Well, uzenza betere' ("She thinks she's better."). And so you have a problem: women's solidarity falters on the basis of petty jealousies. Instead of people recognising that each one of us brings different strengths to whatever we're doing, we want to have a kind of social level. Women are very comfortable with solidarity, provided all are equal in the sense of levelling everything to the lowest common denominator. Fortunately, I don't have the herd instinct. I can live on my own quite happily. I've never needed to have friends. I've loved friends, and I've had very good friends, but I've never had to make compromises in order to keep friends. I just don't think friendships should be based on compromise. I think you should have a friendship in spite of differences, and you should be able to respect one another's differences and support one another. Even if you disagree with the person's viewpoint, you must be able to defend their right to have that viewpoint. Now if that's not the way people relate to me, I have a way of just not bothering to be with them.

The very third problem, of course, is that with that kind of approach, then you don't have a sounding board. You don't know whether actually you're going a bit nuts or not. And that's been my problem. You stop trusting other people's judgement because they are so coloured by all sorts of considerations, not necessarily a hard look at what's going on. So, I found that quite strangely, my most reliable sounding boards have been men. And as I get older, much older men, Black and white, are much more reliable as sounding boards for me than women are, which is a very strange phenomenon. But that's true. I think in part it's because I don't pose a threat to those men. I mean, I'm not competing with them over anything, and they are themselves very secure in who they are, so they don't have to be defensive towards me. And, I'm very honest about my own weaknesses which is probably stupid, and you can see it in my biography. I write openly about the stupidity in my own personality, my experiences, and so I think that kind of openness enables people to relate with me from a very different starting point.

But at the end of the day, to be as transgressive as I am, transgressing so many boundaries and taboos and so on, is a very lonely life. Lonely, not in the sense that I'm bored, and I don't know what to do. Not that, because I am lonely in the midst of crowds in a way. It's this little madness. You always have a sense of needing to have peers that you could really take for granted, say things that are taken for granted instead of having to defend each and every thing that you say. So it's a very exhausting life.

**KAY:** It's very clear that you are vocal in challenging whatever you felt restricted you. Was there a sense of sisterhood or solidarity among women overall in challenging what Pumla described as "prescriptions for female behaviour"?

**MAR:** Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that at a certain basic fundamental level, there were a group of women in the Black Consciousness Movement, and some of them have remained friends up to now. We were all agreed that we were not going to accept certain things. We made that clear. And there was that kind of solidarity, people like Debs Matshoba, Thenjiwe Mtintso and others. We were very, very clear about those things. But, it was a solidarity that was rather loose and fragile, and there were no real continuities because you must understand that there wasn't really a theoretical understanding of what was going on with us or a theoretical understanding of Gender Equity or inequity. It was all a question of experiencing things and trying to interpret them as best we could. I only got to read feminist literature in the '70s long after my activist days were gone. So then I could retrospectively understand why I felt the way I did and some of the arguments I could have used instead of screaming and telling them they're talking rubbish. One interesting thing about this challenging expectations and traditional norms is a fascinating example of the kind of support one got from very unexpected quarters, [which for me] was my grandmother, my paternal grandmother, who defended my smoking to people in the village who were saying, "Woo! How can she smoke?" She said, "There are worse things

that you can do: you can kill people, be a drunkard. She's none of that. She just smokes. What's wrong with smoking?" And she had never smoked in her life, had never seen a woman smoke, but somehow because she loved me and she admired what I was doing, she just felt I've got a right to make a decision to smoke or not to smoke, which was fascinating. I mean, it wasn't the most laudable thing to do, but there you are. In those days, it was a statement of independence.

KAY: I recall you saying that at the time, you were reading Eldridge Cleaver and Fanon. Do you see an overlap between the discourses of Black Power and Black Consciousness?

MAR: Yes and no. Yes, in the sense that the Black Power Movement in the United States was talking the same language about the need for Black identity to be recognised, affirmed, and be seen not as an aberration, but as part of the creation plan. As for Frantz Fanon, what we benefitted from him was his deep understanding of the psyche of the oppressed. That's what was very important for us. But what we read in that quite clearly was that we were a majority in this country. We had the power to change things. It never was any doubt that we were going to be free. It was a question of when, it was never if, which was a different position from where Eldridge Cleaver and company were operating from.

PDG: Dr. Ramphela, as Black women who are Womanists, we've been struck by the lack of material on or by Black women, especially the five names that crop up all over the place -- Deborah Matshoba, Nomsisi Kraai, Thenjiwe Mtintso, Mamphela Ramphela, and Vuyi Mashalaba. We're struck by the fact that apart from yourself, there isn't visibility. There isn't really material on these women, by these women, even at the time. Could you provide some insight into that? Was there an unspoken rule about women writing in Black Consciousness at the time?

MAR: No, I think it's a reflection of several things. First, Black people just didn't write -- period! One of my great sadnesses is that Steve's huge intellect has not left a deeper imprint on the South African landscape that he could have. And it's partly because there wasn't a culture of writing -- period. But of all the people, Steve wrote the most, and I can tell you, it was like pulling teeth because he used to leave it till the last minute, and it had to be done throughout the night, and it was a painful process. In an interesting way, perhaps it fired me with an enthusiasm to write, but I've always loved books. From my childhood I loved books. I've worshipped books, and as I've said before, I don't have the herd instinct. When I'm on my own, what do I do? I read or sleep, and both are very good for creativity. So there is that. So it's a kind of a general lack of focus on the written word, which I think is fair to say Black South Africans are only waking up to that. It wasn't really part of what people did ordinarily.

The second thing is that obviously there were very few women who had the public platform to speak, let alone write. But also, women don't create space for themselves to write because they don't have wives, they don't have this, they don't have that.

And, thirdly, there are a lot of women who even today disagree with the fact that I have written my autobiography because they think that there are certain things that shouldn't be said publicly. I happen to disagree. Nobody thinks that there's anything wrong with Mandela writing his autobiography. Maybe they're right, I'm too young, but then I've done a lot for my age, and I wouldn't be able to go on to the next stage of my life with the burden from the past. So many things had to be written. Of course, I also knew that there would be people, young women like yourselves, who would want to know what happened.

PDG: In your autobiography, you illustrate very clearly that you come from a long line of strong women, women who challenged sexist practices and won. To what extent do you

feel that this has influenced your own ability to transgress at the time of BC, and later your overt espousal of feminism?

MAR: Obviously it played a part. I grew up knowing from these women that anything that interferes with their dignity, whether it be a staff member who treats a patient unfairly...even myself, sometimes I lost my temper; I got mad and tired. I would apologise because I knew that I shouldn't do that. So that theory really came later, and I think the theory comes easier when you've actually practised things from the heart, so my theoretical grounding is informed by a very deep psychic knowledge of what it means to be a woman, what it means to be a Black person, to be powerful and not dominating, what it means to be, you know, all those things.

That's why when I read feminist literature I could admire the strong points of it. I could see its weaknesses immediately -- this whole sense of solidarity of women that does not take into consideration that women are different. They're defined differently by their social class, their geographical location, their age, their relationship with men, and so on. But also, the fact that we are not ever going to liberate women until we have begun to help men to see how imprisoned they also are by gender inequity. And so, in the same way that Black Consciousness spoke to Black people to liberate themselves, it also spoke to white people to recognise that the freedom of Black South Africans is as important to them because they can't be free until Black South Africans are free. Same thing: women can never be free until men are free of the prejudices they have in sexist terms. You won't know that by reading any book; you know that in your gut. I happen to be a mother of two sons, and I'm not doing a great job at the behavioural level, but they understand intellectually; they understand what the issues are. Now it's up to the women they interact with if they are going to let them get away with murder, because they will.

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