

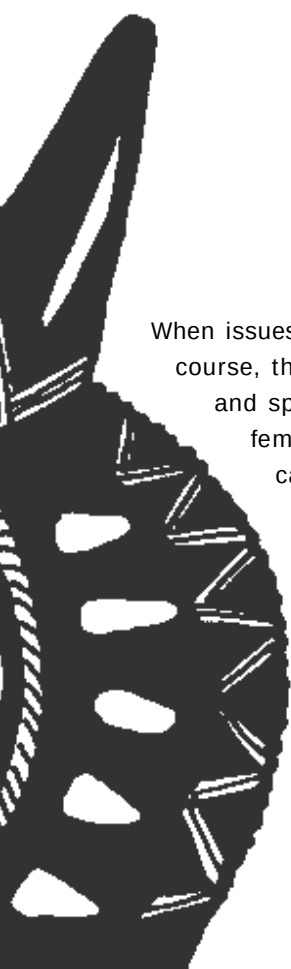


Contents

Overview	2
Impact of Apartheid	6
Asian Women Caught in the Middle	19
To be a Racist	25
Religion, Racism and Gender	33
Gender, Racism and the Media	46
Women in Interracial Marriage	53



Overview



Issues of Race and Gender

By Tafadzwa Mumba

When issues of race and racism are brought into the gender discourse, they run the risk of creating fundamental displacements and spurring interrogations of the manner and level at which feminists activists and women from the North and South can interact and advocate for gender issues as one. To a very large extent, this interrogation has the potential to widen divisions between and among women of different races as issues of 'whiteness' and 'blackness' are brought under the spotlight. It seems purely romantic that such issues have not taken larger chunks of feminist activists' discourse. Inevitably regardless of the extent to which women of different races have tried to integrate, spearhead and support each other in gender issues, issues of race tend to take upper stage.

“How do I hold hands with my sisters in the North without also remembering that for 500 years an estimated 100 million Africans, most of whom were women, were brutally dragged across the world and scattered to every corner of the ‘empire’, while millions more - my fore-parents in the widest sense of the word - slaved on plantations and mines across this region, producing the very wealth that made it possible for European women - of all classes - to renegotiate the distribution of critical resources between themselves and the state through the mechanism of the welfare state. And yet, in this new and very interesting time of the 21st century when the very same forces that invented racial and location difference among and between peoples and women as an exploited and oppressed group, have, through the further entrenchment of social inequality and difference, begun to threaten those very essential bonds that women worked so hard to emphasize during the past hundred years. Clearly, globalization requires that we interrogate more critically those things that have kept us apart - among which most importantly is the issue of white privilege between women in a world divided into North and South.

Pat McFadden. The Challenges of Feminist leadership vs racism July 2001 (on-line conference posting)

In Southern Africa, race plays itself out in its own unique ways, as the articles that follow will indicate. An area of interest is the absence of minority groups from the feminist activist agenda, leaving activism to indigenous black African groups and creating a fallacy that womens’ rights for racial minority groups are guaranteed.

Certainly, it cannot be that women from racial minority groups in Southern Africa are not abused, or that they have access to all their rights, that those issues that continue to bedevil women of other racial groups do not affect them? The story from Zambia negates this and highlights the way in which culture has been used to ‘protect women’, but in effect keeping them in subordinate positions and denying them their rights. The culture is so strong that women within the Asian community look down upon the efforts of the rights movement. Therefore, it is rare to conceive of a white,

Asian or other minority group person in the feminist movement in countries such as Zambia and Zimbabwe. Where they are present, it is on governing bodies of organisations, where their role is more supervisory. These placements are themselves telling, and insinuate that women from minority groups are above feminist and rights issues. Women from minority groups prefer to remain on the sidelines where they can 'contribute silently.' This has implications in terms of representation and perception: Black African women continue to be associated with violation, poverty and abuse, a trend that saw its birth during slavery, was perpetuated during colonialism and that continues to be sustained through the media and other means. Interestingly, this same media is predominantly white-owned with little if any representation by women. Where women are represented it is in non-decision-making positions. In fact, the proportion of male to female representation in the media remains skewed both across racial and gender lines.

Another area of inequality is in the portrayal of women in the media. There is a tendency to associate particular racial groups with particular stories. For example, black women have been associated with violence and whites with luxury and non-violence. As a consequence, the false notion of white supremacy continues. The 'freeness' of white and other minority non-black groups is upheld and the image of the enslaved black woman perpetuated. The resultant belief therefore is that gender is not an issue among minority racial groups.

The absence of minority groups from the feminist activist table can in part be due to the colonial history that accorded human rights according to race. All the four countries of focus – Botswana, Namibia, South Africa and Zimbabwe have some history of colonialism which saw white women being considered superior to black people. White women's participation in the feminist activist agenda today would compromise that position of power. In effect, the absence of white women from the feminist activist discourse has enabled them to maintain the position of power they wielded

during colonialism. In their silence, they have managed to maintain the perception of the white race as being above discrimination. The non-accessibility of white women also speaks volumes on the issue of privilege. McFadden points out that white privilege is deeply embedded in centuries of plunder and the ideological construction of people of colour as 'less deserving' of the material and aesthetics of human production. African women in this case are defined as the 'lowest of the low' in every sense of that hierarchical statement. The above plays itself out in interracial marriages: black women married to white men are considered 'loose,' while on the other hand, black men who marry white women are perceived as having conquered that white privilege. The men are regarded as heroes.

Whiteness has therefore been privileged, giving it easy access and control to resources that blacks cannot easily access. It has enabled white women access to resources, regardless of their class, age or sexual orientation and this is something that needs to be challenged.

Religion has often been used to justify racism as happened during the apartheid era. This resulted in the entrenchment of gross racial inequalities across various sectors in Southern Africa. It will take years to rebuild the negative effects of that racism.

At the end of the day, the challenge for feminist activists is to ensure that the human rights of all women, regardless of colour and race, are upheld and respected, as stated in the United Nations Charter on Human Rights. The long history of slavery and injustice has left scars on women that need to be handled carefully. But to move forward, women of different races have to put the past behind them. Race issues challenge fundamental issues – of identity and beliefs. When we bring gender and race together, there is need for caution so as not to drive away certain racial groups.

The Impact of Apartheid

on Black Women in South Africa

By Thenjiwe Mtintso

This paper outlines the double tragedy of black women under apartheid. It argues that while the lives of black women have improved since the 1994 democratic elections, the vestiges of apartheid still continue to impact negatively on them. Many have as yet to taste the fruits of freedom. The paper briefly outlines some achievements of the democratic dispensation for gender equality; traces the triple-fold oppression of black women under apartheid; points out some of the glaring examples of the legacy of apartheid; touches on the history of and the continuing struggle against gender oppression and concludes by showing that class, race and gender oppression are intricately linked and victory against one is not necessarily a victory against the other.

Democratic Framework

1994 ushered in a new era for all South Africans especially black people who were for the first time able to vote. In their millions they patiently stood in queues – old and young, urban and rural to exercise that fundamental right. Walter Sisulu, a veteran of the struggle, remarked that it was an irony that at 81, he was voting for the first time. The majority of these voters were black women. They were confident that their ability to exercise their right to vote was the beginning of a change in their lives. Indeed their lives have to some extent changed. The new democratic government has put in place constitutional, legislative and institutional frameworks



towards achieving a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist dispensation. Amongst these are: -

 A progressive Constitution that guarantees equal rights for all South Africans and prohibits discrimination on the basis of, amongst others, sex and gender.

 Promulgation of Laws such as the Maintenance, Domestic Violence and the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Acts, which are cornerstones for gender equality. Others such as Employment Equity, Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, Land Bank Amendment etc improve the lives of women.

 The establishment of the National Machinery consisting of the Office on the Status of Women; gender units in all government departments; the Parliamentary Committee on the Improvement of the Quality of Life and Status of Women and the Women's Empowerment Unit. The Commission on Gender Equality is part of the institutionalisation of gender equality.

 The ratification of conventions and agreements such as the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action confirm the strides towards gender equality.

 Women make up 29.8% of Members of Parliament and 38.09% of Ministers and Deputy Ministers ensuring women's relative participation in decision-making processes at the highest level.

 Access to basic services such as water and electricity improves the quality of life of women. Women are regaining their dignity and taking responsibility for their lives. Patriarchal attitudes are changing as evidenced by, for example, the growing anger against violence against women.

Indeed there are strides, though slow and painful, towards changing the power relations between women and men, but there is still a “long walk” to gender equality.

Colonialism, Apartheid and Patriarchy

Colonialism brought in its trail patriarchy, the system of domination of women by men at all levels of society based on the socially constructed notions of gender, gender roles and gender relations. That patriarchy interfaced with the indigenous version and was used to benefit apartheid. Therefore apartheid, race, gender and class oppression were combined to form an intricate system of oppression. Black working class and rural women bore the harshest brunt of exploitation and oppression. They suffered “the triple oppression” – exploited as a class, oppressed as a national group and dominated as women.

The combination of colonial and indigenous women's oppression denied women basic social and economic rights beginning within the family and permeating throughout all spheres of life in society. The institutionalisation of racism and sexism meant that, amongst others, black women were barred from living in cities, owning land, accessing family planning, inheriting, borrowing money or participating in political and economic activity. The system of women's domination and control was reinforced by widespread abuse of and violence against women, both within and outside the family.

The Legacy of Apartheid

The following statistics provide a stark illustration of the legacy of apartheid where black working class women, particularly in rural areas, continue to bear the greatest burden of poverty and inequality.

According to the 1996 Census results, South Africa has a population of 40.56 million. Of these, 77% are African, 11% are white, 9% are coloured and three percent Asian or Indian. 48.1% are male and 51.9% female.

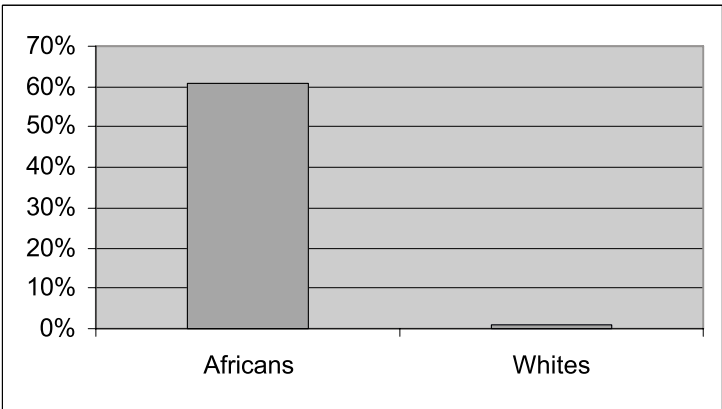
African women make up 39.94% of the total population and 76.96% of the female population.

Approximately 54% of the population live in the urban areas. Rural areas are the previous bantustans populated by Africans and used as labour reserves. Urbanisation is more common among men than women, and in rural areas, the proportion of women in the population is significantly higher than in urban areas. For example, in largely rural provinces such as the Northern Province, 55% of the population is female; in the Eastern Cape, 54% of the population is female and in KwaZulu-Natal, 53%. In highly urbanised Gauteng, 49% of the population is female, according to Central Statistics.

There are major gaps in the available statistics. There is little gender-disaggregated data, and even less information on the overlap between race and gender.

Racialisation and Feminisation of Poverty in South Africa

Percentage of people living in poverty by race group

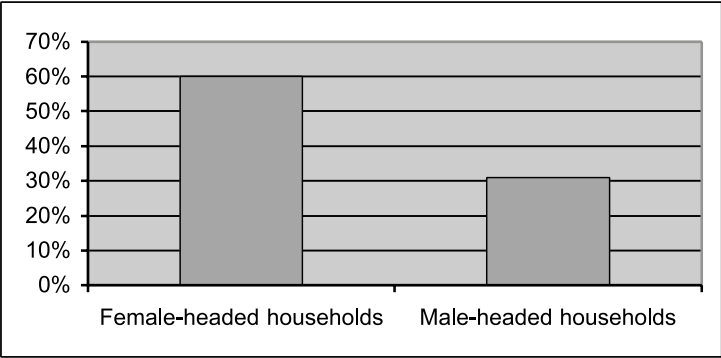


According to the 1996 Census results, 61 percent of Africans live in poverty compared with 1 (one) percent of whites.

Female-headed households

On average, there are thirty times as many female-headed households within the African community, as compared to the white community. Female-headed households are mainly in the rural areas and in informal settlements and tend to be poorer than even those headed by African men.

Poverty rate among female-headed and male-headed households



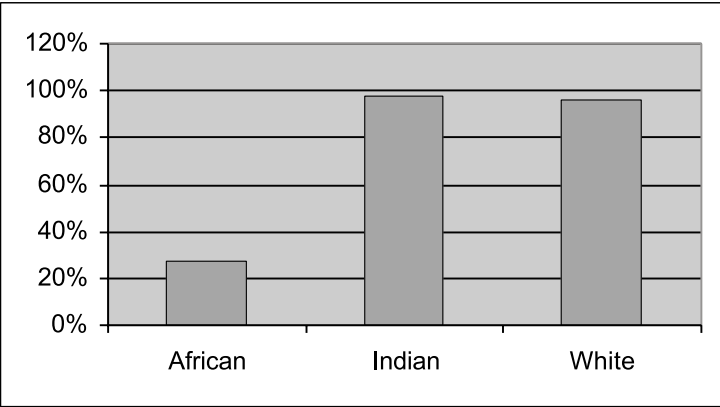
Sixty percent of households are female headed and 31 percent are headed by males.

Living Conditions

Access to water

The lack of access to a water source inside the home is more common in rural and peri-urban areas, and 71% of African households have to fetch water from outside the home. The water source is often some distance from the dwelling, and on average, women spend over an hour every day fetching water.

Access to piped water in dwellings by race groups



27 percent of Africans have access to piped water, compared with 98 percent of Indians and 96 percent whites.

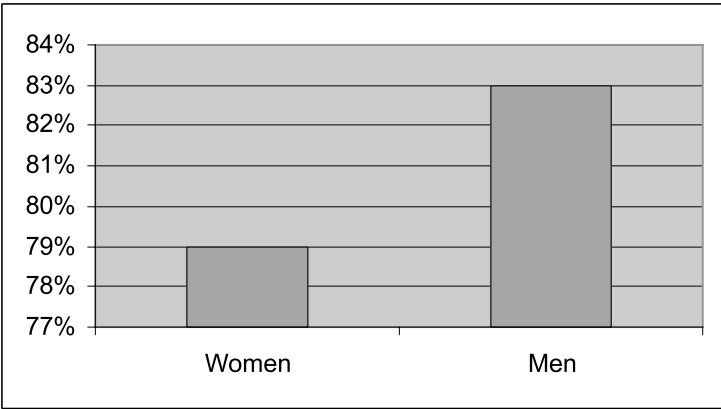
Health care

As black women have limited access to employment opportunities, they also have less access to private medical aid. Only 8% of African women have access to a medical aid, compared to 72% of white women.

Poverty related diseases such as tuberculosis and kwashiorkor are prevalent amongst African poor people. Black women tend to bear the brunt of the HIV pandemic because their socio-economic positions makes it difficult for them to negotiate safer sex or demand monogamy from their partners. HIV positive women often face ostracism from their communities, which, given women's insecure financial position, means being left destitute.

Education

Adult literacy rate



There are still large disparities in the literacy levels of men and women as indicated above.

Conditions in the school and education facilities in rural areas and in the townships still do not create the necessary environment for learning. Barriers to education still exist for many girls and women, notably in the form of gender-based violence in educational institutions. “Poor and black girls are more likely to have to travel long distances by public transport to reach school and are more adversely affected by an increased risk of violence.”.

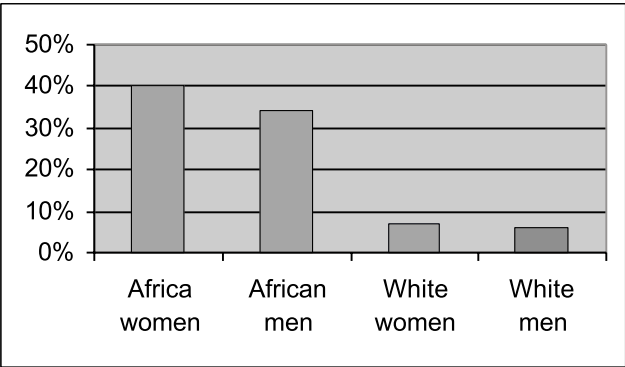
Work

Despite having same levels of education, women tend to earn less than men. African women earn between 15% - 28% less than African males with the same education. White men and women earn consistently more than African men with the same level of education.⁹ Black women are consistently the lowest earners. Even in same fields, women are often paid less than men doing the same or similar work¹.

Black women are either concentrated in low-skill, low-wage employment in industries such as clothing manufacture, or in high-skill, but relatively low-wage professions such as nursing and teaching. In the secondary labour market, black women are largely employed in agriculture and domestic work. Among those women employed, 35% of African women, and 23% of coloured women, work as domestic workers. Within the informal labour market, African women mainly occupy the “survivalist sector” comprising mainly of hawkers and street vendors.

There are few women in positions of economic power. For instance, in 1996, less than 0.5% of directors of large companies were black women. Women formed only 22% of all people in managerial positions, and only 9% of these were African women.

Urban unemployment figures for 2000



40.2% of African women are unemployed compared with 34.2% African men, 7.3% white women and 6.2% white men.

The apartheid policies prevented black women from living in urban areas where jobs were available. The migrant labour system led to male migration from rural to urban areas to provide labour for mining and industry. Women were left to eke out existence from the barren land as remittance from male relatives was very little and erratic.

In rural areas, agricultural labour is often the only source of employment. Women working on farms tend to be classified as casual and seasonal labour. During the apartheid era, it was common practice for farmers to use women and children as unpaid labour, and threaten them with expulsion from the land if they refused to work. The women were frequently beaten and abused by the farmers. But they tolerated this violence out of fear of being evicted. Exploitation of labour on farms is still rife. Ilne-Mari Hofmeyer of the Women on Farms notes that, “Women in agriculture face oppression from four sides – because they are black, because they are women, because they are poor and because they live in **rural** areas. Farm workers of both sexes are trapped in rigidly defined gender roles and exploitative practices. However, the consequence of disempowerment is more painful for women, who suffer further abuse at the hands of men, stripped of dignity and unable to control their lives.” Domestic violence is still prevalent in the farms despite the existence of legislation prohibiting it. Male elders who are supposed to resolve this generally side with the abusive husband, and advise women that, “If you are tired of being beaten, then you are tired of being a wife.”

Legal Position

Under the colonial and apartheid regimes, African indigenous law (already patriarchal in nature) was interpreted and codified by white officials, who added their own distortions, and created an inflexible system, which did not recognise women’s changing role in society. In terms of this customary law, women were reduced to perpetual minors under guardianship of their male relatives. Recent legislation has improved the position of black women, but in practice, many women are still treated as minors, with male relatives insisting on managing women’s financial affairs, and controlling other aspects of their lives.

Access to Resources

Within the traditional patriarchal family structure, property is owned by men and inherited by senior male relatives. Women

access resources through their relationships to men, but have no permanent ownership or control over these resources.

Access to credit remains a barrier to women's economic development. In the past, women required the assistance of their male relatives in concluding financial arrangements, and some financial institutions have retained these biases against women. Anecdotal evidence suggests that racist and sexist stereotype continue to inform the unofficial policies of financial institutions, for example, even where a woman is married out of community of property, banking institutions may require the consent of her husband before granting credit. Access to and ownership of land, a key issue in economic empowerment of rural women is also hampered by gender discrimination in the granting of credit.

The Struggle Continues

Black women did not only suffer the oppression outlined above but they were subjected to the most vicious brutality that the regime could unleash. Apartheid used repression and brutality to maintain itself and to suppress any resistance to it. This brutal repression did not deter women. Led by their organisations, women marched in the streets, they demonstrated, they mobilised and organised against racism. Under the ambit of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) they marched to Pretoria on August 9, 1954, forcing the then Prime Minister to flee from their wrath. Our streets, our villages, every inch of South African soil, were turned into battlefields with black women leading the onslaught against apartheid. They were brutalised and violated, banished, detained, jailed, exiled and murdered. Still this onslaught did not deter them. They returned from jail and continued with the struggle. They went into exile and joined the liberation and armed forces; they dodged police when they were under banning orders and joined the underground structures; they confronted police with stones in their hands and babies on their backs; they returned from the torture chambers seemingly with more vigour. They organised a strong Women's Movement that led to the protracted struggles

throughout the era of colonialism and apartheid in our country. Generation after generation they continued to rally around their clarion call of “wathintabafazi wathintimbokodo uzakufa” (now you have touched the women, you have dislodged a boulder, you are going to be killed).

The women engaged in different kinds of battles during the negotiations process. They fought for their right to be included in the negotiations and had to fight to ensure that the new Constitution integrated gender concerns. Under the Women's National Coalition they adopted the Women's Charter that documented the women's needs, aspirations that had to be integrated into the new policies of a free, non-sexist, non-racial and democratic South Africa.

Currently women still continue, albeit under a different climate, to engage in a protracted struggle for their emancipation. The women's movement is focusing on both the practical and strategic gender needs. Strong organisations have emerged fighting, amongst others, the scourge of violence against women and many other ills that are inherited from the apartheid era as well as those that are part of the patriarchal system. South African women like struggling women the world over, are the product and epitome of the struggle itself. They are still in the forefront of the struggle, confirming the Sotho saying that “ a woman holds the knife at its sharp end.”

Conclusion

The overlapping systems of oppression, discussed above, continue to impact on post-apartheid South Africa just as racism continues to create the “two nations” within one South Africa. It is important for people, societies and nations to understand the gender dynamics of racism. The rapidly changing global economy has also created new barriers to social and economic equality especially for African women. Therefore the struggle against racism should integrate the struggle to eradicate gender oppression.

Bibliography

- Albertyn, C. and Zylich, L.** *Audit of Legislation that Discriminates on the Basis of Sex / Gender.* Conducted by the Gender Research Project, Centre for Applied Legal Studies, University of the Witwatersrand, for the Commission on Gender Equality: Johannesburg.
- ANC. 2000.** "Uprooting the Demon of Racism." In *Unrabulo* No. 8: <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/ngcouncils/docs2000/discuss3.html>
- Baden S. and Milward, K. 1995.** *Gender and Poverty.* BRIDGE: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge>
- Baden, S. 1993.** *Gender and Adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa.* BRIDGE: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/bridge>
- Budlender, D. 1996.** *The Women's Budget.* IDASA: Cape Town.
- Budlender, D. 1998.** *The People's Voices: National Speak Out on Poverty Hearings, March to June 1998.* SANGOCO: Johannesburg.
- Central Statistics. 1998.** *Women and Men in South Africa.* CSS: Pretoria.
- Elson, D. 2000.** *Progress of the World's Women 2000.* UNIFEM: New York.
- Grossman, A. and Mugambi, P. March 2001.** "What's Race Got to Do with It?" In *WEDO News & Views: Newsletter of the Women's Environment and Development Organisation* Vol. 14, No. 1.
- Heintz, J. and Jardine, C. 1998.** *Poverty and Economics in South Africa.* SANGOCO: Johannesburg.
- Lorgat, H. 2001.** "The Scourge in Our Schools." In *The Educator's Voice.* April, Vol. 5, No. 3.
- Nath, M.B. 2000.** *Gender, HIV and Human Rights: A Training Manual.* UNIFEM: New York.
- Orr, L. 2001.** *Globalisation Trends and Women's Work: The South African Picture.* NALEDI.
- Rasebotsa, N. and Molema, L. (Editors). 1998.** *Women Creating the Future.* Vivlia: Florida Hills, Johannesburg.
- Shivdas, M. 2000.** *Alternative Assessment of Women and Media.* Compiled by Isis International-Manila for WomenAction 2000: <http://www.womenaction.org/csw44/altrepeng.htm>
- South African Communist Party. 2000.** *Racism, Class, Gender and*

Poverty in South Africa. Preliminary Submission to the Hearings on Racism in the Media, Hosted by the South African Human Rights Commission: <http://www.sacp.org.za/docs/sahrsub.html>.

Statistics South Africa. 1998. *Census '96: National Results*: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census96/HTML/press/Part002.html>

Statistics South Africa. 2001. *Discussion Paper 1: Comparative Labour Statistics*: <http://www.statssa.gov.za/Discussion&technicalpapers/discussion.htm>

Taylor, V. 2000. *South Africa: Transformation for Human Development*. UNDP: Pretoria.

UNICEF and UNIFEM. 1995. *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*. UNICEF and UNIFEM: New York.

UNIFEM. 2001. *Integrating Gender into the Third World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance: UNIFEM Background Paper*. UNIFEM: http://www.undp.org/unifem/hr_racism.html

United Nations. 1997 – 2000. *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*. United Nations High Commission for Human Rights: http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/d_icerd.htm

UWC Gender Equity Unit and SARDC-WIDSAA. 1997. *Beyond Inequalities: Women in South Africa*. UWC / SARDC: Bellville and Harare.

Wichterich, C. 2000. *The Globalized Woman*. Zed Books: Lon

Asian women caught in the middle

By Zarina Geloo

Women's rights are accorded and accessed differently by women of different races. In the Asian and black races, women are often considered minors (regardless of laws giving women majority status) and still have to depend on male members of their family to negotiate and represent them in public life. Culture has also been used to deny women their rights. In this article, Zarina Geloo looks at race and gender relations within the Indian race.

Jayettri Mummar remains unaware that she is considered the guardian of her children and can therefore give them her name, nationality, and sign official documents on their behalf, just like her husband.

Mummar, who is a Moslem, still believes she has to get her husband's permission to apply for a passport, national registration card or buy property. But she is unconcerned. "Whether I am aware of these new developments or not is irrelevant. My husband sorts out these official things for me. I cannot imagine that he or any other Indian man would allow their wives to queue up in crowds and deal with bureaucracy."

Irritated by what she imagines an insult to her intellect for being ignorant of her rights, Jayettri says women



(Indian) have no need for “new freedoms” in either legislation or social form. “Our male relatives and husbands take care of these. That is the beauty of our culture, women are protected, unlike in black Zambian societies where the woman is like a man. She has to fend for herself even when she has a husband and male relatives”.

Her widowed sister-in-law, Anusha, a university graduate in microbiology, who has never worked since graduating, agrees with her saying Asian women living in Zambia are “immune” from many of the ills in local societies. She gives an example of property grabbing, a scourge women activists are facing an uphill battle with. “In Indian custom there is no property grabbing. I did not need any law to protect my children and myself. Our extended family is still strong and takes care of widows and orphans. So tell me what else I need”, she says passionately.

But while Asian women seem to bask in this protection from their husbands and male relatives, this does not take away the fact that they do not have any ownership rights to property.

For the black Zambian woman, it is a lack of education, illiteracy, and awareness of civic rights that hinders her from achieving economic/ social emancipation. But even when Asian women are educated and can be economically viable, they appear to accept values and norms without questioning the effect it has on their lives.

Munira Pillay a medical doctor says all the “benefits” of women’s freedoms enshrined in the Zambian Constitution, and the strides the women activists have made, benefit Asian women also, whether they actually need to employ them or not. However Pillay, who is Hindu, says all these things become irrelevant when it comes to actually applying them. Helpful as the national laws are for women, the deeper trouble lies with the way they are applied and the way they are interpreted by male members of the Indian society. Legally, women can now own land and property. However, Indian women are never titleholders of their husbands or family’s property. They are not even custodians. Instead their resources are passed on to a male relative who takes care of it and they have no

say of how it is used or disposed of.

Pillay, 34, says Indian society has become very adept at blurring the lack of women's emancipation.

"You will hear that women are allowed to work. But look at where they work, in their husbands or family's shops, which they will never own; in travel agents where no training is required and where the job is a mere stop gap or fun job before entering into marriage; or in Indian-owned businesses where the job is organised by the family. " This all gives a semblance of economic freedom but in reality is not. Women in family businesses do not have any control on how profits are spent, asserts Pillay.

The situation is the same with education. Indian society will claim that girls' education is a priority and will reel off statistics of how many Indian girls finish school. But Pillay asks where these girls or women are in the workforce or in the professional circles. "They disappear, they are in their husbands homes or waiting to get married in their fathers houses. It is a waste of education," she says.

She feels particularly angry that the average Zambian woman is not educated because she cannot access education. "The Indian woman does everything while waiting for the ultimate - marriage and motherhood".

Pillay says another example of the hypocrisy of Indian society is arranged marriages. Nowadays, the more wealthy families, considered more modern, claim that their daughters choose their spouses but this is continuously challenged by events on the ground. These young girls, considered lucky by others whose choice of husband is dictated by their families, are presented with a list of suitors to choose from.

"If Indian girls really have this freedom of choice, why do we still have young brides burning themselves because they are desperately unhappy, and why are love struck couples running the risk of dis-inheritance by eloping? Most of all, why has Pillay's family been ostracized because she refused to enter an arranged marriage and her four younger siblings unable to find "suitable"(wealthy) matches because the family name had been sullied?

Her younger sister Anakie, a medical doctor had to marry her shopkeeper husband to “redeem” the family name. Says Pillay: “I am not terribly unhappy but I have little respect for my husband who is uneducated and has out dated ideas of my role as his wife.” However, Anakie considers herself lucky — her husband is not wealthy so she is “allowed” to work to supplement the family income.

Anakie says there is this facade that the Indian community has adopted where it appears an oasis of calm and peace. Women do not go to the police when they are beaten by husbands, abused by in-laws (a phenomenon particularly endemic in Indian society), or lose control of their inheritance or family property.

“It is considered very low class, and in bad taste for an Indian woman to seek legal recourse.... It would also bring shame to her family. Besides, even if she wanted to, she would have no support structure or financial means to take this course of action.”

Legally, Asian women married under the Hindu or Moslem rites loose out because these two ceremonies are not recognised under the Zambian laws, unlike the Christian ceremonies, which fall under the customary law. This means that Hindu and Asian women are not entitled to lay claim to their children, husbands’ property or even resources they acquired while married as they cannot claim to be common law wives under the customary law.

While Prishina Motala, a lawyer says this does not constitute a major problem for Asian women because they rarely sue or even go as far as the courts in times of divorce or widowhood, it still does not take away the fact that they do not have rights.

“Who knows, maybe if Asian women decided to challenge this in court there would be need to amend the laws, or even get it recognised under the customary act. I advise Asian women to get married both in court and in their churches to protect themselves.

Of course there are some who do not get the chance to get married legally, and I foresee problems for them but these are some of the silent sins of Indian society that need exposure,” says Motala. A lawyer of 15 years Motala says she knows that there are Asian

women who have been cheated out of inheritances, businesses and resources by their male relatives, in-laws and husbands but refuse to go to court because of the stigma attached to it.

Asian men also realise they can play on the timidity of their womenfolk. Motala says these days men prefer to get their wives from India, from poor families, who will live in Zambia under their bondage with no immediate family and completely ignorant of the laws of the land.

Asians and other minority groups make up one percent of the 10.3 million Zambian population. Women make up 51.3 percent of the total population. Generally, Indian women shun advocacy groups, which, paralegal Judith Kandoma feels could help raise awareness to their rights.

While on the whole, women's issues fall across the racial divide, Kandoma believes that Indian women are particularly shackled by tradition and culture which should have spurred them to take a more proactive role in women's emancipation.

"How will we know if they are being abused, physically or emotionally or need counseling if we do not know what their problems are? They have problems, we know that," Kandoma says, adding that the gains made by women's movements are rendered useless because Indian women do not enforce them. For example, the law against incestuous relationships is clearly defined but Indian girls against their will, are still forced into marriages with close relatives. She says Indians in Zambia, live by the traditional norms and culture brought by their ancestors when they came into Africa. But unlike their counterparts in Asia and India, they have not agitated for a change in gender issues. "In India, the women are fighting against forced marriages, physical abuse, the caste system, economic and political emancipation, but surprisingly, here, they are content to be invisible. And yet that need not be the case. If they came forward, we would include their concerns on our agenda," she says.

The emergence of Islamic women religious leaders who preach the Koran to other women would have provided a forum for women to discuss issues affecting them, but they actually entrench cultural beliefs. Hamida Ramallah, 58, says the religious leaders who are basically a group of elderly women well versed in the Koran, would have been the vehicle for change, but they do not deal with real issues; of careers for girls, arranged marriages, divorces or even infidelity in Indian men. "Indian women are being infected by their philandering husbands with HIV, but they are helpless, they do not even have a forum to discuss it, yet the rest of the country has understood the concept of condoms. That's how far behind the Indian woman is, " she says.

Ramallah, considered poor by Indian standards because her family (brothers, sisters and husband) are employed by other Indian shop owners, says people like Mummar are complacent about their lot because they have not grasped the concept of independent thinking. "They think rights and freedoms are for western or indigenous people but they are the ones losing out, letting their menfolk make decisions for them, being treated like children." A mother of four, she regrets her lack of education and arranged marriage. She says if her parents educated her, she would have been able to stand on her feet and would have had a better future. It is because of her regrets that amidst great adversity from her family and in-laws, she encouraged her daughters to go to university and choose careers over marriage.

"I don't care, I want something better for them. My family does not know it but I have arranged that upon each of them graduating, they will go to my uncle in Canada to get them away from this environment. "

To be a racist

By Hope Chigudu

We have all been shaped and sometimes warped by race; and yet none of us is born racist. Based on where we come from, who our parents were, where we lived, what kind of jobs we did, what kind of friends we had, all these things end up being in our value system which influences our racial attitude.

Racism remains a major issue. It is a complex borne of anger, brewed over the generations and spiced with insinuations or outright injunctions of a nonexistent superiority. It cuts across black, white, olive, red, and yellow complexions. Even within those colours, racism can find further avenues of intolerance to vent its latent anger; it can find shades in between. Sometimes the shades assume a gender shape.

In this short paper, I summarise my experience of living in a racist household and community. I am white, and live in a country where the majority of citizens are blacks. I attended an only boys school, that is where my proverbial baptism of fire started.

When I was growing up, I was so much trapped by my own 'dominant' culture that it never occurred to me that there were other cultures. I was a victim of racism, I led a hate-filled life. The hatred ate at my psyche yet, I never regarded myself as a racist, in fact if any one had called me a racist a few years ago, I would have referred them to a mental hospital. I thought that I was doing the right thing, after all this was the way I was socialised.



The only black person that I grew up interacting with was the family domestic worker. I should not even call it interaction. We gave her orders and she obeyed. She used to call me sir although she was old enough to be my grandmother. It never occurred to me that she was a human being with children of her own as I never saw them and as she hardly went to her own home. She was not supposed to look after her own children; she was supposed to look after us. She was a house-girl (a 'girl' in her 50s).

I used to look at nanny, as we called her, and wonder if she really loved herself deeply as a black woman, if she loved her body and if she glorified in it. It was black, pitch black, how could she love it? I saw many of her friends trying to be white by using skin-lightening creams. I sympathised but understood. Who did not want to be white? To me nanny was just there, she belonged to a race that ate food that we despised. We made fun of her language and her culture. I always thought that she was lucky to have an opportunity to be close to a higher race, my race. I never thought that nanny, as an African, had her own standards when it came to dress, hairstyle, and other aspects of her culture. We despised her and her entire race for doing things differently. We would get rattled by her own way of doing things since our notion of what we regarded as appropriate was the only valid view. My mum and her friends would sit and discuss blacks as 'they'. In actual fact, in my mothers circles of friends, 'they' and 'them' referred to blacks. It was always 'they eat this', 'they comb their hair this way',... To my mother and her friends and in fact to all of us, all blacks were the same, they only differed in names. One was Rudo and the other Chido-such heathen names! They needed to be given civilised names, Christian names such as John, Mary, and James. How could one claim to be Christian without a Christian name? The kaffir names are not in the bible. We had to rename all our servants at home. Their native names were as complicated as they were weird.

I grew up knowing that blacks were either too much of this or not enough of the other, they behaved in such and such manner, they...the list was endless. We whites were the better and superior race and we were ordained to be above others. This kind of

upbringing instilled in me a sense of confidence, a pride and arrogance that did not acknowledge the existence of anyone else as an equal but more as a servant class.

I went to a predominantly white primary school. I played with white kids and ate with them, I did not have to interact with black kids, they were few and I wondered what they were doing in our school. I despised them. Did they know anything about birthday parties? They were created to be servants, just like nanny. Fortunately, all the teachers were white. The grounds-men and office messengers were black just like the servants that worked at home. There was nothing unusual about that. The best pupils were always white. It never occurred to me that a black kid could be as intelligent as the rest of us white kids.

Racism dissipates useful energies of the perpetrator in useless pursuits to maintain the superiority complex and to ensure that the oppressed cannot rise to decipher the superiority illusion. Indeed it is an illusion because science has proved that beyond the skins, all human being have the same bodily functions. Given equal opportunity, they would probably achieve equally. Can you imagine how the notion of superiority haunts the racially prejudiced? It haunted me for years.

I was growing up in a racist community but I did not know that it was racist. I assumed that the way we did things was the way they were supposed to be done. I assumed that the rest of the world was like us, and yet as time went on, it was obvious that this was not so. This truth almost killed me.

I went to a predominantly white private secondary school, one of the best in the country. My six years at the school could be equated to a series of journeys across various contradictory, and at times antagonistic locations. The first shock was when, in our very first test, a black kid came first in the class. We raised an alarm and I mean an alarm. My friends and I alleged that he had cheated. How else could anyone explain that a black child was as gifted as a white child? We complained bitterly both at home and

at school. We almost went on a strike. The parents mobilised and sent a joint letter of complaint to the headmaster. The black kid was accused of the shameful act of cheating. The kid looked heartbroken and really hurt. At the insistence of parents, the examination was repeated. The same pupil came first again. Most of us were scandalized but still believed that he had cheated or used witchcraft, blacks were known to do these things. He was castigated and leached. How could he, a member of the inferior race, remove our privilege? Had he been of another colour; yellow or red, whatever, we would have forgiven him. At school, we talked about the race issue for a long time. We almost came to a sad conclusion; contrary to what our families and institutions had socialised us to believe, in terms of intelligence, we were not superior. Discovering that there were blacks who were actually better than us whites was a rude awakening. My confidence was shaken, shattered and crushed. I was devastated. My ego was wounded and my spirit killed. What was I supposed to believe in?

The racially prejudiced suffer from dangerous delusions of a natural right to dignity and superiority. They fight eternally against an inner human spirit, which seeks to reach out to the rich diversity of cultures and peoples. They live in self imposed psychological exile borne of a biological sense of what is right. The hatred they live with is more damaging to their health than the possibility of tainting by the imagined inferior groups

There were more blows in store for us. Some of the black kids did not just excel in class; they excelled in sports as well as other extra curricular activities. We were stuck, we were angry and we were hurt. Our natural superiority weapon was being taken away from us. We resorted to ridiculing their accent and calling their language primitive. Despite the insults we hurled at them, it was becoming more and more obvious that what I was brought up to believe was not necessarily the norm. It is always hard to accept mistakes but in this case, I had no choice. Evidence was dancing before me, mocking me..

As time went on, most of us were forced to accept that race was not a determinant in matters of intelligence. We were also forced to befriend some of the very bright kids so that they could help us with our assignments. It was a humiliating experience but in the process we discovered that they had concerns like all of us, that they cried and laughed just like us and that some of them were 'normal' people. Slowly we were crawling towards them, hard as it was. It was a humbling experience, it was unfair. Remember I was brought up to believe that the blacks were born to serve the whites. I grew up with a strong sense of entitlement. Why not? The whites wrote most textbooks that we used at school, the whites started our school, the majority of the teachers were whites, and whites owned interesting commercial businesses, we had all the reasons to be arrogant. Economically, whites were more visible, how could I not see us as a privileged race? Who were the inventors of whatever was considered useful in life; telephones, medicine, aeroplanes etc. how could I not feel superior to blacks? What had they ever contributed to modernity? What did they have that they could claim as their own? Race was all I could think about when dealing with blacks. Yet circumstances were forcing me to interrogate my views.

I grew up fully aware that blacks were violent criminals. My parents told me chilling stories about incidences of black brutality against whites. I learnt to avoid them as I had heard that even brief encounters with blacks could be a cause for alarm and trouble. Every time I saw a group of black boys approaching me, I would freeze. I would really be scared, immediately, for no good reason. I had gut fears of blacks. The mass media with its negative portrayal of blacks fuelled my fears. Today, I have vivid memories of a black boy who became my nemesis, often threatening me physically and verbally at school. I can still see his long ugly fingernail on my nose and hear him saying, 'white boy, I will crush your brains', just because I called him a kaffir. He only did this when other white boys were not around. But then my fears of blacks are grounded in something deeper than memories of a childhood bully. There was and is always an assumption that you are going to be attacked by blacks, My fear, even today, is that I do not have the language to



talk blacks out of their rage if they threaten me. There is it, my fear of black anger.

In the shop owned by my father, we always knew that inevitably, blacks would try to shop lift. At home we used to lock up the cupboards lest nanny and other servants got tempted and stole our property. I could never sit next to a black person unless I had to. Not only did I fear theft, I also feared the way they spoke loudly, the way they were vocal, and so expressive in language and gesture, throwing arms in the air and probably hitting you in the process. Black people's ways can be intimidating and I must admit that I am still intimidated; the way their women make statements with hands on the hip, or pointing a fat black finger for emphasis.

Back to my school days, one of the most debilitating and humiliating experience was when one day, a school textbook was stolen and a thorough search revealed that the textbook was in possession of a white boy. We did not believe it; we argued that one of the black kids had either stolen the book and hidden it in the white boy's bag or that the poor boy had put it in his bag by mistake. We refused to believe that one of us could steal. This was a profession reserved for the blacks. The theft threw the class into a heated argument and for a long time, the divide between white and black was intensified. Interestingly, the culprit did not defend himself as violently as most of us defended him. However, it did not matter; we were comforted by the fact that we were not defending one person. We were defending the white race.

As I look back, I remember that even the teachers affirmed the white boys more regardless of their performance and behaviour than they did the blacks. This was comforting. My own parents continued to believe in their own racial superiority. They continued to justify the inferior status of the blacks. They used religion, historical accounts, education and fiction to justify their own superior status. They gave one example after another in an attempt to prove that blacks were unreliable, thieves, cheats, stupid; ...I was feeling insecure all the same. Things were falling apart. Were we superior?

At the end of six years in the same high school, there were many racial related issues that were still troubling me but I was interrogating my own beliefs and value system. I was getting more and more convinced that the black kids were as intelligent and talented as whites.

In form five, for reasons that I still do not understand, I developed a close relationship with a black boy at my school. The day I took him home, my parents did not talk to me for days. Interestingly, when I visited his own home, I was amazed to discover that his parents were more sophisticated and progressive than mine. They were welcoming and treated me normally. His mother had a terrific sense of humour and the sister was a singer. The grandmother shook my hand warmly although she did not speak a word of English. Within the family, there was love in the air. It was a pleasant home and a pleasant experience for me. It was at this time that I wished that I had learnt the local language. I wished that I had taken time to understand the culture of blacks, the majority in the country. I wished I had tried to understand the black people's ways. This indeed was a humbling experience.

I went home and told my parents about my friend and his home, about his warm, funny and interesting mother, about the obvious values of the family. I talked about my friend's lively, spontaneous, full of fun and talented sister, and above all I talked about the way they accepted me with open arms. I explained the interesting food that we ate, the unique house, and the music. My parents were furious. How could I not see that it was all deceit, deceit, and deceit? Just because I talked about the sister positively, my parents reminded me that interracial unions between black and white were always explosive. 'Black women regardless of how they look, no matter how beautiful, they are still down in class to white women', warned my mother. My parents talked about how blacks continued to appropriate our culture. They said that the wedge dividing us was too wide to be closed. I was castigated for disobeying God and my parents by visiting and admiring 'them'. 'What have we not given you that you should humiliate us by visiting servants. What if our friends get to know what you have done' lamented my poor mother.



What I have learnt in life is that limited contact between different ethnic groups gives rise to all kinds of popular beliefs. Such beliefs spring from ignorance, fear, and the need to find a plausible explanation for perplexing physical and cultural difference. Our cultures tend to be socially conservative and we feel threatened by any kind of difference. Very often such prejudices are inherited from parents or friends without any question. Such statements might at first appear harmless but they are the seeds that breed conflict and result in violence. Our lack of tolerance of other races that are different from ours and about which we know little makes us as bad and dangerous as common criminals.

The limited contact with blacks and my own upbringing made me spend many years preparing for a battle against an imagined monster. My mind was twisted. Is not this pure madness? There are many people born into such hate-filled homes. They are psychologically militarised to prepare for the imagined enemy. They are taught, from an early age, to guard the army of their 'superior race' against the toxic exposure from the 'inferior race(s)'. They are given the arms of war: arrogance, condescension and vulgar expression of their superiority. Armed with these, such children are unleashed upon society in their damaged state, full of hatred of other people 'who do not look like them.' These children grow up into dangerous adults whose ignominious activities set human development back at every turn. Such pitiable creatures walk around believing that they have an innate superiority and they seek to protect it at all costs.

Talking about race has never been easy. But only through open and honest dialogue will the races begin to know each other. This is the way to start the healing process. Honesty is crucial in this process. We all need to be comfortable with the racial and cultural differences we bring to the table and recognise that *different* does not have to mean *divided*. We have to learnt how to communicate without anger, and to listen without denial. That is where the racial healing and understanding start.

**Hope Chigudu is an International Consultant
in Gender and Development.**

Religion, Racism and Gender

By Dr Musa W. Dube

Racism is a concept based on the assumption that an aggregate of descendants of a common ancestral origin have innate superior characteristics, coupled with a belief in their right to dominate others who differ decisively from their own distinct identity traits. In other words, racism can apply to any group of immanent relations (family, tribe, people, nation) who possess the power to define rights duties, and liberties; to legitimize ideologies, theologies, and systems of value; to assign myths to various members of the human family, which in turn, invariably divide human ontology between persons and non-persons.

Katie Cannon

“Cast Out This Slave Woman With Her Son”

The book of Genesis tells the story of many patriarchs of Israel. Abraham, who was promised the nation of Israel, is one of the central founding fathers of Israel (Gen 12:1-3). Abraham had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac, through Hagar and Sarah, respectively. There is a story on how he came to have two sons by two different mothers: Sarah and Abraham were married, but they had no children. Sarah, who held



that the Lord had closed her womb, (16:2) said to Abraham, "Go in to my slave-girl; it may be that I shall obtain children by her... He went in to Hagar and she conceived," (16:2-3). Hagar bore a son called Ishmael. After the birth of Ishmael, Hagar is said to have "looked with contempt on her mistress." (16: 4). Sarah lodged a complaint to Abraham, who said, "Your slave girl is in your power; do to her as you please. Then Sarah dealt harshly with her and she ran away," (v.6). But as she ran away, the angel of the Lord met and talked to her saying, "return to your mistress and submit to her... I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude" (vv.7-10). Hagar returned and most probably submitted, for we hear of no more quarrels between the two women.

Some years later, the Lord opened the womb of Sarah, and she bore a son to Abraham by the name, Isaac. The story tells us that Sarah's "child grew.... Sarah saw the son of Hagar, the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, playing with her son Isaac. So she said to Abraham:

Cast out this slave woman with her son; for the son of this slave woman shall not inherit along with my son, Isaac. The matter was very distressing to Abraham on account of his son. But God said to Abraham, "Do not be distressed because of the boy and because of your slave woman; whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for it is through Isaac that offspring shall be named for you. As for the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also, because he is your offspring. So Abraham rose early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting on her shoulder, along with the child and sent her away. And she departed and wondered about in the wilderness or Beersheba...God was with the boy, and grew up; he lived in the wilderness, and became an expert with bow. He lived in the wilderness of Paran, and his mother got a wife for him from the land of Egypt. (21:10-21).

What is this story about? Why does the Lord close the womb of Sarah, cause her to give Hagar to Abraham, then open her womb

again? Why does the Lord command a harshly treated slave to return and to be submissive to her mistress? Why does the same Lord God allow Sarah to throw Hagar and her son, the Egyptian slave-girl out, once she has borne Isaac? And if the Lord says Abraham's descendants will be through Isaac and if he promises Ishmael to be a descendant of another nation, are these two nations equal? What exactly is this story about?

Ideology of Gender and Racism in Religious Stories

To illustrate how the ideology gender and race are propounded in religious texts we shall focus on stories in the book of Genesis, as they tend to deal with origins and the identity of many nations/ ethnicities groups and races. We shall primarily focus on the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac. But we shall also touch on the stories of Lot and her daughters (Genesis 19:12-38) and Noah and his three sons (Gen 9:18-28).

Gender refers to a culture specific social construction of men and women. It refers to the roles assigned by different societies to women and men. Gender research has shown that women and men in different societies are given different roles. These socially constructed and ascribed roles do not distribute power equally between women and men. In most cases, if not all, gender has been constructed from an androcentric point of view, that is, from a male perspective. It gives public power of decision making, leadership and property ownership to men. Women, on the other hand, are confined to the private space, where they are given roles of wives and mothers and exist under the leadership of either their fathers, husbands or brothers and they depend on the property of the same. Gender, therefore, does not distribute power equally between men and women, hence the movement towards gender justice or gender empowerment, which seeks to build better relationships.

Research shows that gender oppression works together with other forms of social discrimination such as racism, classism, ageism and

ethnic marginalisation. Racism, as Katie Canon tells us, is applied by those “who possess power to define rights, duties, and liberties; to legitimize ideologies...assign myths to various members of human families, which in turn, invariably divide human ontology between persons and non-persons.” Racism, like gender does not distribute power equally between people of different colors, ethnic groups, nations, regions and religions. Class discrimination is when power in the society is not distributed equally on the basis of material (and sometimes birth/nobility) ownership. The society and nations are thus divided into what is known as low, middle and high class or first, second and third world. Age is also socially used to empower or disempower people. In some societies elderly people are given power, while young people are denied leadership, decision making and property ownership. In other societies, young people or youthfulness is highly honored while age can legitimize social discrimination.

These social factors highlight the complexity of our social identity as human beings. Ideologies of gender, class, age, and race converge in our lives to either empower or disempower us—to allow us to speak and be heard or not heard; to enable us to either make decisions and carry them out or fail to do so. This also means that we are never quite powerless or always powerful in all circumstances. Rather certain categories of our identity may give us power in some places and circumstances, while others disempower us (Tolbert 1995:305-317). Some people, however, have many categories of social empowerment on their side, while others have more disempowering categories in their identity. For example, a woman who is from a high class, white race and respected nation is much better than a woman who is from a low class, despised ethnic group and color.

36

How then is gender visible in the story of Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac? How does gender work with other social categories of oppression, such as racism?

In this story, we meet Sarah, who is identified with her gender role as the wife of Abraham. She is agitated by her incapacity to fulfill one of her major gender roles—namely mothering. She thus

approaches Abraham with a plan, namely, that Abraham should “go into” her slave-girl, Hagar so that she may obtain children for her. We note here that it does not occur to Sarah that Abraham may be the cause of their lack of children. This is in line not only with many other biblical stories, but the social thinking of many societies—that is, infertility is usually associated with women than men.

Hagar is the second woman in this story. She is not just a woman. She is an “Egyptian slave-girl” of Sarah and she is not married. We note that when Sarah wants children, she makes a plan, discusses it with Abraham, but does not bother to discuss with Hagar or inform her. When Sarah has consulted Abraham, “he went in to Hagar and she conceived.” We have no opinion of Hagar the Egyptian slave girl, whether she had agreed or not. However, once she mothered Ishmael, Hagar was no longer just a powerless slave girl. She had one card of power over Sarah: that of having fulfilled the social expectations of mothering. Hagar used this card and looked upon Sarah with contempt, something that Sarah did not accept. She complained to Abraham, who immediately reminded her that she holds class power over Hagar: “Your slave-girl is in your power: do to her as you please” (16:6). These were the words of Abraham to Sarah and she used them until Hagar had to run away.

But, as Hagar was to find out, even the heavenly beings did not resolve her from her class status—an angel of the Lord said to her “return to your mistress and submit to her,” (16:11). The appearance of an angel, a divine character, commanding her to return and to submit to a harsh mistress brings in a religious legitimization to social oppression. That is, God allows class oppression. God allows slavery. She is comforted by the fact that she and her son will be blessed, for the angel says Ishmael’s offspring will be greatly multiplied. But we must note that, they will be descendants of slaves, who must submit. So while both Hagar and Sarah are women, relegated to the role of being wives and mothers, Hagar suffers also for being a slave (low class) and for being different from Sarah (Egyptian).

Finally, Sarah bears a son, Isaac and now decides she does not wish her son to share inheritance with a son of a slave, Ishmael. Hagar had lost her mothering power over Sarah. Not even submission will save Hagar and Ishmael. They must go. Sarah has fulfilled her role of mothering and she does not need Hagar anymore. Abraham is grieved, not for Hagar the Egyptian slave girl, but rather for Ishmael, his son. Once again, a divine character comes into the story, namely God. God speaks to the distressed Abraham saying, ‘whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you,’ 21:13. The divine character (God) explains to Abraham as it was explained to Hagar, that “As for the son of the slave woman, I will make a nation of him also” but “it is through Isaac that your offspring shall be named,” vv.12-13. With God having spoken to Abraham, he wakes up to act: he dismisses Hagar and Ishmael, with nothing but “bread and a skin of water,” 21:14.

In this way, the wishes of Sarah are respected—Ishmael and Hagar have no share in the property of Abraham, which is spared for Isaac. Second, dismissal means that the offspring of Ishmael, which shall be a nation, shall not be named after Abraham. Rather, they shall be known for being an offspring of a slave woman, who was bid to obey by the angel of the Lord and then thrown out of the house with a full blessing of God, and without any inheritance. In chapter 25:12-18, the descendants of Ishmael are outlined and the scholars hold that “while some of the names are unknown, but other identifications have been made with Arabian tribal groups to the east and South of Canaan” (Fretheim 1994:515)

Clearly, equal power has not been given to the two nations whose origin is traced Ishmael, the son of slave woman, and Isaac, the son of the legitimate wife. This inequality is religiously blessed by the appearance of an angel of the Lord and God sanctioning the submission of Hagar and their dismissal. What is clearly formulated in this story is an ideology of inequality between two different nations. This ideology of inequality between different nations is also evident in the story of Noah’s sons and Lot and his daughters, as we shall see below. It also propounds an ideology that legitimizes the oppression of the nation, which is characterized nega

tively. But before we turn to these other examples, it is important that we should scrutinize the gender roles of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac and how they interact with other social categories of identity.

In the story of Abraham, the presenter/teller/writer seemingly presents him as unconcerned about a son. It seems it is all Sarah's concern and worry. Abraham seems to helplessly obey his wife—first, to go into the slave girl; second, to remind Sarah that he is still the mistress over Hagar, and third, to reluctantly throw the slave girl out. In every way, Sarah seems to wield so much power. But the reader/hearer must not forget that first, she wields power in the private sphere of the home. Second, that the offspring that she brings forth will bear, not her name, but that of Abraham. He will also inherit Abraham's property. Third, the gender stereotype of associating women with jealous and evil informs this story, but like others, it veils the fact that jealous and competitiveness amongst women is usually an indication of their lack of power and dependence on men (husbands, fathers, sons and bosses at work). In short, Sarah's concerns are to fulfill Abraham's unspoken desires, who needs a son to carry his name and to inherit his property (Gen15: 1-6). Lastly, it is Abraham who is promised a nation through Isaac, not Sarah. It is Isaac who inherits property, not Sarah. So power is hardly in the hands of Sarah despite the presentation of the story.

Coming to the two offspring of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac, it is notable that both of them are sons. No daughter is born to Hagar and Sarah. What are their roles? They are both promised nations "their offspring will be greatly multiplied," but they shall be distinct. Second, they are property inheritors, but we see that class militates against Ishmael. That is although he is male and shall be a father of nations, he is denied inheritance and Abraham's name, since he is a son of an Egyptian slave woman—Hagar. This inequality is a planted seed within the story that grooms and legitimates racism—the looking down of the nation that originates from Ishmael. The story is certainly not written from the perspective of Ishmael and his descendants. It is written from the perspective of

Isaac and his descendants. It is thus the Isaac camp that 'possesses the power to define rights, duties and liberties; to legitimize ideologies, theologies and systems of value; to assign myths to various members of the human family, which in turn, invariably divide human ontology between persons and non-persons,' (Canon 2000:175). In this story, Isaac and his descendants are "persons" while Ishmael and his descendants are "non-persons." The Isaac camp represents itself, while the Ishmael camp is represented by those who are in power; those who seek to keep them powerless.

This pattern of using religious stories to propound ideologies of gender and race inequality is also evident in the stories of Noah and his sons and Lot and his two daughters. Randy Bailey's excellent article, "They are nothing but Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Canon Narratives," explores both the stories showing that they propound an ideology that sanctions the discrimination (and even annihilation) of one nation over the other (1995:137-138). A brief narration of these stories will illustrate the point.

Noah and His Three Sons

The story of Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth is found in Gen 9:18-28 and it reads:

These were the three sons of Noah; and from these, the whole earth was peopled. Noah a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. He drank some of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. And Ham the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their fathers nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said: "Cursed be Canaan; lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers." He also said, 'blessed by the

Lord my God of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. May God make space for Japheth, and let him live in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.”

What starts off a story of a family, spirals to cover nations and the identity or origins of all people: “from these the whole earth was peopled.” The story makes no pretence about giving equal power to all members of the earth, who all originate from Noah, the survivor of the flood. Rather, the story openly legitimates the oppression of one nation by the other. Ham is named as the father of Canaan and cursed to be a slave of Shem. The descendants of Ham are further identified as ‘Cush, Egypt and, Put and Canaan,” 10:6. The descendants of Shem are outlined in Gen. 11:10-26, which ends by saying he became the Father of Abram (Abraham), the husband of Sarah.

What ideology is propounded here? As Bailey's article notes “Israel is totally to be identified with Shem, the one who took the lead in covering up Noah, the one whom Canaan is to be a slave, the one whose God YHWH is to be blessed” (p.137). Not only does this story legitimate the dispossession, annihilation and sub-ordination of Canaanites in the biblical text, when the Israelites were promised and given their land by God, it was also used in the apartheid regime to legitimize the oppression of black people by white South Africans.

Lot and his two Daughters

The story of Lot and his daughters is found in Gen. 12-19 and it is closely linked with Abraham's story. When God first called Abraham to leave his country and to go to a land that will be shown to him, (12:10), he took with him his brother's son, Lot. They became wandering pastoralists together until they parted ways. This brought Lot to Sodom and Gomorrah, where the Lord ordered him to leave these two cities as they would be destroyed. On the night of the destruction, Lot's wife was turned into a pillar of salt, while Lot fled to Zoar with his two daughters. The story continues to say:

So he lived in a cave with his two daughters. And the firstborn said to the younger; "Our father is old and there is not man on earth to come in to us...Come let us make our father drink wine and we will lie with him, so that we may preserve our offspring through our father. So they made their father drunk with wine that night. And the first one went in...the younger rose and lay with him and he did not know when she lay with him; and when she rose. Thus both daughters of Lot became pregnant by their father. The first born bore a son and named him Moab; he is the ancestor of the Moabites to this day. The younger one also bore a son and named him Ben-ammi; he is the ancestor of the Ammonites to this day (19:30-38).

Like in the story of Abraham, two women are sexually involved with one man, Lot, and they both bear sons. In this story, it is the women also who are concerned with descendants, but Lot remains silent. They plot, just like Sarah, and bring forth two sons. Lot, like Abraham, seems to be a victim of two women. He does not know anything—he is sent to sleep with strong drink and raped by two daughters. As Bailey correctly notes, a remarkable thing happens here: Lot is so drunk that he does not know or remember anything, but lo and behold, "he does perform!" (p.129). Both daughters get pregnant, and like in the case of Abraham, they give birth to sons. Unlike the Story of Abraham, they are not his wives, they are his daughters.

Like the story of Abraham and Noah, the sons are the fathers of nations/ethnic groups—Moabites and Ammonites. But what is the difference? What does the story do? Which ideology does it propound? As Bailey convincingly argues, they "label within the consciousness of the reader the view of these nations as nothing more than incestuous bastards," (p.131). Bailey goes on to show how this narrated origin of Moabites and Ammonites is used in the biblical books to exclude, humiliate and to sanction their annihilation (2 Sam.8:2; 2 Sam 12:26-31, Judges 11, 2 Sam 10 & 12). Bailey's argument is that they propound an ideology that makes the marginalisation and discrimination of Amorites by Israelites acceptable to the reader.

Conclusions

The Time is Now

These three stories are just a sample of how the ideology of gender and racism can be legitimized through religion. There are many other stories of origin and identity, which are not found in religious texts, which also propound ideologies of inequality and authorize marginalisation. All these stories, wherever and whenever they are told, they present the reader/hearer with values that make it acceptable to discriminate one nation, ethnic group, people or women. That is, they normalize discrimination.

Since stories are central to our lives, and since they have structures that protect them and continue to tell them—that is, to ensure they inform and influence social values, identity and worlds, how can we arrest their negative ideologies? Feminists and liberation readers have given many suggestions and strategies. Some of these are:

1. Readers/hearers must scrutinize and expose the ideology of every story. That is, they must ask what values are propounded in so far as race, class, age, ethnicity, gender and nationhood are concerned. And where a text propounds a dangerous ideology, it must be named and as such.
2. Readers/hearers/writers must allow those groups that are often marginalised; those whose stories are excluded from official documents and institutions, to present/write/tell their own stories of origin, self-identity and power. This is because the stories of the oppressed are often told by their oppressors, who seek to keep them discriminated.
3. Socially empowered human rights informed storytellers of our day (preachers, news reporters, editors, novelists, teachers, singers, and poets) have an obligation to create new stories: stories that respect and uphold the rights of all. This includes

reinterpreting the old and discriminative stories to empower people of all ages, ethnicities, races, genders, classes, and nations.

4. Governments, NGOs, the private sector and their institutions, can and must use their positions of power to promote the human rights of all. They can do this by ensuring that stories that legitimate racism and gender discrimination are illegal and through educating their human resources to promote and respect the human rights of its citizens and all people who live in their states.

With some of these strategies put in place, we can begin to spin and consume stories and interpretation of stories that respect and celebrate our diversity as women and men, as black, white and yellow people; as people of different sexual orientations, ages, ethnicities, dis/abilities, nations, regions, religions and classes, without ever reducing the humanity of any people or any form of life to exploitation and marginalization. Power is in our hands to shape a just world for ourselves as members of the earth. As for religious people and their stories, they must begin by asserting that all forms of life and people are sacred. ***The time is now.***

**Dr. Musa W. Dube is a Theology and Religious Studies
lecturer at the University of Botswana**

References:

Bailey Randall, C., "They are Nothing But Incestuous Bastards: The Polemical Use of Sex and Sexuality in Hebrew Narrative," pp. 121-138. In Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, eds. *Reading From This Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United State, Volume 1*. Minneapolis; Fortress Press, 1995.

Cannon, Katie G., "Racism," p.175. In V. Fabella & R. S. Sugirtharajah, eds. *Dictionary of Third World Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 2000.

Dube, M. W., *Postcolonial Feminism Interpretation of the Bible*. St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.

Dube, M. W., *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and The Bible*. SBL: Atlanta, 2001.

Fretheim, T. E., "Introduction, Commentary and Reflections," pp. 319-674. In *The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary: Volume 1..* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994.

Jakobsen, Janet R., "Ideology," p. 148. In Letty Russell & Shannon ... ed. *Dictionary Of Feminist Theologies*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995.

Kelly, Shawn., "Race," pp. 213-219. In A. K. M Adam, ed. *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*. St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.

Maluleke, T.S. "African Intellectuals, African Culture, and the White Academy in South Africa: Some Implications for Christian Theology in Africa." In *Journal of Constructive Theology* 2. No1, 1996 (3-30).

Maluleke, T.S. "Dealing Lightly With the Wound of My People: The TRC Process in Theological Perspective." *Missionalia* 25. No 3 (1997) 324-43.

Mosala, Itumeleng. *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*. Michigan: Grand Rapids, 1989.

Niditch, Susan., "Genesis," pp. 10-25. In *The Women's Bible Commentary*. Louisville: Westminster Press, 1992.

Oduyoye, Mercy A., *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995.

Pablo, R. "Ideology," p. 103 In Virginia Fabella & R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds. *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. New York: Orbis Press, 2000.

Pato, Luke Lungile., "Apartheid," p. 7. In Virginia Fabella & R.S. Sugirtharajah, eds. *Dictionary of Third World Theologies*. New York: Orbis Press, 2000.

Purvis, Sally B., "Gendered Construction," pp. 124-125. In Letty Russell & Shannon Clarkson eds., *Feminist Dictionary of Theologies*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

"Richardson, Nancy D., "Racism," pp. 234-235. In *Feminist Dictionary of Theologies*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Stratton, Beverly, "Ideology," p.120-127. In A. K. M Adam, ed. *Handbook of Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*. St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.

Tolbert, Mary Ann, "Poetics and Politics of Location," pp. 305-317. In Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert eds. *Reading From this Place: Social Location and Biblical Interpretation in the United States*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995

Tolbert, Mary Ann, "Gender," pp. 99-105. In A.K.M. Adam, ed. *Handbook Postmodern Biblical Interpretation*. St Louis: Chalice Press, 2000.

Weems, Renita J., *Just A Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible*. San Diego: LuraMedia, 1988.

West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993

Gender, Racism and the Media

In Southern Africa

By Nora Appolus



Historically, women in Southern Africa, like elsewhere in Africa, faced several obstacles to their emancipation and development. Chief among these obstacles and challenges were the traditional and cultural constraints, which mapped out well-defined roles for women. This situation was further exacerbated by brutal colonial systems in place in Southern Africa, in particular in South Africa, Namibia, Zimbabwe and Angola, whose far-reaching ramifications were felt in other countries of the region.

Under these colonial systems, women were relegated to nothing more than child-status: to be seen and not heard. Their cultural and traditional base was also slowly broken down, thus eroding their ability to fall back on their traditional lifestyles and values.

Although colonialism in Southern Africa brought about a culture of reading and writing and ushered a new era of newspapers and later radio, followed by television, women in general and black women in particular, had no access to any of these media. They were silent witnesses to this powerful tool being manipulated to the advantage of the colonial masters and men.

All major newspapers, magazines and other media were owned and run by white men. The media in Southern Africa was thus firmly established as the exclusive domain of white men. The negative portrayal of women in the media also helped to entrench this culture.

Even with the advent of the rural exodus of blacks to urban centres and the increasing demand for access to the media, magazines aimed at a black readership, such as the famous “DRUM” magazine (published in South Africa but distributed to many countries in the region), were owned by white males and news-rooms were run by them. Black male reporters were ostensibly used, but white owners and editors carefully vetted the coverage of stories.

“Successful” black women were portrayed as “pin-up” or “calendar” girls or as “song-birds” to which young black girls should aspire.

The effects were a negation of African culture and the embracing of European culture.

The demand for cheap labour for white-owned industries - provided by both black men and women – the oppressive colonial system and its iniquities and increased access to education led to the political awareness of the blacks.

This new political consciousness, together with urbanisation and grinding poverty, brought about a need amongst the blacks to be better educated.

Urban black women, who were largely in menial employ, increasingly turned to professions previously reserved for whites.

Even then, the only professions open to them were nursing, social work and teaching. Journalism, even for their white counterparts, was still a white male domain. Black women, therefore, were never encouraged to choose journalism as a career - firstly, because it was a daunting career fraught with seeming difficulties, secondly because racial and gender stereotyping effectively blocked access to this career.

Today, the situation still largely remains the same.

This is particularly true in South Africa, where the majority of large

circulation mainstream dailies (The Star, Financial Times to name a few) and magazines are white-owned and run by white men. The scenario in Namibia is the same: the largest circulation Afrikaans daily is owned and run by white men. However, much to her credit, the largest circulation daily in the country — The Namibia — was founded by Gwen Lister, a woman and she still runs it today. But what we are seeing there is that even where women are the owners, they tend to be white.

Within the print media in South Africa, white women dominate in the newsroom, but their status still remains largely inferior. As for black women, they still have very little impact on these media organisations. However, the South African Broadcasting Corporation's News Division has 314 reporters of whom 219 are black. The editorial team is also predominantly African. This influences the type of stories carried by SABC and the way issues such as affirmative action and economic empowerment are handled. (Rhodes Journalism Review, 2000)

Economies of scale have forced some of these white-owned media conglomerates to create magazines and other publications specifically targeted at a black readership and dealing mainly with issues that are perceived to be of interest to black communities. Although some of them have black women editors, such as DRUM'S Liz Khumalo, black women journalists are often relegated to covering "women's issues" and other related beats.

Lack of role models and mentors have made it especially difficult for black women in the media to progress to positions of authority. More importantly, there is a singular absence of networking among women in the media – black and white – where pressure or lobby groups could be formed to sensitize both the audiences/readers and the editors and owners.

48 This can partly be attributed to the highly competitive male-dominated environment in which journalists, and women in particular, operate.

The relatively high illiteracy rate among black women, exacerbated by a lack of scholarships/funds for study in this field posed further challenges.

Those black women who have ventured, albeit late, into the media and made a success of it have largely done so under their own steam and against all odds.

Ownership of the media by black women is another area for concern. Lack of capital; access to donors; business skills; and access to loans from financial institutions have effectively ensured the continued marginalisation of black women as media owners. An enabling environment that will encourage black women to fully participate in levels, including ownership, of the media must be created.

The advent of independence of Southern African countries created an enabling environment that afforded the opportunity for black women to go into the mass media, especially since these were state-owned (NBC, Namibia; SABC, South Africa; Radio Botswana; ZNBC, Zambia; ZBC, Zimbabwe; MBC, Malawi, etc.). However, this has not achieved a gender balance in positions of authority.

A cursory glance at public/national broadcasters reveals that women journalists are equal in number to their male counterparts, sometimes surpassing them, as is the case at the NBC, TV Malawi and many others.

However, few women are in policy-making or management positions.

A case in point is the SABC. The three Chief Executives since the transformation in 1994 have all been men. The NBC is another example, where the three Directors-General since independence in 1990 have all been men. Zimbabwe's ZBC and Zambia's ZBC have all been headed by men since independence. At NBC, only three of the 10 people in top management are female.

Even recently created national broadcasters like Television Malawi (1999) and Television Botswana (2000) are all headed by men. Their second tier management levels are also dominated by men.

One of the many obstacles still facing black women in the media today is the lack of training opportunities. When training offers eventually became available in post independence Southern Africa, it was invariably the men that benefited.

However, this situation is changing, albeit slowly. Regional training

institutions such as the Nordic-Sadc Journalism Centre (NSJ) in Mozambique and Inter Press Service (IPS) Africa insist on gender balance on their courses. Several European media organisations also emphasize gender balance on courses they offer. Initiatives such as these must be commended and encouraged. More importantly, media managers must, as a matter of policy, ensure that as many women as possible are offered training, particularly in media management.

Realizing the importance of empowering women in general by providing them access to the media, Zimbabwean media women conceived the idea of listeners' clubs for women and other marginalised groups in rural communities (Development Through Radio – DTR). Under this concept, women in rural communities are trained to produce their own programmes in which they raise issues of concern to them. These programmes are packaged and broadcast on public radio. Through effective networking and sharing of expertise and skills, DTR clubs have been launched in Zambia, Malawi, Tanzania, South Africa, Angola, Namibia and as far afield as Nigeria and Ghana. These listeners clubs provide a way for women to access the media, which is predominantly patriarchal. It is interesting to note that these clubs are mainly for Black Africans or less privileged groups and do not appeal to the elite. Hence we see the interplay of race, class and gender.

However, such initiatives are doomed to fail if governments in the region do not take cognizance of the great potential of women in the media, not only as instruments of changing stereotypes but as instruments of peace, development and social change.

The Namibian Government, in its National Gender Policy, attempts to address the gender imbalance in the media and create an enabling environment for women to attain positions of authority. This policy recognises that "...a number of women are involved in careers in the communications sector in Namibia but very few have attained positions at the decision-making level or serve on governing boards and bodies that influence media policy". As part of its strategy to address this situation, the Namibian Government will

“..promote women’s full and equal participation in the media, in particular in management, programming review and dissemination of programmes and information”.

A National Gender Plan of Action sets out the steps and the time frameworks of how to achieve these goals.

Generally however, it is clear that governments in the region still do not recognize the important role that black women in the media can play. The media, particularly media women, is not high on their priority list of development issues.

Portrayal of Women in the media

There is need for research to be done into representation of black women in the media. Because of the historical position of black women at the bottom of the social strata, the media in South Africa struggles to portray them any differently. This poor media status of black women is further reinforced by the gendered character of news.

There is near invisibility of black women in the news, and where they do appear, it is still mostly in the following stories: under-development, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, overpopulation, disasters (burning of shacks) and violence against women. In these items they mainly appear as victims and people who have absolutely no control over their destinies.

**Phula Mthala, Media Monitoring Project in Rhodes
Journalism Review August 2000.**

Bibliography

Women in the Media – NAMWA; 1999

The National Gender Policy, Government of Namibia, 1997

Beyond Inequalities, SARDC/University of Western Cape, 1997

The Namibian – Namibia

Mmegi – Botswana

Racism in the Media, Rhodes Journalism Review, August 2000

Women in Interracial Marriage

Still facing discrimination in Zimbabwe

By Inter Press Service - Africa

Although the legal environment governing inter racial marriages has greatly improved in Zimbabwe, women married to men of different races still have to confront social and cultural barriers.

According to Dr Lovemore Madhuku, a constitutional law lecturer, discriminatory marriage laws existed before Zimbabwe gained independence from Britain in 1980. "The Marriages Act, which denied people of different races, particularly blacks and whites from marrying each other was repealed in the 1950s because it was discriminatory and unconstitutional. However, whites were not allowed to marry under the African Marriages Act, which was another form of racial discrimination," Madhuku, who is also chairman of the National Constitutional Assembly, a civic organization advocating law reforms in Zimbabwe explains.

Laws that discriminated against people on the grounds of their race were repealed after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, explained Madhuku. But after independence, laws were enacted which discriminated against people on the basis of gender. Of note was the Citizenship Act, which allowed foreign females to



get automatic Zimbabwean citizenship if they married a male citizen. This right was not extended to Zimbabwean women.

Sekai, a black Zimbabwean woman married to white Australian Jim Holland, is one person who suffered a bitter struggle at independence when, she says the government wanted to deport her husband back to his home country despite the constitutional provisions against such an act.

“For 16 months we fought battles in the courts to have my husband allowed to stay in Zimbabwe and at last we won the battle and my husband was allowed to stay in the country,” she explained.

“Mixed marriages under the colonial period were rejected and the government did not do much to reconcile citizens not to segregate each other on racial lines, says Holland.

Sekai feels that both the government and non-governmental organizations have failed to invest in racial harmony. As a result, some colonial practices that perpetuate racial discrimination still exist in Zimbabwe, she says.

“This piece of legislation (Citizenship Act) was both unlawful and unconstitutional because it violated women's rights. It did not have any space in a democratic society which respects human rights and gives equal opportunities to all people irrespective of their sex,” Madhuku says.

The discriminatory nature of the Citizenship Act forced women and human rights campaigners to wage a bitter campaign against it. Their efforts forced President Robert Mugabe's government to persuade Parliament to amend the Constitution. The amendment became famously known as Amendment number 14 of 1996.

The new law took away men's rights to have their foreign wives gain automatic citizenship. It now requires both Zimbabwean men and women who have foreign spouses to apply to the Immigration Office

for registration of their unions.

Zimbabwe is considered as having one of the best Bill of Rights when it comes to race relations and mixed marriages in particular. The Declaration of Rights Section 11 of the Constitutions says, "... every person in Zimbabwe is entitled to the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual, that is to say, the right whatever his race, tribe, place of origin, political opinion, colour, creed or sex but subject to the respect for the rights and freedoms of others and for the public interest."

Although these strides have been made on the legal front, women married to men of other races continue to face an uphill struggle socially and culturally. Although interracial marriages are quite acceptable among sections of the elite, there is still a lot of stigma associated with such relationships at other levels of the society.

A lot of the women married to men of different races are ostracized by friends and family. Black women married to white men or those of other races are labeled prostitutes and accused of being disrespectful of culture.

Tendai, a black Zimbabwean woman married to a Dutch national Clemens Westerhoff says she has often borne the brunt of this discrimination. "Some people do not approve of such kind of relationships (interracial). One can see an element of disapproval among both blacks and whites if say we (Clemens and I) go together to a restaurant. The divide can be seen from the way people look at you."

A white businesswoman who is married to a black man and who preferred anonymity says she also has not been spared the disapproving glances: "While other powerful groups in Zimbabwe, like politicians and businesspeople see nothing wrong with interracial marriages, typical traditional and conservative men in our country do not approve these unions," she explains. She says that she has numerous problems when she visits her husbands' rural

home and her conservative friends in Harare.

“In the rural area, some people think that our relationship is queer and each time we visit our rural home, a number of villagers actually gather to observe the behaviour of a white woman married to a black person. One day I heard one of the village elders saying that my children will not be blessed because of this union,” explained the businesswoman.

She told IPS that although there was nothing illegal about that union, a lot needed to be done to educate people that there was nothing untraditional for white and black people to marry each other. Furthermore, there is need for people to come to terms with people's human right to choose freely, their life partner.

Ironically, men married to white or Asian women are regarded as symbols of achievement although conservative patriarchal social leaders such as chiefs sometimes accuse them of violating traditional norms. The different reactions to men and women's interracial marriages indicate the gendered nature of interracial relationships.

Sekai feels the government should have done more to operationalize its policy of reconciliation expounded at independence in 1980. She feels civic organizations and the government should organize workshops where they educate members of society on methods of conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence. Such workshops can also be used to assist people to accept interracial relationships and to eradicate the myths and misconceptions surrounding such marriages.

From the looks of things, it seems plausible to say that Zimbabweans should appreciate that the Constitution of this diverse Southern African nation says citizens are all those born in Zimbabwe, born to Zimbabwean parents, descendants of Zimbabweans and those who obtained the status through marriage to Zimbabweans or applied for it.