

CONJUGAL WRONGS: GENDER VIOLENCE IN
AFRICAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis considers ways in which African women writers are exploring the subject of violence against women. Any attempt to apply feminist criticism to novels by African women must be rooted in a satisfactorily African feminism. Therefore, the history of black feminist thought is outlined showing how African feminisms have been articulated in dialogue with western feminists, black feminisms (developed by women in the African-American diaspora), and through recognition of indigenous ideologies which allowed African women to protest against oppression.

Links will be established between the texts, despite their differences, which suggest that, collectively, these novels support the notion that gender violence affects the lives of a majority of African women (from all backgrounds) to a greater or lesser extent. This is because it is supported by the social structures developed and sustained in cultures underpinned by patriarchal ideologies.

A range of strategies for managing violence arise from a cross-textual reading of the novels. These will be analysed in terms of their efficacy and rootedness in African feminisms' principles. The more effective strategies being adopted are found in works by Ama Ata Aidoo and Lindsey Collen and these focus particularly on changing the meanings of motherhood and marriage.

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INTRODUCTION

Nyapol knew that Aziza was often beaten but this was the first time that they had heard such a terrified cry. The yelling and shouting died down just as suddenly as it had come. Aziza never cried for long, simply because there was nobody who could go to her rescue ... They soon dismissed the scene as a normal row between husband and wife.

Grace Ogot (1966) *The Promised Land*.¹

There is little doubt that in much of Africa, as in other parts of the world, women are subject to abuse at the hands of men. Incidents of violence against women are rarely publicly condemned, except in cases of extreme physical abuse, yet many African women's lives are shaped, if not by violence (physical, verbal or mental) then by the threat of violence often present in cultures underpinned by a patriarchal ideology. Women's predicament in many African societies is often not that violences, such as wife-beating, are hidden and secret but that they are all too often normalized by society. As seen in the quote above, violence is recognised but intervention is deemed unnecessary because wife-beating is commonly a part of marriage.

This is not to suggest that wife-beating is an exclusively "African" phenomenon nor that being victims of abuse typify African women. Neither am I suggesting that violence against women is never silenced in African societies: for example, some forms of sexual abuse can be denied as rape in certain cultural contexts. Many African cultures deny that wives can be raped by their husbands, justified on the grounds that marriage implies the wife's consent to all intercourse with her spouse. Cultural myths of men's vulnerability to lust can also silence women's claims of rape by re-identifying the intercourse as having been invited by the woman, signalled through her dress, behaviour or location.

Thus, it is equally as important to identify these practices as abuse in a public arena as to expose violences against women. Women's groups in various parts of the African continent

are working towards these objectives.² Such groups provide important practical support for women who have been subject to abuse but the focus of this thesis is to consider the particular role works of fiction can play in addressing this issue.

Fiction cannot offer succour in the way a women's organisation can. However, it can focus on exposing the dynamics of social relations that enable violence against women. Furthermore, it has the capacity to envision social paradigms which do not allow women to be systematically abused. In her report for The World Bank, Lori Heise notes:

violence is not inevitable. Cross-cultural research shows that, although violence against women is an integral part of virtually all cultures, there are societies in which gender-based abuse does not exist ... Such societies stand as proof that social relations can be organized in a way that minimizes or eliminates violence against women.
(Heise, 1994, 1)

To envision societies where violence against women is uncommonly found is not to resort to fantasy. It would be problematic, however, for the authors to imagine convincingly an absolute overturn in all the institutions of law, religion and politics within the realistic settings of the novels and short stories. Instead, they expose the failures of these institutions to address women's social oppression. Models of restructured institutions are limited to marriage.

In many of the novels and short stories being studied here, the contemporary meaning of marriage is criticised for including ideas (such as ownership) that support rape and wife-beating. The analysis supports the idea that marriage within a patriarchally based society institutionalises violence against women. As December Green comments in *Gender Violence in Africa: African Women's Responses*:

Violence by husbands against wives should not be seen as a breakdown in social order but an affirmation of particular sort of social order, namely a patriarchal one. In this sense violence is recognised as the norm.
(Green, 1999, 28)

¹ Quoted from Grace Ogot (1990) *The Promised Land* Nairobi: Heinemann (Kenya) (124-5).

² For example 'Musasa' in Zimbabwe; 'Women in Nigeria'; and 'The Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre' in Ghana.

Some of the authors take this analysis a step further by representing alternative models for men and women's intimate relationships. Whilst clearly the wider social dimension cannot be ignored, these imagined relationship prototypes have viability because "marriage" is one of the few institutions that has a private aspect. Cooperative individuals thus have agency to resist social norms to some extent.

The potential audience for these books has to be considered if, as I am suggesting, they are offered partly as contributing to a wider debate about gender violence. To be able to read these books it is necessary to have had more than a basic education in the English language, and an income which makes books affordable. The African readership is probably limited to an educated elite with an interest in women's affairs. Thus, it could be suggested an interest in debating the possibly insitutionalised nature of violence against women (rather than a pragmatic emphasis on supporting abused women and punishing abusers) is limited to a small minority of African women.

Green notes that violence against women is typically seen as a marginal concern for the majority of African women who are poor and/or living in rural communities:

most of the membership of women's organizations working on gender violence is drawn from small minorities of elite, educated, urban women. Based on their background and interests it might seem that such women have little in common with the majority of women in their countries. Yet ... these elites can play an important role in their desire to redress wrongs. In many cases they provide the only organizations that persistently articulate the issues facing women.

(Green, 1999, 203)

Some African feminists have suggested that the majority of "grassroots" women have little interest in issues such as gender violence, being more 'preoccupied with basic economies of living than with socio-political issues' (Aina, 1998, 82). However, Green acknowledges that elite women have an important role in promoting public discussions about women's rights.

She goes on to suggest that many African women perceive the economic, social and political as linked issues:

Where they have been most effective, African women have been able to raise concerns about domestic violence, rape and sexual harassment as part of a larger body of social, economic, and political rights that also include concerns about housing, water, land, credit, and the lack of adequate childcare.

(Green, 1999, 216)

This is action at what Green calls the 'practical' level although, as she points out, such action can become politicised and move into the realms of strategic action; the level at which 'the prevailing form of gender subordination' (1999, 201) is challenged.

The particular contribution that fiction can make to the violence against women debate is at this strategic level. Thus, rather than dismissing the authors' opinions as elite and irrelevant, their voices add another dimension to discussions. Released from the time-consuming and physically challenging work of their rural counterparts, such women are able to articulate to politicians, policy makers and professionals in law, health and education, the attitudes and assumptions which place women at risk from violence. Fiction contributes to theoretical debates about the status of African women, already part of African feminisms' agenda.

Characters portrayed in the specific novels under consideration in this thesis represent a range of social classes rather than being limited to elite women. This would appear to suggest that, collectively, the authors comprehend their work as having a wider relevance than merely to Africa's female elite of which they are part. Yet, the books are all set, at least for significant portions, in the urban environment. Even where protagonists are situated in a rural environment they are identifiably urbanites, or aspire towards urban life. This focus on urban women does not mean that their indigenous roots are unimportant, ignored or lost, exchanged for a westernised sensibility, but suggests that rural settings are less fruitful in exploring violence against women. The authors show how there is often pressure on African women to

be “traditional” like their rural counterparts and foremothers. In many respects it is easier to conform to perceived traditional behaviour in a rural environment where work, family and kinship structures appear stable and unchangeable.³ It is mostly in the urban environment, where change is often signified in the novels, that crisis and conflict is engendered through women’s unwillingness or inability to conform to “traditional” roles. Here, they feel empowered to resist structures (such as marriage) which enable violence. Yet, simultaneously they are more likely to be victims of sexual and physical attacks because of their resistance and because cultural protections from extreme expressions of violence are harder to sustain in urban areas where kinship groups are dispersed. Thus, in the novels, cities and towns represent significant sites of resistance for women.

As noted above, the authors themselves belong to a minority of elite women in Africa. These are women who have had access to education, often including periods of study abroad in Europe or America. Although the texts have deliberately been chosen to range across the continent, the authors’ education has, to some extent, a homogenising effect on possible cultural differences in regard to gender violence. Western and westernised curricula will have raised the authors’ awareness of feminism and gender violence in comparable ways. Similarly, African debate about feminism tends towards the articulation of “African” feminist positions rather than national or ethnic feminisms.

Yet, it is important not to ignore differences in cultural backgrounds in reading the novels’ treatment of violence against women. The authors’ constructions of gender relations will differ according to the specificities of ethnic group; perceptions of “traditional” practice; the historical development of the group; philosophies of religion; and contemporary

³ The exception to this is perhaps in areas where a migrant male workforce has damaged rural structures (for example in Southern Africa).

expressions of political, economic and social systems. For example, attitudes towards female sexuality will differ between societies as seen in the texts from Zimbabwe. Here, women are culturally expected to reject any sexual advances (even from husbands) show how women can be at risk from rape when non-consent is interpreted as cultural coyness (this is discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Alice Armstrong's research into rape in Southern Africa).

The notion of "race" is also a factor that has to be considered beyond differences of African ethnic groups. The majority of these authors are black Africans, however there is representation from mixed race, Asian extraction and white African women writers. I have chosen to identify all these writers as simply African (rather than make differentiations according to notions of African "purity") on the grounds that they all have a personal and social history in Africa. Debate continues over what might define African literature (see for example Kanneh (1997)). However, all the primary texts being studied fit two of the suggested criteria; being concerned with African experiences, and written by nationals of African countries.

Recognising the authors' similarities and differences is important. As Chidi Amuta explains in *The Theory of African Literature: Implications for Practical Criticism*, the relationship between the world of literature and world of reality is not mimetic but mediated by the author (1989, 81). Amuta's work will be discussed in more detail below, however, it is pertinent to consider his notion of the 'mediating subject' (one of his categories for a dialectical theory of African literature) here. This states that the author's:

mode of representing socio-historical experience is a function of objective factors such as facts of biography, class orientation, ideology and political alignment. He [*sic*] is engaged in an active process of mediation, i.e. recycling socio-historical experience according to the laws of imaginative projection.

(Amuta, 1989, 81)

The incidents in the texts and resistance strategies represented, of course reflect the writers' differences based on social and individual differences in experience and beliefs. Yet their

knowledge of more global issues of feminism and violence against women bring a wider relevance to their texts. Thus, links can be made between the texts because aspects of the ‘mediating subjects’ for these books will also be similar.

Another linking factor (one which begins to justify a reading of the books as some form of sociological commentary) is the authors’ recognition of a social responsibility in writing.

Ama Ata Aidoo, a writer as well as an academic, explicitly recognises this function of women’s writing:

I think part of our responsibility or our commitment as writers is to unfold or open for ourselves and our communities what exists, what is wrong, the problems ... [and to] state our case in such a way that we would entertain, we would inform and perhaps if we are lucky to be that good, to inspire others.

(Needham, 1995, 130)

Having a social project is not the only function of their writing; the novels are not merely tracts but have clear aesthetic and entertainment dimensions. However, the texts do appear to be engaging with social problems, identified as such from the woman’s point of view, and it is these aspects of the texts that are of interest to this research.

This is not to suggest that African male writers lack a social aspect to their writing. Ruth Meena, in ‘Gender Research/Studies in Southern Africa: An Overview’, notes their ‘energy in re-writing an African history, literature and philosophy’ (1992, 9) to recreate an “African” reality after independence. However, this too often ignored the specific needs of the “post-colonial” woman or utilised her as a cultural symbol of “traditional” values. Françoise Lionnet writing about the work of Aidoo and Bessie Head, agrees with Aidoo that:

Women writers are often especially aware of their task as producers of images that both participate in the dominant representations of their culture and simultaneously undermine and subvert these images by offering a re-vision of familiar scripts.

(Lionnet, 1997, 205)

She suggests this is particularly the case for African women writers whose agenda has so often been erased by masculine concerns (in literature as well as politics) noting that Aidoo

‘dramatizes deep-seated cultural misogyny and the potentially fatal consequences of practices ... that construct woman as objects of exchange within the male economy’ (1997, 207).

Not all commentators agree explicitly with this point of view. Despite Meena’s assertion that an African masculinity was re-invented after independence using cultural forms, she disagrees to some extent about the power of literature to promote change in a society:

Changing images which are depicted by writers ... will not automatically change the subordinate position of women in society. The way people write ... [is] but an inner expression of the material conditions under which they live. The underlying cause of women’s oppression is not embedded in people’s feelings or expressions but in their social practices.

(Meena, 1992, 12)

Of course, she is right that literature does not have an automatic or immediate effect on people’s lives but it can affect culture because, as Lionnet notes, literature is a discursive practice which ‘encodes and transmits as well as creates ideology’ (1997, 205). Thus, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie asserts a relationship between art and society because any artist has to be a social being as well as an individual. An artist’s work:

[h]owever deeply marked by her primary experience ... is always a bridge, a connecting link between the artist and other members of society ... because her work of art affects other people – contributes to the reaffirmation or devaluation of their ideas, goals or values – and is a social force which, with its emotional or ideological weight, shakes or moves people.

(Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, 47)

Mary Kolawole is in agreement with such sentiments, furthermore asserting that this can be a conscious desire:

Many of the [women] writers have confessed that they are motivated to write by the impulse to change the status quo, interrogate patriarchy, imperialism and western feminisms. This is closely related to the desire to liberate African women, change their consciousness and recreate a positive self-perception to enhance progress.

(Kolawole, 1997, 153)

It could be argued that these intentions would be better carried out through more conventional forms of activism, such as founding women’s groups, demonstrating and lobbying. Such activities are available to a greater proportion of the African female

population, and are arguably rooted more deeply in “reality” than abstract theorisation.

However, a fictionalised account might have more power to influence society because it is not “real life”. Accounts of real cases of violence against women stimulate the emotions to such an extent that rational analysis of the cause is difficult and, after the fact, how to prevent such violence is less important than how to punish the perpetrator. However compelling a work of fiction is, the reader’s awareness that it is fiction makes space for rationality. This might prompt the reader to ponder (and subsequently work to subvert) such situations in reality.

A further strength of fiction can be to minimise the risk that women take when they challenge those practices which oppress them. Allison Drew offers the thought that ‘[e]xtreme or atypical cases [of female resistance] can illuminate normal social relations precisely because they directly challenge those social relations’ (1995, 2). The strength of fiction is that it can depict such extremes without imperilling women (although, as noted below, women writers do jeopardise their safety at times). As Lionnet suggests, the characters in these novels:

function as *literary* figures ... whose extreme predicaments haunt the reader’s imagination, and help to crystallize awareness of gender repression while problematizing these issues in reference to a specific cultural context.

(Lionnet, 1997, 208)

Thus not only can the choice of individuals be represented (through characterisation) but also the pressures from cultural, social and political structures which inform choices and enable discussion about the general behaviours of groups of people in a given society.

The power of literature to promote change and challenge the status quo is illustrated by Josef Gugler in his article on literary theory. He lists (male) authors who have been imprisoned (for example Jack Mapanje, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong’o) and exiled (for example Mongo Beti, Nuruddin Farah, Alex La Guma) by governments who fear their voices. As Gugler notes: ‘Scepticism about the political impact of literature is the fashion

among academics. The reactions of governments suggest, however, that this scepticism is exaggerated' (Gugler, 1993, 9).

The banning of Lindsey Collen's *The Rape of Sita* (one of the primary texts in this thesis) provides a female example. This novel has been banned for blasphemy in Mauritius (a country that, as Collen points out, has no blasphemy laws (1994, 210)) which suggests that the issues she raises are markedly relevant to that society:

The Prime Minister of Mauritius bowed to pressure and banned *The Rape of Sita* ... after Hindu fundamentalists objected to the title. While Sita is a very common woman's name in Mauritius, it is also the name of the revered wife of the god-king Rama in the Hindu epic *Ramayana*, who symbolises the ideal Hindu wife - pure, chaste and virtuous. The Prime Minister declared that the book was 'blasphemous' and an 'outrage against public and religious morality'. He also called on the Commissioner of Police to take action against the author.

(Women Against Fundamentalisms, n.d.)

The protest against Collen's book was not limited to an official call for some kind of punishment:

In the months that followed [Prime Minister Anerood Jugnauth's ban], Collen received anonymous threats of rape and disfigurement with acid. She was also attacked in the press, and calls for her rape were painted on walls in the town of Terre Rouge during the spring of 1994.

(PEN, n.d.)

Collen's work of fiction was interpreted as a strong attack on the patriarchal power-base, whose reactionaries felt the need to assert their power by threatening the author.

The question of how to read African literature (and even the validity of such a genre) has been a subject of much discussion. Space prohibits an adequate summary here. However, to elucidate my approach in reading the novels, I want to consider briefly specific theoretical positions.

In his article, 'Literary Theory and the Theories of Decolonization', Biodun Jeyifo acknowledges a multiplicity of literary theories. Yet he asserts that theorisation has been

hijacked by western academia to such a degree that he is forced to use a western theory to explain his proposition:

Since this [Eurocentrism of theorisation] is a point that is largely unacknowledged, we can only say, applying a re-understanding of the Marxist theory of ideology, that this is because this “recognition” of theory, which, as we shall presently demonstrate, is a *misrecognition*, has achieved the status of that *naturalization* and transparency to which all ideologies aspire and which only the most hegemonic achieve.

(Jeyifo, 1993, 18)

Having exposed theorisation’s claim to universality as a deception, Jeyifo recognises two categories of decolonised theory.

The first group consists of theories cultivated within indigenous literature: ‘[t]he fundamental premise here is that each literary culture generates the theories most appropriate to its own historical experience and socio-cultural specificities’ (1993, 21). Proponents of this theory can reject any western theory as irrelevant to African literature. The second type allows that theory is ‘fundamentally homeless and rootless [thus] it constantly undergoes revision, differentiation and transformation as it encounters new and divergent contexts and milieux’ (1993, 21-22). Thus, any theory can be modified to read African literature.

Whilst Jeyifo explores the ramifications of both these positions, the most interesting suggestion is that these two positions are not mutually exclusive. One of the ways they are reconciled is in a theoretical stance he labels “soft” nativism’. This:

calls for flexibility and vigilance in applying “their” [western] theory to “our” [African] literature and furthermore, it additionally calls for generating “our” own theory from “our” own literature and cultural traditions.

(Jeyifo, 1993, 25)

This is not an equivocation but a useful way to exploit existing theory without automatically investing in a western bias. Jeyifo acknowledges the possibility that western theories are inherently partial, yet he overlooks the potential association between African and western literature that might exist due to colonisation (this is not recognised by all theorists of African literature, most notably Chinweizu and Madubuike (1985)). My willingness to recognise these

links has already been signalled in the discussions pertaining to the authors' western influences; such a connection makes an adaptation of theory more feasible.

Chidi Amuta's text on African literary theory mentioned above, for example, is based in Marxism. He notes that Marx:

saw the artist as a vital agent ... in the shaping of social consciousness through the creation of artifacts which reveal the dynamics of social life and shatter the veils and complacencies of false consciousness.

(Amuta, 1989, 53)

This conceptualisation of literature gives it the power to manipulate social perceptions – an aspect of fiction, as seen above, that women writers take seriously. Using Marxist theories to explain how literature has a social dimension is not an irrelevance in an African context; this might equally be an inherent property of African literature merely helpfully articulated through Marxism, as much as an imported method of interpretation. Furthermore, Amuta stresses the differences in a western and African use of this theory:

while ... contemporary western Marxist theory ... has been concerned mainly with defining the precise relationship between advanced capitalism and art in the form of post-modernism, radical Marxist theory in Africa ... is preoccupied with the responsibility of literature and art in the task of national liberation, anti-imperialism and the redressing of social inequalities.

(Amuta, 1989, 54)

The need for developing indigenous theories is recognised without rejecting out of hand the useful work that has been carried out in the west. In the example of theories of gender violence, Heise notes, that '[a]lthough violence against women is almost universal, its patterns and their causes can be fully understood and remedied only in specific social and cultural contexts' (1994, 1). Thus western theories can have some application, but always with care and with explicit recognition of cultural differences.

Amuta confirms the need for an 'interdisciplinary social-science-related approach' (1989, 8) to African literature given the themes it tackles, and the responsibility it shoulders. Richard Bjornson, in his article 'Theory and Moral Commitment in the Study of African Literature',

agrees with Amuta that African literature can usefully be interpreted through the lens of social-sciences. He raises the issue that ‘no text can ever be adequately understood when it is divorced from its various contexts – literary, linguistic, cultural, social, psychological, political, economic’ (Bjornson, 1993, 33). Theoretical positions within each of these areas are not neutral, neither are they homogenous. Thus, in the case of gender violence the various different theoretical explanations have to be interrogated to choose carefully those that are relevant and useful for analysis of this theme in the literature.

Bringing ideas of gender violence to these texts has not been unproblematic because of the lack of specifically African theorisation and limited research into violence against women in the different societies of the continent. Where culturally specific studies are available I have used these, but have often had to rely on western explanations for violence against women. A further difficulty with utilising those studies rooted in a particular culture is that this pulls against the intention of this study – to make links between the texts. Where links can be established, this suggests the basis of an Afrocentric theory of gender violence that perhaps coincides with aspects of a western account. This commonality is found in the assertion that gender violence is not “natural” or inevitable in societies but is a culturally constructed form of behaviour found in societies where patriarchal principles are hegemonic. This thesis will suggest the novels being studies support those ideas, as well as denying that violence against women is a necessary aspect of gender relations in African society (as often argued by male politicians). The conclusions drawn here do not pretend to be sociologically sound as no sociological methodology has been applied. However, as the discussion above states, I suggest that the novels can contribute important information to debates about society and the status of women in that society. To further underpin my analysis, I have read the novels against feminist theory as it related to gender violence.

Feminist theorists were among the first to challenge popular explanations for male violence against women and to question the state's unwillingness to act against such violence. Thus, theories of gender violence and strategies of resistance can be understood through a feminist framework. Inevitably, different feminisms find different explanations for the phenomenon, as discussed in Chapter One. I would argue that the authors being studied in this thesis are engaging in the feminist debate, even where they do not explicitly label themselves as feminists. They all appear to be arguing for equal rights for women, not only enshrined in law but also reflected in social attitudes, a vital change for eradicating violence against women.

Amuta's text rarely recognises the gender dimension, however his reluctance to support a 'traditionalist aesthetic' would possibly be endorsed by the women writers being studied here. This seeks to:

define the authenticity ... and critical evaluation of African literature in terms of values and models freely selected and adapted from the so-called 'traditional', pre-colonial African cultural matrix.

(Amuta, 1989, 33)

Amuta takes issue with the homogenising tendency of espousing '*the African world view*' (1989, 38), rather than with the way "tradition" can be used to oppress women. However, Ruth Meena has articulated this inclination:

Culture has been used by African male scholars and particularly those who have taken a nationalistic perspective as an excuse to conceal existing oppressive gender relations and legitimise the perpetuation of these oppressive relations.

(Meena, 1992, 9)

Thus, for women writers 'redressing of social inequalities' (Amuta, 1989, 54) has to include those that arise from underlying patriarchal ideologies.

To engage in a "feminist" reading is not a simple matter. Care has to be taken not to rely on a monolithic feminism. Potential problems with such an assumption can be seen, for

example, in two articles written by Katherine Frank, published in *African Literature Today* in the 1980s. In the first, 'Feminist Criticism and the African Novel', Frank notes that:

Feminism, by definition, is a profoundly individualistic philosophy: it values personal growth and individual fulfillment over any larger communal needs or good. African society, of course, even in its most westernized forms, places the values of the group over those of the individual with the result that the notion of an African feminism almost seems a contradiction in terms.

(Frank, 1985, 45)

Frank's subsequent essay, 'Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa', notes that 'the real source of conflict in African feminism ... [is that] feminism is by definition an individualistic ideology in contrast to the communal nature of African society' (1987, 17). In 'Rewriting History, Motherhood, and Rebellion', Susan Andrade criticises these 'gross generalizations about feminism (constructed as white) and the "Third World" (constructed as male)' (1990, 92). Furthermore, she suggests that 'Frank's argument ... characterizes communalism in all African societies as patriarchal and all feminism as European and individualistic' (Andrade, 1990, 93).

The African feminist commentator, Filomena Chioma Steady, would certainly disagree with such an assertion. She has attacked the emphasis of western feminists on competitiveness, selfishness and individualism as male values which developed in an oppressive society and the promotion of which only attempts to integrate women into an unequal system (1985, 25). A different model is found, for example, in Steady's article 'Women and Collective Action: Female models in transition' (1993), which endorses collective action by African women. However, this is not to say that community action to improve women's status is part of one African "feminism". Like western feminisms, African feminisms are multifarious (as to be expected in such a vast and diverse continent). Frank's reading fails to recognise any multiplicity in feminist practice (western or African). This leads her to interpretations, such as the association of feminism with characters' westernisation

(1987, 16-18), which fail to recognise the characters' rootedness in aspects of their indigenous culture. Chapter One, therefore, also outlines some of the different positions of African feminisms.

It is particularly important when coming from a different cultural background than the writers to make the application of theory as transparent as possible. I have attempted to do this in Chapter One by recognising different theories and explaining their relevance to these African novels. I have also tried to ask questions of the texts, reading them as records of women's social circumstances, in ways which allow them to speak their own explanations and solutions for violence against women. In this way, African women can be given a voice – rather than being spoken for by their male compatriots or western women who 'insist on issues of polygamy and female circumcision' (Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, 14) without reference to African women's views. Chapter Two draws together links between the texts in ways which, I hope, allow 'different readings' (from those which would emerge relying entirely on western academe's "universal" theoretical positions) to surface from these African texts because they have been 'allowed to arise from the culture in which [they] are situated' (Kanneh, 1997, 70). Thus, literature can also illuminate social science.

Chapters Three and Four explore the writers' focus on the effects of violence against women and the strategies suggested to manage or prevent this violence. The effectiveness of these strategies will be analysed against their potential to challenge those social institutions which promote conflict in gender relations. Chapter Three focuses on problematic strategies, still circumscribed by patriarchal structures, whilst Chapter Four discussed authors who envisage gender relationships which transcend the norms of marriage. This focus reflects a

belief that imagining less oppressive practices can affect women's reality albeit by gradual degrees. Thus, fiction writing is one way African women become agents of change.

CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Overview

This chapter will locate African feminisms within the broader context of black feminisms, suggesting its similarities to and differences from the model that was initiated from the African-American diaspora. There will be a brief summation of the history of the feminist movement, highlighting events which exposed western feminisms' Euro-centric, middle-class bias and prompted calls for a recognition of women's differences in feminist thought. However, the focus will be on current debates in African feminist theorisation particularly as they relate to marriage, the place of men in feminism, and motherhood. These are the concepts which will illuminate the novels being analysed.

The latter part of the chapter will outline the positions taken up by different disciplines to explain gender violence. An overview will be given of these explanations but it will be suggested that the most pertinent for the purposes of this research is that espoused by radical feminists. This suggests that gender violence is institutionalised in most patriarchal societies. The problematic nature of applying western theory (and one rooted in radical feminism) to an African context will also be considered.

Defining African Feminisms

Ruth Meena has claimed that '[f]eminists from the African continent have ... been inspired to construct knowledge from their own point of view' (1992, 3). We have to consider here: what does feminism mean at the beginning of the 21st century, and what does it mean in specifically African contexts? Recent Western feminist thought has been articulating different positions within feminism. Ann Brooks discusses this in her book *Postfeminisms: Feminism, cultural theory and cultural forms*. First she points out that postfeminism is not an

antifeminist stance, or a 'backlash', as sometimes assumed by the popular press. Rather it is a critical response to earlier feminist models which:

facilitates a broad-based, pluralistic conception of the application of feminism and addresses the demands of marginalised, diasporic and colonised cultures for a non-hegemonic feminism capable of giving voice to local, indigenous and post-colonial feminisms.

(Brooks, 1997, 4)

This shift in thinking has been prompted partly by 'critiques from women of colour, third world feminists and lesbian feminists' (Brooks 1997, 16) and reflects the arguments of post-colonial and poststructural theories which have fragmented formerly monolithic concepts (such as the universality of patriarchal oppression for women). Embracing pluralistic feminisms for Africa is still proving problematic. Discussions and debates over a "genuine" feminism for Africa (as opposed to one contaminated by western thought) imply a trajectory which will lead to a set of principles which underpin all African feminisms.

Attempts have been made to define this genuine African feminism with limited success. Some of these have been defining statements such as Filomela Steady's claim that a goal of feminism is the 'total liberation of humanity' not just women (1987, 4). Others attempt to define a set of principles: for example Carole Boyce Davies and Ann Adams Graves in *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Their list includes: a refusal to be antagonistic to men but recognising a common struggle which challenges them to be aware of women's specific subjugation; a recognition of traditional oppression which colonisation reinforced; awareness that historically women must have addressed gender oppression as there is evidence in some societies of structures which gave women equality; an examination of African culture to determine which institutions are of value to women and should be retained and which should be rejected as unhelpful; a respect for African women's self-reliance and co-operative work but a rejection of 'muledom'; and that race, gender and class are linked oppressive forces (1986, 8 –11).

Whilst these features can be found across the spectrum of African feminisms, Jane Bryce points out the problems of attempting an authoritative definition of a feminism for the whole continent:

Without in any way meaning to belittle the usefulness and timeliness of a text like *Ngambika* when it appeared on the scene in 1986, it is not possible now to overlook the prescriptive and homogenising tendency of its (albeit brave) attempt to define an 'African' feminism.

(Bryce, 1994, 621)

However, it appears that the desire to find overarching principles in African feminisms is still strong. Obioma Nnaemeka, in her introduction to *Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power*, eschews a dogmatic set of tenets but does want to synthesise African feminist thought. This is despite her emphasis on feminisms and her recognition of the tensions between different feminist schools of thought.

She identifies the following features which, rather than merely resisting western feminisms, are proactive and 'rooted in the African environment' (1998, 9): 'African feminism's valorization of motherhood and respect for maternal politics ... should be investigated in the context of their place and importance in the African environment'; the 'language of African feminism is ... a manifestation of the characteristics (balance, connectedness, reciprocity, compromise, etc.) of the African worldview'; African feminisms must offer 'resistance to gender separation' and emphasises 'the cross-gender partnership that is a prominent and time-tested feature of African cultures' (Nnaemeka, 1998, 11).

Nnaemeka's principles are less prescriptive than those in *Ngambika*, yet they also fail to acknowledge the multiplicity contained in terms such as 'African worldview' or differentiate meaningfully between different African cultural contexts.

The impossibility of creating any satisfactory definition has led Carole Boyce Davies to reject the attempt:

The need for complicating Black feminisms assures an interruption of monolithic assumptions of any discourse, such as specific definitions, of what feminism is or what Black feminism or Third World feminism, itself can be. The word “defining” originally meant “setting up of boundaries or enclosures”. An anti-definitional stance moves us out of minority status into possibilities of alliances which recognise specificities and differences.

(Davies, 1994, 56)

For Davies, refusing to define is more positive than engaging in debate over what types of feminisms may exactly be. Rather than attempt to define the relevant feminisms for this study, I will consider the current debates within some African feminist thought and factors that have affected their development. This will lead to a focus on ideas surrounding marriage, motherhood and the role of men in ending oppression. These issues will become increasingly relevant to the reading of the novels being undertaken here.

Like Nnaemeka I am using the word ‘feminism’ for ‘convenience’ (1998, 5) rather than to suggest parity with the theory developed in America and Europe. Some African women will not use this term about themselves or their work because of the associations it has for them. Florence Dolphyne, for example, writes:

I have become more and more conscious of the difference in approach to women’s issues between Western women, especially ‘feminists’, and African women who are actively working for women’s emancipation. I ... always knew that I was working for the total emancipation of women in Ghana. However, I never considered and still do not consider myself a ‘feminist’, for the term evokes for me the image of an aggressive woman who, in the same breath, speaks of a woman’s right to education and professional training, her right to equal pay for work of equal value, her right to vote and to be voted for in elections at all levels, etc. as well as a woman’s right to practise prostitution and lesbianism.

(Dolphyne, 1991, xiii)

Further, the fixation of western feminists on ‘barbaric’ rituals such as bride price, polygamy and female genital mutilation, alienates African women (Dolphyne, 1991, x). At the Mid-Decade Conference held as part of the United Nations ‘Decade for Women’ (1975 – 1985), which Dolphyne attended, tension developed between the African delegates and the western representatives. In part this was because of disagreements over strategies for eradicating such

practices; but resentment was also caused by the refusal of the western cohort to accept that other issues (such as women's economic situation) were more important to African women in general (Dolphyne, 1991, x-xi).

Meena also blames western feminists for the current aversion to feminism in Africa, criticising the 'liberal feminists [who] employed distorted anthropological knowledge to advance their own cause ...[and] created a hostile environment and stigmatised feminism on the African continent' (1992, 3). This has led to not only writers, but women's organisations, rejecting the label feminist:

many feminist organisations ... would take exception to being labelled feminist because of the social stigma attached to feminism but all ... have been challenging the oppressive gender relations and demanding transformation.

(Mannathoko, 1992, 82)

This is despite their clear commitment to female emancipation.

Hostility towards feminist ideologies from both men and women in Africa is, in part, a fear of feminism's potentially divisive nature. Davies and Graves in *Ngambika* suggest that women's struggle is more difficult than the struggle for national liberation as it sets men against women and challenges traditional culture (1986, 8). In agreement, Susheila Nasta comments that:

In countries with a history of colonisation, women's quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfillment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of the wider struggle for liberation and nationalism. Does to be 'feminist' therefore involve a further displacement or reflect an implicit adherence to another form of cultural imperialism?

(Nasta, 1991, xv)

What is needed is for African women to construct their own images of themselves 'to expose the lie that has constructed her as Other, *without engaging in reaction*' (Philip, 1995, 98).

Changu Mannathoko (and Meena) as implied above, do apply the label 'feminist' to their theoretical perspective; what is at issue then is who has the power to define African feminisms.

One response to this question of imperialism has been the declaration that African women had well developed strategies of feminist resistance before this developed in the west. The title of Adewale Maja-Pearce's interview with Ama Ata Aidoo asserts Aidoo's belief that 'We were feminists in Africa first' (1990). In this interview, Aidoo cites the Igbo women's war of 1929 as proof of an indigenous feminist activism, finding 'this whole charge that African women have only borrowed feminist ideas from the west particularly painful' (Maja-Pearce, 1990, 18). Contemporary forms of feminism in Africa are considered by many women as rooted in particular African cultures, not in western thought:

feminism has its roots in the African condition ... It is a misconception to view feminism as a Western ideology which reflects Western culture simply because feminist theories, just like other theories, have been influenced by external pressures resulting from colonialism and imperialism'

(Mannathoko, 1992, 72)

This is not a naïve attempt to refute the colonial legacy. Most feminist commentators, like Mannathoko, would recognise that it is often impossible to separate the African from the colonial with any degree of certainty. Gwendolyn Mikell too recognises African women's need to assert an indigenous feminism despite the pressure from other cultural forms:

In particular, educated African women who have maintained a dialogue with their Western counterparts over the past two decades recognise the pressure toward Western forms of radicalism, but they bristle when their national leaders interpret their gender reform efforts as responses to external manipulation.

(Mikell, 1997, 2)

Mikell goes on to describe how African feminism 'differs radically from the Western forms' (1997, 3) because, as an indigenous product, it developed from very different economic and social circumstances:

African feminism ... has largely been shaped by African women's resistance to Western hegemony and its legacy within African culture ... the slowly emerging African feminism is distinctly heterosexual and pro-natal.

(Mikell, 1997, 4)

Mikell seems to have one feminism in mind, rather than the several that are developing . The inclusion of the word ‘survival’ in the sub-title of her text suggests she is referring to the types of feminism commonly labelled “grassroots”.

Grassroots feminisms’ ideas develop from the idea that in some pre-colonial African cultures women were not limited to a domestic role and therefore not subject to the same oppressive forces as their western counterparts. Further, in terms of institutional power, some African women held high status positions in their societies and more generally women gained status through their role as mothers. Steady has explored the strength of grassroots African women who were not elevated to positions of power in institutions. She is firm that her ‘intention here is not to romanticize the African past but to draw on those features in traditional tribal societies that promoted complementary values - the essential framework for African feminism’ (1987, 5). The societies depicted by Steady held ‘[c]ommunal values [which] stressed cooperation and distribution, rather than individualism and accumulation’ (1987, 5). Within such a system, where the ‘dominant ideology was group preservation’, checks and controls ensured that tension between the sexes was minimised and no differentiation was made between the value of production and reproduction. In fact the reproductive role was considered supremely valuable and symbolic as it perpetuated and strengthened the group (1987, 7). Thus:

African women had definite social, political and economic roles that induced them to achieve a measure of independence and autonomy and to develop their self-reliant capabilities through participation in production and reproduction.

(Steady, 1987, 7)

These roles were protected through the women’s associations which were part of the social structuring of many groups. Audrey Wipper notes that these associations promoted women’s ‘common economic, political, and social interests’ (1984, 69) and in:

traditional African societies, the bases of women's associations included kinship (membership in lineages), age (age-sets), sex (society-wide puberty rites, secret societies, and women's interest groups), and village-wide dance or work groups (Wipper, 1984, 69).

At their most influential, these groups could make and enforce rules, and all such associations created the cohesion between women necessary for mobilising against any infringements of their rights. In much contemporary feminist praxis in Africa this tradition of cooperation is retained.

Polygamy is typified by Steady as promoting these cooperative values and giving women additional freedom and greater mobility because it ensured economic security and allowed shared mothering. Steady also feels that the system promoted strong bonds between women and provided safeguards against male domination. Family units were created by the mother and her child/ren. The husband, required to divide his attention between his wives, never occupied a central role in any of these units. This limited his authority over his wives (Steady, 1985, 16). Different attitudes to motherhood meant that parturition did not necessitate a retreat into domesticity (Obadina, 1985, 140). In fact in many cultures women had an obligation to work. As many African women had never been housebound they did not have to fight for the right to work outside the home. Therefore, the Western feminists' insistence on the development of a role for women within the public sphere was not considered relevant where African women had established precedents for a public presence.

A central concept in much grassroots feminism is the idea that in traditional African cultures men and women inhabited separate spheres. Niara Sudarkasa argues that 'status' only attaches to gender in modern Africa. Traditionally, 'male' and 'female' were defined by a cluster of statuses of which gender was only one. This led to the idea of separate spheres where men and women were not 'sized-up' against one another and were not (as in the Western dichotomy) 'related to each other in a hierarchical fashion' (Sudarkasa, 1987, 26).

Therefore, women and men in many African societies inhabited separate, non-hierarchically related and complementary domains which both incorporated the public and private and were internally hierarchically ordered (Sudarkasa, 1987, 26-8). Stemming from this was the notion that women did not aspire to positions held by men because they were accorded equal respect for their own unique roles in society. Modern African feminist theories frequently draw on this paradigm to assert their desire to retain difference whilst gaining equivalence with men. This is contrary to the “equality” aspirations of some western feminisms that can be perceived as women wanting to be like men.

Cooperation enabled women to act against men who disturbed this equilibrium. For example, Steady suggests that in the past certain societies had sanctions against domestic violence which ‘were far more effective in controlling male aggression than the modern law enforcement institutions’ (1993, 92). She relates a conversation with urban women who complained that they could no longer ‘[tie] the culprit’s hands and feet and [let] him roll down a rocky hill’ (1993, 92-3) as was their rural practice. In Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s examples, based in Igbo culture, sanctions also seemed to take the form of retaliatory action by the men of the abused women’s kinship group or a collective response by her female peers (1994, 16). Other examples of female resistance from Ogundipe-Leslie are social harassment by ‘sitting on a man’; the use of witchcraft and magic; exploitation of sexuality and withdrawal into madness as traditional feminist strategies (1994, 126). Such strategies, Ogundipe-Leslie claims, give African women a greater status than western women have ever enjoyed: ‘In some ways, African women had economic and social structures which gave them more social space and clout than their European sisters’ (1995, 15).

Mikell discusses ‘dual-sex’ patterns too suggesting these were perhaps less equal than has been suggested. She suggests that:

female subordination takes intricate forms grounded in traditional African culture, particularly in the “corporate” and “dual-sex” patterns that Africans have generated throughout their history.

(Mikell, 1997, 3)

However, this indigenous paradigm does:

continue to influence rather than determine African women’s attempts to achieve gender equity in the contemporary period. These cultural patterns have provided symbolic reference points for many African women in their struggle to achieve equitable roles in their societies.

(Mikell, 1997, 3)

These precedents are used strenuously to deny that African women are more victimised than their western counterparts (sometimes assumed by western feminists) but rather that in parts of Africa women had some measure of liberation historically denied many western women. In some societies they could also hold high office and contributed to the public life of the society:

it appears that except for the highly Islamicized societies in sub-Saharan Africa, in this part of the world more than any other, in pre-colonial times women were conspicuous in high places. They were queen-mothers; queen-sisters; princesses; chiefs; and holders of other offices in towns and villages; occasional warriors; and, in one well known case, that of the Lovedu, the supreme monarch. Furthermore, it was invariably the case that African women were conspicuous in the economic life of their societies, being involved in farming, trade or craft production.

(Sudarkasa, 1987, 25)

It is important to highlight that this situation did not pertain to all African women. Some, as alluded to by Sudarkasa, did not enjoy such levels of autonomy and influence and Sudarkasa warns against characterising African women as absolutely strong and independent (1987, 25).

The manifestations of a patriarchal ideology differed from culture to culture in Africa, and varied in the severity of oppression experienced by women, but over the continent in pre-colonial Africa forms of patriarchy held sway.

After colonisation and the drive towards modernisation and nationhood, traditional models of female strength have been severely compromised. Mikell notes that it was not only the western colonisation that affected women but that ‘[g]ender hierarchy and female

subordination, evident in traditional African culture, became more pronounced during the phases of Islamic expansion and European conquest' (1997, 3). In the interview with Maja-Pearce, Aidoo blames Victorian patriarchal attitudes for giving greater advantage to men in education and work, privileges which still exist:

[Colonialism] definitely had very negative effects on contemporary African women. Ours has been the double quarrel. Not only as Africans but also as women. Colonised by the coloniser, then by our own men, with their new power.

(Maja-Pearce, 1990, 17)

Colonisation 'reinforced existing systems of social inequality and introduced oppressive forms of social stratification, including racial segregation, through the machinery of the state' (Steady, 1987, 10). This disparity sustained itself through nationalist struggles:

While nationalist movements had mobilised both women and men in the struggle for independence, power was essentially transferred to a few men who inherited the colonial administration apparatus.

(Meena, 1992, 9)

Cultural characteristics were exaggerated in nationalism in order to strengthen opposition against 'hegemonic occupation' (Donaldson, 1992, 9) in a way which leached autonomy away from African women by the insistence that 'proper' women were 'submissive, married, rural-based, faithful and loyal to a spouse and parents' (Meena, 1992, 9). Thus, the need has arisen to (re)discover appropriate modern feminisms, pertinent to post-colonial, post-independence states in Africa, which address women's diverse needs and are rooted in some notion of African female traditions.

The activism based in traditional women's groups, whilst undoubtedly indigenous, is not considered feministic by all commentators. Alison Drew notes a difference between female consciousness and feminism where:

Female consciousness .. accepts and maintains pre-existing gender relations; when these become unbalanced and women's traditional roles are threatened, women fight to restore that balance and reassert ... their ability to nurture.

(Drew, 1995, 5-6)

Such action only begins to incorporate feminism when it ‘seeks to modify or transform pre-existing gender relations to allow women and men equal rights and opportunities within a particular socioeconomic framework’ (Drew, 1995, 7).

Olabisi Aina certainly sees the grassroots movement as lacking an acceptably modern feminist agenda as ‘although the traditional African system provided some degree of security for the female members, there existed some forms of oppression within that very system’ (1998, 69). These included polygynous family (something Steady cites as an advantage for women), arranged marriages, obnoxious widowhood practices and inheritance rights. The problem as Aina sees it is that ‘feminist consciousness has been left to a few elite women, who are mostly in academia’ (1998, 79). Women’s societies lack a feminist orientation according to Aina but leaving feminist developments to scholars will not produce effective theories because ‘to be effective agents of change, African forms of feminism must properly incorporate women at the grassroots’ (1998, 66).

Thus a gap can be seen to open up between what could be characterised as “grassroots” and “elite” feminisms or alternatively a tension between the activist and the academic positions. For ‘Zulu Sofola it is the illiterate, rural women who are able to mobilise and act decisively against things they perceive as detrimental to their status. This particularly focuses on the woman’s right to identify herself as a wife and mother, something that is often perceived as eroded by western feminist ideas. Sofola is scathing about educated elite women who she sees as damaged by their acquisition of western education with its ‘philosophy of gender bias’ (1998, 61). Nnaemeka describes this disagreement thus:

The older and activist African women favor African traditional cultures as empowering for women and harbouring strong, relevant women endowed with leadership abilities, while the younger academicians – who seem to emphasize such concerns as human rights, racism, sexual harassment, motherhood, etc. *as seen, prioritized, and articulated by the West* – see the leadership of the feminist movement in Africa as the prerogative of academic and elite women.

(Nnaemeka, 1998, 16)

Nnaemeka's italics strongly imply the former as somehow more "genuine". Whilst the general agreement in Nnaemeka's text seems to be that some reconciliation is needed between these two positions (and all those in between) there does appear to be some feeling that, as the majority of women in Africa are rural and uneducated, creating a relevant feminism for Africa has to come from their experiences and their perceptions for change because they are more in touch with these traditional roles and strategies and have not been "corrupted" by westernisation.

African feminisms' intersection with the west

Colonisation and its legacy have left an impact on gender relations in much of Africa, sometimes limiting the action women could take against male oppressors without resorting to imposed legal systems. Social stratifications were intensified along racial as well as gender lines making it unlikely that women would expose "their" men to the prejudices of colonial governance. Adding this compromised female place to Drew's notion that much indigenous activism sought only 'to maintain the balance of power in social relations or to prevent its erosion to the detriment of subordinate groups' (1995, 2), makes Aina's rather controversial position, that "academic" feminisms are needed to politicise "grassroots" activism, more convincing.

In post-colonial Africa, with its western (British-Victorian patriarchal) legacy in law, politics, education and religion, it is perhaps not surprising that feminisms developing in urban, academic environments have common features with some western feminisms. As noted

above, Mannathoko acknowledges a possible western influence due to colonisation, even where indigenous feminist thought is asserted. Debates over feminism in Africa show how difficult it would be to try and untangle that which was “purely” African from imported feminist ideas which partly respond to imposed social structures. The important aspect is the debate over the usefulness of any feminist ideas as agents of change.

Mannathoko assesses the relevance of liberal, radical and Marxist western feminisms to Southern Africa in her article, ‘Feminist Theories and the Study of Gender Issues in Southern Africa’. She notes that liberal feminism, with its emphasis on achieving equality in education and work has relevance in the context of Southern Africa. This has led to the formation of organisations (such as the ‘Women’s Action Group of Zimbabwe’ and the ‘Women and Law Project of Southern Africa’) to lobby for reform and challenge the state on discrimination against women (Mannathoko, 1992, 80-81). The situation in the west of the continent differs as women traditionally had more autonomy in these areas. Gloria Chukukere notes that equality for women is part of the Nigerian constitution (1998, 135). How far this spreads into the application of legislation is a matter of debate. One common criticism of liberal feminist approaches (recognised by Mannathoko) is that they do not question those structural inequalities in a society which create specific gender relations. This would include notions that even laws encoding equality might not serve equality in practice. Given a legal system that has developed through a patriarchal ideology how far laws can encode equality is questionable. As December Green notes, laws might not be specifically designed to oppress women but they are formulated within ideologies which make certain assumptions about the role of women, and men, in society. If these laws are then also interpreted against ‘social mores’, and these as Green notes are ‘slow to change’ (1999, 112), such assumptions are intensified in the practice of law.

Ways of challenging structures are found in Marxist feminism. Mannathoko defines this as a feminism that traditionally locates women's oppression in their confinement to the domestic realm. This is not relevant to African women generally as the 'notion of domestication is indeed alien in the real practical life of the African woman' (1992, 10). Even the elite class where the husbands' income would support a family (or families) the wives conform to the cultural ethic where 'work is a responsibility and an obligation' (Aidoo, 1998, 46). This is particularly the case in much of West Africa.

Where Marxist feminism does become relevant is in its recognition that for the majority of African women their work is often outside of the recognised economy, poorly paid, and can be backbreakingly heavy. Mannathoko suggests that Marxist feminism was particularly attractive to South African feminists because under the apartheid system the underprivileged class and black women could be conflated. In other parts of Southern Africa, Marxist and radical feminism have been blended to overcome the criticism that Marxist feminism ignores gender as a source of male power independent of class and (capitalist) economy (Mannathoko, 1992, 88). The group Women in Nigeria (WIN) who use Marxist feminist ideas to some extent also recognise this problem. The introduction to *Women in Nigeria Today* begins by recounting a debate between colleagues: was women's oppression only an aspect of class, thus to erase class difference was to end women's oppression; or was gender operating as a separate discrimination to class (WIN, 1985, 1)?

This blend of radical and Marxist feminism is called 'Dual-systems theory' by Sylvia Walby. Here:

[c]ontemporary gender inequality is analysed as a result of the structures of a capitalist and patriarchal or capitalist – patriarchal society ... [as] the two systems are so closely interrelated and symbiotic that they have become one.

(Walby, 1990, 5)

To be relevant to African circumstances, such an analysis would have to include concepts of race and acknowledge the way capitalism has in African countries.

Radical feminism is perhaps the one perspective on women's oppression that is seen as having the least relevance in Africa and is often rejected by African women. Chukukere suggests radical feminism is 'repugnant' in championing 'extreme liberties [which] include sexual freedom and separatism' (1998, 136). It is generally these aspects of radical feminism that are seen to alienate it from the African context. Its usefulness is that it identifies women's oppression as located in social institutions. These ideas are more favourably received by some African feminist activists and researchers. Perhaps rather than refer to radical feminism with its 'repugnant' connotations, the term 'transformative feminisms' is preferable.

This is a body of feminisms that have in common a desire to change women's status through the alteration of current institutional and social structures in any culture. Angela Miles writes of the differences between 'assimilationist' and 'transformative' feminisms; the former 'bases the case for women's equality on women's sameness with men' but the latter affirms '*both* women's equality with and differences from men ... [which] allows them to use diverse women's ... experiences ... to challenge dominant male presumptions and structures' (1998, 164). Miles recognises that there cannot be a single feminism defined as 'transformative' because of the diversity of women's experience; this term indicates a grouping of feminisms which have as their common core the principle defined above and have other broad common principles. These posit working towards the development of a 'sisterhood' of women as imperative; focus on the importance of non-white women's voices; and assert that feminisms' goal has to be to end oppressions of race and class as well as gender – all of which suggest its roots in American black feminism.

African-American critics have been particularly active in exploring feminisms' biases and, in manifestations such as 'Womanism', suggest the relevance of their ideologies to continental African women as well those of the Diaspora. Angela Davis has shown how the feminist movement was racist at its inception, stemming from the nineteenth century brawling over suffrage. As it seemed more likely (for political reasons) that the black man would get the vote certainly before, and maybe even instead of, women, white or black, leading white feminists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton (a leading voice first in the anti-slavery movement, then in the women's suffrage movement) resorted to making racist statements and associated with known racist politicians to try to persuade parliament to enfranchise women (Davis, 1982, chapter 2).

Furthermore, the comparison of race and gender oppression in both first and second wave feminism eclipsed the specific experience of being a black woman. As Deborah King explains in her article 'Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness':

We learn very little about black women from this analogy. The experience of black women is apparently assumed, though never explicitly stated, to be synonymous with that of either black men or white females; and since the experiences of both are equivalent, a discussion of black women in particular is superfluous.

(King, 1988, 45)

General feeling amongst black American scholars is that the mainstream feminisms of this century have been guilty of subsuming all female experience under an umbrella of white, middle-class concerns in a form of imperialism, which may not be tainted with the explicit racism of nineteenth century liberation movements, and even appears to be well intentioned, but which by taking a 'universal stance disguises its white, middle-class solipsism and recuperates the experience of diverse groups of women' (Donaldson, 1992, 9) therefore 'exhibit[ing] not overt racism that conjures active dominance and enforced segregation but a more subtle "white solipsism" that passively colludes with a racist culture' (Donaldson, 1992, 1).

The need for a 'black feminism' was articulated by Barbara Smith in her article 'Towards a Black Feminist Criticism' first published in 1979. Here she explains that a :

viable, autonomous Black feminist movement in [the US] would open up the space needed for the exploration of Black women's lives and the creation of a consciously Black woman-identified art. At the same time a redefinition of the goals and strategies of the white feminist movement would lead to a much needed change in the focus and content of what is now generally accepted as woman's culture.

(Smith, 1985, 169)

At the centre of black feminist thought is the notion that black women are exposed to a number of interlocking forces which work together to oppress them, thus the failure of some western feminists is 'not because of the stress on equality ... [but because it] ... does not see sexism as related to class exploitation and racism in an established hierarchy of dominance' (Christian, 1985, 147). Rose Brewer also identifies that the 'conceptual anchor of recent Black feminist theorizing is the understanding of race, class and gender as simultaneous forces' (1993, 16). Additionally, King asserts that it is too simplistic to see these forces are only additive ('racism plus sexism plus classism'); rather these forces should be recognised as multiplicative as this acknowledges the inter-connectedness of these oppressions (1988, 47). Such an approach prevents one oppression supplanting the other in terms of focusing resistance. King's example is that if class oppression is seen as the largest component of black women's subjugation then an exclusive focus is put on economics.

One effect of a refusal to separate these strands is that the black man, being subject to racism (and so less strongly implicated in patriarchy than white men), is not the enemy but can be cooperated with and/or cooperate in ending oppression. Also, by taking an inclusive theoretical position which recognises many groups as oppressed by different permutations of the interlocking discourses of race, gender and class, rather than being implicated in the exclusionary practices of white, middle-class feminism, all women, including white women, can be seen as a part of a "sisterhood" of female oppression. Further, because of its inclusive

stance, the goal of black feminism is not only to achieve female equality but to end all oppression.

Such notions can be traced in some African feminism thought (defining principles from *Ngambika* include the non-antagonistic stance towards men and interlocking forces of race, gender and class) but in other ways black feminist ideas relate solely to the Diaspora. For example, ideas of Afrocentrism which are central to the thinking of academics such as Patricia Hill Collins. In *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins identifies the black community as having an alternative world view to the Western world which enables black women to resist racist propaganda:

Black societies reflect elements of a core African value system that existed prior to and independently of racial oppression.

Black women fashioned an independent standpoint about the meaning of Black womanhood. These self-definitions enabled Black women to use African-derived conceptions of self and community to resist negative evaluations of Black womanhood advanced by dominant groups.

(Collins, 1990, 10 & 206)

This, with 'common experiences' of:

colonialism, imperialism, slavery, apartheid, and other systems of racial domination ... foster shared Afrocentric values that permeate the family structures, religious institutions, culture, and community life of Blacks in varying parts of Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and North America.

(Collins, 1990, 206)

By insisting that even quite different oppressions, such as imperialism and slavery, are in fact forces of sameness, Collins presents an opposition of black/African/ Afrocentric and white/Western/Eurocentric which could be seen as useful in the African-American context where the black population feels a need to draw a solid line between themselves and the white oppressors sharing their physical, geographical space. However, it unhelpfully constructs a homogeneous Africa which cannot reflect the diverse experiences of women on the African

continent who do not define themselves racially so much as on ethnic, geographical, national, religious and class grounds.

The ideology called ‘Africana womanism’ has similar problems. This has been developed by the African-American academic, Cleonora Hudson-Weems and is worth mentioning because of Mary Kolawole’s attempts to apply this to an African context.

Hudson-Weems classifies continental Africans and Africans of the Diaspora in one group – Africanans; and defines:

Africana womanism [as] an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in *African* culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of Africana women.

(Hudson-Weems, 1998, 155)

The homogenisation of a global black population is already apparent. Despite her comment that ‘it is easy for some people to believe that all white people or all people of any race or sex form a homogenous group’ (1998, 158), Hudson-Weems makes no concessions to the heterogeneity of ‘Africanans’, over the Diaspora or within the group of continental Africans. She states that the ‘ever-present question remains the same: what is the relationship between an Africana woman and her family, her community, and her career in today’s society?’ (1998, 149); her commitment to the probable multiplicity of answers to this is doubtful.

In fact it is fairly clear that her work is about racial oppression (and she does reject all association with feminism) and little to do with specificities of female experience:

If one considers the collective plight of Africana people globally, it becomes clear that we cannot afford the luxury ... of being consumed by gender issues.

Africana people must *eliminate racist influences* in their lives first.

(Hudson-Weems, 1998, 158 & 159).

This homogenisation becomes particularly problematic for African contexts when she tries to define principles of this ideology. To justify the refusal to see ‘the man’ as the primary enemy she states that ‘Africana men have never had the same institutionalized power to oppress

Africana women as white men have had to oppress white women' (1998, 155). She also states that 'Africana women have never been considered the property of their male counterparts' (1998, 156). These statements are not true of many African cultures, pre-colonial or contemporary.

Mary Kolawole has used this theory to try and develop 'global ideology for African women which embraces racial, gender, class, and cultural consciousness' (1997, 24). She cites 'Umoja' (the Swahili concept of togetherness) as being an appropriate image for African (not 'Africana') womanism as it:

enhances the accommodation of diverse attitudes to the woman's question without undermining one's African identity. It underscores harmony in diversity and underlies our theory that African women's consciousness is a mosaic.

(Kolawole, 1997, 194)

Collective action or the importance of promoting collective action is a thread running through most African feminisms but assumptions about the existence of an African identity and a homogenous group that can be referred to as African women (and mean anything more than women domiciled in Africa) is a problem. This leads to some contradictions in Kolawole's work that are not really fully explored. For example her desire to confirm the pro-natal stance of 'African women' leads her to assert that the 'African woman cherishes her role as a homemaker as well as her status as a mother' (1997, 31), but she also recognises the validity of concerns over reproductive rights and undervaluing of the domestic role (1997, 32). Later she quotes 'Zulu Sofola's claim that 'the only way the African woman of today ... can be liberated is to study the traditional systems and the place of the woman as defined by it' (James, 1990, 150). Kolawole appears to be in agreement with this but further into her argument complains of the traditional 'African' 'inability to concede any other positive role to women beyond the "mother is gold" and "mother is supreme" ideology' (1997, 144). In

womanism's attempts to embrace a black sisterhood, specificities of black women's experiences are unhelpfully erased.

An effect of the homogenisation of Africa in African-American feminisms is a certain amount of romanticism about an imagined African culture where the whole continent developed the same idealistic, cultural traditions. Collins tells us that the 'traditional African worldview is holistic and seeks harmony' (1990, 212). Stanlie James discusses 'othermothering' (the sharing of childcare by black women) in her work, as a positive tradition retained from Africa:

The status of women ... is enhanced by the supreme symbolic link attached to them and their crucial role in reproduction. Thus within the indigenous African context, mothering is highly regarded. It incorporates the symbolism of creativity and continuity.

(James, 1993, 45)

Romanticising of "Woman" in any culture usually has a detrimental effect on women within it. Whilst it might be acceptable for African-American women to look to an idealised role model to clarify their self-image, Nasta points out that 'female figures represented as powerful symbolic forces, repositories of culture and creativity ... were essentially silent and silenced by the structures surrounding them' (1991, xvi). Thus in some ways some black feminisms (and Africana Womanism) can be seen as practising an "African-American solipsism". Carole Boyce Davies (herself an African-American critic) warns against the 'attempt to create a monolithic construction out of a diverse continent of peoples, nations and experiences' (1994, 9) in naming 'Africa' as only the opposition of what is western.

Miles in discussing 'transformative' feminisms does acknowledge differences between women, yet her analysis of specific variations is sketchy. She assumes one set of ideas called 'women-associated, women-affirming values' which can be used to combat a 'patriarchal-capitalist' ideology (1998, 66). Although these values are not defined their use to develop 'equal, cooperative, life-sustaining, communal forms of social and economic organization'

(1998, 166), reflects Filomela Steady's rather idyllic notions of a society structured by women. This would:

have the following general paradigmatic characteristics. First: promotes egalitarian and cooperative values rather than hierarchical and authoritarian ones. Second: views bureaucratic rationality, meritocracy and academic objectivity as exclusionary devices to ensure male privilege and dominance. Third: prefers peace to war, and opposes the ideology of domination. Fourth: promotes nurturing and the preservation of life. Fifth: opposes and strives to eliminate global economic and political processes detrimental to women. Finally: values impulsive and experiential reasoning.

(Steady, 1993, 91)

Steady acknowledges that such a utopia can only be achieved if the 'modern women's movement seeks to overthrow the dominant structure of patriarchy by establishing and promoting the actualization of female models' (1993, 94-5). Such ideas reflect the need stated by many African feminists to retain an essential femaleness in their identity, actions and aspirations rather than merely aspiring to more powerful positions in existing structures. Brooks notes a general shift in 'postfeminisms' towards emphasising difference rather than equality (1997, 4) – something found within certain African feminisms.

Miles suggests part of transformative feminisms is a refusal of 'the apparent logical contradiction between women's equality and difference from men' (1998, 164). Eunice Njovana, Director of the Musasa Project in Zimbabwe says:

I am proud that I am a woman and I serve a purpose as a woman. I certainly do not want to be a man or think like one or act like one. I want to be a ... woman who is recognised and respected for what she is.

(Getacha and Chipka, 1995, 162)

Without a transformative strategy, however, there will be tension between these two positions. This uneasiness is apparent in Kolawole's text. Whilst she states that there is less concern with equality than a wish to assert difference (1997, 27), this seems predicated on the assumption that equality requires women to become manly because she envisages equality as being within current structures of work, politics and gender relationships such as those encoded by marriage. Kolawole discusses the need to change laws to promote equality (1997,

33) and considers the work of women's groups who concentrate on 'gender inequality in law, differential remuneration or benefits' (1997, 50). However, it could be argued that women cannot become equal within structures which are grounded in the doctrine of women's inferiority and unsuitability for inclusion in such institutions.

This thesis will show how the novels could be read as supporting this need to change institutions, hence the focusing lens of violence against women. One explanation for gender violence is that patriarchal ideologies can create an environment and institutions which support violence against women in particular contexts. The novels and short stories will be read as informing an understanding of ways in which marriage (and the related concepts of motherhood and sexual abuse) operates as an oppressive institution within societies underpinned by a patriarchal ideology. These texts are written by educated, African women who will be aware of many feminist agendas, including non-African forms. Nnaemeka labels these 'so-called modern African women' as less relevant than rural women which seems rather harsh. In *Women in the Third World*, Lynne Brydon and Sylvia Chant do not deny the right of women other than rural women to contribute to debate over the place of women in African societies. Whilst they focus on low-income women:

This is not to imply that the situations of middle-class and elite women are not in themselves problematic, nor that they do not merit enquiry. Indeed, it has often been pointed out that while membership of a higher class (here equated with income) may improve the material aspects of women's lives and raise their overall 'status' in society, they continue none the less to suffer from gender subordination.

(Brydon and Chant, 1989, 2)

Their choice to write about low income women is in part predicated on the fact that 'more has been written about poor women than those belonging to the middle- or upper-income groups' (1989, 2). Thus, although the protagonist in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A Love Story* is professionally privileged, Aidoo denies that her struggles with marriage are irrelevant. Aidoo asks: 'Is Esi too an African woman? She not only is, but there are plenty of them around these

days...’ (1991, 8). Furthermore, Aidoo shows how Esi is subject to oppression as a women despite her material wealth.

Concerns of well-educated, urban women in Africa have to be accepted as valid. If they are to be excluded as “westernised” and “irrelevant”, this makes a nonsense of claims that feminism is inclusive. Once some feminisms are rejected, boundaries have to be set round what acceptable feminisms might be, which would necessitate a focus on defining and “enclosing” feminism(s). The urban or educated or rich women are not less genuinely African nor are the feminisms they are developing. I have focused on wifhood and motherhood through the paradigm of violence against women because this is a major theme across the fiction written by African women. It appears that violence against women is a general concern. A site of resistance is being developed in these texts that intersects with all the other resistances to female oppression, such as those against the poor economic opportunities on which a group of rural women may focus, or in discriminatory laws challenged by a women’s legal group.

Some may argue that resisting violence against women would be more effectively done through developing centres to give sanctuary and help to abused women. Such intercession into cases of individual violence is important but may not address the question of why some men are violent to women (and why some are not). Theorising about this cannot produce immediate results but has an important place in formulating preventative action. This thesis asserts that creative writing can contribute towards developing African theories of gender violence. The purpose of fracturing feminist thought is to give equal acknowledgment to all sites of resistance, in a recognition of the multiple, interwoven threads of oppression. Any attack on their integrity will weaken the fabric of oppressive ideologies.

Marriage, Motherhood and Men

The three areas of debate in African feminisms on which I want to concentrate are those over the trustworthiness of men in the struggle for emancipation, the value of various marriage types and whether African women should retain their strong identification as mothers. How society formalises the relationship of men and women (and from this issues of reproduction) is a crucial question in considering gender violence. Debates over the most beneficial form of marriage for African women and whether child-bearing should define womanhood, helpfully open a space for debate over the institutionalisation of gender relationships. The following discussion outlines many positions but will not attempt to weigh up the differences of opinion to place them in a hierarchy of appropriateness. Instead all these positions will be juxtaposed against the novels as appropriate to explore the intersection of opinion, and the way these feed into theories of gender.

The problematic nature of female identity through motherhood, and discussions over various marriage ceremonies have already been signalled to some extent. These show disagreement over the value of these institutions in pre-colonial times, though most agree that changes to custom through colonisation was generally detrimental to women's status. In British colonies, the specifically Victorian patriarchal ideas about women's place in society based in particular interpretations of the Bible, imposed different norms for appropriate relationships between men and women. It also imposed notions of appropriate female behaviour. When Aidoo comments that the Christian missionaries made sure that African women in their care became 'wonderful wives and great mothers' (1998, 44) her sarcasm assures us that this was removed from African concepts, and far from 'wonderful' for women. Not all of these impositions are rejected in modern African environments. For example Margaret Stroebel suggests that the rights of women in Christian marriage to share their

husbands property was very attractive to Yoruba women, although men who married under Christian law often took ‘outside wives’ as well (1995, 107). More problematic in this context is the exclusion of women from the public arena, curtailing the ability of Christian Yoruba women to trade. Resurrecting tradition is not a straightforward process. In a post-colonial environment allegedly traditional practices can be revived in ways which are unhelpful to women:

Since culture is not static, new concatenations of this [gender] asymmetry and inequality have arisen that politicians and laypersons alike sometimes present as customary, when, in fact, they are distortions of the African reality.

(Mikell, 1997, 3)

It can be seen in the debate over motherhood, for example, how the identification of women as mothers can be important politically and economically.

In *Ngambika*, Davies and Graves discuss the need to keep the high status afforded to motherhood as an important aspect of African women’s identity. They recognise however, that this can be to the detriment of childless women so they reject aspects which make motherhood obligatory (1986, 9). Steady seems to present a somewhat idealised image of African motherhood, in her essay ‘African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective’ (1987); and in the introduction to *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally* she identifies motherhood and the valuation of children as the most fundamental difference between African and Western women (1985, 29). Like Davies and Graves, she sounds a note of caution by her recognition that a ‘woman without a child is stigmatised in many societies in Africa, and barrenness is seen as a punishment for sin’ (1985, 31). Meena paraphrases from an unpublished paper by Desiree Lewis where the ‘oppressive nature of motherhood is highlighted despite the centrality of motherhood in the African society’ (1992, 10). If motherhood in some way defines what an African women is, then it is difficult to see how it could be equally acceptable

for a woman to choose to remain childless or to have children, or for barren women to be seen as 'complete'.

This paradox can be seen in Flora Nwapa's summation of her views on infertility in women:

My conclusion on this issue of barrenness is that women are what they are because they can give life, they can procreate. So in African societies, when this unique function is denied a women, she is devastated ... But does this handicap, this childlessness make a women less woman ...? I do not think so.

(Nwapa, 1998, 97)

There appears to be a positive desire not to abandon this aspect of female identity, which apparently makes women 'what they are'. Logically, if procreating defines women, women who are childless, through choice or "faulty" biology, cannot "really" be women at all. Childlessness has to compromise the "woman-ness" of female social identity.

Nasta identifies the problem in the fact that 'the role of mother, with all that it implies, is universally imposed upon women as their main identity, their *proper* identity above all others' (1991, xx) explaining that her anthology 'opens up a critical debate *across* cultures' about the 'mythology of "motherhood"' (1991, xx). Her universalisation of this identity could be questioned (in many western cultures the identities of woman and mother are becoming increasingly disengaged) but it could be argued that the idea of one "proper" identity for women, which is that of mother, is gaining purchase in parts of Africa. Some evidence suggests that women are increasingly reluctant to marry (for example Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997, 70), and have less need to identify themselves through being wives. However, Brydon and Chant suggest that 'even where women are not necessarily forced to become wives, motherhood is an important component of female status' (1989, 38). There seems little evidence to suggest that women are choosing to reject motherhood even where they desire to limit numbers of children.

In part, this identification of woman as mother can be seen as politically motivated. African governments have been known to encourage women to be “traditional” for various purposes (for example, see Meena, 1992, 9 cited above). Encouraging women to have many children has implications for national economies:

governments ... transfer most of the costs needed for the reproduction of human life to the household level. When this happens, it is the women who bear the greater burden of the costs.

(Meena 1992, 14)

It can benefit governments to keep intact the myths of motherhood which induce women to have many children and to work to clothe, feed and educate them, boosting the labour force, despite incurred costs. In some societies, women’s identity is only ratified through bearing many children thus placing a physical strain on them as well as an economic burden. The financial cost is exacerbated where marriages (and marital-like relationships) have been destabilised by war or economies based on migrant labour. Social expectations remain that women will have multiple children (often serially with several different men) even where there is little expectation that the fathers will provide support or even stay.

This perceived unreliability of men in committing to long term relationships has, no doubt, contributed to women’s reluctance to marry. However, despite some move away from marriage, the majority of African women do marry. Ceremonies can be customary or Islamic (which allows men to take other legal wives) or Christian (which imposes monogamy although some men will take ‘outside wives’ or marry subsequent wives under customary law) in many countries. The advantage of polygyny for women is hotly debated. For Sofola, women who insist on monogamous marriages damage their more important identity as mother. Elite women, she suggests, have elevated their role as wife through their rejection of polygamy at the expense of motherhood. In polygyny, because the man is shared and less central in the woman’s life, attention is focused on the mother / child relationship. Monogamy

also damages trust between women, as wives in monogamous marriages fear being replaced; men are able to exploit this fear to control their wives (Sofala, 1998, 63). Steady sees polygyny as fostering positive communal values and forging bonds between women as well as promoting greater autonomy (1987, 6).

Commentators such as Aina and Ogundipe-Leslie represent the other side of the debate. Ogundipe-Leslie, for example, identifies polygyny as a form of oppression which indicates African women as chattels (1994, 53). Margrette Silberschmidt suggests that male power traditionally resided in polygamy as the more wives they had, the more land they could cultivate. Many wives also meant many heirs – vital to consolidate a man’s position in the community. This proved his virility and whilst sons continued and expanded the clan, marriage of daughters provided cattle and created relationships with other lineage groups (Silberschmidt, 1992, 241). Silberschmidt’s research in Kenya suggests, however, that women perceived polygyny as weakening the economic strength of the family and her power within the marriage:

Women mainly worried about how to make ends meet, and rarely, if ever, wanted their husbands to take a second wife, not least because this would reduce their range of possible sanctions against them.

(Silberschmidt, 1992, 246)

Sanctions against men such as withdrawing labour, refusing sex or to prepare food were less effective if other wives could take on these tasks (Silberschmidt, 1992, 244).

The most useful debates about polygamy centre on the relationship between history, economy and polygamy. Dolphyne writes in some detail about this, exploring the roots of polygamy: a man’s need for farm labour; a woman’s need to be married for status, child-bearing and economic security. She acknowledges that in modern Africa the situation is very different but that polygamy still has its uses. Childcare and domestic duties can be shared and she suggests that it discourages men from taking mistresses or indulging in ‘serial

monogamy'. However, Dolphyne also points out the negatives: the possibility of rivalry between co-wives and the children of different mothers; and women's feelings of hurt and betrayal when their husband marries again because of contemporary expectations that marriage is for companionship and affection, not just economic security (Dolphyne, 1991, 14-21).

Ideas of masculinity rooted in potency and fertility, linked concepts in some African cultures (Coquery-Vidrovitch, 1997, 217), are more likely to encourage men to found multiple families in modern urban environments, than economic considerations. As seen from Silberschmidt's research above, an economic need for familial labour has traditionally been a reason for polygyny, but this is not a necessity in cities and towns. Thus, proving masculine potency has become a major reason for men wishing to retain rights to polygamous marriages, although arguments are usually couched in terms of "African tradition". According to Aidoo, men see unmarried women as an insult to their manhood (1985, 262) and women's refusal to marry (or to procreate) can be seen as a challenge to men's authority. Tellingly, in David Maillu's justification of polygyny, he cites men's rights to sexual satisfaction as one of the major reasons for taking several wives in an urban context where there is less economic need to do so (1988, 10 & 15).

Distortions of tradition and determination to throw off a colonial legacy have shifted polygyny from a practice necessary to sustain a rural economy, to a right that men frequently claim even where they cannot afford to keep multiple families. Traditionally, men only took another wife when it was financially viable usually with the agreement of their first wife. Multiple marriages increased their status as a visible sign of wealth, rather than the marriages inherently providing status. In the urban environment women (and their children) can find themselves abandoned when husbands put their resources into creating another family unit at

the expense of the previous one. In such a situation, the less central place of fathers in a family can be seen as disadvantageous to women. Even men who are not inclined to polygamy face social pressure to prove their masculinity by marrying more than one wife and producing many children.

Attempts at political change can also be viewed as threatening. In Nigeria in 1982 during attempts to repeal bigamy laws which forbid the coincidence of Islamic, traditional and western marriages (only allowing one wife in the latter case) women stormed the parliament. Ogunjipe-Leslie notes that the men's reaction was to laugh – their usual response to 'women's issues' (1985, 124). Such attitudes undercut some African feminists' resolution to refuse to view men as an enemy.

This was one of the defining principles stated in *Ngambika* and supported, for example, by Nnaemeka's definition of African feminism: 'African feminism resists the exclusion of men from women's issues; on the contrary, it invites men as partners in ... social change' (1998, 7-8). Aidoo comments that during the period of colonisation, men may not have positioned themselves deliberately between the coloniser and African women but 'must have taken the line of least resistance' (Maja-Pearce, 1990, 18) and Meena is adamant 'that freedom from oppressive relationships cannot be granted, it has to be fought for. The oppressed, that is the women, have to take the initiative' (1992, 26). Other commentators question the willingness of men to embrace the feminist cause at all. Hope Chigudu, Vice chair of the Zimbabwean Women's Resource Centre and Network, is strident:

Some women are telling us [feminists]: Be careful you are going to lose your men. Who said that men will ever support you! ... Why should they support us? ... The men are not interested in our liberation. A few might support us, but they are not carrying the burden. They do not understand the nature of our struggle apart from being beneficiaries of our oppression.

(Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 81)

What incentive is there for men to divest themselves of the privilege accorded to them through their gender? The counter argument is provided by Edwin and Bene Madunaga: the ‘very male attitudes that oppress women also dehumanise men and confine them to narrow sex stereotypes’.¹ Walby also notes that originally patriarchal theory thought the domination of younger (less powerful) men by the older household heads (patriarchs) was more significant than the issue of men’s domination of women (1990, 19). Several of the novels being analysed here raise the issue that men’s behaviour is also circumscribed by patriarchally-based cultural expectations thus, many men would find some benefit from a dismantling of these structures.

This diversity of opinion over marriage and motherhood is in part caused by the different cultural backgrounds of the cross-continental commentators considered here. Where women traditionally had economic autonomy, inheritance rights and had developed strategies of direct action (for example in many West African societies) men are more acceptable as allies. The structures of oppression that men can exploit are less rigorous, and men’s institutional power over women concomitantly diminished. In societies where the manifestation of patriarchy was more oppressive (perhaps in strongly patrilineal groups or through particular religious practices such as seclusion) men are less likely to be seen as allies, and perhaps less likely to sympathise with women’s causes.

Gender violence

Gender violence, as explained by radical feminists in the west, is located in precisely those structures which give men a socially recognised power over women. This power is manifest in ‘cultural, political, and institutional factors [which] ... support and/or tolerate violent behaviour’ (Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 7). If this is true then some kind of

¹ Angela Dennis (1976) ‘Socialism and the Fight for Women’s Rights’ quoted in Madunaga (1985), 30.

transformative feminist model is required to develop strategies to end violence against women by altering the structures which support it. However, this is not the only, or even most recognised, theory of gender violence and only goes some way to explain the phenomenon.

The introduction to this thesis has already established the difficulties of finding African research on violence against women, and theories of gender violence in an African context appear to be non-existent. There has been a quite extensive Ghanaian project (Coker-Appiah and Cusack ed. (1999)), and December Green's book *Gender Violence in Africa* (1999) draws together research done in various cultural contexts. However, Kelly and Radford note that it is mainly western countries that have the resources and political circumstances to promote research. This means that :

knowledge is skewed toward Western countries, particularly the United States. Even here, however, some groups have been disproportionately excluded from most research and services (especially disabled women and girls and those who do not speak English).

(Kelly and Radford, 1998, 55)

Generally there is an acceptance that violence against women is something that is universally affecting women, although the amount and manifestation of violence will vary from culture to culture:

It seems indisputable that in every society there is evidence that men have used violence against women with whom they have intimate relations (evidence in support of a universal male psychology despite local cultural variations).

(Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 20)

This in itself may be a purely western conception of violence against women. However, Coker-Appiah and Cusack's research uses western texts (such as Dobash and Dobash (1998)) to underpin their theoretical perspective that 'violence against women is not an isolated act, but rather a regular occurrence in the way that men and women relate' (1999, 10). This implies that this western theory can be useful to analyse the African situation.

As Dobash and Dobash suggest, such a global presence of violence against women tends to support theories of biological essentialism which suggest that men are innately aggressive thus naturally and inevitably violent. Alone, this theory fails to explain why, if men are innately violent, some are manifestly not so, and ignores any questions of power, culture and historical relativity (Hearn, 1996, 29). Dobash and Dobash note that biological approaches have traditionally been rejected by those who take a 'cultural' approach to explain gender violence but that increasingly for 'many social scientists, the fact of the "biological" has now been acknowledged' (1998, 19). This has led to an approach that has combined the two explanations leading to a notion of first and second order explanations where biology provides the former and a social/cultural perspective the latter. The focus then shifts from the fact of male violence against intimate partners to the 'patterning or variation in the amount, type, and contexts of male violence' (Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 19-20). It also provides an explanation for non-violent men where social mores discourage men to exercise their "naturally" violent inclinations on their intimate partners (but perhaps channels it into "acceptable" violence such as defence of the nation).

To a great extent these different explanations for gender violence are underpinned by particular definitions of violence against women. Broad definitions which include 'verbal abuse, intimidation, physical harassment, homicide, sexual assault, and rape' make the problem appear large and significant, whereas more narrow definitions make these incidents the exception (Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 4). Where, for example, definitions only recognise extreme violent acts then a psychological position is supported:

Popular conceptions of violent acts and those who commit them often reflect the notion that this is mindless, incomprehensible, unpredictable, and unpatterned behavior enacted by the alcoholic, the mentally unstable, or the socially desperate. Such notions are less uncomfortable and less challenging than the notion that violence might be functional, intentional, and patterned.

(Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 141)

Walby concurs, noting that this most popularly accepted explanation is the position supported by liberal feminists; the ‘conventional view of male violence sees it as the acts of a few, wayward , generally psychologically deranged men’ (1990, 129). The psychological and interactional model of gender violence is favoured by Neil Frude. In his article ‘Marital Violence: An Interactional Perspective’ he asks:

Is it tenable to view violence by husbands as ‘accepted’? It may be true that little significance is generally attached to pushes and pulls, but the view that *violence* by husbands is accepted or encouraged is difficult to maintain. Few people approve of husbands beating up their wives and, for almost all social groups, it would be totally unacceptable ... When a husband’s brutality *is* revealed then his actions are almost universally condemned and sympathy is extended to the victim.

(Frude, 1994, 154)

There seem to be two relevant issues to unpick in Frude’s statement. First, in many African contexts, revelations of a husband’s violence against his wife are unlikely to meet with social condemnation. The second issue is one of definition.

Definitions in themselves can be gendered. The way that the sexes define violence differs quite radically. Men delimit violence within the narrow parameters of physical assault, discounting pushing, holding, using their superior weight and bulk, and rarely define coercive and pressurised sex as violence (Hearn, 1996, 27-8). Women consider emotional, sexual and physical behaviours as violent and furthermore identify violent behaviour as being specifically ‘designed to control, dominate and express authority and power’ (Hanmer, 1996, 8). Frude excludes just those ‘minor’ physical assaults that women do perceive as violence. If a wider definition of what constitutes violence against women is adopted then liberal, psychological explanations cannot account for the prevalence of violence against women, or for the acceptability of men’s violence against their intimate partners in some social groups.

Discussions with Ghanaian women interviewed for Dorcas Coker-Appiah and Kathy Cusack’s study ‘indicated the absence of a culture that **clearly** states that violence against women ... is unacceptable in any form in Ghana’ (Cusack, 1999, 14). Furthermore, they

found ‘a high level of acceptance for beating women and children as a way of training and bringing them to order’ and that their ‘project had to work with the fundamental belief that violence is acceptable’(1999, 15). The right of men to chastise their wives physically as part of a public debate is not limited to Ghana. Stroebel recounts a debate in the Kenyan parliament where one MP complained that the marriage bill being debated would, if passed, outlaw the ‘very African’ practice of beating wives to teach them manners (1995, 117). Ayo Oyajobi, writing about Nigeria, notes that in regard to ‘spouse-battering’ assault laws were deemed to be sufficient to protect women from extreme violence. There were two arguments underpinning this: one, that ‘public opinion perceived the issue as falling under the exclusive domain of domestic relations which must not be interfered with by the law’; secondly, that wife beating itself was justified as ‘the right of the husband to chastise his wife and the due deservedness of discipline by an erring wife’ (1989, 25).

Such a level of cultural acceptance for violence against women points to an explanation for gender violence that suggests it is encouraged by the social, cultural and political structures which develop within a patriarchy, and not censured except in some extreme behaviours. Archer goes so far as to suggest that ‘the rule of law has *encouraged* wife-beating’ (1994, 313). Dobash and Dobash also see violence against wives as sanctioned by social structures noting that historically society has given ‘numerous legal, political, economic and ideological supports for a husband’s authority over his wife which included the approval of his use of physical force against her’ (1979, ix). Of course, both these refer to western society, but the examples above from Stroebel, Oyajobi and Coker-Appiah and Cusack suggest that similar supports are found within African cultures.

This is the explanation for violence against women favoured by radical feminists. Whilst violence is not considered a ‘conscious male plot’ (Bart and Moran, 1993, 1), it is seen as a

function of patriarchy and one that consolidates male supremacy. In *Violence Against Women: The Bloody Footprints*, Bart and Moran suggest that ‘all forms of violence against women are interrelated, coalescing like a girdle to keep women in our place, which is subordinate to men’ (1993, 1). This means that the:

abuse of women is systematic ... receiving cultural and structural support. Women’s subordination is accomplished and maintained by patterns of interpersonal interaction prescribed by culture and social structures’

(Bart and Moran, 1993, 79)

The rejection of radical feminism by many African feminists has already been noted.

However, by associating it with the idea of transformative feminisms, this radical feminist idea of violence being embedded in the structures of society can be adopted without the associated radical feminist ideas of lesbianism and separatism that are deemed offensive to some African women. If this explanation of violence against women is accepted, the need to transform such structures to end oppression follows. I will show how this framework is the most useful for reading the novels under discussion because it views marriage and motherhood as institutions. These coalesce with patriarchal ideologies to create notions of ownership in gender interactions which can permit men’s violence to women.

One of the weakness of this explanation of gender violence (which has been encountered when considering biological explanations) is pointed out by Kelly and Radford. If the structures of a given society encourage men to be violent to their wives, why do some men abstain from violence? Kelly and Radford note that this is an under-researched area in the field (1998, 67). One way round this suggested by Dobash and Dobash, is to develop an interdisciplinary approach where the:

Focus is primarily on the preeminence of cultural, political, and institutional factors and an examination of how they support and/or tolerate violent behaviour – but the “biological” and the “psychological” are also included, particularly as they intersect with these cultural conditions.

(Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 7)

From this four levels can be proposed from which gender violence can be analysed in any situation; the individual, the interpersonal, the institutional and the ideological (Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 7). This allows for the notion of individual choice within the structures which might accept men's violence against women; as Green notes 'violence against women erupts at the intersection of social forces and individual choices' (1999, 28). Importantly, this gives agency to men by refusing to see them (or allowing them to see themselves) as merely acting out of instinct or conditioning over which they have no control.

Equally, it modifies the notion of victim-blaming that men can use to justify their behaviour:

Men usually say they have a good reason for using violence, and it lies somewhere in *her* behaviour even if the detail of violations remains vague or unspecified.
(Dobash and Dobash, 1998, 152)

Men often justify their violent behaviour as a response to feelings of frustration, anger or fear of a loss of power (Hearn, 1996, 27). Such attitudes firmly lay blame at the feet of the women who are getting beaten. It is implied that if they conformed to wifely behaviour men would not be provoked to violence. In these circumstances 'provocation' is defined by the male partner and for women, violence includes the 'uncertainty and potential of men's violence' as well as an inability to control the initiation of such behaviour (Hearn, 1996, 27); mere presence is often provocation enough. An analysis that acknowledges that violence is also an individual's response, forces the notion of choice – men that are violent to women are, on some level, making a choice to act in this way. This means that even within a patriarchal ideology men can choose not to be violent and not to use their institutionalised power to coerce women into acquiescence.

In theorizing about violence against women 'the meaning and consequences of events for those who experience them' (Kelly and Radford, 1998, 56) must not be forgotten. Women's challenges to violation have been to force a recognition of the violence to which they are

subjected and to insist on ‘support for, rather than stigmatization and silencing of, women’ who have been abused (Kelly and Radford, 1998, 70). As noted in the Introduction, African women also often have to challenge the normalisation of violence in their societies. One way to create a voice is through writing fiction. The lack of “scientific” research and theorisation of violence against women in an African context should not be perceived as so much of a problem when there are a multitude of fiction texts exploring intergender relationships and the way these could be altered beneficially for women and men. Power relationships will always promote struggle for superiority; these authors do not want a reversal in the power structures which gives women dominance over men. The solutions they offer are focused on the personal, exploring how men and women can form equal associations, whether as friends, sexually or both; the interactional through consideration of the power of cooperative, group action of women and men; and how changes to institutions which encode the relationship of the sexes can challenge the patriarchal ideology of society.

Applying these ideas to a reading of the novels, in the absence of indigenous theories, will be an inductive process. In Chapter Two, from the particular examples (i.e. the events in the novels), I will formulate some suggestions about how motherhood and marriage are perceived as constructing particular relations between men and women, and why this might promote violence and strategies of resistances to violence. Of course, it is helpful to such a process that these fictional events, whilst drawing on real life, are constructed, possibly in accordance with a message the authors are attempting to convey. It will be less difficult to theorise against such manipulated incidents than to formulate theoretical notions from reality which can be complex and messy. A risk is that theory not based in real events, will have no relevance to practical strategies to help women affected by violence. These have to address the specificities of women’s real lived experiences which are likely to comprise multiple

forms of abuse, over a period of time. As the concern here is to probe the structures that might support violence in society, “tidied up” incidents actually help to clarify the roots of different types of violence.

CHAPTER TWO

Meanings of Wifhood

In Chapter One, a wide definition was assumed for violence against women on the grounds that women themselves see a range of behaviours as abusive. These include physical violence, sexual abuses (such as rape and harassment), psychological and emotional abuse. Accepting this range of behaviours places male violence against women within the social structures created and underpinned by any form of patriarchal ideology. Thus, many manifestations of violence against women are seen as socially acceptable. This thesis will focus on wife-beating and rape (including marital rape) rather than psychological abuse or other types of physical and sexual abuses as it is these practices that are most prevalent in African women's fiction. Most of the theory about violence against women in an African context gives precedence to the issue of female genital mutilation (FGM)¹ some of which questions the application of the term "violence against women" to this practice. Possibly because of its taboo nature, few novels (or short stories) refer to FGM.

The purpose of this research is: firstly, to begin to induce a theoretical perspective about wife-beating and rape based on the fiction writing of African women novelists; secondly, to outline the strategies of resistance and change the novels portray, and to analyse their efficacy against the theoretical base. This chapter will describe how these two abuses are written about over a range of novels and short stories, and begin to suggest how far the authors appear to be challenging, or implicitly supporting, some of the cultural assumptions about these particular violences against women.

¹ There is debate over the correct terminology for this practice. Janice Boddy (1998) uses 'female circumcision' as this is the preferred term amongst the women with whom she works; Tobe Levin (1986) suggests that this is a euphemistic and inaccurate term and that 'female genital mutilation' describes the range of practices more precisely. "Mutilation" is of course a pejorative term which might not reflect the attitudes of groups for whom "FGM" is a practice.

The majority of examples are drawn from West African authors where a strong tradition of women's writing has developed. Flora Nwapa's short story 'Man Palaver' (1992) is drawn on as are several of Buchi Emecheta's earlier works (particularly *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Destination Biafra* (1994 – first published 1984)). Other Nigerian authors are Mabel Segun and Phaniel Egejeru. Comments on the nature of rape will draw on Segun's short story 'The Surrender' (1995) and the sub-plot of Egejeru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten* (1993). Three Ghanaian texts will also provide useful examples for the section on rape: Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), *Beyond the Horizon* (1995) by Amma Darko, and Nna Otua Codjoe-Swayne's *The Dancing Tortoise* (1994). The latter novel is also used to illuminate the discussion on wife-beating.

On the other side of the Continent, two Kenyan authors' works will be considered: Grace Ogot's short story 'Elizabeth' (1988) in the sections on rape and blaming women for violence; and *Ripples in the Pool* (1975) by Rebekah Njau in the consideration of wife-beating. Most texts representing Southern Africa are Zimbabwean. Tsitsi Himunyangaphiri's novel *The Legacy* (1992) will be used to illustrate the law's impotence in addressing the issue of wife-beating. The examples of rape and sexual politics in Barbara Makhalisa's short story 'The Underdog' (1984) will add to the section on rape. Yvonne Vera's work will be discussed in greater depth in Chapters Three and Four, however, this chapter briefly considers her short story 'An Unyielding Circle' (1992). The other two authors' works being considered in this chapter – Bessie Head (Botswana) and Lindsey Collen (Mauritius) – are also more deeply discussed in Chapters Three and Four. However, this chapter briefly discusses some of the issues in Head's novella 'The Cardinals' (1993) and *The Rape of Sita* (1995) by Collen.

This may appear to be an excess of examples to use as evidence. However, the purpose of this chapter is to establish two things: firstly, that wife-beating and rape concern African

women writers across the Continent; secondly, that despite cultural differences, similarities can be found in the novels' representations of violence against women. A range of examples have to be used to make these points. In fact, the examples have been limited in some sense because fiction from other countries (such as Uganda where FEMRITE publishers are encouraging women to publish fiction) proved unobtainable; other texts were inaccessible because of language barriers (for example, women's writing in Swahili, French and Arabic).² Finding similarities implies that the development of a general African theoretical position is feasible and possible. Differences in the examples suggest ways in which such a general position would have to recognise alternative or modified explanations for different cultures. However, an overarching theory seems an essential beginning to provide a meeting point for all African people to start a dialogue about violence against women.

Wife-Beating

As seen in Chapter One, some African feminisms explore women's pre-colonial state, and suggest that the solution to any contemporary oppression is a retrieval of past privileges and female strategies of resistance. In relation to wife-beating in particular, several commentators have remarked on sanctions against violent husbands, and strategies wives could use to avoid violence, in some pre-colonial societies. These could include refusal to cook food or of sexual intercourse, but the usual response to physical attack was for a woman to leave her husband's home and return to her own kin. Of course, this was only possible where women married into groups relatively near to their natal home, and in patrilocal marriage systems, but it effectively removed the women from immediate physical danger.

² I have avoided using texts in translation because of the further issue this raises of interpreting meaning in the light of the inevitable subjectivity of the translator. This creates another layer of meaning to the text and to eliminate at least this level of ambiguity, I reluctantly rejected novels by writers such as Calixthe Beyala and Nawal El Sadaawi.

Women's present predicament is suggested to be an effect of modernisation and the development of more nuclear (westernised) family units:

African women tend to be protected by their larger families in the occurrence of violence within marriage through the possibility of the return of the bride wealth or the withdrawal of the woman by her male relatives ... It can be argued that African kinship systems provided the abused woman the family and community support which feminist movements tried to give Euro-American women through shelters for battered women ... Unfortunately, African women in abusive situations are beginning to lose some of the protection they enjoyed from male relatives due to the nuclearization and Westernization of African families.

(Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994, 15-16)

According to Betty Wamalwa, the changing family in Kenya has increased violence against women:

Although it is difficult to generalize for all ethnic groups in Kenya, wife beating has become much more severe and frequent with the breakdown of the African socio-cultural system. The social limits on men are often non-existent as the extended family system continues to break down and women become marginalized.

(Wamalwa, 1989, 72-3)

The failure of the so-called "traditional"³ structures to protect women in modern Africa is explained in terms of the dispersal of extended kinship units.

However, even in the pre-colonial past there has to be some doubt as to the effectiveness of such strategies in ending violence against women within the culture, if the wider "feminised" definition of violence is adopted. Wamalwa notes that wife-beating in contemporary Kenya is viewed as 'normal customary practice' (1989, 71) and this attitude is found in other societies over the continent. In societies where physical reprimands of wives by their husbands is viewed as unremarkable and "normal", a distinction is often made between 'wife-beating' and 'wife-battering':

³ The problematic and generalising nature of the term "traditional" is recognised. However, subsequent uses of the term will often be without quote marks. The term is used as a short hand for those pre-colonial practices which are relevant to this thesis' argument relating to violence against women and gender relationships. Unfortunately, space and clarity of argument do not allow an exhaustive analysis of all these practices. The context, however, should suggest the inadequacy of a blithe acceptance of something called "tradition", implying instead how this can be used manipulatively for the benefit of particular groups of any population.

men who beat their wives are not 'abnormal' or deviant. Their conduct is culturally accepted. The women in these societies are not meek and accepting. They are compelled to tolerate such treatment, but would decidedly prefer husbands who do not beat them ... Wife-battering, on the other hand, is something extraordinary, possibly resulting in severe injury, incapacity or even death. In most instances, such behaviour is not viewed as usual or acceptable by members of the society.

(Brown, 1992, 2)

The traditional strategies to protect women only came into force where the wife, and her kin and/or wider society, felt the husband's violence against her was "unreasonable"; types of violent acts or behaviours in this category would vary in different societies. So, even if women would prefer not to be beaten, there is an expectation that they might have to tolerate some violences against them – for example beating and rape – because these are acceptable practices within marriage.

Furthermore, the primary purpose of most of these strategies was to sustain and perpetuate the marriage relationship. Beating wives in itself can be considered vital to the stability of the family and to society. Dorothy Counts suggests that 'society – women as well as men – may reason that the stability of society rests on the continuation of long-accepted practices' (1992, xii) like wife-beating; she notes her male colleague's fear that in discontinuing such practices 'the institution of marriage would be destabilized and family life in his society would suffer' (1992, xii). If a woman does return to her kin it is a temporary measure whilst she waits for her husband to negotiate her return. This may include discussions between her male kin and those of her husband, the offer of a placatory gift or some retribution being visited on the violent husband. Of course, if the violence continues once a wife returns, or is very severe, the marriage may end (usually acknowledged by the return of the bride price) but this was a last resort:

If the situation became intolerable, the wife could always return home. The latter course was one which all parties attempted to avoid, however, because a marriage was not a contract between two individuals, but rather represented the joining together of families and clans.

(Wamalwa, 1989, 72)

The novels and short stories being considered here reflect this uncertainty: women characters are shown leaving their husbands because of violence but evidence suggests the authors' reservations about this as a "solution" to domestic violence for women.

The most conventional use of leaving after a husband's violence is found in *The Dancing Tortoise* by Nna Otua Codjoe-Swayne. The main female protagonist, Jiffa, leaves after her husband has beaten her for asking questions about his 'endless phoney meetings' (1994, 10), why he is sleeping in the spare room and his unwillingness to talk to her (he is, in fact, having an affair). It is clear that she has no intention of ending the marriage, but only wants to express the depth of her anger over his behaviour and after 'weeks of quarrelling with her husband' (1994, 1), this is obviously a strategy to avoid marital breakdown:

Jiffa had sat up all night thinking of how to save her marriage, and had decided to go to Kpetwei and report the matter to her mother-in-law ... When she got up, she looked in the mirror and saw the bruises on her face. It was good to have evidence.
(Codjoe-Swayne, 1994, 12)

A significant difference is that Jiffa goes to her mother-in-law's home. Jiffa has no kin of her own but Mama Agawu has been like a mother to her, bringing Jiffa up as her son's promised wife. Mama is supportive but as a mother-in-law both Mama and Jiffa know that her role will be in reconciling the couple; after all Jiffa's only connection to Mama is through her marriage to Mama's son.

Mama does effect a reconciliation of sorts, even though she finds evidence of Vincent's infidelity. She promises her son to keep this secret from Jiffa, and only demands he apologises to Jiffa in front of her and returns to the main bedroom to sleep. Further, Mama denies the husband's right to beat his wife: 'You have no right to beat her. This is the last time I want to see such a thing. A word to the wise is enough' (1994, 187). The beatings Vincent administers are certainly couched explicitly in terms of correcting the woman. To Jiffa he says: 'I want to teach you not to be rude' (1994, 10) and after his mistress, Vera, confronts him he decides to

‘teach Vera a lesson’ (1994, 250). In the event he does not do this physically because of her pregnancy. Mama’s comment above does not deny the man’s guiding role in a marriage. What she points out to Vincent here, and later in the novel, is that if Jiffa ‘does something wrong, don’t beat her’ (1994, 267) but only reprimand her verbally. Codjoe-Swayne, makes explicit her denunciation of wife-beating, but there is evidence of implied acceptance of those very assumptions about the marriage relationships which enable and normalise men beating their wives.

Recourse to this traditional response to violence means the marriage crisis passes but it is not resolved. After the reconciliation, even as Vincent makes love to Jiffa he is thinking of his mistress, Vera. Mama’s agenda is not to assure Jiffa’s happiness but to sustain the marriage she has arranged for her son, so the reconciliation is made in complicity with Vincent. She undertakes not to tell Jiffa about his unfaithfulness but makes no attempt to extract a promise to end the affair. When Vera subsequently gets pregnant and challenges Vincent, in front of Jiffa, to marry her, Jiffa has to leave again for Kpetwei. Codjoe-Swayne’s solution to this crisis is for Vera to miscarry, leaving Vincent’s ‘mind clear to embrace his wife’ and Jiffa hoping ‘it would last’ (1994, 284). The very last incident of the novel perhaps suggest this is an optimistic hope. Rather than closure in a resolved and happy marriage, Mama dies unexpectedly and the final image is of Jiffa, screaming, being lead from the hospital by the area chief who once wished to marry her. Losing the one person who could reconcile Jiffa and Vincent, plus the reappearance in the narrative of a former suitor (who appears still to love her), implies the possibility for further marital disruption.

It could be suggested that one of the problems Jiffa faces is not having her own kin. It is partly this isolation which makes her vulnerable in her marriage. One of the factors for predicating the probability of wife-beating in any society according to Brown is the relative

isolation of wives: ‘a wife is in a much more vulnerable position and there is a far greater likelihood that she will be ill-treated if she is isolated from her family’ (1992, 12). As has already been suggested, isolation is seen as exacerbated in contemporary urban African society and this is in evidence in several texts. In modern Africa, the increasing movement of women away from family groups geographically may make returning impossible. The protagonist (Mara) in *Beyond the Horizon* by Amma Darko, moves to the city where her husband lives and cannot easily return to her natal home when Akobi becomes violent. Eventually, she ends up in Germany where neither Akobi’s nor her family are aware of, let alone able to prevent, him selling her into prostitution.

The loss of family structure through geographical removal, also affects Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta. Francis’ family had protected her in Nigeria as they appreciated her earning potential. When she moves to London to join Francis, she becomes vulnerable to Francis’ need to counteract his feelings of failure with violence. Her only brother is in Nigeria, but it is not only distance that compromises his ability to help Adah. He sends all his savings to her so that she can return to Nigeria but Adah does not accept his offer to let her return to his home. Emecheta does not make Adah’s reasons explicit but it is explained in the text that her brother has been shamed in some way when Francis complained to his parents in Nigeria about Adah’s attempts to use contraception. Adah’s brother is willing to accept Francis’ version of events and perhaps Adah is not prepared to return to a situation where, even if she leaves her husband, she will then be under her brother’s jurisdiction. Eventually Adah has to rely on British law to extricate herself from an increasingly dangerous marriage. Living in a different country from her kin does put her at risk but also enables her to act and achieve an independence that may have been impossible in Nigeria.

One difficulty in relying on traditional procedures is that women themselves might no longer be “traditional”. For example, they may forfeit their right to conventional help by having rejected accepted practices for contracting marriages. In Flora Nwapa’s short story ‘Man Palaver’, Adaku is asked by a friend if her husband beat her:

‘Of course not,’ she answered. ‘The day he beat me would be the day I leave him.’

Obiageli smiled. ‘Have you thought where you would go if you left your husband?’ ...

Adaku looked blankly at her friend. She had never given a thought to it. Now she thought, where in fact would she go? To her parents, who had never sanctioned the marriage ... ?

(Nwapa, 1992, 43-4)

Recouping this tradition for preventing violence (as advocated by some African feminists) has to be linked to women’s acceptance of other traditions such as women accepting marriages arranged by their family, rather than being entirely free to choose their own husbands. Like Adah, they may wish to be independent of structures which always place them as the dependent of men even if this is apparently for their own good. Many other female characters in the texts do not fit into the traditional stereotypes of “wife” (or “mother”); can such women expect or want to rely on the protection of male relatives as Ogundipe-Leslie suggests (1994, 160)? In fact, Ogundipe-Leslie’s very grammar implies the lack of agency women had in this system. She notes the strategy was ‘the withdrawal of the woman by her male relatives’ (1994, 16), making the woman passive. Using such strategies mean gender relationships remain imbalanced through men having to have a paternalistic relationship to women.

Other writers symbolise this imbalance in different ways. For example, Yvonne Vera shows how kneeling to a man can be used merely as a way to remind women of their inferior status. In ‘An Unyielding Circle’ a woman is forced to kneel by a group of drunken men when offering them food and drink, giving and receiving with both hands. ‘The woman obliged with a confused and angry heart’ (Vera, 1992, 77) because no genuine respect can be offered to these men. However, despite their drunkenness, it is clear that the men do retain power.

The women overhear them asserting that the ‘only way to control a woman is to beat her’ (1992, 76) and talking about ‘women they had thrown out of their homes’ (1992, 77). Such talk frightens the women and the glances of ‘sympathy and understanding’ (1992, 77) that pass between them show these are not idle boasts; the women recognise that these things do happen. Laretta Ngcobo in her preface to Miriam Tlali’s *Soweto Stories* points out that:

When men in the West ‘walk out’ they pack their cases, call a taxi and catch a train, out and away they go, leaving their wife and children distressed but protected and secure in the family home. Whereas in South Africa, when such times come it is often the woman who has to ‘walk out’, often with her children trailing behind her. She leaves her husband comfortable and secure in his home. African women have no homes as such; its [*sic*] always a mans [*sic*] home and his peoples [*sic*] home.’

(Ngcobo, 1989, xviii-xix)

Whilst pressure is brought to bear on women to remain with their husbands if the husband still wants them, they have to leave the home if their husbands demand it. Even if the husband abandon their wives, the home does not necessarily default to the woman. In many patrilineal societies, the woman would lose her children too as these “belong” to the husband’s kinship group.

Even when a wife has made the decision to leave, and has a family home to which to return, the texts suggest that they cannot always rely on this being a successful strategy to leave violent husbands. Near the beginning of *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara determines to return to her father, leaving her abusive husband in the city. Once she gets back to the village she is ‘met with very little sympathy’ (Darko, 1995, 28) and has to conceal the true purpose for her return:

I abandoned the idea of announcing my wish that the marriage be dissolved, something I had been intending ... father had used the goats and cows [Mara’s bride price] to remarry, and he definitely was not going to agree to my wish. So instead I said after all the rebukes that I had just come to have my child. And this message too I sent to Akobi in the city.

(Darko, 1995, 28-9)

Even in a conventional marriage which has been arranged by and approved of by Mara's father, Mara cannot rely on her family to help her. Darko has prefigured this in her description of Mara's father. His criteria for choosing his daughters' husbands 'took more into consideration the number of cows coming as the bride price than the character of the man' (1995, 4). There is no indication on Darko's part that the father has been corrupted by the changes in tradition wrought by colonialism or modernisation for him to so greedily "sell" his daughters to the highest bidder. She implies that even in the past women must have been vulnerable in a marriage system where the bride price could be seen as buying a wife. Darko finishes this chapter with Mara exclaiming Akobi 'left for the city ... with me as his wife ... and property!' (1995, 7). Where women can be exchanged for wealth, it is not surprising that they are not welcomed home as their permanent return usually necessitates returning their bride price.

Tsitsi Himunyanga-Phiri's novel, *The Legacy*, is set in Zimbabwe but similarly her protagonist, Moya, has not been welcomed back at her parent's home despite fierce beatings from her husband:

Before I could answer he hit me, two hard slaps across my cheeks that made me feel as if my face was about to split open ... He beat me callously as if I was a rug that he was trying to clean. When he finally finished I was limp and covered with blood ... This was not the first time that he had beaten me ...

Should I leave him?

But where would I go?

To my parents? They would just send me right back to him like they did once before, after the first time he beat me. They had told me then that he was my husband and I must have done something wrong to make him feel that he had to discipline me.

(Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 24-5)

Moya has been married at a young age as her father needed the bride price money to support his three wives and their children. In accepting her back, he would have to repay the bride price; it could be financial expediency which makes him blame Moya and send her back to her husband. However, he could also believe in the cultural norms that he is maintaining. The

parents can only explain the beating as a punishment for something Moya must have done wrong, in which case the beating is a “reasonable” chastisement. There is no reason for the marriage to end as might be the case if they considered the husband’s act as ‘battering’, hence extreme and unacceptable. Moya’s definition of the act as unreasonable – implied by her leaving – is not accepted.

Where such attitudes remain, it is clear that eradicating wife-beating will be very difficult. Himunyanga-Phiri could be implying the unreasonableness of the parents’ judgment by her description of the beating Moya endures. It is severe enough to incapacitate her, something Counts suggests is usually disapproved of in societies where women make a major contribution to subsistence (1992, 3). Ironically, Moya has been beaten as a result of her determination to contribute to the family income. Her husband’s objection has been that she had not obtained his permission to pursue this particular business opportunity. Himunyanga-Phiri uses her character to question a relationship that allows men to use physical abuse to assert their authority:

What right did he have to batter and bruise me like this? Not even my mother and my father, the ones who had brought me into this world, had treated me in such a manner!

Did the mere fact that I was his wife give him the right to degrade me in this way?

Was it necessary to use brute force to emphasize the fact that I had to get permission from him for every move I made?

(Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 25)

It is because she is his wife that he is able to treat Moya in this way. Because of the way marriage encodes gender relationships, the wider society (including the woman’s own parents) do not condemn him for beating her.

Himunyanga-Phiri links this violence with the dependence women are assumed to have on their husbands so that ‘a woman was a perpetual dependent – incapable of making important decisions and only able to survive under the care of a man’ (1992, 1-2). This assumption appears to be particularly engrained in Zimbabwe. It was not until 1982 that the

Government there passed the Legal Age of Majority Act which stipulated that women became autonomous adults at age eighteen; before then, pre-colonially and in colonial Rhodesia, women were regarded as permanent minors (Aidoo, 1998, 43). It is suggested in Himunyanga-Phiri's text that despite this legislation women are still popularly considered incapable of caring for themselves. As Moya's husband died *intestate*, the Administrator-General distributes the property, based on the patrilineal inheritance system. On the grounds that a woman on her own could not finance or manage this concern, Moya loses her home and business to her husband's brother. Himunyanga-Phiri's suggested solution to this is recourse to the legal system. As she is a lawyer by profession, this probably appears to be the logical solution despite that fact that it is legal authority that has deprived her character of this property in the first place.

The usefulness of legal systems in combating prejudices against women will be considered further in Chapter Three, but for now we can note that whilst it might be a solution for property and financial injustices, Himunyanga-Phiri does not utilise the Courts as a way for Moya to protest her husband's violence against her. The important message is that women have to be financially independent. This has to be coupled with emotional independence. Both Moya's daughters have disastrous relationships, and both are redeemed when they recognise their ability to achieve autonomy. For Himunyanga-Phiri the only way to avoid being beaten is to refuse to be a wife. This also rescues women from the humiliating widowhood rituals Moya endures: being abused by her dead husband's relatives; and having to sleep with her brother-in-law to be cleansed of her husband's spirit. She leaves little hope for a possible relationship between men and women that is non-violent, complementary and desirable.

Some of the novels by the Nigerian author, Buchi Emecheta, also suggest that being beaten is part of the cultural “package” of marriage which also includes security and a right to be “given” children. For example, towards the end of *The Slave Girl*, Emecheta writes:

Ojebeta was content ... She was happy in her husband, happy to be submissive, even to accept an occasional beating, because that was what she had been brought up to believe a wife should expect. For his part, Jacob worked hard and was a good provider.

(Emecheta, 1977, 178).

Emecheta does not describe the beatings Ojebeta might have to tolerate. Whilst Himunyangaphiri describes brutality to undercut the parents’ assumptions about a husband’s right to discipline his wife, Emecheta avoids vivid descriptions. The inference that beating is acceptable in certain circumstances, and must be tolerated if a woman is to have a secure marriage, would be untenable if the personal cost to women were made clear.

In Emecheta’s next novel, *The Joys of Motherhood*, for example, Amatokwu, Nnu Ego’s first husband beats her for suckling her co-wife’s child (the implication is that, being childless herself, she is trying to steal the child). She runs back to her father who tells Amatokwu: ‘I don’t blame you for beating her so badly ... but let me take her to my house’ (1979, 35). He is sympathetic to his daughter but cannot condemn Amatokwu for his reaction. Amatokwu is a good provider and has proven his sexual prowess by impregnating his second wife therefore he is “entitled” to beat Nnu Ego to discipline her. Her second husband, Nnaife, is perhaps less consistently successful but when he has a job he can pay his son’s school fees and give out housekeeping money. Thus, he ‘gained the respect and even the fear of his wife Nnu Ego. He could even afford to beat her up’ (1979, 117). Emecheta’s terminology here suggests some criticism but she still links the husband’s provision of financial security for his wife with being allowed to beat her.

The notion of rules surrounding wife-beating is reinforced by several authors’ condemnation of beating a pregnant woman. Vincent in *The Dancing Tortoise* forbears from

beating Vera because of her pregnancy: 'If you weren't pregnant, I'd slap you' (Codjoe-Swayne, 1994, 212). Other male characters do not let this prevent them from disciplining their wives. Francis, in *Second-Class Citizen*, resolves that 'he would not beat [Adah] into submission because of the baby' (Emecheta, 1974, 64) but when the pregnant Adah refuses sex in order to manipulate Francis her pregnancy doesn't prevent him 'shaking Adah brutally ... [until] she whimpered in pain' (1974, 88). She has to be careful not to deny him for too long 'otherwise it would result in blows' (1974, 89). Other male characters directly attack the pregnancy itself. In Rebekah Njau's novel, *Ripples in the Pool*, Gikere 'kicked [Selina] right in the belly ... [when] she was four months pregnant' (1975, 145). Akobi (*Beyond the Horizon*) beats Mara because she gets pregnant (Darko, 1995, 17). This is signalled by Amma Darko as abnormal behaviour through her female authority character, Mama Kiosk who wonders: 'What African man got angry because his wife was carrying a baby?' (1995, 17). By identifying Akobi as an 'African' man, Darko suggests that the valuing of children is a cross-continent cultural attitude. It is this particular attack on Mara that identifies Akobi as a 'bad man' with 'something inside his head' (1995, 17) not his physical abuse of her.

The recognition throughout each of the novels of all these male characters as "bad" does not suggest that the authors consider wife-beating as aberrant behaviour. It is the particular manifestation of violence (also found in incidents of extreme physical abuse in other novels) that sets them apart from "normal" African men. Thus Vincent, although often misguided, is not "abnormal" because he refrains from carrying out his intentions. The desire to chastise his mistress, and earlier beatings of his wife, are supported in the text as acceptable, as discussed above. The recognition that the practice has rules attached to it serves to confirm the integration of this form of violence against women into social constructions of gender relationships.

Similarly, Emecheta's links between wife-beating and masculinity confirm wife-beating as a part of "normal" masculine identity. Emecheta's examples suggest that notions of masculinity in Igbo culture are linked to a man's ability to control and discipline his wife, by beating her if necessary. However, for men to earn the right to do this, they have also to prove their manhood by giving their wives children and providing for their family. Wife-beating is not, in itself, a route to masculinity as represented by Emecheta. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Francis beats Adah regularly (and frequently proves his sexual prowess) but he still does not know 'how to be a man' (1974, 63). He fails to take on the masculine responsibility of providing for his family which leads to feelings of inadequacy. He attempts to bolster low self-esteem by beating Adah. These are not attempts to discipline Adah. This is recognised by his fellow Igbos. He is humiliated by Mr. Okpara who tells him to stop fighting with Adah and 'advised Francis to be a man ... get a job ... [o]therwise he would lose his manhood' (1974, 168).

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnaife hits Nnu Ego when she challenges him to go and find work. Nnu Ego's verbal and physical retaliation is very different from her inferred acceptance of beatings once Nnaife has work. In both books Emecheta's feminised descriptions of the men reinforce their lack of masculine traits. Both Nnaife and Francis' fatness is likened to pregnancy; Francis' belly was 'bulging like that of his pregnant wife' (1974, 75) and Nnaife had 'a belly like a pregnant cow' (1979, 44). Nnu Ego comments that 'marrying such a jelly of a man would be like living with a middle aged woman' (1979, 44) and notes that Nnaife's hair is not shaved but he 'left a lot of it on his head, like that of a women mourning for her husband' (1979, 42). It is interesting to note that Nnaife's job as a grasscutter, which allows him to take on a masculine role, also shrinks his waistline (1979, 119). Francis, however, seems incapable of taking on responsibility throughout the novel.

Emecheta's differentiation between men who have "earned" the "right" to beat their wives and those who have not implies a belief that women might have to accept beating as part of a "good" marriage (that is one where the husband fulfils his responsibilities). Brown notes that in 'some societies, a man may feel compelled to beat his wife in order to establish and assure his position within the male peer group' (1992, 12). Thus, the beating of wives is not only an accepted part of marriage in some cultures but also one way men assert their masculine identity.

Another Nigerian writer, Mabel Segun, makes this point more explicitly in her short story, 'The Mat'. Ogun is a good provider for his wife but his position in the house is challenged by his mother-in-law and subsequently his wife, in league with her mother. Friends urge him to beat his wife to bring her into line but he is afraid that this will also entail beating his mother-in-law which is taboo. Gradually his wife, using the excuse of her pregnancy, requires Ogun to take on the household tasks as well as his shoemaking work. In disgust Ogun's cousin tells him to '[b]eat the old woman and damn the consequences [or] ... run away, then, if you can't be a man' (Segun, 1995, 89). Ogun cannot and remains a servant to his wife and her mother. His reluctance to challenge the taboo and beat his wife even if his mother-in-law tries to intervene, compromises his manliness. A man's ability to beat his wife, it appears, is an essential part of masculinity.

This is sometimes shown to have been internalised by the female characters too. In *Ripples in the Pool*, Selina's husband, Gikere, finally beats her severely after for her disrespect to his mother. Later, Gikere tells a friend, Maria, that 'Selina has no power over me, now. I have shown her I am a man' (Njau, 1975, 50). Maria confirms the cultural attitude where beating a wife confers manliness by telling Gikere: 'You beat her up. For a while you played your role as a man' (Njau, 1975, 143). How far Njau supports her character's opinion

is unclear. Maria has rejected Gikere in the past because he is weak suggesting she appreciates the security conferred through a strong husband, even if this means him using this strength against his wife. However, two aspects of Maria's comments draw attention to Njau's questioning of wife-beating. Firstly, Maria identifies the need for a man to be 'physically and spiritually'(1975, 143) strong. Gikere lacks a spiritual dimension and this perhaps leads him to excessive violence against his wife. Like Francis in *Second-Class Citizen*, he uses wife-beating to try and prove his manhood. Secondly, Njau exposes the constructed nature of masculinity by Maria's suggestion that Gikere is playing a 'role' when he beats Selina. To fully embrace this role he needs to 'hit and hit [Selina] hard until she realises that [he is] a man' (Njau, 1975, 144). Maria appears to fully condone such action but Njau undercuts this by showing how, even after Gikere has beaten Selina bloody, she is not convinced of his authority: 'if [Gikere] thinks he has humiliated me by beating me like a dog, he is mistaken' (1975, 148). Juxtaposing these two female characters' opinions reveals Njau's ambivalence.

Amma Darko also acknowledges women's acceptance of male violence in *Beyond the Horizon*, even when they are the recipients. Her character, Mara, remarks:

I had grown wholly attached to Akobi, to his unfairness, to his bullying, to the strength he possessed over me. I didn't like what he meted out with that strength, and yet, at the same time, that same strength made me acknowledge him as the man of the house; as my husband.

(Darko, 1995, 44)

Darko shows how Mara can recognise Akobi's behaviour as unfair and bullying, and even dislike being physically abused, but still accepts those cultural attitudes which link male authority with violence. Jane Kariuku writing in *New African* magazine cites the findings of a recently released paper on violence against women in Africa. This stated that:

When violence against females, for example wife beating or female genital mutilation, is condoned by culturally prescribed attitudes and beliefs about women, it may be thought of as acceptable – even by women themselves.

(Kariuku, 1999, 47)

Similarly, field research carried out by Florence Butagwa in Kenya showed that 44.7% of women felt that their husbands had a right to beat them. In response to a question on what action they would take on being beaten, some would run away and return later but many would do nothing (Butagwa, 1989, 61-2). Yet, despite recognising the way in which the wider society encourages men to beat their wives, through its association with masculinity, the authors do not always condone the men's actions.

The first way this is done is to show the realities of female suffering in a violent relationship. This has been noted, for example, in Himunyangha-Phiri's novel, *The Legacy*. Explicit descriptions of beatings are found in nearly all the texts mentioned so far. The exception is in some of Emecheta's work, where "acceptable" beatings are not described. These descriptions are a way of bringing this practice into the public arena. The Women's Health Development paper on gender violence highlights the fact that women are often ashamed or afraid to report that they are being abused (1997, 7). Reinforcing this is the social and political view which usually considers domestic abuse between adults as private and to be dealt with internally by the family. Some of the authors suggest that increasing emphasis on the individual and the nuclearisation of the family in many modern African urban environments has worsened this attitude. Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* bemoans the fact that there is no longer any 'old woman next door' (Emecheta, 1974, 67) to intervene in arguments. In *Beyond the Horizon* when Akobi wants to beat Mara he closes the door on the shack. It is not acceptable public behaviour and when he is exposed as a wife beater, he is ashamed as 'only bushmen beat their wives' (Darko, 1995, 22). This may be in part associated with the fact that he is beating a pregnant woman as mentioned earlier.

However, it also suggests ways in which modernisation has put women at greater risk of more extreme violence in their relationships with men. Wamalwa notes that to improve

women's status in society the 'public's general acceptance of domestic violence' must be challenged, repositioning wife-beating from an issue that 'the public does not perceive as a problem' to making it a public issue which is generally condemned (1989, 73). This could backfire, however, if, as in the case of Mara and Akobi, beatings become private and invisible in the public sphere because they are no longer seen as an acceptable part of a marriage. By exposing the reality of the pain and suffering of women, the authors retain the public awareness of this as a practice but show its unacceptability. It is important to note that the female characters are not generally depicted as mere victims in these situations. As will be discussed in Chapter Three in more detail, women are seldom depicted as passive in the face of such treatment. Rather these descriptions are trying to bring home the real brutality here and shock into silence those who mouth platitudes about culture and tradition.

The second way is to develop a type of "anti-masculinity" in characters associated with wife-beating, by depicting these men as incapable of assuming other masculine responsibilities. In *Ripples in the Pool*, Njau depicts Gikere as a drunkard who cannot manage to build his clinic or keep his shop solvent despite being given vast sums of money by Selina, his wife. Beating Selina gives him momentary feelings of power but he cannot sustain this. Darko also identifies Akobi in as a 'bad' husband in *Beyond the Horizon*; not because he beats Mara but because he fails to fulfil his other masculine duties regarding providing for his wife (much as in Emecheta's work where husbands who do not provide are censured). Mama Kiosk tells Mara: 'Men buy for themselves, Mara. There is no law that says they shouldn't. But they buy for their wives too, Mara. And there's a law that says they must' (Darko, 1995, 13-4). In moving to the city, Akobi chooses to ignore these 'laws' which demand that husbands do care for their wives. Refusing this responsibility, means the beatings lose their meaning. After all, culturally beating of wives is part of this "care" as it is a discipline

provided for the good of wives, in the same way that punishing a child is to socialise it to operate effectively in society.

Once wives in the texts begin to rationalise violence in this way, they can question the inevitability of violence in their marriages. For example, Mara, in *Beyond the Horizon*, eventually concludes that Akobi beats her because he feels inadequate not because he feels that he is a man: ‘All his beatings of me were the protective covering of his cowardice.’ (Darko, 1995, 115). She rejects her earlier belief that the beatings proved his adequacies as a husband. Uncontextualised by notions of paternalism, the wives recognise that the beatings are expressions of frustration and assertions of superiority for these men. This is the first step to rejecting violence as an unavoidable part of marriage.

In considering violence against wives, Wamalwa notes that the ‘tendency is to treat each case individually, attributing it to the illness or the perversity of the man involved’ (1989, 73). It has already been suggested in Chapter One that the readings of the novels will suggest that the authors rarely concur with such popular opinion. By showing how these violent acts are part of a construction of masculinity and not the work of deviant men, they suggest that this is a practice that is culturally embedded and often enabled by social attitudes. By focusing the narrative through the wives and their suffering, questions are raised about the construction of maleness which incorporates violence against women.

The texts also imply that the notion of ownership in marriage is another thing that makes wives vulnerable to violence in their marriages. It has already been pointed out that beating of wives is often considered an appropriate way for men to train and chastise their wives; an indication that within marriage men take on a paternalistic role, rather than this being a relationship of equals. As Wamalwa notes, in ‘traditional societies [in Kenya], men beat their

wives when they felt that the wife had not adequately fulfilled her obligations' (1989, 71). The debate over the introduction of the Marriage and Divorce Bill in Kenya (referred to in Chapter One) that removed the rights of a spouse to inflict corporal punishment was opposed by several male MPs on the grounds that:

Corporal punishment was a necessity for disciplining one's wife. [They] recommended corporal punishment in order to teach wives manners since it was not only very African and normal, but necessary.

(Asiyo, 1989, 43)

Phoebe Asiyo also notes that the male MPs tended to address the issues jokingly. Being able to make a public statement of this nature suggests a high level of cultural acceptability for the practice; that it is seen as a humorous topic also trivialises it.

Despite legislation which recognises women as equal citizens with men, Cusack notes that research in Ghana found wives were still infantilised within the marriage relationship where their husbands 'make decisions for them, supervise and monitor them' (1999, 25). Members of the discussion groups stated explicitly that men felt their wives were their property (1999, 14). Some of the Ghanaian novels support this research. Jiffa in *The Dancing Tortoise* has been 'sold ... for a bride price' (1994, 22) as a child. When her parents die she goes to live with her future in-laws to be trained as their son's wife. Although the mother-in-law, Mama Agawu, is a sympathetic character, she does tell her son that Jiffa 'is here to serve you, and there is no need to thank her for everything she does' (1994, 34). Having ownership of Jiffa confirmed is possibly one of the factors which enables Vincent to rape Jiffa before they are married (this will be discussed in more detail below) and to beat her once they are married.

Aidoo, in *Changes*, interrogates the past and current meaning of marriage for her Ghanaian women characters. Aidoo seems somewhat cynical that marriage can be an

institution that is positive for women. The grandmother represents marriage in the past as a death for women's potential:

It was not a question of being an only wife or being one of many wives. It was not being a wife here, there, yesterday or today ... it was just being a wife. It is being a woman. Esi, why do you think they took so much trouble with a girl on her wedding day? ... She was made much of because that whole ceremony was a funeral of the self that could have been.

(Aidoo, 1991, 110)

Despite this, a conversation between Opokuya and Esi confirms that it is still not acceptable for women to remain single in contemporary Ghana, even though there have always been women who find themselves single:

'Our societies do not admit that single women exist. Yet ...'

'Single women have always existed here too ...'

'Oh yes, all over the continent ...'

'Women who never managed to marry early enough.'

'Or at all. Widows, divorcees.'

...

'I'm sure that as usual, they were branded as witches', Esi said laughing.

(Aidoo, 1991, 46-7)

Where circumstances do mean that women are single, they are demonised by their community. Women are only socially acceptable if they are under the jurisdiction of a man; their father, brother or husband. Aidoo uses her character, Esi, to experiment with ways to challenge these attitudes. For some time after her divorce, Esi remains single but as we have seen above this is not socially acceptable. Her second marriage is driven in part by the insistence of her lover, Ali, that they marry. This appears to be prompted by Esi's lack of need to rely on him, as much as any more general cultural unease at the notion of a single woman:

'How do I strike you?'

'Just kind of relaxed ... as if you don't need anybody'

...

'... Ali, there isn't a single human being who doesn't need somebody.'

'Does that mean you will marry me?'

'Must I?'

'Yes, Esi, I want to marry you.'

(Aidoo, 1991, 86)

Consent to the marriage does not appear to be necessary once Ali has decided he wants to marry her.

Esi's reservations about the marriage, where she will be a second wife, are compounded by Ali's insistence that she wears an engagement ring, something that Ali, in a clear parallel to colonisation, agrees signals 'that she has become occupied territory' (Aidoo, 1991, 91). This is not to suggest that Esi is coerced into a marriage that she does not want. Yet, Ali pressurises Esi into marriage by taking an 'indigenous viewpoint' and arguing that by refusing marriage on the ground of polygyny, she is betraying her culture for a colonialist viewpoint. Yet, Aidoo exposes his hypocrisy through his insistence that Esi wears an engagement ring, which, as Esi points out, is 'not exactly a part of our way of doing the two or more wives business' (1991, 90). Aspects of polygyny attract Esi; she will be socially acceptably married but she will not be pressurised by being the sole object of her husband's attention. However, being part of a polygamous marriage is not satisfactory in a modern, urban setting. Aidoo shows how Esi does get the time she wants to pursue her career because she is not exclusively responsible for the wifely jobs of cooking, bearing children and constant companionship but she does not have much access to the emotional and sexual side of married life either. Ali always refers to his house with Fusena (his first wife) as 'home' – perhaps partly because Fusena does embrace the traditional role of wife.

Generally the female characters in the texts desire marriage. The novels suggest that for the majority of women being a wife remains an important part of female identity. The issue is what "wife" might mean within specific societies and how shifting the meaning of the word (or creating another description for the way women relate to men in sexual, procreative and emotional ways) might make marriage more beneficial for women. For Aidoo, the traditional aspects of marriage, such as polygyny, are used contemporarily in ways which work to the

further benefit of men and the detriment of women. Ali misuses the tradition by not discussing his second marriage with his first wife. Traditionally, as Opokuya points out to Esi (Aidoo, 1991, 97), a first wife would have helped to choose a second wife but as Ali's father points out, economically there is no need for a second wife in the relationship: 'What tasks had you given [Fusena] to perform for which her energies had seemed inadequate?' (1991,135). Fusena is unwilling to accept Ali's marriage to Esi but in the text the men conspire to coerce her, by using the older women in the family to ask her to agree. Fusena cannot argue against them: 'what could she say to the good women , when some of them were themselves second, third and fourth wives?' (1991, 107). This is not to suggest that it was necessarily negative in the past but that it has less relevance in a modern, and particularly an urban, context. As John McCall suggests:

As both men and women increasingly seek work in commerce, civil service, and education, the logic of polygyny appears less viable, particularly from the women's perspective.

(McCall, 1995, 178)

Justifications then become rooted in other aspects of polygyny which were about the man's wealth and sexual prowess. These intensify the association of wifhood with the notion of property.

Aidoo also presents another model of marriage. Esi's friend, Opokuya, in many ways has a happy marriage; in fact 'some of [Opokuya's] colleagues always said unkindly, Opokuya searched for problems to talk about, so that she too would sound just like any other wife' (1991, 40). Opokuya manages all the tasks of a married women that Esi finds so impossible. She subsumes her own needs to focus on running her home, caring for her family and contributing to the household income by working as a nurse. This makes her a 'good woman' as far as Esi's husband can see. Yet, Opokuya's multiple roles undermine her contentment:

Opokuya was feeling sorry for herself and tired. Tired from being too conscientious. Tired of being too mindful of other people's needs and almost totally ignoring her own.

(Aidoo, 1991, 123)

Whilst Esi admires Opokuya's 'full life', Opokuya is jealous of 'Esi's freedom of movement' (1991, 56). Aidoo notes how both these women are caught in impossible situations. To fulfil all aspects of wifedom, women have to prioritise serving their husband and family, over any personal needs. In trying to find space for themselves, they risk their marriages and being ostracised as social pariahs. Esi's situation certainly highlights the difficulty of operating outside of "normal" marital structures. However, Aidoo uses Opokuya to suggest the problems of operating within them.

The two aspects of ownership and servitude come together in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*. Ownership of women is shown in the ability of Ojebeta's brother to sell her once their parents are dead, and in the ability of her relative to buy her. Emecheta correlates slavery with the other ways women are owned as daughters and as wives. After Ojebeta returns to her people after having been a slave she realises:

In a sense she was still not free now, for no woman or girl in Ibuza was free ... A girl was owned, in particular, by her father or someone in place of her father or her older brother, and then, in general, by her group or homestead.

(Emecheta, 1977, 160)

Once she marries she has to accept ownership by her husband to the extent that she cannot 'exercise her own individuality, her own feelings, for these were entwined in Jacob's' (1977, 178). As a wife she barely has autonomy. The effortless way one of her fellow slave girls at the Palagada's becomes Pa Palagada's mistress/second wife reinforces this association, as does Ojebeta's lack of choice in accepting the Palagada's son as a suitor.

This attitude is echoed in Himunyanga-Phiri's novel, *The Legacy*, despite it being set on the other side of the continent. On Moya's wedding day, with the pain of defloration comes the understanding that 'my life would never be mine again. I was now the wife of Saul

Mudenda. Moya Mweemba no longer existed' (1992, 17). The woman's concept of an distinct, independent self vanishes into the identity of wife (which is dependent on her association with the man) with marriage. The way rape prefigures marriage will be discussed later in this chapter; here it can be seen that it is the consummation which confirms the marriage's reality for Moya in much the same way that some of the raped female characters in other texts, find their rape assures their marriage to the rapist.

For Aidoo, when a man acquires a wife he gets:

a sexual aid;
a wet-nurse and nursemaid for [his] children;
a cook-steward and general housekeeper;
a listening post;
an economic and general consultant;
field-hand and,
if [he is] that way inclined,
a punch-ball.

(Aidoo, 1985, 262)

Definitions of wifhood in the novels support the multiplicity of meanings in the concept of 'wifhood' – many of which work to the detriment of women's status and well-being. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Francis defines a wife as 'to be slept with ... have sense beaten into her ... to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready' (Emecheta, 1974, 175). Mara, in *Beyond the Horizon*, believes, as she has been taught, that 'a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure' (Darko, 1995, 13). In fact, 'not obeying and worshipping Akobi would make [her] less of a wife' (1995, 16).

Another part of being a wife in many cultures is the duty to contribute economically to the household. As has been noted in Chapter One, in many African societies women were obliged to work outside the home. This allowed them varying degrees of autonomy and freedom:

Research on traditional Igbo societies reveals that most women were able to evade absolute male domination by embarking on independent income-generating activities, keeping their profits separate from men's income.

(Ezeigbo, 1997, 99)

In much of West Africa, women's role in food production was vital to sustain the family and surplus could be traded. Markets in West Africa tend to be dominated by women traders.

Brydon and Chant note the difficulty of generalising over the continent in terms of women's work, where 'a key feature of African economies is their diversity' (1987, 34). They also note the effect of religious ideology on participation of women in the economy; it appears that there is less female participation in waged work in predominantly Islamic countries (Brydon and Chant, 1987, 35).

This economic independence was not enjoyed by all women in Africa's past and contemporarily, when women work, this can be another exploitation. Women's work can be under-represented in parts of contemporary Africa as women disproportionately work in the informal sector and at illicit activities such as prostitution and brewing beer. The notion of women working is not unproblematic and the novels often represent women working in menial jobs for low wages, or at risky semi-legal and illegal work. However, as will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Four, economic independence is something that the novelists suggest should be cultivated as part of female identity. Economic independence allows women to escape abuse but importantly it is also one way to create a climate where abuse is less likely to be perpetrated and tolerated in a society. Some of the texts do warn of the vulnerability of women when trying to shift into economic independence. In *The Legacy*, Moya is beaten when her husband finds out about her trading activities which take her away from home for long hours. He has told her 'no wife of his would work' (Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 23), although given his expenditure on girlfriends and socialising, the income Moya generates is vital to feed, clothe and educate their children. Grace Ogot's short story

‘Elizabeth’ (discussed in more detail below) suggests that women’s incursion into urban work (here defined as a male milieu) can put them at risk of sexual abuse which is blamed on the woman because of their trespass.

Another aspect of a wife’s identity as listed by Aidoo is motherhood. Aidoo defines it as something integral to the meaning of marriage and wifeness. Using an example from Igbo culture, Ezeigbo notes that ‘a woman is required to have children ... failure to procreate jeopardizes her position in the family’ (1997, 100). Further consideration will be given in Chapter Four as to how the authors are interrogating the identity of motherhood and how far it relates to that of wife.

Marriage and Rape

Another important aspect of wifeness is to be a sexual partner. Sex in marriage appears to provide another arena where men can play out their domination over women. The research carried out in Ghana by Coker-Appiah and Cusack found that men used sexual neglect as a way to punish their wives. Cusack notes that:

Sexual neglect strongly reinforces the perception of women as needless. Thus their primary role sexually is to service their male partners. Such a perception of women leaves them feeling they have no right to express themselves sexually or otherwise.
(Cusack, 1999, 24)

Yet, using sexual neglect as a punishment tacitly recognises women’s need for sex (as a physical pleasure and an expression of love and commitment). As noted in Chapter One, this is a sanction that women have used against men (Silberschmidt, 1992, 244) but it appears, from the primary texts being studied, that these female authors perceive men in contemporary urban society as having little compunction about finding sexual satisfaction elsewhere. This option is not so available to women because public ally they are said to have no sexual needs. Women who sleep with men other than their husbands are inevitably labelled as prostitutes (that is using sex for material gain not pleasure) because it is impossible to construct their

behaviour in any other way. The strong identification of women as mothers fuels the assumption that for women sex is only necessary for procreation. Thus, women can only complain about sexual neglect if this denies them opportunities to conceive.

The additional sexual role women have in marriage (apart from bearing children) is to 'service' their husband's sexual needs. When women's sexuality is denied, their rights to refuse sex are removed, as well as their desire for sexual satisfaction. The interviewees in Coker-Appiah and Cusack's research confirmed that this was true within marriage:

There was a great deal of unanimity between men and women that there is no such thing as forced sex in marriage ... Justification for suggestions that forced sex has no legitimacy were linked to perceptions about the nature of marriage ... Women have numerous responsibilities to fulfill once they have entered into this contract including giving their husbands unlimited access to their bodies.

(Cusack, 1999, 29)

Similar attitudes appear to pertain in Zimbabwe, reflected in the law. Wendy Ndlovu, a legal practitioner, explains:

We do not have a statute dealing with marital rape. Here, in our country, a husband can rape his wife and the protection of the law will not be extended to her because she's said to have consented to all acts of intercourse at the time she contracted the marriage. This is an obvious gap in the law which needs to be addressed. It doesn't make sense to say that when a woman married ... she was consenting to each and every act of intercourse demanded thereafter by her husband.

(Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 134)

The episodes of rape in the Zimbabwean novels being studied will be considered later as they do not deal explicitly with marital rape. However, I will argue that similar paradigms operate to make women vulnerable to rape within and outside of marriage: the failure of a society to recognise women's sexuality (which erodes her right to consent); assumptions that men's sexual urges have to be satisfied; and women's role to 'service' the lust that they arouse in men. The two fiction texts which name marital rape explicitly are both set in Ghana. Perhaps this suggests that some women here too perceive forced sex in marriage as sexual violence.

However, as can be seen in Aidoo's text, whatever the legal position, the idea of marital rape is thought an impossibility.

In *Changes*, Esi's first husband, Oko, watches her move around the bedroom, naked, getting ready for work. He begins to get aroused, finally resolving to do 'what he had determined to do all morning' (Aidoo, 1991, 9). Esi's reaction to her experience is to define it as marital rape but Aidoo also gives her an awareness that society would not generally accept this view. One reason given for this is that as women's power is considered to derive from their ability to arouse men, it is thought that 'any sane woman, would consider any other woman lucky or talented or both, who can make her husband lose his head like that' (1991, 12). This opinion is stated by an invented audience of academics, imagined by Esi, being presented with a sociological paper 'The Prevalence of Marital Rape in the Urban Environment' (1991, 11). Tellingly Esi imagines the audience as '[o]verwhelmingly male', reflecting perhaps the reality of a gender imbalance in Ghanaian academia but also implying that it is often the men of the society who form and uphold these attitudes which expose women to violence. A more substantial argument Esi knows would be put forward is that indigenous words for marital rape cannot be found in a multitude of African languages therefore it cannot exist as an African phenomenon. As Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi points out this is a false argument: 'The issue here is not so much the (non)existence of a word for rape in the indigenous languages as the way in which language/(wo)men en-codes rape' (1999, 291) or in this case silences this female experience. There is no doubt in Esi's mind that she has been raped. Aidoo represents the intercourse as violent (although this does not make it rape *per se*) and afterwards Esi feels 'angry', 'sore', 'dirty', raped. The act of marital rape might literally be unspeakable within African culture but obviously, in Aidoo's view, this does not mean it therefore does not exist. Aidoo's insistence on referring to languages across the continent, not

just those indigenous to Ghana (for example Kikuyu and Ki-Swahili in the East and Xhosa in the South) suggests she considers marital rape is something silenced across Africa.

Interestingly, it is not so much the idea of consent, but the way Esi feels afterwards, that identifies the intercourse as rape. Esi is certainly unwilling but when she comes to her realisation that it was marital rape it is because she is 'still not feeling fresh or clean' (1991, 11) after her second (post-rape) bath.

Similarly Amma Darko's protagonist in *Beyond the Horizon*, the second Ghanaian novel, identifies one of her sexual experiences with her husband as marital rape. The main identifying feature is her feeling of humiliation afterwards:

He was brutal and over-fast with me, fast like he was reluctantly performing a duty, something he wouldn't have done if he had his way, but which he must because he must. And then he was up and I was still kneeling there, very much in pain because what he did to me was a clear case of domestic rape ... I emerged from the bathroom feeling embarrassed and ashamed.

(Darko, 1995, 84-5)

This is not violent in the way Aidoo describes Esi's rape, utilising words such as 'thrust', 'forced', 'plunging', 'thrashing' and 'pounding' (1991, 9). In fact in legal terms, this might not be deemed rape as Mara appears to consent to the act, obeying Akobi's instructions to remove her trousers, and kneel down. In fact Mara's other sexual experiences with Akobi appear to have been comparable and she has not identified these as 'domestic rape' but as 'love' (Darko, 1995, 21-22); these have been private and appear to be desired by Akobi. In the incidence of rape, Akobi is unwilling himself, only having intercourse with Mara because his male friend encourages him to 'have a quick welcome one' (1995, 83) and Mara is embarrassed that Akobi is ordering her to have sex in a semi-public environment. This is particularly disappointing for Mara who had imagined a 'romantic' welcome:

I used to imagine how he would gather me in his arms and press me to him. Of course, love this romantic never existed between us at home, I knew, but I felt that if he wanted me to join him in Europe, then at least there must be some development in his feelings for me.

(Darko, 1995, 74)

Akobi's only interest in her, it transpires, is to prostitute her to make money. The 'welcome one' is proof of his disinterest in her emotionally or sexually. It is this rejection of her as a "wife" (embodied in the pain of over-fast and purely physical sex) that makes her label it rape and her status as "wife" that makes consent irrelevant. It can also be seen that, for women, rape does not necessarily have to be a violent act.

The twin issues of violence and consent in defining rape are identified as problematic in much legislation pertaining to rape. Definitions in law state penetration and lack of consent as the two features of rape. Ayo Oyajobi states that, under the Nigerian Criminal Code, rape is defined as the 'unlawful carnal knowledge of a woman or girl' (1989, 16). However, she suggests that the law only gives 'farical protection' as women fear being exposed to ridicule and indignity during trials for rape. As already mentioned, if a woman is married the law assumes that she cannot be raped because 'by consenting to contract matrimonially she has given herself up to all sexual intercourse even when forcibly imposed on her' (Oyajobi, 1989, 18). The law legislates for physical and mental violence against wives and it is only under such laws that women can complain of forced sex where it is accompanied by severe physical violence. In the case of married women then the issue of consent becomes irrelevant. Oyajobi also objects to the way legislation defines rape only as something men do to women. This gives no protection to men who are sexually assaulted and perpetuates the association of women and rapability.

Alice Armstrong has made a study of rape and the law in Zimbabwe. She has found similar problems in the way the law defines rape. In Zimbabwe, rape is defined as 'unlawful, intentional sexual intercourse by a man with a woman without her consent' (Armstrong, 1990,

3). The first problem that Armstrong identifies with this definition is that sexual intercourse is defined as vaginal penetration by the male sex organ. As she points out there are sexual acts which are just as degrading and violent that can be perpetrated on women by men (although Armstrong does not acknowledge this, Ayojobi's comments regarding the sexual assault of men are also pertinent here). The notion of consent is a second difficulty; this is rooted in the interpretation of legislation. The presence of physical force is no longer a necessary element of rape in legal terms, yet it is difficult to prove lack of consent in court if a woman cannot present 'overt signs of injury' (Armstrong, 1990, 4) from her experience. This in itself is problematic particularly as 'recent research from abroad indicates that rape victims are more likely to react not by struggling, but by submitting in order to protect their lives' (Armstrong, 1990, 4). However, there are other more culturally specific behaviours in some African contexts which blur notions of consent.

Catherine MacKinnon, in exploring rape in British society and law, notes the problem of consent where women are 'socialised to passive receptivity; may have or perceive no alternative to acquiescence' (1989, 177). It has already been noted that many African women are socialised to be submissive, as wives, in accepting arranged marriages and the authority of their fathers and husbands (and other male kin). Notions of ownership and the "proper" behaviour for women can mitigate against women violently rejecting men's unwanted sexual advances.

However, there are customs amongst the Shona in Zimbabwe that Armstrong describes where women are expected to fight any sexual advances, desirable or unwanted, whoever they are from, including husbands:

[a woman] is expected to refuse sexual advances at all times, for fear of being thought a prostitute. The man, on the other hand, is expected to fight for sexual favours even to the extent of using violence to obtain his wishes. This affects the question of what is

rape and what is not, in the sense that it affects the determination of when a woman has consented, and when a man is aware that a woman is not consenting.

(Armstrong, 1990, 19-20)

This can be linked with the high value placed on female virginity at marriage in Shona culture; the more a bride fights, the more sexually “pure” she is assumed to be. With such cultural attitudes in place, violent sexual experiences become normalised in certain circumstances and thus ideas of what constitutes rape need to be rethought. As MacKinnon explains:

Perhaps the wrong of rape has proved so difficult to define because the unquestionable starting point has been that rape is defined as distinct from intercourse, while for women it is difficult to distinguish the two under conditions of male dominance.

(MacKinnon, 1989, 174)

Violence in sexual encounters are not limited to the Shona in Zimbabwe. Other cultures as widespread as the Nandi in Kenya (Langley, 1979, 91), the nomads of Somalia (Lewis, 1955, 112), groups in Swazi society (Armstrong, 1987, 268-9) and Nigeria (Segun, 1995, 25) customarily expected women to fight off their new husbands and the husbands to take their sexual rights by force.

Mabel Segun, from Nigeria, in her short story, ‘The Feast’, writes of a wedding night where a man finds his new wife resisting his efforts to consummate their marriage:

Inside, a struggle was going on in the bridal chamber. But the young man was not daunted. He had been told what to expect. ‘They always fight at first,’ an old uncle who had six wives had told him, ‘but don’t you take any notice. Just carry on.’ And carry on he did. He pushed her flat on the bed and she fought back with all her might, as she had been told all virgins did. But in the end she was subdued.

(Segun, 1995, 25)

This is not only to reassure the man that his wife is a virgin but also a signal to the wider community that her family has brought her up properly. The women outside the hut where the consummation is taking place are reassured that the bride must be virtuous as ‘it was taking so long’ (1995, 25). However, this non-virgin bride’s resistance is partly prompted by fear. By behaving as she has been told virgins do, she hopes to convince her husband that she is one

too. Of course the struggle is only a symbol of the physical evidence that has to be produced for those women waiting outside the house. Her husband refuses to “own” her once he finds she is ‘damaged goods’, suggesting that in some cultures the notion of male ownership of women in marriage is also attached to the man who takes the woman’s virginity. This works to end the marriage described here but, as will be discussed in more detail below, a man who rapes a virgin can be compelled to own her by marriage.

Traditional practices such as these can partly explain the integration of force and violence into the concept of male sexuality in some cultures. Some feminists think of rape as a purely violent act asserting power and not a sexual act at all. This is reinforced by the way rape and intercourse are differentiated, both legally and socially, in terms of levels of force in the man’s sexual behaviour rather than the point at which the woman feels violated. However, according to MacKinnon:

rape is not less sexual for being violent. To the extent that coercion has become integral to male sexuality, rape may even be sexual to the degree that, and because, it is violent.

(MacKinnon, 1989, 173)

Equally, intercourse that is violent is not necessarily rape, just as non-violent sex could also be rape. Mabel Segun begins to explore this dilemma in another short story ‘The Surrender’.

Under pressure Keke agrees to sleep with her boyfriend Chimele:

He started kissing her passionately. It was not until he had been doing so for some time that he suddenly realised that there was no response in her. It would have been different if she had struggled. There was a certain brute joy in mastering a woman’s resistance. But she neither responded nor refused.

(Segun, 1995, 12)

At this point Chimele stops and walks away from what he calls ‘cold-blooded sex’. His rejection of her is not purely because she is unresponsive but that for him even consensual sex should be violent to be arousing. It is even implied that for the act to be sexual for Chimele it has to be physically resisted by the woman. The complication is that from Keke’s point of

view, this is rape. She has been coerced into sex by Chimele but her agreement is not only because of his assertion that if she loved him she would consent. Keke is at University where, rather than behaving in an acceptably female way, she is ‘trying to break out of a sort of purdah and the men don’t approve’ (Segun, 1995, 4). To punish her defiance, the men at the University write a ‘scandalous’ story about her in their University magazine – presumably suggesting she is sexually immoral. Of course, this gives a clear signal to the other female students about their vulnerability to accusations if they displease the men. When Chimele, whom she admits to love, begins to pressure her into sex, her agreement is an angry response to the lies that have been told about her:

Why not? It was no Supreme Sacrifice but it would be a sacrifice all the same – a sacrifice of all the principles she has cherished for years ... Suddenly a terrible wave of hatred engulfed her – hatred for the idealist she had been. In childish pique she made her decision.

‘I will do it,’ she said. ‘Then I’ll deserve everything they’ve said.’

(Segun, 1995, 11)

It is not untypical that the hatred she feels is towards herself, not her persecutors, something discussed further in the next section. The situation has been exacerbated by the unwillingness, or inability, of her female peers to support her. The women side with the men in disapproving of her. The Warden of the College explains that they ‘dislike the purdah-like restrictions as much as you do and they resent you for having the courage to break out of it’ (Segun, 1995, 4). It is the self-hatred born of victimism that makes her agree to sex with Chimele and which causes her total passivity. It is difficult to call her decision consent yet also problematic, certainly in legal terms, to label Chimele a rapist.

The difficulty of making a differentiation between an act called rape and one labelled sex is seen in *The Dancing Tortoise*. Vincent’s rape of Jiffa is an act born of anger and thus, is necessarily violent. Even if Jiffa had consented this would probably have been the case because he is expressing the anger he feels for the judges of the competition he has lost. Yet,

for Vincent the rape is an effect of lust as well. He groans ‘I love you’ and engages in foreplay; afterwards, he is somewhat surprised at her reaction:

‘Didn’t you enjoy it?’ he asked.
‘I don’t know what you mean. I’m in pain.’

(Codjoe-Swayne, 1994, 171)

Jiffa’s response totally rejects the act as sexual for her. The representation of a difference in male and female perspectives is not unusual, but the conflation of rape and sex in the statement: ‘forced her to make love to him’ (1994, 171 & 180), used twice by Codjoe-Swayne is interesting. It implies that she perceives any intercourse as potentially simultaneously violent and an expression of desire.

In contrast, in Aidoo’s *Changes*, when Esi is raped by Oko there is no implication that he wishes to hurt Esi. Paul Pollard suggests that:

the apparent motive of many non-stranger rapes ... would appear to be sexual access ... for instance, in many date rapes the attacker would have been equally content had the victim consented.

(Pollard, 1994, 186)

Oko would have been equally content with consensual sex. If Esi had acquiesced, Oko would have had confirmation of his power to control the relationship, in the same way that physically overcoming her resistance confirms his superiority. As Pollard goes on to comment ‘power and domination expressed via the intercourse (whether consensual or not) should not be ignored’ (1994, 187). For Pollard, male sexuality does not just include notions of force but also control.

The western idea of romance can be seen to have introduced a further dynamic into male-female sexual relationships. Bessie Head wrote ‘escapist love stories’ for the supplement of the Golden City Post at the beginning of her writing career (Daymond, 1993, viii). Her novella, ‘The Cardinals’ shows a relationship which is abusive, mainly psychologically but occasionally physically. However, the story often uses the style of romance fiction in the

encounters between Mouse and Johnny. When Johnny slaps Mouse she suddenly finds herself 'drawn to the magnetic hollow curve of his back' (Head, 1993, 110). Some moments later, in frustration, he tries to throttle Mouse and slaps her again and this appears to lead to sexual passion – which is itself violently described:

She was hardly conscious of her agonised cry as his hard kisses ravaged her mouth. For her it was like a dissolution of body and bones with only a heart left; a pulsating heart awash in an ocean of rushing tornadic darkness.

(Head, 1993, 115)

Such writing, which draws on the western romantic fiction genre, could be said to be reinforcing notions of sexual violence within courtship and perhaps in expectations of marriage itself.

It has already been noted how in some contexts, the very beginning of marriage is marked by a violent sexual experience. However, it can also be seen in the texts how this not only affirms the woman's virginity, but that it is the sexual consummation of marriage that confirms the contract, rather than the matrimonial ceremony. In fact sexual intercourse can be considered a viable way to create a marriage without the ceremony having taken place. In Emechata's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego's new husband considers consummating the marriage as the act which will keep Nnu Ego with him; any symbolic representation of the marriage (such as the giving of bride price) does not appear to give such assurance:

He demanded his marital right as if determined not to give her a chance to change her mind. She had thought she would be allowed to rest at least on the first night after her arrival before being pounced on by this hungry man, her new husband. After such an experience, Nnu Ego knew why horrible-looking men raped women, because they are aware of their inadequacy. This one worked himself into an animal passion. She was sure he had never seen a woman before. She bore it, and relaxed as she had been told ... This man's appetite was insatiable, and by morning she was so weary that she cried with relief.

(Emecheta, 1979, 44)

Nnaife's brother confirms that his treatment of her was to 'make sure [she] wouldn't run away' (1979, 45). The mention of rape in connection with Nnaife deliberately draws attention

to the violence of the act, and although Emecheta draws back from naming Nnu Ego's experience as rape it is clear that she resigns herself to intercourse, not consents to it. However, whilst hinting at the reality of a rape, Emecheta then suggests that this very act is the deciding factor that crystallises Nnu Ego's decision that she has to stay with Nnaife. There is no suggestion that being "raped" might incur a wish on the woman's part to escape. Despite that fact that Nnu Ego obviously feels abused, she forgets her dislike for Nnaife, and becomes a "good" wife.

Another example from Emecheta's work shows how certain forms of marriage can be contracted through the acts of kidnapping and rape. The practice of kidnapping women for brides is found in various groups in the African continent, for example nomadic groups in the Horn of Africa (Lewis, 1955, 111), in Swazi culture where it was known as *kwendzeselwa* (Armstrong, 1987, 259) and in Igbo culture as represented in *The Bride Price* by Emecheta:

All the man responsible [for the kidnapping] had to do was ... force her into sleeping with him, and if she refused his people would assist him by holding her down until she was disvirgined. And when that had been done, no other person would want to take her anymore.

(Emecheta, 1976, 138)

This practice might not have been considered the best way for a woman to be wed, particularly as the bride price the family could demand would be lower than through more formal negotiations, but marriages contracted this way were as valid as any other. In fact, raping a woman could be a way of forcing her family to accept a marriage they might not otherwise sanction. This can obviously be exploited by couples who want to marry when their families do not approve, or can hasten marriage even where a man cannot raise bride price.

Even where an institutionalised form of kidnapping brides is not apparent, unmarried, eligible women who have been raped can be married to their rapist. In *The Dancing Tortoise*, Vincent's rape of Jiffa (whom he has been betrothed to since childhood) makes it more probable that their marriage will be formalised, not less likely. Whilst the rape is not

desirable, the fact that Jiffa is no longer a virgin means she is ineligible to marry anyone else. The worth of a woman to her family, provides an explanation for such marriages. There will be an expectation within the family that a daughter will bring a bride price at marriage. It appears that it is more important that this is paid than a consideration of the woman's trauma at being raped. This is not necessarily an impulse of greed. It is also important to a woman's identity that she is married; something that it might be difficult for her to achieve if she is not a virgin. Even if there is the possibility that she could marry without her virginity, it might be more honourable for the woman and her family that she commands a good bride price from her rapist, than being practically "given away" as "spoilt" goods.

Further, the community in which the woman lives, might well consider that she is "married" to her rapist on the grounds that he has taken her virginity (as suggested in looking at 'The Feast' above). In *The Dancing Tortoise*, Vincent's father blusters that he regrets arranging the marriage and that 'Jiffa would be better off making her own choice' (Codjoe-Swayne, 1994, 175). His wife, Mama Agawu tells him not to 'talk like that' but the irony is that Jiffa has no choice in social terms now that she has been raped. She has been considering the advances of another suitor in defiance of the arrangements her parents made for her. Just before her rape this suitor has told her 'you can make your own decisions if you want to' (1994, 168) rather than submissively accept her arranged marriage. Once he hears of the rape and subsequent pregnancy of Jiffa he accepts that 'his dream of marrying her was dead' (1994, 180); raping and impregnating Jiffa gives Vincent a right to her that no man can challenge.

Another West African example can be found in the sub-plot of Phanael Egejeru's *The Seed Yams Have Been Eaten*. Like Jiffa, Rachel has been pledged to Jiwudu as a child and at twelve has been married to Jiwudu and sent to live with his mother until she is mature. Rachel

is kidnapped by soldiers before this marriage is consummated and is given to a captain who is mesmerised by her beauty. He intends to ‘go and meet her parents and marry her the proper way’ (1993, 239). The alternative is to ‘marry her by force’ (1993, 246); that is to rape her and hopefully impregnate her. He tells her: ‘I confess with shame that I love you and I will not live to see you become another man’s wife’ (1993, 248). The Captain appears to consider either method a valid form of marriage, although his admission of shame appears to acknowledge that his actions in forcing her to marry him are wrong. He suspects, as his mother does, that she is already married. However, even Rachel appears to accept, like Jiffa and her community, that after the rape she is the Captain’s wife and not Jiwudu’s. The rites which have formalised her marriage to Jiwudu, are annulled when this other man takes her virginity. Once she has been raped, she ‘called on Jiwudu and her *chi* and asked them what she did to deserve her fate’ (1993, 249). This is the first time she has broken down. Her question and the abandonment of her fantasy that Jiwudu will rescue her, implies that the rape has changed her marital status permanently. The narrative structure of the text reinforces this. After this episode, nothing more is written about Rachel or her ‘fate’. Egejuru does not imagine that this part of the plot could develop into areas of Rachel’s continuing resistance to her fate, or attempted escape. A cross-textual reading with other West African texts, *The Joys of Motherhood* and *The Dancing Tortoise*, suggests that like Nnu Ego and Jiffa, she will now become a “good wife”.

Armstrong has written about how rape and marriage are linked in certain circumstances in Zimbabwe. She notes that ‘the man who rapes a woman can be compelled to marry her. This is a concept completely foreign to western legal systems’ (1990, 10). The attitude is not limited to West African cultures and similarly in Zimbabwe it is tied into notions of virginity and bride price:

when a daughter is raped or seduced ... [b]ecause virginity is prized, she becomes damaged goods, regardless of whether the sexual intercourse was with her consent, and her value as a wife is diminished. Perhaps this is the reason one person we interviewed defines rape as 'seduction where the man refuses to marry the girl'.

(Armstrong, 1990, 21)

As Armstrong notes, where there are such cultural definitions of rape 'the question of whether the woman has consented to the intercourse appears to lose its significance' (1990, 10). In fact rape, seduction and presumably consensual sex are conflated. Any idea of choice rests with the perpetrator; the choice of whether or not to have intercourse and the choice of whether or not to marry the woman if she is unmarried. Armstrong draws mainly on Shona culture in her research but the Ndebele writer, Barbara Makhalisa, appears to be drawing on similar attitudes in one incident of rape in her short story 'The Underdog'. Netsai's mother sends her away from drought-ridden Gokwe to look for work in Harare:

'Mama, who can I go to?'

'Baba vaMurenga will take you in.'

'But Mama, Baba vaMurenga is well-known for womanising,' I whined.

'He shan't send you away as Mai vaMarita did.'

'He shan't send me away because he will make me his wife.'

(Makhalisa, 1984, 12)

Through Netsai, Makhalisa makes the link between an idea of wifehood and a man's sexuality. Netsai's fears are confirmed as her uncle coerces her into sex using his relationship to her (he is her mother's sister's husband) to his advantage. He refers to her as 'my young wife' constantly and '[a]lthough he went about the "my wife" business in a jocular manner, one could not put it past him to put all that into practice!' (1984, 24). He finally traps her in the house with the doors locked and she is forced to have sex with him. Here is another incident where the woman does not consent but is unable to resist in any way that a court might accept as non-consent to sexual intercourse. Escape is impossible because she is locked in; if she did escape there is nowhere to go for help; neither is screaming useful – if anyone

heard, or if the police came it would only 'publicise the horrid deed' (1984, 28). All Netsai can do is give in and try to numb her mind and body to the act.

It appears that Baba vaMurenga would let her stay as his 'wife'. He has already shown willingness to give her money and under a polygynous system can justify her presence as strengthening the family unit, rejecting Netsai's argument that if they have sex it is destroying her aunt's home. Later in the story, Makhalisa notes Netsai's recognition that she cannot complain of her constant sexual exploitation as for other young women represented in the text, 'similar advances spelt extra cash which seemed to be all that mattered to them' (1984, 33). In fact Netsai does wonder 'if it was worth it to moralise every aspect of life' (1984, 33); if she rejected her principled stance, she too could exploit the situation to her advantage instead of feeling victimised by it. However, this would move Netsai from the position of victim, where Makhalisa appears to want to place her. Makhalisa presents her protagonist as a particular type of victim of circumstance. Firstly, she obviously wants to separate her from the "good-time" girls castigated by the pastor's wife. It could be argued that these girls are also victims, forced to play a game of survival by using their only asset – their bodies. However, their loose sexual morals and the threat they pose to marriages make them perhaps less sympathetic.

In contrast, Netsai dreams of a 'white wedding' and respectable wifedom. Further, Netsai is not a victim throughout the text. Her experience with Baba vaMurenga is not her first sexual experience – another reason that she does not put up a fight could be a certain level of resignation for a familiar scenario. During the liberation war, she has been 'rounded up by D.A.s ... [and] had to provide them with entertainment in their camp' (Makhalisa, 1984, 9). Makhalisa shows how this experience has made Netsai wary of casual sex for advancement – when a friend suggests that the only way to get a job is to sleep with potential

employers, Netsai ‘shuddered thinking of the harrowing experience with D.A.s during the war’ (1984, 14). She determinedly finds a job through respectable channels. After having to give in to Baba vaMurenga, her previous experience of forced sex makes her determined not to ‘buy [her] stay here like [she] bought [her] life that year’ (1984, 27). She knows Baba vaMurenga assumes he will be able to continue to take advantage of her because she is desperate, but she determines not to be a passive victim and leaves.

However, these experiences have also resigned her to being used sexually by men. She submits to Baba vaMurenga and later to her employer who loans her money ‘no strings attached’ then demands she repays it sexually. After this episode, Makhalisa lets Netsai become fully victimised by a hypocritical system when she gets pregnant by her employer, has a botched abortion and is jailed for breaking the law whilst the man who impregnated her is not required to take any responsibility for his actions nor even sought out. The psychological effect of rape on female characters and the way abortion is used, will be considered in more detail in Chapters Three and Four. For now, it can be noted that despite some feminist assertions that women must be represented as survivors and resisters, many of the raped women in these texts are portrayed ultimately as victims.

Strategies of resistance will be considered in Chapter Three, but Netsai, Jiffa, Rachel, Mara and to some extent even Esi are all victimised, partly by their rapists, but more dramatically by the cultural attitudes which label raped women in particular ways and by the social structures which characterise women as rapable. Netsai’s story expands on ways women are placed in a rapable position, some of which depend on similar notions of ownership which also pertain to marital rape. Where women are not owned by husbands they are often under the authority of their kin. The text strongly implies that Netsai’s mother must be aware that Baba vaMurenga will take sexual advantage of her but still commands her to go.

Baba vaMurenga himself uses his kinship to Netsai to coerce her into sex. The employer who rapes her significantly 'tended to regard [her] as a necessary item in the household' (Makhalisa, 1984, 29), that is as a piece of property. Grace Ogot suggests a similar attitude in her short story 'The Other Woman'. Jerry's wife is too busy working to satisfy his sexual needs so he decides to work off his frustration on the 'ayah'. When she resists his advances he shouts 'I do what I like with you – you are my servant' (1992, 53). It is this statement that makes Taplalai decide to submit, as if she too recognises her status as property.

It is not only notions of ownership that make women rapable but also cultures' ideas about the appropriate behaviour and place of women. Women can be vulnerable in the workplace – not as Netsai and Taplalai are through notions of ownership – but if they are perceived to be trespassing in a male domain. The clearest trespasser into the male work environment is Debbie who joins the army in *Destination Biafra*. Emecheta does not present this as a naïve action; as the critic, Bayo Ogunjimi points out, Debbie knows she will face ridicule and hostility (1997, 32-3). This comes from both men and women. The attitude of men encountering her in this role is that 'much as you are armed and in command now, you are still a woman' (Emecheta, 1994, 75) and the soldiers who rape her meet her assertion 'I am a Nigerian soldier' (1994, 125) with derisive laughter. Even when Debbie tries to protect the party she is travelling with against the hostile soldiers, one of the women pleads with Debbie 'give them your gun. After all you are a woman' (1994, 125). Female soldiers are not seen as competent in this role and her uniform does not prevent her rape.

In a country at war, whether civil or international, women are at risk. Like the rest of the population they are exposed to famine, brutality and homelessness but women are additionally vulnerable to rape. Brownmiller argues that this is more than a spillover of violence. Rape forms part of the soldiers' armoury and the:

body of a raped woman becomes a ceremonious battleground ... the act that is played out on her is a message passed between men – vivid proof of victory for one and loss and defeat for the other.

(Brownmiller, 1976, 38)

This symbolic use of rape in war is in evidence in Debbie's case. The soldiers identify the Igbo as the enemy so they kill the men in the party and rape the women. Yet, Debbie's rape is different than if she had been a civilian woman. It is informed by her position as an enemy woman but also because she had dared to try and usurp a traditionally male role. The second rape attempted on her by a soldier is to remind her of her female place: 'I am going to show you that you are nothing but a woman, an ordinary woman' (Emecheta, 1994, 167). For this officer, she is not a soldier, she is not even "the enemy"; she is only a woman, proven by her rapability.

Often women who are deemed to have removed themselves from the safety of a family environment are seen as fair prey. December Green suggests that:

[u]nprotected working women are demonized in a number of ways ... These women are to a certain degree cut off from their "respectable" rural backgrounds. Outcasts from respectable society, unmarried or "uncontrolled" women are labelled in such a way to set them apart and may experience a great sense of stigma.

(Green, 1999, 64)

This makes them vulnerable to sexual abuse. In 'Elizabeth' (the short story by Ogot mentioned above), Elizabeth is raped by the business man for whom she is a secretary. Her grandmother has warned her that she will get 'burnt' if she 'plays with boys' as a mature woman – a warning not to leave the rural family to work in the city (1988, 197). This could be seen to reflect the rural/urban dichotomy identified by Florence Stratton in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. Stratton suggests that women writers often seek to subvert African male writers' construction of female identity which labels city women as sexually loose and the village as a place of redemption where women are virgins or wives and mothers (1994, 53). In 'Elizabeth', Ogot appears to support this construction, not just because

of the grandmother's words but because these words are shown to be true through the narrative choices made by Ogot (for example, that Elizabeth does get pregnant outside marriage). This can also be seen in Makhalisa's 'The Underdog' in her representation of Netsai who is similarly seen to be a victim of licentious men, yet is clearly at risk because she is working in an urban environment. This is supported by the descriptions of her as 'a good girl' in the village, doing those traditionally female tasks of gathering wood, collecting water, cultivation and cooking.

Elizabeth's engagement ring does not warn her boss away from 'occupied territory' (Aidoo, 1991, 91). In fact this appears to make him more inclined to rape her. Perhaps he reads this as a sign that she is already sexually experienced and assumes that having one lover makes her available for any other. This argument is used by Rowan Tarquin in *The Rape of Sita* by Lindsey Collen. He persuades himself to rape Sita partly on the basis that she is married:

How come she accepts sex from Dharma, then. What's so special about him. 'Why should she accept him and not me,' he raged inside himself. 'There's nothing inferior about me.'

(Collen, 1995, 67)

Oyajobi identifies this attitude as a possible problem in some legal systems for women wanting to take a complaint of rape to court. In Nigerian courts the previous sexual history of the complainant is admissible evidence. Oyajobi suggests that this should be irrelevant as saying 'yes' previously should have no bearing on saying 'no' at other times and that any woman, including prostitutes, should have the right to decide with whom to engage in sexual intercourse (1989, 20-21).

Other assumptions can be made about women travelling alone (as Sita is). Another short story by Ogot, 'The Middle Door', recounts the experience of a married woman who has to

travel by train to visit her brother. She is accosted by two policemen in the night who assume by her appearance and because she is travelling alone that she must be a prostitute:

You give it to other men – who give you money. We must have it too, with or without money. Look at your painted nails. Look at your hair and polished face. You are not married to one man, we know it.

(Ogot, 1992, 31)

Her glamorous appearance is in contrast to the ‘simple housewife’, a ‘village woman’ with her provisions, encountered earlier in the story. As the woman does not conform to the policemen’s stereotype of a “good wife” they assume that she must be a prostitute and therefore available for sex, because this is the only other identity they can imagine for her.

Blaming Women for Violence

If women are deemed to be in an inappropriate place or improperly dressed, then they become rapable in popular thinking and also can be blamed for the rape. Ayo Oyajobi identifies some more of these common rape myths in her article ‘Better Protection for Women and Children under the Law’: the victim brought it on herself by her dress, behaviour, location; rapists are victims of teasing women; women are compulsive liars and are unable to tell truth from lies; women say ‘no’ when they mean ‘yes’; women like to be raped as they are fickle and like men to be assertive to help them make decisions; men only respond to women’s behaviour and cannot be expected to control themselves in the light of some of that behaviour; normal men do not rape, only sick, morally incontinent or depraved ones (1989, 17). All, apart from the last statement, are used to place responsibility for her rape onto the woman.

Generally, it can be said that the novels and short stories here reject the popular myth which typifies rapists as ‘sex-starved or insane or both’ (Allison and Wrightsman, 1993, 3). As already noted in Chapter One, such psychological explanations for gender violence cannot account for the levels of violence against women found in many societies, when violence is

defined more widely than events of extreme physical and sexual violence to include those acts that women commonly define as violence towards themselves. Also, the women writers considered here challenge the myth that women are usually raped by men they do not know in dark and lonely places. In nearly every case the woman is assaulted by a man she knows. Notable exceptions are women who are raped by soldiers. As discussed earlier, war gives us the clearest example of the way that masculinised institutions encourage gender violence. In *Destination Biafra* when Debbie's mother reports Debbie's rape to a border guard he is indifferent: 'Hundreds of women have been raped – so what? It's war (Emecheta, 1982, 129). 'The Underdog' also portrays rape as a wartime activity. As noted above, Netsai has been one of a group of women rounded up to provide 'entertainment' in the camps (Makhalisa, 1984, 9). Rape in war is not just something perpetrated on an individual level but is condoned and organised by the armed forces.

In most cases of rape, outside of war, there is evidence to suggest that 'the "typical" rapist is an acquaintance, probably an intimate' of the victim (Pollard, 1994, 172). This does not necessarily challenge those myths that imply women prompt rapes. Rather it reinforces the notion that it must be something in the woman's behaviour that causes normal men to act in this way. These myths are often so culturally embedded that they can be seen underpinning some of these narratives.

For example, in 'Elizabeth', Ogot shows how society can blame women for being raped. Village wisdom, supplied by the Grandmother, warns Elizabeth that 'when a mature girl plays with boys and becomes pregnant outside of wedlock, she destroys herself and eventually destroys the whole family' (1988, 197). Once she leaves the safety of the village and the female environment to work, unprotected, in the urban (male) environment, she risks getting pregnant and shaming her family. By describing the circumstances of Elizabeth's pregnancy

through rape (rather than coerced or consensual sex outside marriage), Ogot is clearly trying to present Elizabeth sympathetically to the reader. However, by deciding that the rape will lead to pregnancy and suggesting that Elizabeth's only choice is suicide, Ogot confirms that the village wisdom is true. Logically then, Elizabeth can be blamed for her fate because of the choices she has made. A further choice that she makes is to remove herself from the protection of her fiancé. He wanted her to stay in America, marry there and return together at a later date. She however 'insisted she wanted to be married among her people' (1988, 201) and returns home alone.

The narrative choices Ogot makes work against her presentation of Elizabeth as entirely the victim of a sexually voracious man. Attitudes about how women should behave in order to avoid rape pervade the text and implicate Elizabeth as responsible for her rape. Men's inability to control their sexual urges when tempted by women underpins the text's reluctance to blame Jimbo for the rape. The apparent contradiction of him setting himself up as a fatherly figure to Elizabeth and then raping her could be interpreted as gross hypocrisy but the description of the rape belies this. He is incoherent, sweating and 'his face was wild with excitement' (1988, 196). This is a man in the throes of passion, unable to stop himself because Elizabeth is 'lovable' and by being so has tempted him. The story reinforces the myths about rape, despite presenting the horror of rape and its consequences.

Similar tensions can be found in other texts. In *The Dancing Tortoise*, Jiffa feels guilty after her rape:

It being Sunday, she should be getting ready for church, but ... she knew she had sinned by making love before marriage, and somehow she would feel better praying for forgiveness in her room.

(Codjoe-Swayne, 1994, 173)

The act that Jiffa has called rape the day before has become 'making love' and she takes the 'sin' of premarital sex onto herself. The shift in terminology is necessary to make sense of her

guilt but this appears to be unconscious on the part of Codjoe-Swayne. Like Ogot, Codjoe-Swayne wants to present rape as an abuse men perpetrate on women. Vincent clearly physically forces Jiffa into intercourse and Jiffa struggles before she is overpowered. However, Codjoe-Swayne's subsequent adherence to cultural norms of marrying a raped virgin to her rapist, elides the issue of rape from the text. The issue becomes that Vincent has gone against his parents' wishes not to consummate his "marriage" before he has finished his education. So Jiffa's acceptance of guilt is never challenged explicitly in the text. It is undercut to some extent by Vincent's apology after the rape, and by his letter in which he apparently accepts the blame for his action. Yet the apologies lack sincerity because of Vincent's anger at Jiffa for calling the act rape and refusing to agree with him that she had enjoyed it. Vincent's parting shot to her – 'Don't bother to reheat any food; I'm not hungry' (Codjoe-Swayne, 172) – shows he does not expect his actions to alter the "marriage" relationship between them. Furthermore, careful reading of the letter exposes its contradiction. Vincent writes: 'There is no justification for what I did ... I was frustrated, but that is no excuse' (Codjoe-Swayne, 1994, 176). Yet he rationalises his action by suggesting: 'I did what I did because of how I was feeling' (1994, 176); presumably those feelings of frustration he has just denied are an excuse.

As in Ogot's short story 'Elizabeth', Codjoe-Swayne's description of the rape shifts blame from Vincent by suggesting he has no control over his sexual urges. Since Jiffa has come to live with his family he has wanted to consummate this marriage; Jiffa has had to beg him to 'control' himself (1994, 46) something which Codjoe-Swayne shows he cannot do. However, Codjoe-Swayne's failure is not to misplace blame on the wrong individual but rather an unwillingness to interrogate the way marriage is constructed within this culture –

allowing child marriage, encouraging women's servitude to their husband and requiring raped virgins to marry their violators.

This can also be seen in her presentation of wife-beating. Mama Aguwu may state that Vincent is wrong to beat Jiff, but her suggestion to let her mediate '[i]f Jiffa annoys you' (1994, 187) indicates Codjoe-Swayne's acceptance of cultural attitudes that women provoke violence from men. Similarly, in *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko often makes a link between Mara's behaviour and the beatings she receives. The first time that Akobi beats her, Mara wonders 'What had I done?' (1995, 11) and later she recognises a pattern of abuse:

When I didn't bring him the bowl of water and soap in time for washing his hands before and after eating, I received a nasty kick in the knee. When I forgot the chewing stick for his teeth ... I got a slap in the face. And when the napkin was not at hand ... I received a knuckle knock on my forehead.

(Darko, 1991, 19)

Darko appears to be suggesting a cause and effect situation, perhaps implying that if Mara made sure not to upset Akobi he would not beat her. In a society where women are explicitly beaten for not fulfilling their duties, such attitudes will inevitably be strong: if women carried out their wifely duties properly there would be no need to beat them.

Even where the female characters are shown to be blameless victims of male violence and the men are suggested to be responsible, the texts often appear to have little other purpose than to expose women's suffering. In 'The Underdog', as has been suggested previously, Makhalisa represents Netsai as victimised by men and, in her opinion, men who force sex on women should be held responsible. The wife who refuses to accept that her husband is raping the maids, preferring to blame the girls for being attractive and attempting to seduce him, is not sympathetically portrayed by Makhalisa. Speaking out against popular opinion in this way is important. It questions the perception of all urban, young, single women as predators determined to exploit older, richer men. Makhalisa accepts that such girls exist but wants to clarify that sometimes the woman cannot be blamed. However, the division of these women

into “good” and “bad” girls signals Makhalisa’s failure to engage with the ways society constructs men and women in relation to one another.

Makhalisa bases her criticism of violence against women on subjective judgments, perhaps even implying that some women do deserve the violence perpetrated against them. Emecheta shows in *Second-Class Citizen* how subjectivity, based in cultural norms can expose women to violence. Emecheta makes it clear that it is Adah’s unwillingness to conform to these norms that leads to Francis’ abuse of Adah:

To him, a woman was a second-class human, to be slept with at any time ... and, if she refused, to have sense beaten into her until she gave in; ... to make sure she washed his clothes and got his meals ready on time. There was no need to have an intelligent conversation with his wife because, you see, she might start getting ideas. Adah knew she was a thorn in his flesh. She understood what he was going through because he was suffering so. But although she was sorry for him ... she was not going to be that kind of a wife. Francis could beat her to death but she was not going to stoop to that level.

(Emecheta, 1974, 175)

The more Adah refuses to conform to ideal wifeness, the more violent Francis becomes.

Francis becomes so unreasonable, irrational and violent that Emecheta is obviously not condoning this attitude but as has been discussed earlier, some of her texts imply circumstances where men do have a “right” to beat their wives, and that women often have to accept this as part of marriage. Debates over who might be to blame for incidents of violence, or even refinements of attitudes about when violence might be justified are never going to prevent violence against women. Such arguments only serve to reinforce cultural attitudes that violence against women is acceptable. Only scrutiny of the social construction of gender relations and the movement of blame from individuals to institutions will enable a clear analysis of the reasons for violence against women. Once this is achieved, alternative structures which do not enable violence and exploitation can be explored.

Ama Ata Aidoo is one author who explores the notion of culpability. In *Changes*, Aidoo makes a distinction between the opinion of general society and her own views of ‘blame’ for

Esi's rape. She shows how Esi is aware that cultural attitudes would consider that provoking desire in a man, particularly your husband, is something of which to be proud (1991, 12). Putatively, in society's view, Esi has prompted Oko's action partly by consenting to marry him in the first place and certainly by walking round the bedroom naked. This makes Oko 'lose his head' (1991, 12). According to Oyajobi's list of popular rape myths, men who rape are only reacting to women's provocative behaviour and cannot be expected to restrain themselves given some of that behaviour; thus, Oko apparently cannot be blamed for raping Esi. Furthermore, if men are victims of teasing women (another myth identified by Oyajobi) then Esi is to blame for her rape because by walking around naked she has been sexually teasing Oko.

Aidoo distances herself from these attitudes, to suggest a very different place to lay blame. First of all, she does not imply that Esi attaches any guilt to herself. To allow Esi to identify her experience as rape, Aidoo does allow Esi to label herself as dirty. This could be considered unhelpful if Aidoo is trying to explore ways in which women should not be held responsible for rape. An alternative might have been Esi's explicit recognition of her non-consent to the act. However, in the light of cultural attitudes about men's conjugal rights it would be difficult to make this convincing. Aidoo balances the possible negative effect by identifying Esi's anger at what has been done to her. At no point does Esi feel guilt or accept that her actions might mean that she deserved to be raped. This is reinforced by her decision to leave Oko, not only because he raped her but as the deciding factor amongst several others.

Secondly, Aidoo emphasises the intellectual, as opposed to emotional, nature of Esi's decision. She 'decided to feel assaulted' (1991, 36) and is quite aware that the 'incident was not the only cause of her dissatisfaction' (1991, 37). Although Esi has moments of hysteria soon after the rape, her actions are not irrational despite her family's accusation that she is

‘mad’ to leave a marriage that is more than satisfactory in social terms. Thirdly, Aidoo satirises the imaginary academics, showing her disagreement with their attitudes. She contrasts their trivial intellectual word-playing and their determination to treat claims of marital rape as a joke with Esi’s very real, negative experience – particularly that she is ‘sore’, not just emotionally hurt.

All this does not mean that Aidoo shifts the blame onto Oko. He sincerely believes that the rape was an expression of his frustrated love for Esi. His claim that this was ‘part of his decision to give the relationship another chance’ (1991, 36) is genuine. What he does not express explicitly is how far his actions are rooted in cultural expectations of masculine behaviour. He knows that he is a figure of fun to his friends because he has not forced Esi to conform to wifely stereotypes but it is Aidoo who links this with the rape by placing this complaint just before he attacks. After the rape Oko wants to tell Esi he is sorry but ‘he was convinced he mustn’t’ (1991, 10). Again, whilst Oko does not articulate why, Aidoo shows that this feeling is a product of cultural attitudes which warn men ‘[i]t’s not safe to show a woman you love her’ (1991, 7) as a woman will dominate any man who shows deference to her. For Aidoo, blame does not lie with individuals. Rather rape is a product of marriage as a social institution, which forces men and women to conform to certain gender roles. How Aidoo and some other authors, for example Lindsey Collen, suggest gender relationships might change to prevent violence against women is detailed in Chapter Four.

Another way that women are thought to be responsible for violence against them is the accusation that women collude with violence against other women. This can be through refusing to intervene where women are being abused, or by perpetrating violence against other women who are beneath them in the hierarchy. Judith Brown notes that women who are elders, senior wives or mothers-in-law may participate in the abuse of young wives (1992,

11). Green explains this as a symptom of women's internalisation of the codes of behaviour imposed on them. Thus in 'many societies it is not uncommon for women to support and participate in violence against other women (even when they themselves are subjected to the same violence)' (Green, 1999, 12). Collusion of women in violent practices has been most usually identified with FGM. This has been described in terms of an abuse practiced by women, on other women, for the benefit of men. Theorisers on FGM suggest that this is an unhelpful way to view this as it ignores the cultural importance of FGM and the pressures women face to conform to social norms. As one of the interviewees in Shamis D-Ashur's book comments: 'If we circumcise our daughters there is pain. If we don't circumcise our daughters there is different pain. The community will not accept us' (1989, 3). This purpose behind the collusion mitigates against the "obvious" method of preventing FGM – that is legislating against it. As Linda Williams points out, this would criminalise women who carry out the operation, possibly burden them with guilt and denigrate women already circumcised (1996, 4). It has already been noted that FGM will not be considered in this study because it rarely features in fiction by African women.

However, there are examples of women using their hierarchical position to abuse other women in the texts, or colluding with men to exclude women who will not submit to male authority. Isolation from and rejection by other women is written about as a further damage for women who are already being abused by men. In 'The Surrender' by Mabel Segun, Keke's suicidal feelings are initiated by the persecution of the male students at her college but exacerbated by the hostility of her female peers. Rather than supporting her attempts to escape the 'purdah-like restrictions' imposed on women, they choose to resent her courage and join those who condemn her. In *Ripples in the Pool*, Selina finds herself isolated once she moves to her husband's village. The rural women are hostile to her city ways: '[w]omen spit when

they see me. I've no friend here in the village' (Njau, 1975, 71). The active hostility of the village women limits Selina's freedom; she describes herself as 'a prisoner' and 'suffocated' by this treatment. Her mother-in-law is particularly opposed to her, having disapproved of the marriage even before she has met Selina.

Mother-in-laws are frequently depicted as hostile as the woman is seen as competition for the son's attention and as a stranger to the lineage. Part of the bitterness is that the women are of course necessary for the continuation of the lineage. Thus, failure to produce sons is met with disdain. In *Changes*, Esi's in-laws want to 'hurt Esi: very badly' (1991, 39) because of her decision to only have one child (and that one a daughter). In *The Legacy* the birth of Moya's first child is met with contemptuousness from her mother-in-law: she had 'disappointed them by not giving them a grandson ... The family needed boys if it was to prosper; what good were girls' (Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 19). Moya is anxious during her next pregnancy in case it proves to be another girl. The common-sense view of Nnu Ego – 'Did not women have to bear the woman-child who would later bear the sons?' (Emecheta, 1979, 186) – holds no sway in a patrilineal society.

All the fiction texts mentioned so far challenge the notion of violence against women as simply acceptable. In some cases a close reading exposes the authors own acceptance of some cultural assumptions about violence against women but generally the texts recognise that wife-beating and rape, within and outside of marriage, cause suffering and cannot be dismissed as "traditional" and therefore acceptable. By looking cross-culturally at the texts, a picture has emerged of some common ways in which the social construction of "wife" enables wife-beating and marital rape across the African continent. Associated notions of ownership and women's "proper" place, whether as wives or daughters or as "good" women, are seen to

work with many rape myths to make women vulnerable to rape by men other than their husbands. Despite this, the female characters are rarely represented only as victims.

The analyses above have already begun to show how the events in the novels can model female modes of resistance; for example Himunyang-Phiri's example of refusing to marry where marriage means an emotional or economic dependence on men, or Emecheta's depiction of wife-beating as anti-masculine. As argued in the Introduction, literature and its representations of gender can influence wider cultural perceptions. Chapter Three will look more closely at the strategies of resistance employed by the characters in prose fiction written by African women. I have suggested above that effective strategies for ending violence against women have to challenge prevailing notions of gender roles and how these shape male-female relations. However, as the discussion on feminisms in Chapter One suggests, some African feminists wish to retain institutions such as marriage and motherhood intact. They suggest inequality and oppression can be challenged from within current systems; through the courts, for example. In Chapter Three the discussion will be limited to possible strategies that can be effected without radical changes to the social order. Their effectiveness will be assessed and their correspondence with the tenets of some African feminisms examined.

CHAPTER THREE

Models of Resistance

The previous chapter established that reading across the novels and short stories suggests the authors concur that women are vulnerable to violence in societies which view them as property. This chapter will consider how the authors discussed in Chapter Two represent some of the effects of gendered violence on women and the responses to violence that are modelled in the texts. Works by Lindsey Collen, Yvonne Vera and Bessie Head will take on more importance in this chapter (compared to Chapter Two). Additionally, the novel *A Shattering of Silence* (1993) by Farida Karodia will be examined. This chapter will not use the texts by Nwapa, Codjoe-Swayne or Egejeru.

A recurring notion in the texts being studied in this chapter is of the way abuse splits the woman's concept of "self"; severing off the body as part of that self. The novels show how body alienation can result in women attacking their own bodies, as they become "other" to the self (through suicide for example). Some of the authors attempt to use this alienation as the starting point for models of resistance. The problems associated with these forms of resistance will be considered. Another response to abuse is that the women characters turn their aggression on others; to their children, or their male abuser. This can be more easily assimilated as a resistance because of its active nature. However, some doubt is raised in the texts as to its effectiveness for ending abuse, or its potential for re-identifying women as non-abusable. Resistance can also be located in the utilisation of existing institutions. Some of the texts show women using the legal system, or structures of female solidarity, to counter the oppressions of their cultures. Whilst these seem to have some use, their limits in dismantling the social attitudes on which they are founded, will be discussed.

Alienation of the Body

Eva Lundgren has noted that when ‘a woman is abused, it is impossible for her to be *completely* present in her painful, violated body’ (1998, 192). Contiguity between the physical self and ‘symbolic’ self is lost; as Lundgren points out “‘she’ is no longer her body’ (1998, 192). In the same volume, however, Janice Boddy, discussing female genital mutilation (FGM), warns that the dichotomy of ‘Western foundational distinctions between ... “body” and “mind”’ (1998, 97) is not necessarily a useful model for considering the way African women conceptualise their bodies. The inclusion of FGM as a violence against women is questionable because of the way this practice operates to enhance and socially integrate the female body in most African cultures that circumcise women. Wife-beating and rape arise from different paradigms of female identity (as discussed in Chapter Two) and several authors depict their female characters’ disengagement with their corporeal selves during and/or after abuse. This could be explained as an influence from the authors’ westernised education (discussed in the Introduction) but even if this is the case, its usefulness as a fictional device cannot be denied. It powerfully exposes the devastating effect of abuse for female self-identity and self-respect.

In ‘The Underdog’, Barbara Makhalisa draws attention to Netsai’s body alienation after her uncle rapes her, by abandoning her usually conventional prose style to use verse:

*This body was no longer mine
No longer mine, yet mine
No longer mine, but my landlord’s
No longer mine, but my boss’s
No longer mine, but my mistress’ husband’s
No longer mine, but a machine
For every pleasure-seeking male
Life is no longer living but existing.*

(Makhalisa, 1984, 35)

Although Netsai still recognises her body as a part of the self to some extent, the emphasis is on how it has been objectified and appropriated through sexual abuse. It is now

conceptualised in terms of a mechanical thing to be used by men, and no longer linked to the thinking and emotive aspects of self. Makhalisa shows how this separation diminishes Netsai's ability to respond emotively and intellectually to experiences, only allowing her to 'exist' functionally. This can be unfavourably compared with her earlier, rural life. Here she could dance; an activity that appears to be used to symbolise a coherent identity incorporating a physical, emotional, spiritual and rational self.

Amma Darko in *Beyond the Horizon*, also suggests that abused women find it impossible to integrate the body into a notion of "self". Looking in a mirror, Darko's protagonist, Mara, refuses to acknowledge that her reflection is an image which represents one aspect of her "self". The body as the site of abuse is rejected. Mirrors are a frequently used by western writers to draw attention to issues of self-identity and Darko may be drawing on this tradition in her novel. For example, Trinh Minh-ha discusses the illusory nature of any "self" a mirror might show in *Woman, Native, Other*:

we persist in trying to fix a fleeting image and spend our lifetime searching after that which does not exist. This object we love so, let us just turn away and it will immediately disappear.

(Trinh, 1989, 22)

Trinh points out that attempts to find the self in a transient pattern of light must fail. For Mara, the fact that she is looking at a reflection, only a representation of just the physical, reinforces the alienation she feels from her body: 'I am staring painfully at an image. My image? No! – what is left of what once used to be my image' (Darko, 1995, 1). Trinh notes that a mirror 'reveals to me my double, my ghost' (1989, 22) but for Mara the doubling reveals something "other" than "me". Like Netsai, Mara connects tenuously to this body, but a time when it was part of the "self" is relegated to the past as something that 'once used to be me' (Darko, 1995, 3). Rape and the sexual exploitation of her body have severed it from her "self".

Both Makhalisa and Darko go on to show how, having disassociated themselves from their bodies, the characters are easily portrayed as having internalised those social attitudes which taint them and blame them for the rape. The Ghanaian study on violence against women found that women rarely reported sexual abuses, including rape, incest and sexual harassment, as the women felt shamed and were reluctant to expose themselves to blame and stigmatisation (Gadzekpo, 1999, 128). Netsai labels herself as ‘dirty and used’ (Makhalisa, 1984, 9) as does Mara, using much the same phrase – ‘dirty, old and overused’ (Darko, 1995, 3). Having cast off the body because it is abused, it becomes a disgusting representation to the women herself of the emotional unmanageability of their experience.

Thus, Mara views her body as merely an object of exchange – something that has perhaps been established in her youth when she is given to Akobi in return for material goods. Through prostituting her body, she can provide material things for her family: ‘Material things are all I can offer them. As for myself, there is nothing dignified and decent left of me to give them’ (Darko, 1995, 140). Her “self” in any greater sense than just the physical is worthless in this trade and even her body’s worth is limited by its “used” state. Such attitudes are supported by the notions of virginity and fidelity that are associated with being a “good” wife. In her short story ‘Elizabeth’, Grace Ogot shows Elizabeth shutting the curtains on the sight of ‘innocent children’ playing outside; she is no longer pure even though her virginity has been taken without her consent. Like Darko, Ogot shows her protagonist’s conception of her body as an object of exchange. In Elizabeth’s case, her non-virgin body is worthless because the rapist ‘had robbed her of the treasure she had hidden away for so many years ... and she felt ... that she had nothing left to offer her man on the wedding day’ (Ogot, 1988, 198). Her subsequent suicide signals her perception of her body’s worthlessness, as judged by the standard of her society.

In the examples above, it can be suggested that the authors do little to resist the way raped women are made to feel guilty and ashamed of an act that is forced on them, yet importantly, they draw attention to social culpability placed on women in cases of rape, and to the injustice of laying blame with these women. For example, Makhalisa explicitly states through Netsai that the man who has raped and impregnated her should be ‘in this gruesome pot’ (1984, 7) too. He should be made legally and socially jointly responsible for her pregnancy and illegal abortion.

Netsai’s final thoughts in verse clearly highlight discrimination against women in a society whose legal and cultural institutions always blame women for any sexual misdemeanor:

*Blessed is Adam
His deeds do not tarnish him
But Eve suffers open scars
Scoffed, scorned and alienated
By family, friends and community
Blessed is Adam
His crime goes unpunished
But Eve, the underdog must face
Degrading law courts and rot in jail
What kind of justice is this?
Tell me.*

(Makhalisa, 1984, 42)

Darko and Ogot appear to concur with this, although less explicitly. Mara and Elizabeth clearly suffer because of their abuse and the text focuses attention on this. However, whilst the authors try not to remit the abusers, it seems problematic imagining their punishment or social condemnation for their abuse. In *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko lets Akobi drift out of the narrative, only reporting his imprisonment for debt. The rapist in Ogot’s story finds Elizabeth’s dead body at his house and panics that the police will find out the truth. Yet, the story ends here and it is not difficult to see why. The likely “truth” the police would discover would be of consensual sex and a young women trying to trap a rich husband by claiming he

is the father of her child. Unable to realistically imagine that society would punish the men directly for damaging these women, the texts focus instead on the build up to Elizabeth's suicide and Mara's descent into drug addiction.

Several authors have turned their attention to ways women might cope with the identity crisis triggered by abuse. One set of strategies tries to imagine the possibility that the female characters can reclaim their alienated bodies. This often proves problematic in the context of the cultural isolation of the characters and the authors rarely succeed in finally presenting their characters with reintegrated identities.

Buchi Emecheta raises the issue of 'The Tainted Woman' (the title of Chapter Twelve) in *Destination Biafra*, but takes this no further than an acknowledgement of the social stigmatisation of raped women. Debbie will not report her rape knowing that publicising it will only bring ridicule and shame. However, Emecheta tries to subvert this branding of raped women as tainted, by showing Debbie reclaiming her "polluted" body and using it as a weapon to avoid another rape:

Allah will never forgive you now because you tried to violate a woman who has been raped by so many soldiers, a woman who may now be carrying some disease ... You thought you were going to use a white man's plaything ... only to realize that you held in your arms a woman who has slept with soldiers.

(Emecheta, 1994, 167)

This is effective in preventing the rape. The officer who has tried to rape Debbie tells her: 'I am sorry; if you had told me before, I would not have touched you' (1994, 167). However, this statement is not an apology or prompted by sympathy for Debbie. He would not have touched her because she is defiled: 'My mother would die if she heard I had anything to do with a woman like that' (1994, 168). It was suggested in Chapter Two, in relation to 'Elizabeth' (Ogot, 1988) and *The Rape of Sita* (Collen, 1995), that women who are not virgins, or assumed not to be, can be seen as more rapable not less. This operates through

assumptions that women who have already apparently consented to sex are accessible to any man. As can be seen in the quote above, Debbie's sexual experience with a white lover makes Lawal more determined to rape her. What makes Debbie taboo sexually is having had intercourse with soldiers – the use of 'rape' and 'slept with' as interchangeable shows her consent/dissent is irrelevant. This appears to be part of Igbo cultural belief. Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* reminds her husband, 'it is a curse in Ibuza for a respectable woman to sleep with a soldier' (Emecheta, 1979, 88). This makes Debbie's strategy effective in this particular instance but in terms of a general model of female resistance to abuse it is a problematic strategy. In other cultural contexts it is not a means of avoiding rape: for example, in the Zimbabwean text 'The Underdog', Netsai is raped by her uncle and her employed despite her sexual experiences during the war. Furthermore, it relies on women already having been abused and could be considered as sustaining women's feelings of self-loathing associated with rape.

In *Beyond the Horizon*, Darko also tries to allow Mara, to assert possession of her body (before finally rejecting it as discussed above). She states 'I am still me' (1995, 127) and claims to be autonomous:

Why couldn't I take control of my own life ...? If I was sleeping with men and charging them for it, it was me giving myself to them. The body being used and misused belonged to me.

(Darko, 1995, 118)

However, the same problematic notion of ownership which objectifies the body pertains.

Mara may feel she currently owns her body but is still involved in a process of exchange – 'giving' herself, or at least the physical part of herself. Conceptualising the body in this way, will always allow ownership to pass into other hands. In fact, other terminology used in the novel denies Mara's claim to her physical self. She has been 'given away' to Akobi by her father. In turn Akobi passes her on and she is 'made the property of a ... man who owned a

sex nightclub' (1995, 114). Even when she escapes from the club she has to contract herself to another pimp becoming 'his slave and his property' (1995, 3). Significantly, towards the end of the text Mara hopelessly states: 'I have problems recollecting what I was like before I turned into what I am now' (1995, 139). Darko's lexical choice of 'what' over 'who' shows how far Mara has accepted the objectification of her body.

A vocabulary of ownership around the body is also used by Makhalisa in 'The Underdog'. Netsai asks herself: 'who was I if part of me was no longer mine?' (1984, 28). As the body becomes an object it can be owned like property. Even Netsai's assertions to 'own' her body in part is unhelpful for an integrated sense of identity as it suggests she views her own body, not just as alienated, but as fractured. Her temporary and insecure tenure is itself only partial. This suggestion of the body splitting apart is more fully imagined in Collen's *The Rape of Sita* and Yvonne Vera's novel, *Without a Name*. Here the dilemma of wanting to reject the abused body, yet also to retain it as an important aspect of self, is depicted in this image of the divided body. The authors show how their characters imagine they have reclaimed their bodies, but this wholeness is a self-deception and unsustainable.

In *The Rape of Sita*, Sita's first impulse during the rape is to repudiate her body, but then she tries to assert the integral part of body to self: 'What is in a body, she thought. It is but a shell. "No, it is me. I am my body"' (Collen, 1995, 153). However, Collen shows that although Sita imagines she has retained an integrated sense of her body in the "self" recognised after the rape, part of her body has been 'sequestrated'. Unlike 'sequestered', which means separated, isolated and secluded, Collen uses this legal term which means to 'temporarily remove (property etc.) from the possession of its owner' (OED, 1993). Despite the fact that Sita is trying to find a lost memory, her search for that incident is described in physical terms as 'diving for a body. For a corpse' (Collen, 1995, 31). By using this image

Collen draws attention to Sita's failure to still be "herself" after the rape. Her identity has been altered by rape and, in a society where paradigms of ownership and body alienation pertain, it is not surprising perhaps that Collen conceptualises the damage of rape in physical terms.

A clearer image of the divided body can be found in Yvonne Vera's *Without a Name*. Mazvita's rape is hidden by the low mist which obscured her legs as she walked to the river. After the rape, the invisibility of her legs is described in terms of a physical loss; she 'ran [away] with her two legs missing' (1994, 25). The abuse has not been of her whole body, but 'between her thighs' (1994, 29) and these are the 'parts of her body [the rapist] had claimed for himself' (1994, 29). Here, clearly, abuse does not just alienate the body but splits it. When Mazvita falls in running away, she discovers her legs are still there:

she fell down, looked beneath the mist at the burning hut because the mist has lifted, now formed a canopy over her head, and she discovered her legs, whole, beneath her body, and she discovered a large circle of bright yellow sun. Waiting, burning, naturally.

(Vera, 1994, 25)

Reference to the sun might suggest that this discovery is a positive erasure of the trauma of the rape, but the celestial sun is obscured by the 'canopy' of mist; what creates the yellow light is a burning hut. Mazvita regains bodily unity but this is literally in the light of the loss of her home, fired by the soldiers. The final three words invoke some kind of ominous presence in the conflagration associated with Mazvita's recognition of being 'whole'.

The language Vera uses to describe this post-traumatic body is often very positive: 'The silence was not a forgetting, but a beginning. She would grow from the silence [the rapist] had brought to her' (1994, 29). Mazvita is 'pure and strong and whole' (1994, 30), something she derives from the 'dryness' and 'emptiness' of her body. However, her lack of menstruation (dryness) signals anything but emptiness as she is pregnant. Ignorant of this, she moves to the city where she 'searched for who she was as she had realised that in the city, she was someone

new and different' (1994, 58). Yet, the bodily self that she recreates is around an absence. Mazvita has re-found her body but not necessarily her "self". Vera describes her recovery in terms of 'silence' and 'emptiness' as if her body has become the 'shell' that Sita refers to in *The Rape of Sita* (Collen, 1995, 153). Like Sita, Mazvita refuses to remember that she has been raped: 'He had never been inside her' (Vera, 1994, 31) she asserts.

Her realisation that she is not 'empty' but pregnant triggers a crisis in this frail "self" she has constructed since her rape. She feels 'her body had betrayed [her]' (Vera, 1994, 64) and wonders 'how could she have conceived the child without some knowledge in the matter' (1994, 64). It is as if her body, the foundation of the notion of self she has constructed, is an autonomous thing, actually acting independently of her "self" and in ways detrimental to that self. Furthermore, as her crisis deepens, the text describes a disintegration of her physical being. After Mazvita has borne and killed her baby, her skin is excoriated by the fierce heat as she waits for a bus (the non-chronological narrative puts this in the first chapter):

Her skin peeled off, parting from her body ... The skin pulled away from her in the intense dry heat. She felt it pull from her shoulders ... The skin fell from her back. She was left stripped, exposed, bare wide across her back.

(Vera, 1994, 4)

The presence of the child, where Mazvita had been nurturing an absence of memory and the birth of the child, physical evidence of the rape, reintroduces the discription of the body encountered first around the rape.

The authors are perhaps suggesting that it is impossible to represent successful reclamation of the body because the attempt takes place in isolation. Sita keeps her rape secret despite having strong support structures around her; Mazvita's community is dispersed by the attack on the village which is simultaneous with her rape. Social attitudes are not challenged by these lonely attempts, nor in Emecheta's endeavours to reclaim the "unclean" body. These authors cannot help but show that their characters do conceptualise their bodies as damaged

by abuse, however much they try to deny it. As part of a society that expects raped women to feel shame, they cannot individually cast off these feelings, nor utilise them to empower themselves because these emotions are directed at diminishing women.

The inability of the individual to change public (patriarchal) perceptions of the female body similarly undercuts Farida Karodia's attempts to use mirror imagery as empowering in *A Shattering of Silence*. The power of mirror imagery to show disjunction of the body from a self-identity has been discussed earlier; Karodia takes this image and uses it for a different purpose in her novel set during the Mozambique war of independence. By showing a woman touching herself as she looks in a mirror, Karodia suggests that if women recognise the self in this image, it can be empowering:

In the fogged mirrors, I caught a glimpse of the blurred outline of my naked body ... I became aware of my sexuality. I had never considered myself beautiful, always wondering what men saw in me ... As I gazed at myself in the mirror, I wondered if there was something in me that others saw, but that I wasn't aware of. I touched myself.

(Karodia, 1993, 184-5)

Touching herself (rather than the image in the mirror) signals the protagonist's recognition that the reflection is an image of "self", and that her body is part of that self. Her body, body image and sexuality coalesce as she slips her hand between her thighs.

This moment is disrupted for the reader, however, by the connection made between the "I" Faith sees in the mirror, which is not the "self" but only a representation of how it appears, and that which is seen by the male gaze – 'what men saw'. The full impact of this objectification of the body comes some pages later as Faith is captured by soldiers, beaten by the commander who then attempts to rape her. Karodia reminds us that the female body is vulnerable to assault precisely because of "what men see" in women. At the moment where it seems she will be raped, Faith begins to mentally escape from her body described by Karodia as 'sinking into the cave', 'drifting away' and descending 'into the abyss' (1993, 200). The

earlier moment of a coherent sense of self is easily destroyed by this attack because it is founded on an image / object too easily repossessed by masculine (patriarchal) notions of the female body and its sexuality. So whilst mirror symbolism works powerfully to expose the effects of abuse, it is less useful as a tool to empower women in the creation of female-centered identities.

A similar moment in front of a mirror can be found in Rebekah Njau's *Ripples in the Pool*: '[Selina] continued sitting, staring at her own reflection in the mirror and, as she did so, she stroked her face many times and smoothed it, smiling uneasily to herself' (1975, 117). However, for Njau the touching is not meant to convey confirmation of the body as part of the self. Rather it shows Selina's recognition that she is getting ugly, diminishing the power of her body over men. As in *A Shattering of Silence*, men viewing the female body and women looking at their own bodies are part of the same paradigm. However, Selina's increasing insanity in the text offers a very different reading of this image, referenced in the notions of the 'ghostly double' referred to by Trinh (1989, 22), and rooted in indigenous ideas of madness. This is a very different authorial strategy to those discussed above as it suggests a complete rejection of the body already alienated by abuse.

In *Ecstatic Religion*, I. M. Lewis suggested that women's madness, formed a type of 'feminist sub-culture' (1971, 89). Madness was usually diagnosed as some form of spirit possession and often gave women access to some social power through 'possession cults'. Lewis identified different forms of this phenomenon found in different areas of the African continent, for example, *zar* in Somalia, amongst the Shona in Zimbabwe and in Kenya (Njau's domicile). Lewis suggested that 'such women's possession cults [were] ... thinly disguised protest movements directed against the dominant sex' (1971, 31) and were a

‘widespread strategy ... [for women] to achieve ends which they [could not] readily obtain more directly’ (1971, 85). In *Ripples in the Pool*, Selina’s madness is well established in the text, identified by hostile characters – her embittered husband and the villagers – and the more sympathetic like her sister-in-law, Gaciru, who cares for her:

There was something abnormal in Selina’s eyes as she talked that morning, something ghostly. Her voice, too, sounded strange. She made funny shrieks as she talked and hysterically giggled now and again ... But somehow every time [Gaciru] thought of running away, she found it difficult to disentangle herself from Selina’s mad grip.
(Njau, 1975, 119)

Yet, Njau’s descriptions of Selina emphasise her ethereality. She ‘had become a moving shadow, a spirit flitting away through [the] farms’ (1975, 107), and after she kills Gaciru she ‘fled through the fields like a ghost at night’ (1975, 153). This seems less a case of possession, than the transformation of Selina into a spirit herself.

The link between madness and the spirit world is made in Ibrâhîm Sow’s *The Anthropological Structures of Madness in Black Africa*. This work fails to recognise the multiplicity of African cultures but, generally, explains that the ‘African’ concept of reality consists of three dimensions: the ‘microcosmos’ of everyday life; the ‘mesocosmos’ which represents the precultural world of chance, natural law and the spirits; and the ‘macrocosmos’ of the Order of the Ancestor (1980, 5-7). It could be suggested that Selina increasingly inhabits this ‘mesocosmos’; the ‘domain of doubles who are the “natural” twins of human beings’ (Sow, 1980, 6). As Selina stares into her mirror, she becomes doubled (as Trinh suggests), not reflected; one of her is still the microcosmic, cultured self; the other is the mesocosmic ‘precultural being that has not yet become [wo]man, [her] “natural” twin, as it were, spirit of the bush, the forest, the lake’ (Sow, 1985, 229). After Selina has strangled Gaciru, she flees to the sacred pool of the title, abandoning her microcosmic self to exist entirely as a disembodied spirit of the ‘mesocosmos’. The pool is place that ‘no man dare

penetrate' (Njau, 1975, 153). By assuming man is a metonym for humankind,¹ Selina is cast as non-human and incorporeal; it is as if she becomes one of the spirits of the sacred place.

The model of resistance Njau suggests here entirely discards the body which has been alienated by abuse. Disembodiment exculpates Selina from the murders she has committed; the characters in the text never even suggest she might be responsible for these deaths. The text does not support those social values which would seek to control and punish Selina even though she is a victim of abuse. In fact, punishment is impossible because this would have to be effected on the body (through execution or incarceration). Njau moves Selina into a position of power where, as a spirit of a sacred place, she appears to have the right of revenge against those she feels have betrayed her. Iris Berger, in 'Rebels or Status Seekers? Women as Spirit Mediums in East Africa', has written about the ways in which women can achieve status in societies where their "madness" is interpreted as spirit possession or mediumship. However, as Berger notes (in contradiction to Lewis to some extent) these female cults are thoroughly integrated into the social order rather than being transformatory in terms of women's place in society (1976, 170). Thus any power accruing to women through possession or mediumship is limited.

Njau's strategy is more radical as it removes Selina from the community whilst simultaneously giving her social power (of judgment and punishment). Selina is not so much possessed as transformed. Herein is one of the problems with madness being used as a strategy of empowerment. Either it necessitates women's alienation from their community because they cannot conform to acceptable female ("wifely") behaviour or it is limited in social terms, as the institutions of possession and mediumship contain female power within socially acceptable boundaries. Berger suggests women's raised status can be temporary and

¹ The date of the novel (1975) and other incidents in the text relating to the Pool (which suggest both men and women are at risk if they defy the spirits here) make this assumption tenable.

connected only to performing rituals (1976, 164). In Sow's terms, it has no impact on the macrocosmic 'Order of the Ancestors' which arranges the everyday microcosmos along patriarchal lines. Njau appears to accept the limitations of this type of resistance by not allowing Gikere, Selina's abusive husband, to be targeted for revenge by the Selina-spirit. Despite his individual weakness, he is still protected by those ideologies which reinforce his masculine and spousal authority. Njau's text, by not actualising Selina's rage against him (she has threatened to make him 'nothing but the dust of the earth' (1975, 54)) tacitly supports male, marital authority by making Gikere inviolate.

A more commonly used strategy in the novels, which tries to dispense entirely with the body, is suicide. In her discussion of gender violence in Africa, December Green notes several strategies of, what she calls, 'disengagement' (1999, Ch.5). One of these is 'escape' which includes suicide. For Green this is an effective strategy when it is threatened within particular cultural parameters, rather than carried out successfully which is clearly pragmatically problematic. The texts do not portray the female characters using suicide in this way (as a manipulative, calculated or culturally encoded response to abuse) but as a desperate effort to escape abuse, and to end their lives.

In Mabel Segun's 'The Surrender', for example, Keke is driven first to attempt suicide by seditious gossip published about her in the male run college newspaper. Her second successful suicide attempt is linked to this. As discussed in Chapter Two, Keke finds herself coerced into sex but is finally rejected by her boy-friend for being frigid. When he becomes a student at the university it prompts a crisis of emotion, caused by the unresolved feelings surrounding her earlier suicide attempt, and this sexual encounter:

All the hate which Keke had ever felt – hatred of the hostel girls, hatred of the cruel male students, hatred of society in general – was now concentrated into one blinding hate for Chimele. To her he symbolized all the forces of oppression, of humiliation, of scandal, that had always dogged her steps ... With all her strength she struck at him. (Segun, 1995, 13)

Fearing that she has killed him, thus prompting another scandal, Keke takes another overdose and dies. Segun's story shows how women are victimised in societies where men are given the authority to prescribe and judge female behaviour – particularly their sexual behaviour. Chimele will be able to manipulate Keke because he can provide evidence that she is willing to have extra-marital sex. Of course, as discussed in Chapter Two, Keke only agrees to have sex with Chimele because of these unfounded accusations; and the accusations have been used to discredit her because she is refusing to stay in her designated female place, as circumscribed by the male students. Segun shows how Keke is hemmed in by abuse and prejudice, 'symbolized' by Chimele, until suicide appears the only possible response. Her first unsuccessful attempt at suicide does not protect her from further abuse. The only way suicide can be effective in preventing further violence is where it is successfully committed, thus removing the women from society through death. By deciding on this fate for Keke, Segun emphasises women's victimisation in such a system, which is an important declaration, but it provides little hope for women's recovery from and survival after such institutionalised abuse.

Bessie Head similarly shows how Mouse in 'The Cardinals' is forced into a suicide attempt by similar pressures. Johnny has decided he loves her and puts her under unrelenting pressure to requite his love sexually. He has persuaded her to move in with him (putatively to help develop her writing talent) and pressurises her to move their relationship from platonic to sexual, despite her uncertainty. He moves his argument from discussions about if and when she might feel love for him; to refusing to accept her confusion about love; to threats that he might take what he wants anyway.

His domination of Mouse can be seen on the printed page, where Johnny's long speeches are interspersed with brief interjections from Mouse, which he mainly ignores (Head, 1993, 72-4). When Mouse tells him: 'I just want to be alone' (1993, 77), his response is to challenge her to a race along the beach, perhaps a physical way to prove his superiority. Mouse refuses to compete by running into the stormy sea:

'Mouse!' he cried in a stricken voice. For five seconds all he could see was the swirling, tumultuous waves and then the swirling monster ... flung her out ... She was dazed but conscious and had started to rise by the time he reached her. In an uncontrollable fury he slapped her hard across the face.
'You crazy clot! Why did you have to do that?'
She fell back on the sand in a gesture of abject despair.

(Head, 1993, 77)

Like Segun, Head shows how the dominant gender relations force women to take desperate action. Mouse knows she cannot win the race and, by implication, will not win the verbal argument either. The only way not to lose is to remove herself from the competitive arena. She does this by attempting suicide. Johnny is clearly distraught, yet his first reaction when he finds she is alive is to reassert his dominance by violence. In part this can be explained as his reaction to the fear of losing her but the text continues to reaffirm masculine power. Head does not give Mouse a voice to explain her actions. Johnny speaks for her, telling the passing (male) motorist she is just 'crazy', an opinion with which the motorist happily concurs. Johnny reinforces this back at home telling her he will not 'tolerate such stupidity' and will take her to the 'loony-bin' if she tries it again (Head, 1993, 78). Mouse is entirely silenced by the text except to apologise.

As in Segun's text, the attempted suicide does not remove or even reduce the assertion of male power. Johnny escalates the pressure on Mouse, increasing his use of verbal and physical abuse and emphasising her entrapment:

‘Mouse, we’re heading for a big showdown pretty soon. I’m on the waiting side but you’re never coming. I can’t wait forever.’

‘Please let me go away.’

‘You’d rather run away from a problem than face up to it and solve it ... If you’re a bit scared of sex then it’s simple ... If it’s me you want to run away from then it’s complicated because I can’t let you go. I just can’t.’

(Head, 1993, 105-6)

His rage at her attempted suicide could be explained through those notions of ownership already discussed in relation to marriage and marital-like relationships. It is not necessarily only solicitous, but also possibly anger at her attempt to resist his masculine right to own her, even against her will. Head, it appears, unconsciously accepts these attitudes through her silencing of Mouse. Johnny is in many ways presented sympathetically, determined to help Mouse overcome her emotional repression. However, Head’s choice to make Johnny Mouse’s biological father (unknown to either of them) adds another dimension to the relationship for the reader.

In the introduction to the text, Margaret Daymond suggests that this is Head’s response to legislation in apartheid South Africa which criminalised sexual relationships between different racial groups:

The unwittingly incestuous love which grows between Mouse and Johnny can be read as dramatising and defining her political anger – when set against the trivialising, power-serving prohibitions of the Immorality Act, the taboo on incest is a serious matter.

(Daymond, 1993, xi-xii)

This may be true, but incest also introduces connotations of the abuse which can be perpetrated in unequal power relationships. Daymond, by choosing to describe the love developing ‘between’ Mouse and Johnny, implies that this is a relationship of mutuality and equality. However, the end of the text reinforces men’s domination of their female partners (and possibly their daughters) by Johnny’s final determination to consummate the relationship through coercion or force. Head’s text too confirms that suicide attempts are not a successful

strategy to combat oppression. An escape from abuse can only be accomplished if the woman dies.

The other two examples of suicide that will be discussed here are in response to situations which compromise women's ability to maintain an acceptable social identity after abuse. Elizabeth, in Ogot's short story 'Elizabeth', knows that the loss of her virginity has culturally made her valueless as a wife regardless of how the virginity was lost. The trauma of rape is exacerbated by her subsequent pregnancy. Rather than this confirming a new identity on her as a mother, the pregnancy outside of a stable relationship becomes another way for society (in the shape of the nun she works for) to 'rebuke' her because she is bringing a 'fatherless baby into the world ... [a]nother destitute' (1988, 202). The rape has undercut her "proper" identity as a wife. The other identity available to women, of mother, appears to be unavailable because the pregnancy is outside of the context of marriage. With no other options for identity, the logical response appears to be suicide.

The idea of being 'nothing' is more explicitly stated in Yvonne Vera's novel *Butterfly Burning*. Phephelaphi has not been raped or violently abused but she is reacting against society's determination to identify her as a mother, and destroyed by her failure to subvert this identity or re-identify herself through abortion. Phephelaphi 'wanted an opportunity to be a different woman' (1998, 91). She wishes to create an alternate identity for herself than that shaped by her ghetto existence of which motherhood would be an inevitable part. To achieve this she applies for nursing training but '[i]t is not the being a nurse which matters, but the movement forward – the entrance into something new and untried' (1998, 60). The first objection to her search for a new self-identification comes from her partner, Fumbatha. He does not want her to do nurse training. He 'must keep her close. Somehow. All the time. He must make her belong' (1998, 59). To make a child together would be a way of binding her to

him. It is not in his interest for her to redefine herself away from socially accepted roles: 'I work. I take care of you. It is not necessary for you to find something else' (1998, 59).

When she finds that she is pregnant (invalidating the training offer), she finds it impossible to identify herself as a mother. Instead, the pregnancy removes her sense of self: 'She was nothing now' (1998, 91). This unplanned pregnancy prevents her 'movement forward' rather than completing her female identity. Her answer is to abort the child. Whilst she recovers physically, the mental trauma shatters her identity:

Phephelaphi walks in a stupor, unable to bury her pain; not clear if she has parted from death or life. Folded into two halves, one part of her is dead, the other living.
(Vera, 1998, 109)

The abortion has destroyed Phephelaphi's identity as much as the pregnancy threatened to do. Vera shows that despite her abortion, Phephelaphi's identity still incorporates motherhood, but of a mother who has destroyed her child. The paradox of childless-mother pulls Phephelaphi's identity to pieces. In cultural terms too, she has lost her identity by aborting her child. Her lover, and the father of the child, tells her 'You are nothing' (1998, 122). If she will not accept the role of mother, there is no other identity available.

Like Elizabeth, being 'nothing' forces Phephelaphi into suicide. Vera shows that Phephelaphi's second pregnancy is not a chance for her to redeem the lost identity of motherhood. She still finds the prospect of being a mother and not 'moving forward' nihilistic. Again, as noted in *Without a Name*, Vera uses positive language to describe Phephelaphi's death by fire. In the conflagration, she becomes 'lightness, floating':

She has wings. She can fly. She turns her arms over and sees them burn and raises them higher above her head, easily, tossing and turning her arms up like a burning rope. She is a bird with wings spread. She falls into a beautiful sound of something weightless rising, a blue light, a yellow light, the smell of skin burning.
(Vera, 1998, 129)

Whilst the final phrase appears to undercut the positive images of freedom, Vera insists that for Phephelaphi the pain is part of the restoration of her self: 'No whimpering moan or sob.

No rejection of suffering. This quality of pain can only heal' (1998, 129). Perhaps, like Njau's representation of Selina as a spirit in *Ripples in the Pool*, Vera moots a disembodied existence for women whose bodies have been irreparably divided from, or removed from their "self". Rather than clinging to a physical self, Phephelaphi is described as finding '[f]alling to pieces, easy, easier than she has imagined' (1998, 130). Phephelaphi's death is certainly offered to the reader as the beginning of a sort of freedom, albeit one that operates outside of "reality".

All these incidents of suicide are problematic because they rely on women removing themselves from these structures permanently at the cost of their annihilation. This is not helpful as a pragmatic model for surviving abuse. Neither do they challenge those attitudes and structures in particular societies which oppress women and make them vulnerable to violence. Resistance has to operate at this level if it is to reshape gender relations in ways which makes violence against women impossible. The texts highlight the impossibility of integrating the female body easily into notions of self in societies where women's physical being is considered the property of men. Whether the textual strategy is to attempt reclamation of the body, or to abandon it entirely as part of a female identity, it is thwarted by deep-seated cultural attitudes about the role of women.

Exploiting Institutions to Resist Oppression

When the female body is sexually objectified in a culture, it is perhaps inevitable that women do barter their bodies for material wealth. This has been referred to in previous discussions of Darko's novel, *Beyond the Horizon*. Mara sees her body as an object for exchange but this is in the context of western prostitution (this part of the novel is set in Germany). The more usual use of women using their bodies for material gain is found in the authors' depiction of "good-time" girls. As women's sexual liberation becomes part of contemporary Africa's urban scene, it could be suggested that this is a way for women to

empower themselves, by sexually exploiting men. It is easy to demonise such girls as hedonistic pleasure seekers who destroy the family for their own selfish pleasures. Chapter Two has already noted Makhalisa's division of single young women into "good" girls like Netsai, whose aspirations of a respectable life are destroyed through victimisation; and "good-time" girls who:

can hardly wait for Friday to come so that they [can] drive out in flashy cars with men – most of them husbands and fathers – to have a good time.

(Makhalisa, 1984, 20)

The Pastor's Wife in 'The Underdog' continues her condemnation of these girls and warns of the consequences of such behaviour: 'They think they are having fun, yet there is always a heavy price to pay afterwards' (1984, 20). Yet, reading Makhalisa's text closely, it appears that there are more complex issues operating around this stereotype of the good-time girl which erode the assumption that they are simply the exploiters in such a relationship. These are linked with previously discussed ideas of women as property, the value of daughters to a family and the expectation that women only should aspire to be wives. So whilst such relationships might not easily be labelled as abusive, they are worth considering as part of this thesis because they operate within the same paradigms which make women socially vulnerable to violence. Additionally, the texts appear to suggest that to survive in an urban environment, women are forced into particular types of behaviour because of their desire to improve their lives materially and through beliefs about women's sexual availability. This particularly applies to young, single women living in an cities and towns.

To take an example from another Zimbabwean text, *The Legacy*, Himunyanga-Phiri shows how one of Moya's daughters uses rich men to try and ensure a certain standard of living:

In her determination to have a comfortable life [Mazuba] never stopped to think about the situations she put herself in ... She thought that having to give herself to different men was part of the process ... She just saw it as a way of acquiring material things; if

she wanted a new dress or a pair of shoes there was always a man ready to part with his money.

(Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 45)

Mazuba's ultimate goal is to marry one of these rich men because just to be a wife is not enough. The example of her married sister who lives in a cramped house, only being able to afford basic necessities, makes Mazuba determined to marry someone rich and 'that if she wanted to meet someone well-off she had to be in the right position' (1992, 44). Her education and career choices are shaped by this ambition.

Becoming a very good secretary puts Mazuba in contact with wealthy (married) men, and although they only appear to be interested in her as a girl-friend, she persists in her belief that one of them will be persuaded to marry her. The intersecting desires to be married and to have material comfort, make it appear to Mazuba that to "prostitute" herself is the only way to her goal. Himunyanga-Phiri attaches this label to Mazuba's behaviour through the mother's comments but Mazuba is not a prostitute in the conventional (western) sense. She is exchanging sex for goods or money but only with a series of relatively long-term lovers. This places her more as a "mistress" but does not afford her sexual freedom or the autonomy a wife might lack. Because she is still tied to one man, she is expected to be available for her current lover at all times:

He expected her always to be there and, if she wasn't, he would sit and wait for her, getting more and more annoyed that she had not been at home when he arrived. If he arrived at night then she would be in serious trouble as he would immediately assume that she had gone out with another man.

(Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 46)

From her lover's point of view, it appears, she is still exclusively "his" even though they are not formally married. Mazuba's position is somewhere between a wife and a mistress, without the benefits of either. As she acknowledges, she owes 'her job, her house and most of the money that pays for her expenses' (1992, 46) to her lover. To disobey his wishes in any way jeopardises her position as does pressurising him to formalise the relationship through

marriage. Mazuba's pregnancy causes a breach with one lover; yet, having two children with another man, at his insistence, does not make him any more inclined to marry her. Once these relationships end she has no claim to any property which she would as an estranged wife. This traps her in a vicious circle of dependence.

It appears to be this dependency that Himunyanga-Phiri decries. Rather than focusing on the morality of such relationships (like Makhalisa), Himunyanga-Phiri understands her character's desire to improve her material circumstances. The issue, as expressed by Mazuba's mother (Moya) is that Mazuba has the ability to:

get a good job on her own, a home of her own with her own furniture. If she worked hard enough she could get her own car and need not rely on anyone.

(Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 50-51)

Mazuba is not morally judged (like the good-time girls in Makhalisa's short story) but is shown to be making herself vulnerable, not empowered, through using her body in this way.

Whilst Makhalisa appears to disapprove of extra-marital affairs, this is not to suggest she censures any attempt women make to better themselves. In 'The Underdog', Netsai's unwillingness to settle for a village husband is treated sympathetically:

school had given me a taste of a better life I could live as an elite woman. I did not want to have to struggle as my parents had ... living from hand to mouth and never sure where the next meal would come from ... I did not anticipate having to respond to marrying a poor struggling nobody.

(Makhalisa, 1984, 8)

Netsai has a 'yearning that often surfaced ... to come across a well-to-do man who would marry [her] and give [her] a good life' (1984, 15). She easily finds such a man in her aunt's husband, Ba vaMurenga, who makes his willingness to have Netsai as his "wife" very clear. He is rejected for two reasons: firstly, Netsai finds him repulsive; secondly, because to agree to this relationship would 'destroy [auntie's] home'. From Makhalisa's moral perspective, rooted quite clearly in Christianity, a "good" girl has to reject polygyny; and becoming a

second wife to her drunken uncle does not conform to Netsai's romantic ideals of an 'eligible bachelor' and a 'white wedding'.

From this sympathy stems a recognition on Makhalisa's part that, as in Mazuba's case, Netsai will have to place herself appropriately in urban society if she is to realise her ambition to marry into wealth. However, Makhalisa highlights the difficulties of city life for young women. Netsai has been warned by her friend that 'going to bed' with men is necessary to get any work in the city because it is run by men:

Men still hold the decision-making posts which means ... one must be interviewed for a job by a man. One must be recommended by a man. And most men demand a price.
(Makhalisa, 1984, 14)

So for most female characters in this text, bartering the body is not a choice but a necessity. Even having found a job, the friend warns that wages are insufficient to pay rent, food, clothes and to send money home – the latter being a vital expenditure as the purpose of sending the girls to the city is to relieve their destitute families in the village. Even after women have secured employment, they rely on men to maintain financial solvency and/or to keep their job.

Because Makhalisa wants to retain Netsai as morally uncorrupt, the character finds a position without having to use her body. This emphasises the extent of her victimisation when she is forced into sex by her employer's husband. However, the contextualisation of the more usual way of finding work (through sexual favours) normalises this man's behaviour. He is not merely sexually voracious but has an expectation that Netsai, like many of the other young girls, will welcome the opportunity to exchange sex for favour. When Netsai innocently accepts his 'loan', it is not surprising that he interprets this as her willingness to have sex and he tells her 'he could not understand why [she] was so squeamish, as the agreement [to have sex] would naturally cancel that debt' (Makhalisa, 1984, 34). Even his initial assertion that the loan is with '[n]o strings attached' (1984, 34) could be interpreted, not

as guile, but as cultural sensitivity in a culture where women are discouraged from encouraging sexual advances.²

Understandably, if women are viewed as sexually available then it could be preferable to choose a sexual partner who can improve your circumstances, rather than get raped and alienate influential men through resistance. However, it can be clearly seen in the example of Netsai, that rather than empowering women, this is another way that women can be exploited. In an urban environment women become more vulnerable to rape not only because they are considered as “trespassing” but because there is an expectation that, by being in the city, they are signalling a willingness to have sex with men for profit.

The clear endgame in most of these texts, to find a rich husband before youth and beauty are lost, reinforces how the stereotype of the good-time girl is far from liberating. In ‘The Underdog’ and in *Ripples in the Pool* finding a husband is synonymous with being looked after. Respectively, Netsai wants a man to ‘give her a good life’ (Makhalisa, 1984, 15) and Selina at thirty three and tiring of the ‘game’ tells her friend: ‘I want a home and a man to care for me’ (Njau, 1975, 2). Being a good-time girl is not then a way for women to find freedom or an effective exploitation of men. It is predicated on women’s internalisation of cultural paradigms which identify them as dependents of men at most stages of their lives. It is not always clear how explicitly the authors recognise this, as rejection of this possible model of female resistance could be on moral grounds, rather than its reinforcement of notions of dependence. Makhalisa, for example, appears to present the moral point of view whilst simultaneously showing the impossibility of women escaping the rural poverty trap without recourse to apparently immoral behaviour. Himunyanga-Phiri more clearly rejects any form of association with men as detrimental to developing female autonomy.

² This has been discussed in Chapter Two in reference to Alice Armstrong’s work on rape in Zimbabwe.

Ama Ata Aidoo has also addressed this issue from a Ghanaian perspective. In her short story 'Two Sisters', the younger sister views her lifestyle as a "mistress" as a way of women 'seizing some freedom themselves' (1970, 90). She criticises her elder sister's fidelity because it is 'women like [the elder sister] who keep all of us down' (1970, 90). At first it might appear that Aidoo is supporting the younger sister's point of view because the elder sister's husband repays her faithfulness with infidelity. When she is pregnant he has affairs, without much discretion. Faced with his crying wife and assuming she has heard about his new girl-friend, rather than dissembling he just states: 'You have heard about my newest affair' (1970, 97). This might prove the younger sister's point, yet Aidoo also shows that her real desire is also to have 'a husband of my own' (1970, 89) as long as he is rich. It appears that Aidoo concurs with the East African authors that being a mistress is not a form of freedom for women but an alternative route to wifehood.

Aidoo's main concern, however, appears to be how daughters of a family are considered as financial assets. In her short story 'For Whom Things Did Not Change' Aidoo writes that 'people try to profit by their daughters by giving them to the big men. And they sometimes even encourage them' (1970, 13). This is not entirely a contemporary phenomenon. The elderly man, talking to his wife, suggests that 'in the old days ... the lords [took] the little girls they liked among the women' (1970, 10). In either case, coercion, not the family's greed, could be at the root of this exchange as 'the big man ... can ruin them if they do not give him what he wants – their daughter' (1970, 10). Once such a relationship has been established, the families benefit almost by default. In 'Two Sisters', the elder sister is shown to be a lone voice in her worries that her younger sister is 'ruining herself' by agreeing to be the mistress of a politician. The elder sister's husband tells his wife 'I am sure you are the only person who thought it was a disaster to have a sister who was the girl-friend of a big man' (Aidoo, 1970,

100) and maintains it cannot be wrong when ‘every other girl ... has ruined herself prosperously’ (1970, 98). It would be hypocritical for him to criticise his sister-in-law when he also has girlfriends and thereby maintains this particular system of patronage. From his point of view, it is ridiculous to condemn a system he can exploit as a lover and a brother. He sees the younger sister’s relationship as a positive benefit which might enable him to get a decent car.

Traditionally, daughters of the family brought wealth through bride price but now it appears daughters can also be a source of income by being lovers of wealthy men. Makhalisa, in ‘The Underdog’, also seems to be suggesting these ideas apply to Zimbabwe. If the girls sent to the city do not send back money, they are not fulfilling familial expectations. The story seems to imply that Netsai’s mother accepts that money coming back to the village might be gained through sexual favours because she sends Netsai to the notoriously womanising Ba vaMurenga, when she has failed before to find work either in Bulawayo or Harare. Immediately prior to Ba vaMurenga forcing Netsai into sex, she hears her mother’s voice ‘not persuading but instructing [her] to go’ (1984, 28). This reinforces the suggestion that the mother is very aware of the ways Netsai might have to find money.

The authors appear to agree that any power such affairs might give women is temporary and confined to the private relationship. Such limited power can be found equally in marriage. The non-married relationship does not appear to give women any more sexual freedom nor social power. In fact, “mistresses” have less power than wives who are recognised legally, and have some rights to property. This gives them the power to make demands on their husbands (such as ending a relationship with a girlfriend) and gives them a social status that the “girlfriends” do not have. Despite this, wives fear their marriages may be undermined by their husbands’ infidelity which sets women against each other in defiance of some feminists’

assertion of female solidarity in Africa. Mazuba, for example, is beaten unconscious by her second lover's wife and a group of her friends (a form of solidarity itself). As Aidoo remarks through the grandmother in *Changes*:

a man always gained in stature through any way he chose to associate with a woman. And that included adultery. Especially adultery. Esi, a woman has always been diminished in her association with a man.

(Aidoo, 1991, 110)

As the female characters' adulterous relationships are constructed within the paradigms of marriage – seeing themselves as wives-in-waiting – they do nothing to challenge the way women are represented in relation to men as sexual objects for ownership.

These female characters are not empowered through expressing their sexuality. The authors make it clear that primarily they seek status and material wealth not sexual pleasure. This is in contrast to the male characters whom most of the authors represent as sexually voracious. This reinforces notions that only men have sexual needs. It equally suggests the authors' acceptance that often men view women principally as only worth the sexual pleasure they have to offer. In Aidoo's 'Two Sisters' the husband has to have affairs when his wife is pregnant because she cannot sexually satisfy him. In 'The Underdog' both Netsai's rapists are predatory – Ba vaMurenga has an 'animal flame' in his eyes and the other is nicknamed 'the Wolf'. Furthermore, this inability of men to control their sexual urges, is used to blame the wife for her husband's affair in 'The Other Woman' by Grace Ogot. Jedidah is warned by her friend that her husband will stray if she does not sexually satisfy him. She fails to do so, and he begins an affair with the house-servant who acquiesces because she remembers a traditional saying that 'a man who desires a woman is like a wounded lion – he can kill' (Ogot, 1976, 53). In other words men lack sexual control and cannot be blamed for their actions when pursuing sexual fulfillment. By clearly placing the blame with Jedidah for her husband's behaviour, Ogot appears to be reinforcing the myths that men need sex, and cannot

be expected to control themselves if provoked sexually or denied sex when they need it. In turn, these can be used to justify incidents of rape.

Men taking women as mistresses cannot simply be labelled abuse. However, it can be linked to violence against women through the same structures which define men and women's relationships through notions of men's ownership of women (which can also be identified as part of the institution of marriage). It can also be seen how it creates particular ideas of female and male sexuality which make all women, not just wives, susceptible to rape. It could be argued that in becoming "mistresses", women subvert the institution of marriage. However, in societies where polygyny has been, and is, an accepted practice, the notion of marriage embraces men's simultaneous sexual liaisons with different women. As women are still expected to be married and monogamous, these liaisons do not give women greater power or freedom.

The texts also attack the institution of the law. Generally, they suggest that the legal system is an inadequate institution through which women can enforce their rights and challenge prejudice. In cases of violence against women, the law fails to protect women by upholding gendered behavioural norms.

The most positive use of law is found in *The Legacy* by Himunyanga-Phiri. When Moya's husband dies *intestate*, the Administrator-General divides his property in a way which leaves everything of substance to her brother-in-law and only a quarter of her husband's pensions to Moya. With the encouragement of a female lawyer, Moya challenges this judgment in court. Moya's fight is portrayed as worthwhile by Himunyanga-Phiri because it is more than an individual action. A judgment in her favour could be used to set a precedent that would erode discriminatory inheritance laws.

Himunyanga-Phiri uses this book to suggest that women do not have to accept the discriminatory treatment that custom dictates. Himunyanga-Phiri chooses that Moya wins her case, and furthermore is commended by the (male) judge for bringing the case to court. This upbeat end to a somewhat depressing novel about Zimbabwean women's lives could inspire others to object to unfair treatment. Yet, in legal terms, Moya is helpless in the face of the beatings that her husband administers. After the traditional method of returning to her parents fails, taking her husband to court for his violent assaults is not even mentioned. It appears that the legal system is impotent in the area of violence against women.

Lindsey Collen, makes this point more clearly in her novel *Getting Rid of It*. One of the main protagonists, Sadna, has been raped by her employer, Cyril Blignault. However, she cannot take him to court for raping her, or for beating his wife, Rita, and inciting her suicide. The Union advises her to prosecute for the lesser charge of failing to pay severance money: 'You have to get them on these small points, remember. Fight it out' (1997, 176). Whilst it is not feasible to bring major charges, legal action is still important:

She couldn't complain about wage slavery. Even rape and murder were too difficult to win on ...

And yet it must be done. Complaints must be made.

(Collen 1997, 178)

As Green points out, laws, particularly those in relation to gender violence, do not necessarily protect women. This is not because they are:

designed with the intention of oppressing or discriminating against women, but [because] they are designed in line with prevailing assumptions and ideologies about the role of women, the nature of the family, and the proper relations between men and women.

(Green, 1999, 77)

It is not just the laws themselves either, but how the laws are applied that discriminates against female complainants. Sadna finds it impossible to follow the court proceedings or the argument being used in her defence (Collen, 1997, 179). Moreover, the police, the first point

of contact for a victim reporting abuse, are perceived in these novels as belonging to an institution that victimises women.

According to Human Rights Watch (South Africa) ‘police culture works against women ... the attitudes and assumptions that the police have about women undermine the proper functioning of the law’³. In *The Rape of Sita* for example, Collen never raises the possibility that Sita contemplates reporting her rape to the police. They are perceived as a source of danger themselves in this respect. Police have attempted to rape the Chagos women Sita knows and her friend Véronique has been raped in the police barracks when she goes to file a report. The ‘court case in the Banbu Court was her second rape’ (Collen, 1995, 166). Green also identifies the process of reporting and being involved in a rape trial as ‘the second rape’ (1999, 126). The main defence for the police is that Véronique should never have been at the police station at night. For the judge, the defendants, the defence lawyer and even the prosecutor for Véronique’s case, the trial is an excuse to make continual smutty jokes at Véronique’s expense.

In another example of a rape trial Collen gives in *The Rape of Sita*, the defence lawyer asks the two adult women: ““What were you two doing on your own out at night?” “Our own.” Would fifty women also be “on their own” at night?” (1995, 188). Both Véronique, and these two other women have broken those rules that constrain women’s movements. This makes them blame-worthy and exonerates the men’s actions. Sita can consider going back to Reunion to kill Tarquin, but she never contemplates trying to take legal proceedings against him. With Véronique’s case as precedent, where the policemen who raped her are acquitted, why would she want to follow this route?

³ Human Rights Watch (1995) *Violence Against Women in South Africa* New York: Human Rights Watch (78). Quoted in Green (1999), 115.

Conversely, the texts suggest that the law can easily be used to persecute women who act against social norms, often out of desperation: for example, by procuring abortions. In *Getting Rid of It*, the narrative is shaped by the three main protagonists' journey around the Mauritian capital, Port-Louis, trying to get rid of the foetus Jumila has miscarried. This is not a simple task as they risk being arrested and accused of abortion, illegal in Mauritius. The medical profession in the text are represented as sympathetic to women presenting to the 'slip-and-fall ward' (1997, 21) with complications from back-street abortions. They prompt them to make an excuse: 'The nurses and doctors say: "Slip and fall?" Then the sick woman ... only has to say "Yes". Not add lies to her sins' (1997, 22). Collen identifies the wider society's view of abortion as 'a moral slip and then a moral fall' (1997, 21-2) but even if women do not concur with this judgment '[i]t was a legal slip anyway' (1997, 21-2). So even Collen's three characters, who are blameless legally, are still shown as feeling guilt and fear that they might be accused of this criminal act. Labelling abortion as a 'sin' reminds us that it is not only the legal challenge women face but possible psychological damage because of the social expectations of motherhood and the stigmatisation of women who have abortions.

Collen shows how problematic it is for women to resist their oppression because of the way a multitude of factors work together to subjugate women. At one point in the text the three women decide they will challenge the abortion law which criminalises them:

Take [the foetus] to Line Barracks ... Tell them to arrest us ... Let's make this public. We can't let this go on. Too much silence is a bad thing. Too much getting on with it ... How many more women do they want to die? ... Let's go to Line Barracks. If someone had gone to Line Barracks long ago, maybe we would not be sneaking around like criminals today.

(Collen, 1997, 99-100)

However, as the women realise, it is not just law that keeps them subjugated. Pragmatically women have to 'get on with it'. All three women have responsibilities to living children with

no male partner sharing these duties. They recognise that this defiance is a pretence: 'How could they take on the State' (1997, 101) when they are constrained by a burden of care?

The law also fails to take account of abuse in situations where women kill their abusive husbands. In Mabel Segun's short story, 'By the Silent Stream', Abunovbo kills her violent husband by hitting him with a mallet. Even with the physical evidence on her body of long-term abuse, Abunovbo is arrested and '[d]espite everything ... they bought in a verdict of murder but because she was pregnant, they did not hang her. They sentenced her to life imprisonment instead' (1995, 73). This is also Dikeledi's fate in Bessie Head's short story 'The Collector of Treasures'. She murders her husband by castrating him because he has treated her with contempt and abandoned her, but still appears to consider her as his sexual property. She is jailed for life after this act of poetic justice. The fear of jail prevents Sita from going back to kill Rowan Tarquin after he rapes her. She recalls the American case of Dessie Woods who stabbed her would-be rapist with the knife with which he was threatening her; she was sentenced to life imprisonment. In 'The Collector of Treasures', 'By the Silent Stream' and the case of Dessie Woods in *The Rape of Sita* the law penalises all these women to its full extent for murdering these men, despite the evidence of abuse.

The law, produced by the patriarchal system, is rooted in attitudes which disadvantage women. As Green states:

though legal reforms may indeed seek to limit the severity of violence against women, the gender relations at the root of the violence are ultimately left untouched.
(Green, 1999, 103)

However sympathetic the courts and legal personnel, they are only tackling this social problem on the level of individual abusers. This means that the issue often becomes one of severity of abuse, leading to a public perception that abuse of women is only committed by a few brutal (abnormal) men. The courts can do little to touch the culture of abuse and fear which keeps women subjugated.

Other authors draw on the structures of female solidarity found in many African cultures. As discussed in Chapter One, women's associations (which protected women's economic, political and social interests) were a common feature of many pre-colonial African societies. Women still organise themselves into societies in contemporary Africa for much the same reasons although membership of such groups is now generally voluntary rather than subscribed (Wipper, 1984, 69). Some of the authors draw on this notion of what Audrey Wipper calls 'female bonding' (1989, 69) to show how women can gain strength through solidarity (psychologically, as well as economically, socially and politically). However, problems arise when such solidarity is associated with separatism (found, for example, in Katherine Frank's 1987 article 'Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa').

Such a model of female independence has already been suggested in relation to *The Legacy* in Chapter Two. Himunyanga-Phiri ends her novel with a female community (Moya and her daughters) which is emotionally and financially independent. Bessie Head, in her story 'The Collector of Treasures', also visualises a utopian female community for her heroine. This might be a prison but Dikeledi finds happiness (despite having to leave her children behind) in a female environment where women believe: '[w]e must help each other' (1977, 91). Whilst effective in the sense that it can remove women from abusive situations, it does create a separate community exclusively for women. This implies that women's response to patriarchy ought to be removing themselves from those communities underpinned by such ideologies and inhabited by men. Such a solution to violence against women is out of step with some African feminist thought which insists on men being integral to the processes by which African women can be emancipated.

However, the alienation of men is not just problematic in terms of some African feminist thought. Equally difficult is the issue of withdrawing from an unequal society, rather than challenging the structures created by patriarchal ideologies in a society as these circumscribe male behaviour as well as female. Also, biologically, such communities clearly are not sustainable in the long term. In order to create a more equal, inclusive culture the relationships between the sexes need to be altered, not severed. More helpful readings of solidarity which acknowledge the support for women without excluding men, will be considered in Chapter Four.

Violence Against Others

It is clear that the authors' perception is that women are rarely passive when faced by violence, even if their action is against themselves. Frequently, their acts are against others – either their children, or the men who abuse them.

In Emecheta's work, as suggested in Chapter Two, some of the women do seem prepared to accept beatings passively but this is only in the case where the man is fulfilling his "masculine" role. When men who are unwilling or unable to provide for their families try to beat their wives, the women do retaliate. In *The Joys of Motherhood*:

Nnu Ego began to scream abuse at him: 'You are a lazy insensitive man! You have no shame. If you hit me again, I shall call the soldiers in the street ...'
... Nnu Ego lifted the head of the broom and gave Nnaife a blow on his shoulder ...
'Go and get a job, you!'

(Emecheta, 1979, 91)

Nnaife's lack of job, and unwillingness to find one, justifies Nnu Ego's actions; he is not contributing to household expenses as he should. Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* also isn't prepared to be passive in the face of Francis's beatings: 'She did not know where she got her courage from, but she was beginning to hit him back, even biting him when need be'

(Emecheta, 1974, 162). These episodes turn more into fights than beatings and this is one difficulty with such a strategy of resistance.

Facing up to the abuser and retaliating could be construed as a positive detriment to violence, but fighting back causes violence to escalate and the woman is more likely to be more seriously hurt than the man. Emecheta acknowledges this in the concern Adah voices about getting killed:

the thought struck her that she could be killed and the world would think it was an accident. Just a husband and wife fighting. She still hit back occasionally when she knew she was near the door or out of danger.

(Emecheta, 1974, 162)

Non-conflated definitions of aggression and violence help us to understand women's aggressive behaviour against men as is represented in some of the texts. A widely held (and erroneous) belief in the west is that women are just as likely to beat their husbands as to be the victims of abuse (Dobash and Dobash 1979, 11). However, research which supports such views often fails to differentiate between the damage women and men can inflict on each other. Women's aggressive acts are much less likely to be violent and are often defensive reactions. In the few cases where women do inflict serious or fatal violence on men it is usually in response to years of abuse; this is rarely the case with male violence (Archer, 1994, 5). Whilst such assumptions may not pertain in African societies, Emecheta's novel suggests that, where women do fight back physically, there is a danger they might be hurt or killed. Even in *The Rape of Sita* (Collen, 1995) where Sita's 'bruiser' mother is lauded for beating up men, reservation is expressed about the wisdom of fighting back against a rapist who might kill. Sometimes, it is suggested, it is better to accept abuse and survive than fight and die. Therefore, it is not always a good solution for women to physically resist male violence against them.

In some examples the women do kill their abuser, as noted in the previous section. Even without the legal sanctions this incurs, the texts question this as a helpful response in preventing further violence against women. For example in 'The Collector of Treasures' Dikeledi targets and destroys one man. Head shows how this violent retaliation creates consternation in the male population, particularly given the manner of Dikeledi's revenge. It 'made all the men shudder with horror [and it] was some weeks before they could find the courage to go to bed with women' (1977, 101). The temporary power Dikeledi's act gives to women in the community signifies a reversal of power relations as the men find they fear women. However, Head highlights the precarious nature of such power relations and it could be argued that for either sex this is not a route to equality. Collen depicts a worse case scenario in *Getting Rid of It*. The women's "resistance" through suicide scares the men 'because they felt it as a form of murder. Murder of husbands ... Twelve men killed their wives in three months. Pre-emptive strikes' (1997, 151). In resisting, women risk further violence as the patriarchal machine swings into action to prevent incipient rebellion. All women are put at risk by individual women's violent reactions.

The effectiveness of revenge is questioned by Collen in *The Rape of Sita*. Sita considers killing her rapist but wonders:

would it end rape? Would her act ... just add more disorder and more rot? Not venge things clean. Not change the direction of anything, the state of anything.
Would the murder help anything or anyone at all? 'Will it even help me?' Would it help womankind? ...
Would this act of murder stop men thinking they could rape women? Stop them sequestrating and raping women the world over?

(Collen, 1995, 192)

As Collen suggests, revenge just increases the 'rot' produced where society operates any system of organised inequality. It does not prevent rape or beating of women in society. In fact, it is likely to increase violence against women as men's fear of women increases, and their assumption that women need controlling is confirmed. Targeting the individual cannot

be an effective strategy when violence against women is not located in the actions of a few aberrant men, but supported through social structures. Action has to be aimed at eradicating or changing these.

The impulse to fight back is also shown in novels where the female characters are sexually attacked. The authors rarely show that this struggle saves the woman from rape; in fact it often appears to have the opposite effect of making the assailant determined to subdue them whilst also increasing his sexual pleasure.⁴ Showing women fighting back at their attackers has to be preferable to representing a passive acquiescence. However, the authors clearly find it difficult to show that this leads to a positive outcome. The characters are still victims of rape or beatings in spite of their resistance.

Perhaps the more obvious response to violence within a relationship is to leave. However, as addressed in Chapter Two this is not so simple, both practically, and because violence is often a culturally accepted part of marital and marital-like relationships. The novels and short stories rarely represent this as a workable strategy. In both *Second-Class Citizen* (Emecheta, 1974) and the short story by Mabel Segun, 'By the Silent Stream' (1995), the women escape from physically violent partners. However, in both cases the men are reluctant to let these women go. Alisa Del Tufo suggests that although violent men blame the woman for every negative aspect of their lives, they rarely leave the woman and perversely 'when she finally leaves ... track her down and bring her back' (1995, 85). Abunovbo ('By the Silent Stream') leaves her violent husband after he kills their child but she is kidnapped back by her husband who continues to abuse her. To finally escape she kills him and, as noted above, is imprisoned for this.

⁴ The integration of violence into male sexuality and traditions which reinforce this are discussed in Chapter Two.

In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah has to resort to court orders to protect herself. Her husband attacks her with a knife after she has moved out of their room. Emecheta shows the one successful example of a woman escaping her abusive husband without killing herself, or him and being imprisoned. Significantly, this novel is set in England and utilises the English courts. This is not to suggest any superiority in the English legal system's ability to deal with violence against women. However, perhaps Emecheta feels she can depict success for Adah in England as the laws relating to marriage are not underpinned by the same cultural assumptions stated by Adah's husband: 'Once a man's wife, always a man's wife until you die. You cannot escape. You are bound to him' (Emecheta, 1974, 183).

In discussing women turning their aggression on children, it can be difficult to entirely differentiate between a woman's violence against herself and that against the child. This is particularly problematic in discussions about abortion. The four texts being studied which include abortion, appear concerned with negotiating the multiplicity of violences that coalesce around abortion. It could be argued that abortion is a violence against women – like rape and physical abuse it is usually something done to women's bodies by others. However, in countries where most abortion is illegal, the majority of backstreet abortionists will be female, somewhat shifting the position of abortion from an abuse that operates as an aspect of gender relations. Where backstreet abortions flourish, there is always a risk to the woman's health and this appears a major concern in the texts. In this way, abortion could be seen as women's attack on their own bodies.

Generally, backstreet abortionists proliferate when most abortion is illegal (an exception is the Zambian example below). Thus women can face legal penalties, usually getting discovered when they have to be admitted to hospital due to medical complications. The

application of law can be linked to a moral agenda where the issue is not always focused on the rights or wrongs of abortion *per se*, but on how the women came to be pregnant in circumstances where she was unable to keep the child. Pregnancies within the environment of marriage are assumed to be unproblematic, and pregnancies arising from extra-marital sex (which are assumed to necessitate abortion) are often assumed to be the result of women's immorality. In these cases abortion signifies women's unwillingness to accept the consequences of their choice to agree to extra-marital sex, and/or their failure to acknowledge their responsibilities toward children. In a social climate where women are strongly identified through motherhood, abortion can also be damaging to the female identity when the woman finds it has destroyed the very entity which gave her a social role.

The issue of abortion and its meaning for women seems particularly to concern the Zimbabwean writers whose works are being considered. Vera and Makhalisa make abortion central in *Butterfly Burning* and 'The Underdog' respectively. Himunyanga-Phiri's *The Legacy* also includes an incident of abortion. Under Zimbabwe law abortion is a criminal offence except where the pregnancy can be proven before magistrates to be from 'unlawful sex'; where the woman's health is deemed at risk by two independent doctors; or if the pregnant woman is mentally incapable of raising a child (Kahari, 1994-5, 22; Chikanza and Chinamora, 1987, 238-9). This does not prevent women from seeking abortions but the texts do not simply suggest more liberal laws would liberate women (as a western feminist agenda might).

In *The Legacy* by Himunyanga-Phiri, Moya's daughter has an abortion after getting pregnant by her married lover. Mazuba cannot afford 'a private doctor so she had gone instead to a woman known in the area to perform abortions for a modest fee' (1992, 47). Himunyanga-Phiri is clearly concerned to highlight the health risk women take having cheap

illegal abortions. As in three of the four texts being considered, the non-sterile equipment of an amateur practitioner leads to hospitalisation. It could be assumed that this implies Himunyanga-Phiri's support for access to medically and legally safe abortion, however, her explicit concerns are with other issues.

Firstly, Himunyanga-Phiri raises the economic issues around abortion. With no support from the father of the child, Mazuba cannot afford an abortion in a clinic. As Tambudzayi Kahari points out in her article 'Abortion – a Woman's Right to Choose', it is not a simple issue of making more abortions legal. She cites the example of Zambia where the laws are less restrictive but backstreet abortions still flourish because many women cannot afford the cost of abortion at clinics (1994-5, 23). An additional issue is that backstreet abortions are made even more attractive because they are necessarily more clandestine. Zambian women may choose these over an official abortion clinic, to try and avoid knowledge of their abortion becoming public as women who have abortions are still stigmatized. Himunyanga-Phiri suggests this might be the case in Zimbabwe; Mazuba was 'subject to a lot of gossip' (1992, 48) when she returns to work. In fact, when medical complications arise from the abortion she is 'too scared to go to the hospital, fearing that other people would find out' (1992, 47). It could be argued that part of the stigma attached to abortion is its illegality which confirms social prejudice. Yet, the Zambian example suggests that legalising abortion has not affected the concept of abortion as shameful to women. This is perhaps due to the strong association of female identity with motherhood in many African cultures.

Secondly, Himunyanga-Phiri criticises the social disinclination to develop men's role in abortion. Men appear to be able to make a decision whether or not to accept responsibility for a pregnancy – a luxury women do not have. Even where there is little doubt of paternity, as in the example of Mazuba, the men can still refuse liability. In a society where, as discussed

above, single, urban women are stereotyped as sexually promiscuous “fortune-hunters”, their pregnancies can be viewed as man-traps. Mazuba’s lover insists her pregnancy is a trick to make him marry her. This might be the case, but the man’s assertion that he did not agree to or intend the pregnancy, excludes him from responsibility. Himunyanga-Phiri does not exonerate Mazuba from any accountability. Moya, when she finds out, is not sure who to blame:

I didn’t know whether to be angry with [her lover] or with her. He had treated her badly ... when she was pregnant ... just tossed her aside like a dirty rag but she had been a willing participant.

(Himunyanga-Phiri, 1992, 47)

However, her clear message is that both sexes should have a concern with abortion; it should not be just a women’s problem. Making abortion laws more liberal will do nothing to encourage this.

Similarly, Makhalisa raises these two concerns in ‘The Underdog’. She shows how the prejudice in abortion laws, which penalise only women for having abortions, make it exclusively a female issue. Makhalisa’s protagonist, Netsai, is arrested and imprisoned for her abortion, discovered when she ends up in the hospital with severe haemorrhaging. If anything, Netsai is a more “deserving” case for abortion than Mazuba, having been impregnated through rape and Makhalisa criticises the law’s position by showing how it criminalises women for something in which men should also be implicated, but are not (Kahari, 1994-5, 24also makes this point). Netsai knows that her rapist would never admit that the child was his even if she denounced him in court, and even if he did, he could not be prosecuted for the subsequent abortion.

Makhalisa also notes how economically secure women are more likely to escape health problems and prosecution. As discussed above, she divides the young, female, urban population into those who are only seeking a good time, and those who genuinely want to

better their situation. In doing this her fiction also draws attention to the way '[r]estrictive abortion laws result in discrimination between the rich and poor' (Chikanza and Chinamora, 1987, 247). Netsai's friend argues against the inability of the law to prevent abortions:

those who really do it ... in order to keep enjoying a good life, those are not punished and will never go to jail because they have the money to extricate themselves from these problems ... It is the desperate cases ... those who are really at a loss what to do who get caught and suffer more for it. Instead of being sympathetic, people are meting out judgment.

(Makhalisa, 1984, 38)

For Makhalisa, cases such as Netsai's should be met with sympathy. However, it is this division, and the notion of more and less deserving cases for abortion, that draws attention to a problematic moral agenda.

This is not attached to arguments over the rights of the child, but is underpinned by notions of moral female behaviour. Eunice Njovana is the director of the Musasa project, a women's organisation in Zimbabwe. In her interview for *Zimbabwe Women's Voices* she states:

I have problems with abortion. I think it is an immediate solution but it does not deal with the emotional and psychological damage on women . I think abortion is a benefit that takes away one's liberty. I have serious problems with it except in cases of rape and sexual abuse because intercourse was not voluntary in these cases.

(Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 166)

Only in cases where the woman's sexual morality is not in question can rape be allowable.

Thus Netsai's abortion is morally acceptable because she has been raped, but Mazuba's is not because the sex was consensual and extra-marital.⁵ Himunyanga-Phiri's identification of Mazuba as a 'willing participant' hints at this moral agenda, but it is Makhalisa's text which really shows discomfort over this.

Makhalisa's decision to sentence her character to 'two years imprisonment with hard labour' (1984, 7) despite her rape, is not indicative of her belief that all women who abort

⁵ Of course, as discussed in Chapter One, defining rape and sexual abuse, or women's consent, is deeply problematic – legally and socially.

should be punished by the criminal justice system, but is to highlight the fundamental unfairness in which the system is rooted. Yet, her text also implies that Netsai did not have to resort to abortion. She shows how situations that appear to be desperate to women might make them feel compelled to have an abortion, as Netsai does. Netsai fears she will lose her boyfriend, her job and be unable to support her mother if she keeps the child; neither does she want to shame her family. However, having the abortion leads to all these consequences when she is discovered and jailed for two years. Yet, Makhalisa insists that there are other options than ‘to do wrong’ (1984, 7). In jail Netsai realises there was a better choice but she decided to ‘shun [her] good friends and do things the foolish way’ (1984, 41) and is left wishing that she ‘had gone to them for help earlier on’ (1984, 42). Makhalisa implies that there is always a better way to deal with accidental pregnancies than abortion which appears wrong whatever the circumstances.

The third Zimbabwean text to engage with the abortion debate attempts to put abortion under the woman’s full control. In *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi is the instrument for the abortion rather than a passive recipient of the operation. It is ‘[h]er own hand inserting an irreversible harm’ (Vera, 1998, 98) but her ‘body accepts each of her motions’ (1998, 99). Vera suggests that Phephelaphi, by doing to herself, rather than being done to, remains in touch with her physical self. The description of the abortion is shot through with her physical awareness of all parts of her body. For her, the abortion (the child’s non-birth) is a new birth through which she recreates herself:

The heart beating is hers, her arms, and she is she. She has emerged out of a cracked shell ... She has endured the willed loss of her child. Willed, not unexpected. Expected, not unwilled.

(Vera, 1998, 107)

The process is one of remaking herself by destroying the child which is making her ‘nothing’. Vera reinforces Phephelaphi’s agency by not allowing her to suffer any physical complications after the abortion.

Nevertheless, Vera does not suggest abortion is in any way an easy answer, or even a desirable one. She shows how Phephelaphi’s hope for the abortion is ill founded:

The mess and untidy chaos. This whole action had been about tidying up. Ordering the disorder. Instead, her fingers are torn and bleeding.

(Vera, 1998, 108)

Phephelaphi is unable to sustain the self she has re-created in the light of wider social attitudes towards abortion which, as noted above in the discussion of suicide, label her as ‘nothing’. Her new birth is not recognised, only the fact that she has tried to deny her social identity as a mother. Further the child is not considered hers to destroy. ‘Now you have killed my child without telling me about it? Where did you bury my child?’ (1998, 123) asks her lover. This is a reversal of the situations set up by Makhalisa and Himunyanga-Phiri where the man denies paternity, yet is part of the same problem. All these circumstances deny women have any choice over whether or not they accept ownership of their child. Abortion would superficially appear to offer a choice but doubt has already been cast over this by Njovana’s statement that abortion ‘takes away [women’s] liberty’ (Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 166).

Looking at ‘The Underdog’, *The Legacy* and *Butterfly Burning* has begun to raise the issues which can justify such a statement. For example, the way abortion can make men even less responsible for their fertility. If safe abortions are available to women unwanted pregnancies can be perceived as unproblematic and a female responsibility. It is these very notions of female responsibility that gather around abortion, which deny abortion as a real choice for women. Women, as in Makhalisa’s example of Netsai, can feel compelled to have an abortion through fear of being socially stigmatised for having a ‘fatherless’ baby – a sign

of moral laxity. Equally, the compulsion can come from the women's inability to maintain this child without support from the father.

The stigma of having a "fatherless" child is tied to notions of female morality. Regardless of whether or not the women chose to have sex, responsibility for a resultant pregnancy is always theirs. Even where the pregnancy is a result of consensual sex, men's choice whether or not to accept responsibility exposes the double standards for male and female sexuality. Men might demand that women are sexually available outside marriage, but women are meant to confine their sexual activity within marriage for the purpose of reproduction. For a woman to have an abortion is often viewed as another "selfishness" (the first being the irresponsible sexual behaviour that led to an unwanted pregnancy). These popular judgments can contribute to women's mental trauma after abortion as they internalise feelings of guilt and shame. This is exacerbated by social constructions of maternal "instincts" (discussed in relation to specific texts in Chapter Four) as natural and inevitable. This raises another expectation – that women will "naturally" embrace all pregnancies as fulfilling and confirmatory of their social role. This pulls against those cultural attitudes which stigmatise women for sexual activity (proven by pregnancy) outside of stable relationships. Rather than abortion representing a liberating choice for women, it only adds another demand to the many which already trap women and circumscribe their decisions.

Collen, in *Getting Rid of It*, is mainly interested in exploring how attitudes to abortion expose the wide range of practices which proscribe women's behaviour in oppressive ways. She does not limit her examples to abortion but also considers the problem of miscarriage; a problem only because any pregnancy ending prematurely casts suspicion over women. Collen notes that the problems of unwanted pregnancy (or getting rid of a miscarried foetus) is one of

a number of things that women have to ‘get on with’ at the expense of acting against oppression:

‘Look at the men in this bus queue. Do they have this kind of thing on their hands?’ Goldilox Soo asked ... ‘Do they ... or are they free to think about their work, their union meetings, their plans to play dominos ... it’s as if they can stand here thinking about outside things instead of inside things. While we’re caught in the inside things’.
(Collen, 1997, 116)

It reveals a fundamental difference between male and female roles in a society where gender relationships are shaped by a patriarchal ideology. Women’s energies are focused on and exhausted by negotiating round the practices that constantly monitor women’s behaviour for signs of resistance to or subversion of their allotted roles.

Even though Collen’s main interest is this network of oppression, she doesn’t ignore the possibly devastating effect of the unsterilised and blunt instruments of backstreet abortionists. The three women’s sudden need to act to end the silence over illegal abortion is a response to their visit to Jayamani, who has been left permanently crippled from septicaemia after her abortion. Jayamani has not ‘submitted to her womb’ (1997, 98) but has tried to enforce her right to control her own reproductivity. However, she lives in a society which does not recognise this right, and thus allow legal (safer) abortion. To grasp it she has to take a considerable risk. In fact she is prepared to die but her fate has been worse than that: ‘I was quite prepared to die I was resigned to that risk but somehow not this one not this now I can’t walk anymore I didn’t expect this’ (1997, 84). Her tragedy is to be ‘half submitted, half killed’ (1997, 98). In Chapter Four the notion of women’s two choices to ‘submit or kill yourself’ (Collen, 1997, 192) will be discussed in more detail. In Jayamani’s situation, Collen presents one possible consequence of trying to find a different option.

Jayamani should embrace her role as mother, not attempt to escape it, particularly as her pregnancy has occurred within marriage. However, she cannot face having another disabled child. Like Phephelaphi (in *Butterfly Burning*) she could have chosen to commit suicide

taking the child with her but she is aware of her responsibilities to her first child. Instead she risks death through an illegal abortion but hopes for survival. This is not submission but neither is it a full resistance to her assigned social role. Her decision is prompted by her need to remain a mother to her existing child. Thus, rather than allow her character to have a successful abortion (and supporting the impulse to resist), Collen chooses to physically cripple her, an effect of infection after the operation. This of course reflects the real danger women face from backstreet abortions but Jayamani's disability also symbolises the fate of women who dare to defy the patriarchal order. Collen suggests this is recognised by Jayamani's husband. He initially agrees with the abortion but subsequently attempts to distance himself from his complicity when Jayamani's health is ruined. He realigns himself with the official view deciding 'he shouldn't have agreed what if the priests are right and god is punishing us' (1997, 84). Collen does not condemn him for this; his own fear of punishment by a greater authority shows how men are also controlled within societies based in patriarchy.

As discussed earlier in relation to Phephelaphi in *Butterfly Burning*, even a successful abortion is no guarantee of freedom or liberation. Women can be stigmatised for having abortions, legal and illegal, because of the moral dimension that attaches to women's sexuality. Women bear the physical signs of intercourse if they get pregnant and, if this occurs outside of accepted social institutions (usually marriage), women can easily be condemned for moral laxity. If they choose to have an abortion, or dispose of the baby at birth, they are punished by the law and/or social censure partially because they are expected to embrace motherhood once it is thrust upon them. Yet society makes little attempt to help single women to cope with children even if they have been raped or abandoned. It is easy for men to deny paternity (although genetic testing may begin to reverse this) or to claim the woman got

pregnant without their consent or knowledge. In a social climate where “good” women confine their sexual activity to marriage (within which pregnancy is apparently unproblematic), it is also easy for the society to ostracize single mothers on the grounds that they have to live with the consequences of their immorality. It is a combination of all these structures which sets a question mark over the “simple” solution of access to legal and safe abortion. All the texts question whether this would be a step towards women’s emancipation because it does nothing to develop men’s responsibility towards the pregnancies they help to create.

Kahari identifies this as an argument against more accessible abortion because it encourages a lack of male responsibility for pregnancy (1994-5, 23). Collen is perhaps concurring with this as a valid argument. Abortion is a way for men to ‘evade the consequences of sexual intercourse’ (Hadley, 1996, 110) and is:

a symptom of the social relations and sexual divisions which assign liability for pregnancy and child-rearing to women ... access to abortion lets men, and male-dominated society, off the hook.

(Hadley, 1996, 110)

Giving women a right to choose when and if to have children through access to abortion, merely gives women another responsibility, and the more access they have to abortion, the less responsible men have to be for their own fertility.

Whilst laws that strictly limit abortion are detrimental to women’s health (and the texts do not deny this as a very real problem), relaxing these laws does nothing to challenge the way a society underpinned by patriarchal assumptions, allows men to demand access to women’s bodies. As Hadley notes:

[women’s] economic and social circumstances are such that they hardly experience the decision to seek an abortion as a matter of ‘choice’, an affirmation of their power and right to determine their own destiny. Opting for an abortion often exposes mercilessly how limited and illusory the ‘choices’ really are.

(Hadley, 1996, 110)

The point made in all the texts is that when characters have abortions it is because they perceive that there is no other choice. Making abortion more widely available would also do little to address women's trauma over abortions when they still compromise women's ability to retain an acceptable identity, socially and personally. The texts raise doubts about abortion as an essential female freedom and question its usefulness as a possible strategy of resistance to oppression for African women. Essentially, it remains within the parameters of abuse because it reinforces aspects of female identity which allow women to be subjugated in their societies.

Interestingly, none of the texts engage with debates on the rights of the child which forms a large part of much western argument on abortion. Unlike the other authors who simply do not mention the child, Collen takes a clear stance that the rights of the pregnant woman have to take precedent over the foetus she carries. She states of Jumila's miscarried child: 'Never born. Therefore never dead ... the living always superceded the potential living' (1997, 98-9). This would suggest that to abort is not tantamount to murder for Collen. Where texts consider infanticide, another violence women can perpetrate on their children, the focus is also on exploring why a woman might kill her child and/or the effect on her rather than on the morality of infanticide.

Yvonne Vera is the only writer being considered who writes about infanticide in detail. In her short story, 'Whose Baby Is It?', it initially appears that the answer sought is the identity of the mother of the dead, abandoned baby in order to punish her. The woman in the story professes disinterest in whose child it is, suggesting '[t]he police would find that out soon enough' (1992, 59). The discovery of the baby's corpse, reminds the woman how close she came to abandoning her own child:

She had nearly done it herself, when she found herself pregnant and unable to convince the father the child was his. She had no job, and no way to support a child.
(Vera, 1992, 59)

By focusing on this memory, Vera shifts the title's meaning. The question now is: whose responsibility is the child? Vera also suggests a reason why women abandon their babies, which operate under the same paradigms as abortion. Where the man will not take responsibility and the woman does not have the resources to care for a child alone, infanticide is an option. Vera does not reduce this to a moral issue. Her protagonist did chose to keep her baby and she feels sorrow at this other baby's death: 'A newly born baby, the mother thought ... it grieved her to think of it, but especially to think of her own little girl, whom she was raising alone' (1992, 59). Equally, bringing up a "fatherless" child is a matter for grief.

Vera's novel, *Without a Name*, also considers infanticide, but the issue is complicated here as the child is a product of rape. Mazvita has strangled her baby, and is in the process of taking it back to her home village. She is clearly distressed and on the edge of madness. At the time of the rape, Mazvita has tried to hate her rapist but fails to find this emotion. She has been unable to 'find [the rapist's] face, bring it close enough to attach this emotion to it. Hate required a face against which it could be flung' (Vera, 1994, 30). After the baby is born, she tries desperately to picture him: 'She was sure that if she remembered his face, she could free herself of remembering him' (1994, 84). The only face she can see, though is that of the baby (the product of that rape) and she cannot bear it looking at her. She has tried to ignore the child in the womb, 'tried to bury the child inside her body' (1994, 64) and after its birth she cannot name it or find any maternal connection to it beyond ministering to its physical needs. She transfers the feelings of hate she has repressed onto the child.

Apart from the reminder of trauma, the child represents a loss of the freedom she had hoped to find in the city. Like Phephelaphi, pregnancy is an impediment to Mazvita's ambition and to her mental health. The child takes on a malignant presence for Mazvita who

sees it as having 'risen above its own frailty in order to hinder her' (Vera, 1994, 87). Financial pressures exacerbate the emotional pressure as her current lover determines to evict her from his room. The child is not his, and the fact that Mazvita was already pregnant before he met her confirms to him that all women are whores. Because of this, he need not take any wider social responsibility for Mazvita or the child. Vera recognises Mazvita's culpability in the infanticide by showing how her guilt is 'heavy'. However, this is tempered by Vera drawing attention to the notion of responsibility and to the damage to Mazvita emotionally.

The strangulation 'blinded her and broke her back' (1994, 96) and in killing the child 'she had injured herself irreparably' (1994, 35) and is teetering on the verge of madness. Like Phephelaphi, Mazvita finds that rather than her actions liberating her '[s]he had lost her freedom(1994, 44) because of the guilt she feels.

In many ways the texts appear to make little differentiation between abortion and infanticide. The reasons women destroy their children can be similar and both abortion and infanticide are shown to damage women's sense of self-identity. The authors' doubts over either of these as useful strategies of resistance to oppression are grounded in their own determination to retain motherhood as a fundamental identity for the women in the texts (and perhaps in their societies). Yet they also recognise that this role is too often constructed by the patriarchal ideologies of society for the benefit of the dominant group (generally, but not necessarily all, men) rather than being an identity women create for themselves.

The suggested strategies of resistance considered in this chapter: suicide, legal action, separatism, sexual exploitation of men, abortion and physically fighting back, have all been exposed as problematic. The failures of all these strategies seem to rest on their implied acceptance of current social constructions of gender relationships based in patriarchal

ideologies. Chapter Four will begin to explore some of the ways certain authors are subverting the norms of male-female interaction through several strategies. These include: the representation of female sexuality; exposing the ways in which patriarchal expectations also disadvantage men; teasing apart the biological and cultural aspects of motherhood; and exploring ways in which solidarity can work positively to create a society founded on principles of equality. Challenging women's oppression has to attack the social structures and attitudes rooted in those patriarchal ideologies which circumscribe women's choices. Only by changing the community itself can real freedom be found for men as well as women. Chapter Four will consider how Aidoo, Collen, Head and Vera begin to imagine female and male identity in such a society.

CHAPTER FOUR

Challenging the structures of oppression

This chapter will explore how some of the writers criticise the way men and women are forced to interact in ways which promote conflict by the structures of society which encode such interaction. The focus will be on the novels of Aidoo, Collen and Vera, and some of Head's short stories. Their texts not only expose inequitable assumptions about women in their societies but also promote practical action. Additionally, they imagine alternative paradigms for relationships, predicated on alternate gender identities, which would enable a more equivalent society.

Taking Positive Action

Mamphela Ramphele, in her article 'Do Women Help Perpetuate Sexism', has suggested that the insistence of some feminist groups on a transference of power from men to women is predicated on an erroneous conflation of power with the 'use of force to maintain control over resources' (1990, 11). In fact, she suggests that the amount of force any agent has to use is in inverse proportion to the power that they actually have. Having violently to lay claim to any resource (including that of the productive and reproductive resource of women) exposes a lack of power over such resources. She suggests instead that a better definition of power is the:

'range of interventions of which an agent is capable'¹ ... [so] ... intervention in history includes the decisions not to act, because that decision has outcomes or consequences. Thus resistance and acquiescence to dominance are expressions of interventions in history.

(Ramphele, 1990, 11)

¹ Anthony Giddens and Daniel Held (1982) *Classes, Power and Conflict* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press (334).

December Green takes Ramphele's comments to mean 'the decision not to act [is] a powerful act in itself' (1999, 153). Green suggests that sometimes African women may appear to be passive and accepting but in fact they are actively choosing not to confront systems of oppression directly. Judgment is used to interpret events and at times 'letting it pass' can be an 'active decision' to avoid the dangers of direct confrontation. As far as Green is concerned this is different from accepting an oppressive situation: 'Women may not accept men's authority but choose not to confront it either' (1999, 159). The vital element for Ramphele and Green is choice; thus, women must have other options than to refuse to act, if refusal is to be a form of power.

Green does offer other choices for women. The use of deference – kneeling, speaking softly, feigning ignorance – to manipulate, for example. Aidoo offers an example of this in *Changes*. Mma Danjuma wants to persuade Ali's father to leave Ali with her when he travels. As Aidoo shows, Mma cannot directly tell the men her opinion but has to use mechanisms of subservience. She disorients the men by not bringing food as they expected but 'adjusted her veil ... [and] knelt' (1991, 29). Her kneeling also startles the men: 'Another surprise that afternoon. Mma never knelt' (1991, 29). She prefaces her suggestion with compliments to the men and an apology: 'Please forgive my words' (1991, 29). When she finally suggests that Ali is left with her so that he can go to a 'proper' French school the men laugh and tell her that they had just decided on this course of action this morning:

As Mma turned to return to the kitchen there was a smile on her face. Ah men, how easy that was! Had they really discussed sending Ali to the French school? Or had they just agreed quickly so that she, a women, wouldn't have the credit of being the one to have brought out a good idea? Or was it just that they were anxious to eat? Mma knew she would never know the answer to that one. But what did it matter as long as they did not stand in her way and ruin her plans to get the boy properly educated? They are men. They must have their little self-deceptions.

(Aidoo, 1991, 30)

Aidoo shows how this strategy can be effective, even in the face of blatant manipulation. The shift to present tense in the last two sentences gives her statement more universality than just this specific cultural context.

The men do not acknowledge any recognition that Mma might be manipulating them. It works ‘because it allows men to save face’ and ‘to *think* that they are in control’ (Green, 1999, 161 & 160). In the short term these strategies can bestow temporary control to women, however, this is only an exchange of power which does nothing to dismantle unequal gender relations. As Green recognises: ‘withdrawal ... will never overthrow the social , productive, and reproductive relations within which they are embedded’ (1999, 194). In fact, if anything it reinforces the idea that any important power (such as decisions about children) does reside with men because they have to be manipulated into approval. Practically, it is a strategy that could incite violence (in “reality” the men could have abused Mma for not bringing the food) and this is a greater risk in the other option that Green suggests in the category of non-engagement.

This is ‘negative activity’ where women refuse to cook, or to have sexual intercourse with their husbands, or withdraw their agricultural labour (Green, 1999, 164). Whilst this might not be directly confrontational, Green cautions (after Moore, 1988) that ‘negative activity must be carefully calibrated to avoid confrontation and total breakdown’ (1999, 165) of relationships. So, in fact, at times the only viable option is to do nothing in response to oppressive behaviour, whether this is from a violent partner or in the non-flexible social roles for women. Other options which endanger women cannot be seen as equivalent choices. This is not to suggest that there is no merit in these actions but that they are managing strategies within oppressive circumstances rather than an expression of female power *per se*.

Generally, the authors being considered in this thesis represent their characters as asserting themselves in some way, although this sometimes puts them in physical danger. This has been discussed in the previous chapter. Choosing to do nothing as a calculated response to oppression is not widely represented in the literature as might be expected if it is a common choice that women make. Perhaps the assumption can be made that, as women appear to have this strategy already deeply embedded in their behaviour, the authors' project is to suggest tactics whereby gender relations, and the abuses allowed by inequality, are challenged rather than the inequality managed.

Lindsey Collen in *Getting Rid of It* questions the worth of such inaction. One of the three elite women characters, Liz, tells Jumila of her decision not to challenge attitudes surrounding her marriage:

all this despising I've had from him, it's nothing. Husbands often do it. I'm used to it. And his family too. The ongoing meaning transmitted to me and reinforced every day, that I'm not good enough ... I take all this as normal now. Though no one else should. And this is what finally makes me feel sad. My having accepted is nothing, for me. I even thought it was courageous of me. Brave historian's wife. Putting up with so much. At worst I thought I didn't count. But what is the meaning for other people, for people who come after me, of my having accepted, having bowed down, having given up like that? I hadn't ever realized I was being nasty to other people by putting up with things, by bowing down to things, by grinning and bearing things. It never dawned on me.

(Collen, 1997, 94)

By only managing her oppression and choosing to accept it, Liz has damaged others including her children who have accepted stereotypes which enable oppression. So, whilst this action is shown to be a conscious choice that Liz makes, Collen doubts its worth as an accepted form of resistance because it is more valuable to act in ways which will empower other women. By outwardly being seen to accept her oppression, Liz signals to others that this oppression is acceptable. She also sets herself up as a victim by choosing to put up with this marriage where she is despised.

Her final choice can only be suicide which, as noted in Chapter Three, is not a strategy which moves women to a more empowered place. Rather this confirms her status as a victim. Collen's message is about the importance of not giving up. The other elite women in the text also commit suicide. One of them, Rita, makes the decision to kill herself 'because she suddenly understood what it means to accept slavery and imprisonment, maybe. Got rid of herself instead of attacking the slavery or the jail' (1997, 153). Tellingly the verb 'to mean' is in the present tense drawing the reader's attention to the very contemporary reality of the slavery of women. All these middle-class women choose to give up and destroy themselves rather than fight the system which oppresses them.

Collen appears to imply that it is more difficult for the elite women to resist than Jumila, Goldilox Soo and Sadna who already operate on the margins of society. For Liz, Rita and Sara the public nature of their lives, the narcoleptic effect of their material comfort and the difficulty of giving up position and wealth all conspire to limit their perceived choices. This is in contrast to Jumila, Goldilox Soo and Sadna whose poverty already forces them to defy institutions such as the law to survive: for example, they all squat on State land because they cannot afford to rent rooms and Jumila is an illegal street trader. Because their experiences of oppression are not softened by material wealth, they take steps to resist class inequalities, as well as gender oppression, in ways which will be discussed below.

As has been discussed in Chapter Three, turning violence in on the self is not an effective solution to gender violence in the texts being studied. These strategies may work temporarily as threats or allow women to escape when they are trapped but they are not encouraged by Collen as solutions because they do not dismantle the structures of oppression, nor in the case

of suicide, allow the women to survive. Neither is violence against the perpetrators of violence recommended. Green quite rightly suggests that:

To use violence from a position of powerlessness cannot have the same foundation or the same meaning as from a position of power, even though the consequences for those it is directed toward may be the same.

(Green, 1999, 176)

However, defeating one type of violence with another can only produce at best an unstable and insecure victory. One possible explanation for violence against women in patriarchy is that it reflects a recognition from those in power that the power base is constantly under threat from resistance by the oppressed. The further one moves from the centre of power, the more some men feel the need to assert that patriarchal power over women. Being somewhat marginalised themselves, they need to affirm their patriarchal authority by violence against women, knowing that their power is less secure and also subject to those men nearer the centre. Thus violence is a symptom of insecure power, not a way to obtain it.

Collen equally emphasises the need not to resort to violence in challenging violent and oppressive behaviour even if you can. In *The Rape of Sita*, Sita contemplates attacking Tarquin during the rape, and afterwards wonders if she should return to his flat and kill him. Her precedent for violence is her mother, Doorga, a 'bruiser' who will physically fight men and beat them, sometimes just picking fights to remind the male population to be scared. During the rape, Sita is too scared to fight Tarquin in case she does not win and, in the escalation of violence, he kills her. Yet, she realises after her rape that the fear that prevented her from fighting stems in part from cultural attitudes which insist on women's physical frailty. At the end of *The Rape of Sita*, the narrator, Iqbal, comments:

we will have wanted to be free. Freedom. And then we will be free. We will have wanted to be equal. Equality. And then we will be equal ... Such are the hopes of Iqbal ... maybe Sita will write that one down ... And leave it as inheritance to Fiya [her daughter]. To balance all she inherited from Doorga.

(Collen, 1995, 197)

In order to manage in a society where violence is perpetrated on women it is important to be able to fight. This ability can remove women's fear of violence but it transfers fear to the male population. Within patriarchy both men and women are stifled by fear. Doorga is a figure to admire, because she shows that women are strong and physically able to protect themselves against attack. However, a mere reversal of who holds the power base (symbolised in Doorga and the matriarchal Chagos women in this text) only perpetuates fear which cannot lead to an equal society. As Iqbal's statement shows, Doorga's method of resisting violence against women has to be balanced by the aspiration to develop freedom and equality for all people in the society.

Green somewhat simplifies the issues around patriarchy by drawing a gendered line between the disenfranchised who are women 'marginalised by formal power structures' and men who 'are backed by societal authority' (1999, 152). This possibly works at the family level but it does not recognise that some men are also marginalised by formal power structures at the political and economic levels. In contrast, the Women in Nigeria (WIN) Committee have recognised that men can be oppressed by the same social and economic systems which exploit women (whilst recognising that women are further subject to gender specific forms of exploitation within these systems) (WIN, 1985, 7). It is only a group of elite men who are truly at the centre of power. Thus Rahim in *Getting Rid of It*, is labelled by the "centre", in the form of Jumila's conventional brother, as 'an atheist ... Communist. Infidel' (Collen, 1997, 34) and as such is refused permission to marry Jumila. Powerful men are represented by the husbands of Sara, Rita and Liz who embody respectively economic, political and cultural forces; commerce (managing director of the Millers' Group), law (Cyril Blignault: the Chief of the Drug Squad), and education (the Historian). The latter is significantly an historian. The weight of history can be used to prevent change and the

historian's pretentiousness in having *A Midsummer Night's Dream* always open on his desk shows his allegiance to a colonial past.

African feminisms have often taken into consideration that, as members of ex-colonies, the majority of black² African men have also been subjugated historically. In modern, independent Africa some of these men now form part of the elite but most African feminisms recognise that men can be disadvantaged within a post-colonial patriarchy. The authors being considered here seem to conclude that perhaps on a personal level, these men are more likely to present a physical threat to women than those nearer the centre of power. Cyril Blignault is one exception; he represents extreme repression in the empowered class. He symbolises the forces of law and order; thus, his impulse is to imprison and punish as he has to patrol the boundaries of patriarchy. His peers concern themselves only with the centre. Less enfranchised men who operate further into the margins of patriarchy are more aware of the precariousness of their power base. This can cause them to be more violent towards women to pre-empt any resistance, and less tolerant of any deviation from the patriarchy's constructed norm for women.

The authors being considered in this chapter are very aware of this phenomenon. Collen writes about Sita's awareness that Tarquin 'feels fear. Out of fear, he is violent' (1995, 142). His need to rape Sita stems from confusion about his feelings for her as a person and his perception of her as "Woman" within patriarchy:

He admired her. He hated her for his. He looked up to her. For this too he despised her. He hero-worshipped her. But, he didn't like doing this. He didn't want to have to admire, look up to, hero-worship her. He wanted her, and any other woman for that matter, to be unimportant and inferior. He wished Sita would therefore go away. He wanted her to disappear, to disintegrate. Vanish.

(Collen, 1995, 66)

² I am using the term 'black' inclusively here to mean any man who was not part of the colonising force (e.g. slaves, indentured workers from India).

His admiration is transferred into sexual feelings; his misogyny translates this to rape. He is incapable of positioning himself as a friend to Sita because in patriarchal terms man and women cannot relate like this. Collen is clear that these culturally ingrained attitudes are damaging for Tarquin, and by implication men generally. As a literary character, he is representing a type of attitude not an individual. He is named after the rapist of Lucrece and the would-be rapist of the mythic Sita. Rawan in *The Ramayana* (trans. Lal, 1988) has to try and make the abducted Sita consent to sex because if he rapes anyone his head will split in two. In fact, Collen writes about Tarquin using much the same terminology that has applied to female victims of rape in other texts. He will become fractured if he rapes Sita and he imagines that the rape will ‘dirty her with my filth’ (1995, 139) rather than the more usual view that rape tarnishes women.

Tarquin is aware of the consequences if he rapes Sita – that his head will split in two – but he gives in to this impulse anyway. He realises that ‘[f]or what I am about to do, I shall be the most harmed’ (1995, 150-1). At first this might seem an outrageous attitude for Collen to suggest but in fact it confirms Sita’s victory in the encounter, despite the fact that she is raped. Collen emphasises the trap that Tarquin is placed in because he is expected to behave in particular ways as a man, as much as a woman is. By stripping off her clothes and defying Tarquin, by refusing to show fear, Sita defuses his homicidal anger/fear:

He won’t kill Sita now. She knows it. He has lost. On that she has won. It was out of the question. To this extent she had won.

(Collen, 1995, 151)

Tarquin is reduced to mental (and temporarily physical) impotence but he cannot choose not to rape her: ‘patriarchy gave him only one road ahead. He couldn’t escape because he was in his own flat’ (1995, 150). He is damaged by the very ideology which is meant to give him power.

Aidoo similarly exposes the way patriarchy encodes male behaviour with detrimental effects. In *Changes*, Aidoo shows how Oko destroys his marriage because of social pressure to behave like a man. It is important that the vehicle with which he asserts his authority is rape, rather than beating. Although it is an expression of dominance it is also an attempt to express his love for Esi. His dilemma is created through the opposing forces of his love and the demands from family and friends (and general social attitudes) that he proves his masculinity, by asserting his superiority in the relationship. He has been warned by other men that:

It's not safe to show a woman you love her...not too much anyway ... Showing a woman you love her is like asking her to walk all over you. How much of her love for how heavy her kicks.

(Aidoo, 1991, 7)

But Oko does love Esi desperately; he had courted her for two years and has 'fought to keep [the marriage] going' (1991, 7) for six years. There is also pressure from his mother and sisters to have more children within his marriage or 'outside' it because of the 'unsafety of having an only child' (1991, 8).

Aidoo is not suggesting that it is only the rape that finishes the marriage. Oko's expectations, culturally created, put intolerable pressure on the relationship because Esi will not conform to a socially acceptable, female role. Oko might love her but he cannot tolerate her independence or that she prioritises her job over her domestic and reproductive "duties". The rape is a culmination of the power struggle. It still might not have been final if Oko had followed his heart rather than his need to be masculine. As soon as he has raped her he 'was already feeling like telling Esi he was sorry. But he was also convinced that he mustn't' (1991, 10). To apologise would be to lose the advantage he thinks he has gained and break the laws of patriarchy – it is not that he should not apologise but that he 'mustn't'. Like Tarquin,

Oko is trapped in the gender relationship created by a patriarchal culture. He is unable to transcend this paradigm to form an equal partnership with Esi.

Collen and Aidoo suggest the cultural assumptions that place men in a position of control over women are not natural, necessary or inevitable, neither do they work to the advantage of all men. The hierarchies that patriarchal ideologies create place some men nearer the centre than others. Furthermore, men are often as fearful as women in a society which sets great store by how much power one person has over another. Whilst women fear abuse, men fear losing what power they have (this is also seen in inter-female relationships where, for example, mothers-in-law abuse their daughters-in-law to assert that small power that they have). By renouncing power, men can free themselves from the fear of having power taken from them and from pressure to act in acceptably masculine ways. It is no accident that in Collen's text those men able to do this are already removed from the centre, have less power and are therefore potentially more subject to the centre themselves. This is not to release that power to women, but to allow equality to develop, thus, realising a free and cohesive society which has a greater collective strength than gender divided communities.

Collen particularly champions collective action as a powerful tool for change but this should not be used, in Collen's view, to perpetrate violence on the oppressor. In *Getting Rid of It*, Sadna reports a potentially violent situation at the Party meeting. There have been rumours of a mob beginning to arm itself so that they can fight the government forces physically when they come to bulldoze them out of their homes. At this level, it is the very centre of patriarchy which attacks violently, not only women, but less powerful men. The Party do not want this kind of victory (presuming they win) because it only perpetuates a power struggle. Non-violent action, such as the housing march, is seen as more revolutionary

in terms of re-identifying women if not changing their material circumstances: “We won’t get houses straight away, but we change straight away,” the woman from the House Movement said. “Look at us. Just look” (1997, 164). Men participate in the march too but it is the women who articulate their own metamorphosis by joining in this action.

The ability to take collective action is seen as an important part of female identity in much African feminist thought. There are two aspects to collectivity: one which can be termed “sisterhood” – the cooperation between women on a personal basis; the other “collective action” or “solidarity” which brings women (and sometimes men) together in a group which has specific political objectives. “Sisterhood” can imply a somewhat idealised notion of black women’s ability to form close bonds with each other.

The particular ability of African women to form a “sisterhood” has been much discussed in black feminist theory. Often informed by ideas of community and polygyny, these theories imply that black women are better at creating bonds of “sisterhood” than their white counterparts. This does appear somewhat romanticised and something that has been primarily promoted by African-American women in response to the very particular historical circumstances of transportation and cultural isolation. This is not to suggest that African women do not appreciate the strength of cooperation. Eunice Njovana (director of the Zimbabwean Women’s group, Musasa) identifies a need for women to work together to overcome patriarchal structures:

Women should strike an understanding that they need each other and move from personalising issues. They then rise to the next level of identifying the issues and their differences as well. What is lacking in the women’s movement are relationships.
(Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 167)

Over all the books being studied in this thesis there are a multitude of female relationships.

These cannot be fully analysed here but it is relevant to look at the way in which Vera, Aidoo and Collen represent female friendships in light of the abuse the women suffer.

Yvonne Vera shows how her two main characters in *Without a Name* and *Butterfly Burning* suffer because they are isolated. At first Mazvita in *Without a Name* sees this as positive. Emotional isolation helps her to forget her rape and the burning of her village whilst she finds a new identity in the city. However, once she finds she is pregnant, and therefore cannot ignore the rape, there is no supporting structure to help her cope with the traumatic emotions restored.

In *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi finds that her choice to abort her child alienates her from those women she thought were friends. Deliwe, whom Phephelaphi hero-worships for her refusal to be cowed by those who abuse her, refuses to support Phephelaphi in any way when she finds she is pregnant. In fact, she has an affair with Phephelaphi's lover, and tells him that Phephelaphi has aborted their child thus destroying Phephelaphi's relationship. Phephelaphi is equally betrayed by Zandile who is revealed as her birth mother. Zandile was only prevented from 'throwing the child in a ditch' (Vera, 1998, 123) by a friend adopting the baby. This revelation demolishes Phephelaphi's already fragile sense of self: the knowledge 'shattered her entire core and she became nothing ... She was uprooted but where would she find new ground' (1998, 123). Lacking anyone to trust, Phephelaphi has no outlet for her dangerously unmanageable emotions and she commits suicide. Vera is realistic about the potential for women to betray each other, but perhaps she is also suggesting that women do need to create meaningful and trusting relationships with each other if they are to survive.

Aidoo and Collen write about the value of close female friendships. In *Changes*, Esi and Opokuya:

had missed each other, those two friends. They always did even when they were away from one another for only a few days. And this time they had not been in touch for weeks ... [but] what was between them was so firm, so deeply rooted, it didn't demand any forced or even conscious tending.

(Aidoo, 1991, 32-3)

They are able to rely on one another in all circumstances without this being a burden to either of them. Succour can be given emotionally or practically. Collen shows how friendship in *Getting Rid of It* eases the burden of femaleness within a patriarchy. When Jumila has a miscarriage at home and is left not knowing how to dispose of the foetus (if she admits to the foetus officially she might be accused of procuring an illegal abortion), she goes to her friends for help which they willingly give. The problem of disposing of the foetus, as Sadna says is ‘ours now’ and Jumila is grateful that ‘[a]t least there’s three of us’ (1997, 115).

However, this type of support is limited in its capacity to challenge the structures which create oppression. Although Sadna, Goldilox Soo and Jumila talk about presenting themselves with the foetus at the barracks, challenging the police to arrest them all, pragmatically they only have the choice of trying to discreetly get rid of it without officialdom finding out. If they are imprisoned their children will have no one to care for them.

When they find Jumila’s negative pregnancy test result actually belongs to another woman, who must have received a false positive result “sisterhood” begins to segue into notions of solidarity. They determine that they must find this Jayamani to correct the mistake in case she risks an abortion unnecessarily. Here it is Jayamani’s femaleness that compels them to act, not a friendship, as she is a stranger. Green (after Maxine Molyneux³) suggests that:

women’s solidarity is conditional. Unity must be constructed; it is never given. Even when unity exists, it is always conditional and tends to collapse under the pressure of acute class conflict. It is also threatened by differences of race, ethnicity and nationality.

(Green, 1999, 202)

Novels are a way to construct such solidarities so it is acceptable if they seem to offer somewhat romanticised version of friendship and unity. Importantly, *Getting Rid of It* also

imagines friendship across the class divide. Lindsey Collen's work is particularly explicit about the way traditional attitudes work with colonialism and slavery to weave a web of oppression that affects the poor, as well as women across the classes. Each of the three friends has a meaningful relationship with an elite female "boss" which is supportive and equal. Although each of them are employed as servants for these elite women, Collen emphasises the companionship of the women.

However, whilst "sisterhood" is supportive in managing oppression, it is not a relationship which will engender change. Middle-class women in Mauritian society might be more comfortable materially but Collen shows how they are similarly oppressed by being more subject to social conformity than the poorer women. In fact, it is these women who are less able to change their situation and more likely to escape through suicide.

In *The Rape of Sita*, Collen also differentiates between the notions of "sisterhood" and "solidarity". The abuse Véronique is suffering at her rape trial is stopped by the presence of fourteen of Sita's friends sitting in court on the second day after Sita witnesses all the men in the court (including the prosecution) using the opportunity to make smutty jokes at Véronique's expense. Although she does not know Véronique, Sita feels she must support her. However, this type of support, whilst predicated on notions of "solidarity", in fact operates on the basis of "sisterhood". The abuse stops but the mere presence of the women in court cannot alter the legal system which enables this abuse. It is significant that Véronique's rapists are acquitted.

Yet, in part, this impulse towards solidarity rescues Sita from her depression over her own rape. She has thought of killing herself but, as Collen shows, each time Sita tries to plan her suicide her thoughts inexorably slide to its impossibility:

³ Maxine Molyneux (1985) 'Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, the State, and Revolution in Nicaragua' *Feminist Studies* 11(2), 227 – 254.

Sita had thought of killing herself, putting an end to her own life ... She had thought of the cliffs at Grigri again. Then thought she might end up swimming instead. Her life instinct may be too strong, she had thought. Had also thought of the bridge at Montayn Ori. Popular place for suicide. Then thought maybe someone she knew would go past and stop her ... Then of poison ... Drown in her own secretions. The revolting smell for the people who cleaned up the mess. And so had concluded that stabbing would be better ... Like Lucrece did ... after Tarquin had raped her long ago. But that was long ago. Even at the time Brutus thought it was a mistake.

(Collen, 1995, 191)

Here it can be seen how Collen rejects the notion of suicide as a feasible strategy of resistance, although she acknowledges that it might be an option women who have been raped (or otherwise abused) might contemplate. The strength of her portrayal is not so much that Sita rejects suicide, but finds it literally unthinkable. For Collen, suicide ought not to be in women's repertoire of responses to abuse.

Some of the methods that Sita thinks of are rejected out of consideration for others and it is this philanthropy which brings her out of her depression. When Mowski comes for her help having been attacked for being a witch she finds the answer to surviving. In supporting Mowski, she reclaims her identity as a member of 'the All Women's Front, and ... the movement' (Collen, 1995, 196). This is not an idealistic notion on Collen's part. Mowski has been attacked by her neighbours, including women. However, Collen posits that for change, women have to take collective action in such groups. Mowski will be able to stay in her home because 'hundreds of women' will stand by her. This reverses the previous position where it has been easy for the villagers *en masse* to persecute (or ignore the persecution of) a lone woman; by amassing support this becomes the norm and will shame everyone complicit in this abuse so that they will 'pretend they did not turn their backs' (1995, 196).

As noted previously, in much of modern Africa the traditional age-sets, kinship groups and secret societies are being replaced by women's groups based around, for example, occupation, church, business enterprises or place of residence (Green, 1999, 167, 174, 199).

Collen, herself a trade union activist (see for example PANA, 1999), shows how both Sita and the three friends in *Getting Rid of It* are actors in promoting change through their involvement in political parties and social movements. Goldilox Soo, Sadna and Jumila defend their right to make homes on empty government land by joining the House Movement and demonstrating against government action to clear the land when they have nowhere else to live. The book is structured around the women determining to get to their first party meeting despite the problems that crop up in their day. This is where their determination to end oppression has led them:

Today. The three of them intend to act. Intend. Today. This very afternoon. *Old oppression around too long now*, they felt it in their bones: time for getting rid of it. *Start today.*

(Collen, 1997, 9)

To promote such involvement, Collen shows how, whilst Goldilox Soo, Sadna and Jumila all have doubts about the meeting, they find that even they – poor, female, homeless – can contribute and understand the procedures:

Sadna, Jumila and Goldilox could concentrate on what everybody else was saying. Precise things. Understanding. In their understanding. Within their grasp. Making things change with their own hands.

(Collen, 1997, 194-5)

This is in contrast to legal proceedings where, as noted in Chapter Three, Sadna is bamboozled by the language and formalities of the court. Sita has also been instrumental politically in helping to form a new political party in opposition to the main socialist party which was veering towards the right. Collen makes no major claims of victory for either of these activities, but she shows how such an organisation can be mobilised to agitate for change.

In terms of those African feminisms which insist on men being included in any projects for change, it is important that all the groups above (except obviously the All Women's Front) include men and women working cooperatively. The authors recognise that certain sections of

the male population also experience oppression and have a right to participate in movements for change. Collen is careful never to imply that men have greater power, effectiveness or influence but that men and women are co-equals in these groups. Cooperative action should remain a part of female identity in the opinion of these authors particularly as this can be inclusive of men and can mitigate against notions of competitiveness.

Motherhood and Sexuality

As established in Chapter One, it is generally asserted that motherhood is an important part of female identity in many African societies. As Gloria Ogunbadejo notes: ‘To the African, motherhood is synonymous with womanhood. It is expected to be part of the female instinct and the African woman’s identity’ (1995, 54). One reason given for the scepticism about western feminism’s relevance to African women is the perception that it is anti-motherhood in some way. For example, Rutendo Watawunashwe, interviewed for *Zimbabwe Women’s Voices*, feels that a rejection of motherhood cannot lead to a satisfactory female identity:

I feel that the women’s movement in Zimbabwe and in Africa should avoid the pitfalls that our counterparts in Europe and America have fallen into ... They have achieved a lot for women but many of them are frustrated and are not fulfilled or satisfied in their role as women. I feel that they are almost running away from being women.
(Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 90)

But voices of dissent are apparent in some of the novels being studied. These question the absolute acceptance of motherhood as women’s main and proper identity. Some of the characters are pregnant by rape; or have been abandoned by the father of the child; or have aspirations other than motherhood. The texts do not reject the importance of motherhood to African women, or suggest that this ought not be a part of their identity, but they do appear to be debating the concept of motherhood, not always concluding that it is a positive thing.

Women often have little choice about when and if to have children; particularly in patrilineal cultures where the man and his family usually control reproduction. In matrilineal and patrilineal societies, there is pressure on women to have many children to prove the husband's virility and to produce sons for the lineage. Ogunbadejo notes that '[a]mongst the Ashanti of Ghana, and indeed in many other cultures throughout Africa, the ideal is to have as many children as life permits' (1995, 55). For women, choosing to remain childless or to limit the size of their family to pursue other activities is not generally acceptable. One of the interviewees in *Zimbabwe Women's Voices*, Eunice Kanyongo, claims that 'if it weren't for the fact that I am of ill health ... my husband would have **forced** me to have more children' (Getecha and Chipika, 1995, 44). A barren woman is often ostracised, her barrenness sometimes assumed to be a punishment for offending the "gods". Furthermore, '[i]t is almost always accepted that the man is never "guilty"' (Ogunbadejo, 1995, 55) for the woman's failure to conceive. In such a climate, it is not enough merely to state that the 'African woman cherishes her status ... as a mother' (Kolawole, 1997, 31).

Collen, Vera and Aidoo's books engage in a debate about motherhood to some extent and its impact on female identity in modern Africa. Their texts problematise the notion of women as mothers yet ultimately they retain this as an essential part of an African female identity. Some commentators would consider any erosion of this identity as dangerous in terms of the status of women in society. As Green notes, it is a powerful social tool and one way that women can demand respect in cultures that consider them as inferior in so many other ways (1999, 160). However, whilst this identity can be useful for women, it constricts them into a position where they have little control over their reproductivity. If womanhood is synonymous with motherhood, not to have children cannot be a viable choice for women, and women who cannot have children are alienated. Further, it continues to push men away from a concept of

masculinity that includes nurturing. By women demanding exclusive rights to nurture because it is the only way they can achieve status, social norms are perpetuated whereby men are excluded from a caring role towards children.

The first significance to note in these texts is that practically all the women in the texts have experience of motherhood or at least pregnancy. Narratives have been written by African women which concentrate on the issue of barren women.⁴ However, to some extent, their scope is limited. Because they are predicated on the fact that women have to be mothers, the texts focus on the women's increasingly desperate attempts to conceive. There is little or no consideration of a process that might enable the women to deal with and accept their childlessness and the stories are generally resolved by successful conception or the implication that this will happen imminently. Vera's short story, 'It Is Hard to Live Alone', is more interesting as it juxtaposes infertility against the financial hardship of bringing up a large family, irresponsible fatherhood and the difficulty of choosing to have children in times of war.

The women reflect what can be assumed to be the normal cultural attitude to barren women. MaMlambo says:

It is a terrible thing to be barren ... How can you claim to be a woman without knowing the joy and pain of childbirth? A woman who has never suckled a child on her breast is not a complete woman.

(Vera, 1992, 43)

Her friend, MaMpofu, concurs showing how society stigmatises such women and forces them to be responsible for something that they have no control over: 'Barren! That is a terrible thing. She must be ashamed of herself' (1992, 43). Yet MaMpofu in talking about her family reveals the problems in her choice to be a mother:

⁴ For example: Barbara C. Makhliisa (1984) 'Baby-Snatcher' *in The Underdog and Other Stories* Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 66 – 80; Flora Nwapa (1970) *Efuru* London: Heinemann and (1992) *One is Enough*

I have six children and another on the way. If there is one thing I'm not it's barren...and yet, once I tell a man that I am expecting his child, I never see him again.
(Vera, 1992, 43)

The barren woman is meant to accept shame for something she cannot control, but a woman who has seven children with seven different men can apparently be proud. MaMpofu claims 'I have done my job as a woman' (1992, 44). Vera does not detail the financial hardship that this might create for MaMpofu and is not condemning her morally. It is clear that there is intense pressure on women to prove their worth through having many children even outside of stable relationships. However, there is some hypocrisy apparent in MaMpofu's judgment of MaMlambo's younger sister's pregnancy, fathered by MaMlambo's husband:

MaMpofu would not let the blame lie entirely on the man. 'I think your younger sister knew exactly what she was doing. If I were you I would kick her right out of my home. My six children each have a different father but it is not my fault you know, each father left just before they were born'.

(Vera, 1992, 44)

MaMpofu's double standards are so clear here that Vera must be making the point that women do have to take some responsibility for their pregnancies. However, men equally should be liable for any children of their sexual liaisons. Quite clearly this is not a responsibility that all men are prepared to accept, particularly as the women are socialised to take on absolute responsibility for children's maintenance if necessary and to desire this role for the status it confers.

Men's availability to take on a nurturing role is limited in this short story because they are required to fight. The concern raised by MaMpofu is that men become increasingly itinerant in times of war, having short term relationships without responsibility. Other women in the story debate the prudence of having children within marital and marital-type relationships in times of war precisely because they might be left alone if their partners are killed. Rudo has doubts:

I would like to have a child but I feel really afraid. There are so many women with no husbands but with lot of children. I do not want to be one of them.
(Vera, 1992, 44)

MaDupe agrees that it is problematic but has a different argument. For her the added sorrow of motherhood in times of war is the risk of sons being killed:

These are difficult times to bring a child into the world. Every woman who is raising a son is raising a soldier. It is hard for a woman to raise a child that might have to go back to the soil.
(Vera, 1992, 44)

However, she does not think that this is a reason not to have children:

Women are the back-bone of this struggle. If people like you are barren because they are afraid, what shall be the result of that? Let life flow through you, my child. We need sons to take the place of those whose bodies lie without proper burial ... We must fill the land with the innocence and joy of young ones. It is our task as women and as mothers.
(Vera, 1992, 44-5)

The use of 'barren' in this context opens up a meaning which implies choice rather than a condition. The statement then denies this by linking the idea of femaleness with motherhood which confirms that to be female excludes the notion of childlessness.

Vera is not backing this attitude entirely as this is not the last word on the subject. Rudo is still not convinced: 'your words do not give me comfort. What about our daughters. Will they find husbands to marry them?' (1992, 44). Her concern is wider than merely doing her cultural duty. If she is to be a mother it has to be a responsible decision which cannot be simply about replacing the male population. Daughters will be born who will possibly face the same difficulties as their mothers. Underpinning this story is MaSibanda's refrain (also reflected in the title) that 'it is hard to be a women living alone without a man' (1992, 44) . Vera holds up the issue of motherhood to scrutiny here. She notes the way barren women are stigmatised, and the poverty created for women by prolific childbearing. To have children,

and how many, has to be a thoughtful, conscious decision for men and women, not a given. Not having children must be a valid choice and one which does not compromise femaleness.

In *Changes*, Aidoo considers the implications of choice. Opokuya makes a decision about the size of her family:

Opokuya had decided she wanted four children. She had had them, and then brought the matter out in the open to discuss with her husband, Kubi ... they had agreed that, indeed, four were enough.

(Aidoo, 1991, 15)

Four children is a respectable number and three of the children are boys. Esi has less success in convincing her husband that their one daughter is adequate. His mother and sister support him in thinking that this is unsafe and Oko feels that he has not proved his manhood by only having one girl.

The issue Aidoo faces is the pressure on women to combine roles of wife and mother with their expectations that women will be responsible for all domestic and childcare work; will work outside the home to provide financial support for their children; and will be sexually and emotionally available to their husbands. Through Opokuya, Aidoo highlights the mental as well as the physical cost of managing a job, childcare and running the home:

The children and their father refuse to organise even their already-cooked supper when I'm around... You'd think that with me being away on duty at such odd hours they would have taught themselves some self-reliance. But no. When I'm home, they try to squeeze me dry to make up for all the time they have to do without me.

(Aidoo, 1991, 34)

Opokuya's husband is reluctant to share any of those tasks which are culturally labelled as "women's" duties. Esi, refuses to manage all this and the pressure it puts on her marriage ends in divorce and the loss of her child. She perceives Opokuya's life as 'worthwhile' because she has been able to keep her marriage intact and manages four children plus work. Yet, Opokuya envies Esi's freedom. In another example, Aidoo shows how Ali's first wife, Fusena, has to

give up her education because of her commitment to her family, making Ali's decision to marry the University-educated Esi particularly galling.

Aidoo presents different permutations of how women compromise, showing that none of the female characters find their lives satisfactory. The point is made that it is only women who have to make these choices. Through their biological ability to reproduce, it is popularly assumed that the nurturing role is naturally female. Once they have a child all the responsibility for the practical care of that child falls on them. So Ali can have a 'full-time job ...[and] study part-time for a Master's' (Aidoo, 1991, 65) and be a father with little difficulty because to be a father appears to require very little time input beyond conception. None of the choices illustrated provide a satisfactory answer. A woman is forced to compromise in ways men do not. This necessity arises because of the unique association of women with a nurturing role.

According to Breines and Gordon, the western feminist 'Alice Rossi ... stated recently that we can have little confidence that anyone but the primary parent, the mother, can adequately care for a child' (1983, 497). As Breines and Gordon point out, this assertion has been criticised by Chodorow and Contratto:

In 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother' Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto recently offered a critical perspective on this evaluation of mothering. They suggest that feminists and antifeminists alike have created a fantasy of mothers as 'larger than life, omnipotent, all powerful, or all powerless'⁵ and in doing so reify mothers, denying them subjectivity. The mother-child dyad is conceptually isolated and its specialness exaggerated.

(Breines and Gordon, 1983, 498)

Yet there continues to be an interest in proving that it is in women's biological nature to be the nurturers in society. A recent newspaper article (based on the American anthropologist, Helen Fisher's arguments) noted that:

⁵ Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto (1982) 'The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother' in ed. Barrie Thorne with Marilyn Yalom *Rethinking the Family: Some Feminist Questions* New York: Longman, 54 – 75 (67).

Throughout their lifecycle, girls show more tendency toward nurturing activities, and we believe this is linked to the production of oestrogen. It's amazing how many people have to try and prove that everything is all socialisation, whereas biology and culture go hand in hand ... Women are drawn to activities that involve nurturing and co-operation ... and that is pure biology. You can't discount it.

(Krum, 2000, 2)

Fisher's biological argument does not appear entirely proven – there is clearly uncertainty over the oestrogen influence and the fact that women are drawn towards a cooperative and caring role might not be 'pure biology' but, as Fisher is prepared to acknowledge, culturally influenced.

Although the arguments above are based on western studies, evidence of a belief that maternal feelings are innate in women is reflected in the texts. This is apparent in Ogunbadejo's statement quoted above that motherhood is considered a 'female instinct' (1995, 54). Aidoo also explains Esi's reluctance to completely abandon her daughter in terms of a natural impulse:

She was aware of a strong temptation to stop going to the house and forget about Ogyaanowa. But ... her mothering instincts revolted at the mere thought.

(Aidoo, 1991, 142)

Esi has already allowed Ogyaanowa to live with her husband's family where there are other children and questions the necessity of keeping in contact with Ogyaanowa, particularly given the hostility of her ex-mother-in-law when she visits. However, Aidoo explores the possibility of a mother giving up sole care of her child. Although Esi 'missed her daughter' (1991, 79), she is at least implicitly aware of the convenience of such an arrangement: 'Esi didn't want to admit that the arrangement suited all parties concerned' (1991, 68). Ogyaanowa is no longer bored at the bungalow, and Esi is aware that:

she almost had lost the harassed feeling that attacked her every late afternoon ... [to] do something in connection with her role as a mother, a wife and a home-maker.

(Aidoo, 1991, 138)

Aidoo is careful to note that Oko too 'missed his daughter terribly' (1991, 71) and this arrangement does not exclude Oko as the father.

Aidoo is not advocating women have to give up their motherhood role in order to be fulfilled. Esi still identifies this as an important part of her identity. Yet, the pressures of having exclusive responsibility for child care (which includes all the domestic duties that also form part of wifedom) are exposed. The possibility of women sharing this responsibility is mooted as an option, given that the child itself will not suffer because of this. For Esi it is not an easy decision but it allows her to begin to re-identify herself in other ways than wife and mother. Whilst motherhood is identified as the main prop of female identity, Aidoo's quote above shows how the identities of wife and mother are often inextricably linked. Ogunbadejo makes the point that usually women cannot retain an identity as wife if they are not mothers:

If a wife remains childless, in several parts of Africa the husband has the right to send her back to her family and demand the return of the bride price.

(Ogunbadejo, 1995, 54)

Collen also suggests in *Getting Rid of It* that women might have to give up their children in order to escape their wifedom.

Collen shows Jumila's only route to freedom from her marriage is to give up rights to her child entirely. This is not an easy choice:

Her husband threatened to steal her back he held out the baby girl, five months old then. She was tempted. But then again Rahim was in her ears and in her eyes and in her understanding. The baby opened its mouth and smiled, pulling her towards it. Then everywhere Rahim everyone Rahim pulling away. Then the baby.

(Collen, 1997, 37)

What makes it possible for her to abandon her daughter is to shift her maternal feelings to her orphaned nephew: 'She had The Boy Who Won't Speak to look after instead. No. She said no. Hardened her heart. Against her own daughter'(Collen, 1997, 37). This is not damaging to the woman in the same way as abortion and infanticide, as discussed in chapter Three, because the children still exist within caring environments.

Getting Rid of It particularly begins to tease apart the fact of biological motherhood and the nurturing role. Women's impulse to nurture is not only directed at her biological child/ren

nor does it absolutely tie her to them. Jumila adopts The Boy Who Won't Speak; Sadna has twins, one of which she offers to Jumila as a replacement for the daughter she had to abandon and the one she has recently miscarried. This action is particularly subversive of the patriarchal practice of marriage which ascribes the most importance to biological parentage in order to ensure genetic, patrilineal succession. Jumila is not merely adopting one of Sadna's twins but will register it as her own birth-child. Thus, Sadna is giving up all her rights to the child. Colleen does not label Sadna as abnormal for doing this. Her action is merely an extension of her nurturing role, directed at her friend, rather than her child, thus strengthening their female bond – important for the ability to act cooperatively which, as already noted, is also associated with African womanhood.

The way motherhood is culturally constructed has to be linked to notions of fatherhood if equality is to be achieved. As noted above, Vera mentions irresponsible fatherhood in the short story 'It Is Hard to Live Alone'. In *Butterfly Burning* and 'Whose Baby is It', Vera makes the point that a woman's decision to abandon her children is partly made because there is 'no man ... to ... share the burden with' (1998, 124). The issue of fathers abandoning their children is raised by Bessie Head in some of the stories in *The Collector of Treasures*. However, she also shows how some men in the texts are prepared to accept the role of father to their non-biological children.

For example, in 'Jacob: the Story of a Faith-Healing Priest', Johannah is a woman who has been tricked into sexual liaisons four times:

Johannah had always received proposals of marriage and produced four children always with a view to marrying their fathers, but at the crucial moment, the men simply disappeared.

(Head, 1977, 29)

Despite this, Johannah fulfils her responsibility to the children that these liaisons produce because her identification as a woman gives her no other choice: 'I am a real woman and as the saying goes the children of a real woman do not get lean or die' (1977, 30). 'Real' women have to fulfill their obligations of motherhood and Johannah goes further:

I have come to see the faults are all mine ... Each time I believed that the father of my child would marry me. I have paid heavily for this error of judgment.
(Head, 1977, 31)

Head perhaps suggests that women do have to take some responsibility for their pregnancies but is also clearly critical of the male refusal to be responsible for children. As this story shows, it is easier for society to label Johanna as a 'harlot' than to question the man's part in producing these children.

In *Gender Violence in Africa*, Green refers to 'the nurturing role assigned to [women] in the socially defined sexual division of labour' (1999, 200). The problem in contemporary African society appears to be the increasing failure of men to fulfill their responsibilities in this division. Women have consolidated their position as nurturers by shouldering the burden of care for their "fatherless" children, like Johannah who identifies this as the role of the "real" woman. As women take all the responsibility, men do not have any compunction to develop a nurturing aspect to masculinity. They prove their manliness only by impregnating women. Head does not see this particularly as a product of colonialism or modernisation; for her men have always fallen into two categories, explained in 'The Collector of Treasures'.

She draws a comparison between men based on their conscious decisions in response to society's demands of them. One type is incapable of independent thought. In the 'old days ... he lived by the traditions and taboos outlined for all the people by the forefathers of the tribe' (Head, 1977, 91). Head notes that these were not always rules which benefited women but often regarded them as 'an inferior form of life' (1977, 92). With colonialism such men had another set of rules to obey, which he followed even though this reduced him to the status of

the white man's 'boy'. When independence came such men found their thoughtless acceptance of imposed rules had left them unable to form opinions about how society ought to operate. Such a man:

arrived at this turning point, a broken wreck with no inner resources at all. It was as though he was hideous to himself and in an effort to flee his own inner emptiness, he spun away from himself in a dizzy kind of death dance of wild destruction and dissipation.

(Head, 1977, 92)

He will have a destructive effect on women as he cannot form sustained relationships at all and revels in the 'publicity and sensation' (1977, 100) of 'brawls, curses, and abuse' (1977, 99). The other type of man has:

the power to create himself anew. He turned all his resources, both emotional and material, towards his family life and he went on and on with his own quiet rhythm, like a river. He was a poem of tenderness.

(Head, 1977, 93)

She personifies this archetype in Paul Thebolo and whilst it could be argued that this is a somewhat idealised conceptualisation of a man, this is perhaps acceptable in literature which offers archetypes as social models.

Paul Thebolo fully shoulders his responsibilities as a husband and a father. He is also prepared to widen his social responsibilities. When Dikeledi is arrested for murdering her husband, he promises to take her children 'as my own' (Head, 1977, 103). This archetype is also found another short story in Head's collection: 'Hunting'. Tholo marries a woman who already has a child by a man who has abandoned her. Tholo eschews 'the conflicts of life' to 'communicate ... deeply with his wife, and his work' (1977, 105). This is a model however, that operates within traditional parameters of marriage. This still leaves the women vulnerable if husbands do leave or die. Dikeledi does not have many visitors in 'The Collector of Treasures' because her relatives feared that 'since her husband had left her she would become dependent on them' (1977, 93). Having no husband makes Dikeledi's financial position

precarious. In fact, it is having to beg her husband for school fees for her eldest child that provokes the crisis that leads to her murdering him. Even in *Changes*, Opokuya worries about her fate if anything happened to her husband (Aidoo, 1991, 56). In the face of social change which is making it more acceptable for women not to marry (but not to remain childless) and for men to abandon their children, other models of relationships need to be developed.

Fathers in the other texts being considered in this chapter are conspicuously absent, rarely appearing or meriting a mention and then generally in negative terms. There is marked reluctance in the texts to consider the important role men could play in nurturing children.

Ramphela notes this as a general phenomenon:

For many women the issue of child-rearing as a domain for co-responsibility with their partners is still problematic. The inability to let go of sole responsibility negates the expressed desire to involve the other partner.

(Ramphela, 1990, 16)

Developing nurturing as a part of masculinity would not necessarily deny women's motherhood, and would alter contemporary notions of masculinity in ways which would allow men to be incorporated more easily into equal partnerships with women:

efforts to integrate fathers into the world of children is a positive development, ... this argument is based on feminist psychological work that analyzes the significance of female mothering, a result of which is the suppression in males of the capacity for nurturance and affectionate identification with women. In our opinion, the child's circle of nurturance must be ideally widened to include the father, and others,.

(Breines and Gordon, 1983, 527)

Marriage is not an appropriate arena in which to transform gender roles in this way as it encodes the division of labour outlined by Green above. In *The Rape of Sita*, Collen suggests a way of fathering which operates outside marriage. Mohan Jab acknowledges Sita and her sister as his children but does not insist on marrying or even co-habiting with Doorga. He provides for them materially but more significantly makes time to actively father: 'He gave money for the kids. And more important, he came and told them about his life in the past, and taught them how to think' (1995, 14). In this way he develops 'affectionate identification'

with his children. In such a situation women might lose the status that their monopoly on nurturance confers but will also escape the inevitable negative aspects of such an identification which impedes women's opportunity for equality in other spheres.

Whilst motherhood is retained as an important part of female identity, the problematisation of this issue opens a gap through which women's sexuality can be recognised. In many African cultures, women's role as mother has smothered the idea that women may have sexual needs. As noted in Chapter Two, Coker-Appiah and Cusack found a perception in Ghana that women's 'primary role sexually is to service their male partners' (Cusack, 1999, 24) and that women had 'no right to sexual pleasure and/or to say no to sex' (Cusack, 1999, 30). In fact, as Green notes, 'in many African societies it is the custom that a woman is not supposed to express a desire for sex ... Girls are taught to be passive sexually' (1999, 136). Coker-Appiah and Cusack's research confirms such attitudes in Ghana. Marilyn Aniwa's analysis found that only 2% of the sample felt that women could initiate sex (1999, 70). Even where girls' initiation rites for puberty include training related to intercourse, the emphasis is on ways to increase their future husband's sexual pleasure rather than their own.

As noted in Chapter Two, women's sexual needs are implicitly recognised by the punishment of sexual neglect imposed by their husbands (of course, this can also deny children to women). This is effective because women are not openly acknowledged to have sexual needs thus denying them a right to pursue sexual satisfaction outside marriage. This is in contrast to men whose extra-marital affairs are tolerated if they are not getting marital sex because they are perceived to require a sexual outlet. Head, Aidoo and Vera acknowledge women's sexuality and the latter two imply that it can only be fully realised outside of

marriage. Women's sexual participation and pleasure in sex, as well as the absence of marriage which encodes inequality between the sexes, allows co-equal sex to occur.

Head's collection of short stories, *The Collector of Treasures*, exposes some of the problems linked with female sexuality: morality and the notion that female sexuality is about men's satisfaction. In 'Witchcraft', for example, Head writes that the 'only value women were given in the society was their ability to have sex; there was nothing beyond that' (1977, 49). However, the desire for plentiful sex is not only masculine. The society is highly sexualised across gender divides:

People's attitude to sex was broad and generous – it was recognised as a necessary part of human life, that it ought to be available whenever possible like food and water ... men and women generally had quite a lot of sex.

(Head, 1977, 39)

Mma-Mabele, in 'Witchcraft', is one woman who refuses to sleep with any more men after being abandoned but 'it was rare ... to come face to face with a woman not necessarily in a frenzy about satisfying her genitals' (1977, 49). Female sexuality is also portrayed in a more positive light than this. In 'The Collector of Treasures', Kenalepe suggests that women 'are also here to make love and enjoy it' (1977, 96). This appears to coincide with a focus on the family, specifically children. When the man and woman have this common interest they can share satisfying sexual experiences as Kenalepe and Paul do.

Neither marriage nor absolute monogamy is required to keep harmony. Kenalepe offers to 'loan' Paul to Dikeledi so she can experience sexual fulfillment in a polygamy of sorts. Dikeledi is a trusted friend and, as Aidoo points out in *Changes* through Opokuya, the correct processes of polygyny involved wives choosing new partners for their husband (1991, 97). Kenalepe's actions are prompted by the fact that her pregnancy is making her too ill to want to sex. This underlines social attitudes that men have a right to regular sexual satisfaction but Head balances this by acknowledging that women generally need this too. Because this

arrangement can be understood in terms of polygyny, it is not infidelity. In fact, Kenalepe's care for her friend and her husband's needs enhances her standing as a good woman.

Conversely, when Garesego, Dikeledi's estranged husband, demands sex from Dikeledi, this is portrayed as immoral by Head because it is constructed as abusive. Garesego's other sexual liaisons are not represented as acceptable by Head either as they are not undertaken within those rules of polygyny which involve the wife.

It can be seen that Head does not condone all types of sexual activity for men or women. The character Life, in 'Life', is very active sexually but she is condemned in the text for her emotional bankruptcy. The beer brewers who gather in Life's yard are 'emancipated' and refuse marriage. Yet they are 'subject to the respectable order of village life. Many men passed through their lives but they were all for a time steady boy-friends' (1977, 39). Life sells sex to an 'unending stream' of men. This is shocking but what really makes her 'rotten to the core' is her inability to care for others:

[This] was the basic strength of village life. It created people whose sympathetic and emotional responses were always fully awakened, and it rewarded them by richly filling a void that was one big, gaping yawn. When the hysteria and rowdiness were taken away, Life fell into the yawn; she had nothing inside herself to cope with this way of life.

(Head, 1977, 43)

Her prostitution is a manifestation of her emptiness. Like the men who never cultivated independent thought, Life is unable to connect with her society. For Head, sexuality does not divide along gender lines, but with levels of emotional connection at a personal and community level. However, this tends also to follow gender in Head's stories. Whilst many women are focused on the community, particularly in terms of their responsibility to children, often men are shown opportunistically seeking sex. Men in the stories often pressurise women into sex by claiming this is a necessary preliminary to marriage. Yet, when the woman gets pregnant, this commitment fails to materialise. This has been Thato's experience in 'Hunting'

and Johanna's in 'Jacob: the Story of a Faith-Healing Priest'. Head creates a situation, however, where women like Johanna can laugh at accusations of moral laxity (improper female behaviour) because she is a "real" woman in terms of her motherhood. As discussed earlier, this in itself is not unproblematic, but Head challenges those cultural norms which circumscribe women's sexuality through marriage, without similarly limiting men's.

Collen represents more co-equal sexual encounters outside marriage in *Getting Rid of It*. Jumila and Rahim are not married to each other. Collen describes their experience as having 'found innocence'. There is no domination or sense of attack in her description of their love making. She is as active as he is, undressing both him and herself, and controlling the process: 'she lowered her buttocks, opening her thighs, her yoni, her insides to him' (1997, 43). In fact the language reverses the usual images of penetration with one of enfolding: 'she put her whole weight behind her and drew him into her completely' (1997, 43). Similarly, it is Jumila who is 'vertical woman all roundness' (rather than on her back) and Rahim who is described as 'Exposed. Tender. Vulnerable' (1997, 42) when he is naked. Sex is not something that the man is doing to the woman but a mutual process. Collen recognises the difficulty of locating this relationship within society, however. When the community finds out about Rahim and Jumila, 'they had broken [Jumila's aunt's] house down and removed the rubble' (1997, 45). This is the punishment the 'Godmen' visit on Jumila's aunt for giving Jumila sanctuary and letting her lover visit her there. Their expectation is that women will police each other thus, it is the aunt who is punished because she 'ought to have known better' (1997, 46). In this way, women's solidarity is eroded.

In *The Rape of Sita*, Collen locates Sita and Dharma's relationship in the context of a re-ordered community and she also begins to reconfigure religious meanings through her representation of Dharma, who is named after a Hindu concept. This is discussed in more

detail below. In terms of sexuality, Collen fully signals their equivalence through using language which conflates Sita and Dharma:

he or she sita for there is no he nor she but only both sita all alone ... caressing his or her body letting heat and cool dance on his or her tummy and hand of one side touches nipple of the other ... he or she dharma for there is no he nor she but only both dharma all alone.

(Collen, 1995, 78-9)

The lack of punctuation in the passage emphasises the merging of man and woman until they are indistinguishable as male or female. Collen is not suggesting some type of androgyny as the answer to sexual inequality. It is important that Sita and Dharma are individuals too whose identity includes femaleness or maleness: 'for they are separate and fulfilled and their love is therefore whole' (1995, 79). This equality is reflected in all aspects of their life together.

Aidoo's description of Ali and Esi's lovemaking before they are married contrasts with marital sex. Esi's consent is made clear by setting the description of sex with Ali against Esi's rape by Oko. Then Oko had 'forced her unwilling legs apart' (1991, 9), whereas when Ali goes to 'part Esi's legs ... the legs parted for him willingly' (1991, 85). Yet, once Esi and Ali are married, sex changes:

It was a wild and desperate lovemaking. For both of them. For Esi it was shame for her dependence on a man, who, as far as she could see, was too preoccupied with other matters to ever be with her ... and of course for him it was several shades of guilt, especially ... an awareness that if he was so busy pumping into Esi, then he was also destroying a tradition. And the more he thought of what he was destroying between him and Fusena, the ... harder he drove into Esi.

(Aidoo, 1991, 120)

Ali is now a sexual aggressor and for Esi the pleasure is tainted by feelings of shame. As the marriage progresses Esi's frustration increases as Ali divides his sexual attention between her, his first wife and, it is implied, his new secretary. Now that Esi is married she cannot search for sexual fulfillment elsewhere as she could after her divorce from Oko. Furthermore, her reproductive role begins to eclipse her sexual identity:

there was also this talk of having children. Even if she had been keen on the idea – and God knows she was not – she now wondered how the children were going to get made when she and Ali did not seem to get together often enough to make even one child.

(Aidoo, 1991, 139)

Her frustration is couched in terms of a denial of her right to conceive despite the fact that she is reluctant to have more children. Aidoo shows how, within marriage, Esi resorts to a culturally acceptable construct to complain about sexual neglect – that is that she is being deprived of children.

Aidoo and Collen's attitude to marriage will be considered later, but one negative aspect is that marriage appears to deny a female sexuality at the expense of a maternal role. Outside marriage, women appear able to be both sexual beings and mothers. Furthermore, there is some tentative exploration of a female sexual identity which is not reproductive at all.

Lindsey Collen explores what might be considered a more sexually transgressive relationship by writing about lesbianism. Olabisi Aina has suggested that:

African feminism is only thinking social relations within the heterosexual relations ... issues of rights for the gays and lesbians are outside its agenda. This is because for many African societies lesbianism and homosexuality are nothing but abominations.

(Aina, 1998, 72)

This might be true in general cultural terms but Collen is prepared to consider the implications of homosexuality for women by writing an explicit love scene between two women in *Getting Rid of It*. The description of sex between Goldilox Soo and Sara parallels that between Jumila and Rahim earlier. Specifically, both sexual acts are described as expressing innocence implying that each is as acceptable as the other. This differs, for example, from the suggestion of lesbianism in Njau's *Ripples in the Pool* written twenty years earlier. Here, such a relationship is not only shameful but abnormal and linked to madness. Njau cannot write about lesbianism as part of a normal or healthy female sexuality. The relationship between Selina and her sister-in-law echoes the domination implicit in many female-male sexual relationships. Furthermore, Selina's possessiveness over Gaciru culminates in violence.

In *Getting Rid of It*, lesbianism enables equality as much as non-marital, female-male relationships can. Jumila and Rahim, and Goldilox Soo and Sara stand breast to breast during their encounters to emphasise the equality of the partners. For Collen such a relationship seems more of a possibility but she has to acknowledge the majority view, expressed by Sara's husband, that this is 'depraved'. Like Njau, Collen cannot realistically imagine a sustained lesbian relationship but in her text the destructive force is not internal to the relationship. During their first love-making, Sara's husband finds Goldilox Soo and Sara *in flagrante* and it is this outside agency which ends their relationship. Goldilox Soo is sacked, and Sara, perhaps having glimpsed a better life and love but unable to see a way to escape her marriage, kills herself. Collen's characters are punished for daring to transgress the boundaries of female sexuality, but it is clear that she is supportive of such relationships generally. So a space is imagined for lesbianism, even if it is still very much on the margins. More importantly perhaps, Collen opens a wider debate about female sexuality that is not limited to the pros and cons of marital and non-marital sex.

Meanings of Marriage

Despite some of these authors' reservations about marriage, their project is not to encourage an ending to marriage in its widest sense. Men and women clearly want to have intimate and sustained relationships with one another. The issue is to explore just what "marriage" means in a given culture, how this construction of relationships might work to the detriment of women, and how to re-vision the social and cultural norms which give marriage meaning.

Aidoo in *Changes*, uses the initial incident of marital rape to deconstruct the institution of marriage. As discussed in Chapter Two, until recently in Africa, as in other parts of the world, the law (pre- and post-colonial) deemed it impossible to rape one's wife. By

consenting to marriage, the woman had forfeited her right not to consent to sex. However, whilst the laws of some countries now do allow this complaint to be brought to court, many people still find the idea of marital rape incomprehensible and only admissible in cases of extreme violence. As Green points out: 'Even where laws against wife rape are on the books, social mores are slow to change' (1999, 112). Aidoo's representation of marital rape clearly defines the act between the couple as rape and furthermore confirms it as not only a violent act but a sexual act as well. In Oko's rape of Esi, it is clear that desire and dominance play an equal part in the rape.

Aidoo depicts the tension which can arise in a marriage when the woman refuses to conform to a traditional role. Oko resents the fact that 'Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as wife' (1991, 8), identified by him as cooking and having more than the one child they have already. Esi complains that Oko 'wanted too much of her and of her time' (1991, 38) when she wants to concentrate on her career. Aidoo makes it clear that this is not just a case of Oko's (masculine) unreasonableness; both of them are trapped by gender roles. Oko is as pressurised to assert power over Esi by his friends laughing at him because he is not 'behaving like a man'; Esi is hemmed in by stereotypes of the good wife. Aidoo never implies that feminism means simply that that women are victims of male power, and men are the villains. For Aidoo, patriarchal structures have negative effects on both men and women, and prevent healthy interaction between the genders.

As noted in Chapter Two, naming Esi's experience as marital rape calls it into the public arena where it has to be recognised. However, Aidoo has another, more powerful strategy to combat entrenched attitudes – laughter. On one level this is found in the light and almost comic style which Aidoo uses. This is not to trivialise but to prevent the easy slide into regarding raped women as just more victims of patriarchy by pulling the reader's sympathy

strings. Françoise Lionnet notes that as ‘Hélène Cixous knows so well, it is *laughter* that allows women to function outside of the male economy’ (1997, 215). This tool is not recognised only by Aidoo. Green lists examples of cultures where laughter is used to subvert (1999, 162-3) and in *The Rape of Sita* Collen shows how Iqbal is jealous of the power women create for themselves through laughter (1995, 84). Esi’s hysterical laughter enables her to create ‘a kind of brand new self’ (1991, 11): a self which can decide ‘to feel assaulted’ despite society’s view otherwise; a self which can leave Oko in spite of, or even because of, his pleading that he had only “‘jumped on her” because he loved her and that it had been part of his decision to give the relationship a second chance’ (Aidoo, 1991, 36). Because of this, Esi becomes less rapable. When she asks for divorce Oko is ‘mad’ and ‘threatens’ her but he is forced to talk reasonably with her despite the fact that he still considers her as his wife and thinks she might return. In Oko’s logic (a man who rapes his wife to give his marriage a second chance), rape might have persuaded her against divorce (as in the example of Nnu Ego in *The Joys of Motherhood* (Emecheta, 1979) in Chapter Two) and he would have regained those feelings of power damaged by her rejection of him.

For Aidoo to depict a successful divorce is a way of pushing against the constraints of marriage. As marriages in most African communities are considered unions between families rather than individuals, women are frequently not able simply to leave a marriage. Green notes that divorce is not always a viable strategy for several reasons: the woman’s family may have to repay the bride price; the woman herself risks the possible loss of her children to her husband’s family; she may face alienation from her own community and family if they disapprove of the divorce (1999, 38).

Esi does not divorce as a last resort, out of desperation. She makes a decision with a clear mind after she has identified Oko’s action as rape (1991, 13). Jumila in *Getting Rid of It* also

makes a conscious decision. She knows her husband is fundamentally a ‘good man’ but she cannot stay in a marriage with a husband who has sacrificed the possibility of an amicable relationship to his notions of masculine behaviour. Esi has the advantage of being financially independent and because her marital home is attached to her job, she is not left homeless by her divorce. Yet, eventually she has to give up most rights to her daughter. Jumila has to forfeit her home and her daughter to achieve her separation. She is labelled as mad by her community and family who refuse to help her unless she fulfils one condition – ‘that she return to her husband and her child’ (1997, 37). Collen tells the reader that she ‘hadn’t gone mad. She’d just gone stubborn’ (1997, 36) and through tenacity she survives by becoming a domestic servant. Esi’s financial security means that she can afford to shrug off the criticism of her mother and grandmother but she has to pay a similar price as Jumila eventually. She has to rely in part on Oko’s family for childcare. Eventually Oko’s mother persuades her Ogyaanowa is better off with her where she has ‘sisters and brothers’ (her cousins in western parlance) for company. Neither Collen nor Aidoo, whilst they question “traditional” notions of marriage, feel able to show divorce without price.

However powerful Esi’s laughter might be, Aidoo shows how patriarchy has ways of dealing with such insubordination. Lionnet quotes from Cixous’ article ‘Castration or Decapitation’ where Cixous recounts the story of the Chinese women who were given the choice of becoming silent or being beheaded:

It's a question of submitting feminine disorder, it's laughter ... to the threat of decapitation.⁶

Esi is silenced by being coerced into remarriage. In conversation with Opokuya, they acknowledge that women are not permitted to stay unmarried in their culture:

⁶ Hélène Cixous (1990) ‘Castration or Decapitation’ in eds. Russell Ferguson *et al.* *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures* Cambridge, MA: the New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 345 – 356 (346). Quoted in Lionnet (1997), 215.

“People thought her single state was an insult to the glorious manhood of our men. So they put as much pressure as possible on her –”

“– until she gave in and married, or went back to her former husband.”

“And of course if nothing cured her they ostracised her and drove her crazy.”

(Aidoo, 1991, 48)

So whilst Esi is adamant she will not remarry, once Ali articulates her independence to himself – ‘you don't strike me as someone who'll miss anybody ... as if you don't need anybody’ (1991, 86) – he persuades her into marriage. His proposition is harder to resist because Esi is lonely at times. This marriage is not successful either but Esi has been silenced effectively because she can no longer laugh at her situation but only cry. In a form of decapitation her mind is ‘completely blank’ and her will has gone.

Whilst Aidoo's book cannot offer a clear way out from the difficulty of a society which allows women to be socially constructed as rapable through marriage and disallows single women, she does offer some hope. Firstly by allowing Esi, however briefly, to transcend the social implications of her gender and secondly by offering a sexual encounter which counterpoints the rape. In the novel's final chapter, Opokuya's husband, Kubi, visits Esi hoping to find Opokuya there. Instead he finds Esi in tears:

He found himself holding her close. . Then, as though he had taken a quick decision just in that minute, he turned to face her and hold her closer and hard. She did not feel like offering any resistance. He began to kiss her face, her neck and all over. Then they were moving towards the couch and Esi could feel Kubi's manhood rising.

(Aidoo, 1991, 163)

Kubi's reaction could be read, not as male opportunism, but as an offer of sexual “consolation”, understandable in the light of Esi's somewhat non-traditional attitudes to male-female relationships. Or it could be a genuine misreading of the signals Esi is giving. After all, Esi's initial reaction to Kubi's sexual advance is ‘Why not?’ However, it can also be suggested that Esi has thoroughly returned to a place where she is viewed foremost as a sexual object.

This incident could easily have become rape when Esi, remembering her friendship with Opokuya, withdraws from Kubi's embrace. Aidoo however gives this incident a different meaning by showing how Kubi instantly stops and leaves. He is prepared to privilege his friendship with Esi over other gender relations which might let him assume and take sexual "rights" in this situation. Aidoo emphasises that friendship 'symbolises a choice' (1991, 164). She bestows on Esi the power of choice to 'maintain a friendship ... [or] not to maintain a friendship' (1991, 164) in her decision over whether or not to consent to sex with Kubi. Kubi recognises Esi's ability to make this choice and thus respects her decision not to jeopardise her relationship with Opokuya (as well as being reminded of his own fidelity). What prevents rape is that at this moment Kubi and Esi both recognise women's capacity to make choices, thus it gives Esi a real opportunity for consent. This rewrites those problems discussed in Chapter Two where women's consent becomes an irrelevance in sexual encounters.

In her non-fiction writing, Aidoo has identified her reservations about marriage and the poor position in which the institution puts women:

As the very foundation of the family, marriage has maintained a chameleon-like capacity to change its nature in time and space and to serve the ignominious aims of every society: slave-owning, feudal, or modern bourgeois. Throughout history and among all peoples, marriage has made it possible for women to be owned like property, abused and brutalized like serfs, privately corrected and, like children, publicly scolded, overworked, underpaid, and much more thoroughly exploited than the lowest male worker on any payroll.

(Aidoo, 1985, 226)

The older women in *Changes* are shocked at 'how little had changed for their daughters' (Aidoo, 1991, 107) but why should it have when the institution of marriage continues in its myriad of forms; traditional, Christian, Muslim or even contemporary "marriages" in which men take a series of mistresses in addition to their official wife? This last example is often cited as eroding marriage but, in fact, the opposite has happened. Marriage, as Aidoo states, has expanded to include these new and diverse ways by which men can own women.

Collen, it appears, feels much as Aidoo about marriage. The most destructive relationships for women in *Getting Rid of It* are marriages. Jumila, for example is married to a stranger because her brother disapproves of Rahim. Everyone in the community knows that Rahim and Jumila are in love but her brother arranges a marriage for her as soon as she is sixteen. Collen shows how this loveless marriage to a stranger is sexually violent:

She didn't even know his name. Had never seen him. And when she did see him, she felt a cold withdrawal in herself like from a toad ... He had a difficult time. For example, he had to tie her down on the marriage bed to impregnate her. This was expected of him. There would be sheet inspections and he didn't want anyone challenging his manliness in his house.

(Collen, 1997, 35)

Collen's apparent sympathy for the husband, and his need to maintain respect for his masculinity, is somewhat tempered by depicting his brutal response to this sixteen year old to whom he is a stranger. His action is taken at her expense to preserve his manliness.

All the women who commit suicide in *Getting Rid of It* are married, and their deaths are linked to their husbands' attitudes to the marriage relationship: the historian despises Liz because she is 'not good enough' for him; Sara's husband labels her an alcoholic and neglects her for his other family; Rita is imprisoned in her home by Cyril. Even Jumila's widowed sister cannot escape from the depression that descended on her when she was married. She kills herself too because even when 'that man was gone, the lies were still there, inside her' (Collen, 1997, 96). She has fully internalised what it means to be a wife in her society.

Collen shows how marriage encodes the power imbalance between the sexes. The man is effectively the owner of his wife and therefore she should obey. The expectations of these three husbands vary, with Cyril Blignault being the most extreme, but they have in common an assumed right of control over their wives. Most gallingly this can be presented as being something that is for the benefit of the women. When Cyril and Rita have an argument:

He told me I was lucky he wasn't a drunk and that he didn't beat me and the kids up every night. Can't remember why. Maybe I said something like I'd like to go to the butcher's and baker's myself, making up some excuse as usual.

(Collen, 1997, 121)

He couches her imprisonment as a luxury where she doesn't have to leave the house for anything material. That she might need some freedom is not contemplated. As Rita says:

what kind of a life is it that a person has to be lucky not to be beaten up in her own house at night. And so on. I was screaming, I could hear myself. I wonder what got into me. It's true what he said. I'm lucky he doesn't beat me up.

(Collen, 1997, 122)

The final comment shows how she has internalised these attitudes about her position in the marriage. Liz also does this, "putting up with" hierarchical stereotyping until she realises that this has turned her children against her too. Accepting the social norms of marriage proves to have disastrous consequences for both these women. Liz and Rita, as well as Sara, have accepted the mantra articulated by Sadna: 'Submit or kill yourself, Sadna, the slave thought comes again. Your two choices. Submit. Or if not, suicide' (1997, 192). The three women "bosses" cannot submit to the demands of their marriages so they do commit suicide which appears their only other option.

Collen shows how women can be liberated by refusing to marry, but not at the expense of intimate relationships with men. Not marrying has typically been the case for Sita's ancestors, in *The Rape of Sita*. She can trace her female forebears from 1625, precisely because they have not married and been absorbed into a patrilineage. The fathers of their children are important and named, but they remain tangential to the female line:

Olga ... had her own daughter in turn, who grew up and met a labourer called Gassen who was her friend, and together they had a daughter called Anjalay ... [who] fell in love with a man from the North, called Swaraj, and Olga, her granny ... let her go up to the North where the man called Swaraj lived. And though Anjalay loved him, she would never live with him, but on her own.

(Collen, 1995, 98-9)

Friendship forms a more important and equal bond between these men and women than marriage. Collen's female character's remain independent by not cohabiting (Sita and

Dharma's cohabitation is not the norm) and therefore their homes cannot become prisons or places of abuse.

Such living arrangements do not have to compromise children either. Doorga and Mohan Jab, Sita's parents, are not married, neither do they cohabit. The impulse against marriage is initiated by Mohan Jab:

he doesn't want to *own* a woman ... [marriage] means owning, and he is not going to own any other human being ... Enough of slavery in the history of this place.
(Collen, 1995, 11)

Mohan Jab is enlightened enough to see how marriage can be a form of slavery for women and rejects it on these grounds despite the possible advantages it gives men. This does not compromise his role as a father. He declares Sita and her sister as his children, loves Doorga and supports his children financially as well as developing a personal relationship with them.

For Collen this very unhusbandlike behaviour commends him as a father and a partner:

he never even hit Doorga. Who would have? He never even shouted at her, not moaned about the food she served him when he came around. He had none of the traits of a husband, and this had pleased Doorga.
(Collen, 1995, 14)

(Collen fails to fully realise this archetype, however, as Mohan Jab's mother takes on the domestic role in his house.)

Collen's humorous claim for this all female household, including animals, refutes any mysticism around the family. Indeed, she subtly undercuts her own claims by suggesting its improbability. The cows had she-calves 'more often than not ... This was probably a rumour rather than the truth ... [and the] hens produced chicks by immaculate conception. Hen-chicks' (1995, 90). The absolute femaleness of the household is not what is important but the emphasis on femaleness in the family when years of history, family and political, has ignored a female presence.

The importance of a strong and independent female identity is also stated in Vera's work. Vera suggests that the inability of women to have an independent image of themselves which does not rely on the male gaze is one of the main stumbling blocks to more equality in the relationships between the sexes. In *Butterfly Burning*, she suggests that women allow men to validate them sexually and physically by their touch and recognition of them as sexual beings. Women, she asserts, have to learn to love themselves:

It was about loving her own eyebrows before he had passed his fingers over them ... before he offered her the smoothness on her arms like a gift and gave her the straight lean hips she already owned, and made them hers ... She wanted the sense of belonging before that kind of belonging which rested on another's wondrous claim, being herself because she was a flower blooming in her own green pool, to be able to pick the flower which was herself from the water before he reached out his own strong arm and did all that for her and made her feel empty and waited upon.
(Vera, 1998, 69)

Vera is not suggesting that women should do without men but it is only once a woman has love for herself that she can properly choose relationships to:

seek something more which perhaps only another can provide, and love a man simply because she could, and indeed something in him made her heart beat, and yes, her knees weak with the flow of his tender caress.
(Vera, 1998, 69)

Relationships with men on any other terms are dangerous for women. In Vera's terms:

if she was a flower and all the water dried and he did not water her garden, what then, since she knew nothing about any of it not even what kind of flower she was.
(Vera, 1998, 69)

Relying on men materially or to affirm an identity places women in a vulnerable position, as already noted in relation to some of Bessie Head's stories. However, it is not so simple to create this type of identity in societies which insist on women being adjuncts of men.

In *Butterfly Burning*, Phephelaphi might not be married to Fumbatha formally but the form of their relationship is marriage, and the nature of it discourages her independence. His impulse towards her is of ownership: he 'had never wanted to possess anything before, except the land. He wanted her like the land beneath his feet' (1998, 23). In the absence of formal

marriage, Fumbatha worries how to ensure that she is bound to him and tries to insist on her dependence. When she wants to apply for the nurse training (only for single women) he tells her 'I work. I take care of you. It is not necessary for you to find something else' (1998, 59). Persuasion becomes command when she persists and he 'forbids' her to apply. She ignores the command and this sets in motion a series of events that lead to her suicide. Vera shows how difficult it is for women to gain independence.

Even though Fumbatha is never physically violent, his power to command Phephelaphi is based on the fear women can feel in societies where certain male violences are tolerated as acceptable. As pointed out in the first chapter, it is not so much violent acts but the fear of being subjected to violence that works powerfully to keep women repressed. One of the main effects of rape on the female population is the fear that it engenders. How rape operates oppressively within marriage has already been considered, but it is used outside of marriage as well and is probably the most powerful expression of male dominance. Even women who avoid rape are often controlled by fear; they could be raped if they transgress the boundaries of appropriate behaviour for women. This includes how they dress, where they go and at what times of day but, however much women try to stay within these boundaries, just being female can make one a victim of rape. In *Without a Name*, Vera recognises that: 'Mazvita carried a strong desire to free herself from the burden of fear' (1994, 25) which has been induced by her rape. Mazvita is finally overwhelmed by her fear and Vera's final chapter shows Mazvita has little hope of regaining a sense of self:

If she had no fears, she could begin here, without a name. It is cumbersome to have a name. It is an anchor. It brings figures to her memory. It recalls the place to her, which, earlier, she has chosen to forget ... She would have liked to begin again without a name, soundlessly and without pain. She is frightened. She has begun poorly.

(Vera, 1994, 101 – 102)

The final image of Mazvita in her burnt out village with her dead baby in her arms is the inverse of community and motherhood.

Collen uses *The Rape of Sita* to suggest more appropriate emotions for a raped woman than guilt and shame, and grapples with the notion of fear. Sita has no conscious memory of her rape initially. Realising that she has some 'lost hours' from a trip to Reunion, she sets out to explore her memories. She is fearful that there might be 'shame in it ...guilt' (1995, 35). Thus, Collen acknowledges the feelings women often have after being raped, but Sita only finds '[a]nger. It was rage. It was fury' (1995, 35). This is not a timid emotion at all but 'a wild anger so terrible and a murderous rage so ferocious, as to make her tremble' (1995, 36). Collen sanctions these feeling in relation to rape. Further, she shows how such emotions are more likely to make women take positive action. Guilt and fear lead to self-destructive acts; anger might induce violence against the perpetrator but Collen shows that anger coupled with support leads to positive outcomes.

Sita becomes a survivor rather than a victim. However, Collen does not ignore the fear that has to be overcome, even in her powerful and aware character. Before she remembers the rape, Sita feels inexplicable fear:

Fear, the feeling she didn't know, had started to creep up inside her.
She started to run ...She suddenly knew she was running away from someone ...
More and more a feeling of being prey, an almost animal fear, rose in her ... 'I am fear personified.'

(Collen, 1995, 101 & 102)

It is the fear that alerts Sita that something must be wrong. One strategy that Collen uses to rewrite women is to imagine them as usually fearless instead of habitually fearful. Sita's mother, Doorga taught Sita 'to *know no fear*' (1995, 94) so fear is an abnormal state for Sita.

When Sita feels fear it prompts curiosity, leading to self investigation. In Reunion she is:

Scared to be closed in. On the bus. Scared to be out. Out in open spaces ... you aren't afraid of anything, Sita. She heard her mother's voice ... And a wave of fear to contradict the memory ... *She didn't know fear*. Never had ... She didn't even

understand other people when they were afraid ... She had never known fear. The second time now ... 'It's the same fear,' she thought.

(Collen, 1995, 110)

As she explores and analyses her fear, she remembers the rape and through the same process of analysis comes to terms with it.

Sita realises that women's own perception of themselves has to be changed if fear is to be mastered. When she is trapped in the rapist's flat, she calls on her husband:

'Dharma,' she thought, 'why are you not here to save me.' Thrown into the position of downtrodden woman, she became one. Sita the brave. She thought she had to be saved. For a moment. Because how could she save herself?

(Collen, 1995, 146-7)

She does not fight Tarquin because she is scared that he will kill her if she struggles but after the rape she wishes she had because 'it was only in the idea of patriarchy that she was weak, not in the physical struggle, one to one' (1995, 156). The trauma she suffers afterwards is more psychological than physical: 'afterwards, wasn't she brought down by her own mind' (1995, 176). Once she remembers that she is raped, her anger is replaced by doubts about her culpability. Looking at the rape in some detail shows Collen is realistic about the options women have. She does imagine ways in which women can address rape, to avoid it or cope with the aftermath but it is clear that she knows that survival can mean compromise.

Sita tries a number of tactics to avert the rape: she thinks of screaming; of escaping; she tries 'rational confrontation' (1995, 143); she wonders if she should try to attack or even kill him; she makes an explicit denial of consent; 'she played dead' (1995, 148); finally she rips off her clothes. Some strategies are rejected as too dangerous. She is scared that if she enrages him by screaming, fighting or running away, he will kill her. She is not sure that anyone will hear her if she does scream or if they would come to help if they did. Escaping is practically impossible – the door is locked with no sign of the key and her bag containing her important documents is on the other side of the room. If she does escape, she is not sure where she

would go; she is in unknown territory and wonders how many of the people about (who would be mainly men) would rather rape her themselves than help her: 'would they turn into hunting men, would they, like a pack of wild dogs, attack her, trap her, and kill her? Rape her?' (1995, 146). Even the police might rape her as they did her friend, Véronique. Becoming completely passive does work temporarily. Obviously assuming she is no longer a threat, Tarquin lets her stand so he can undress her. This puts her in a better position to attack him but again she is worried that if she does not disable him he will retaliate so far that she will not survive this rape and this soon becomes her main concern. Collen does not advocate pointless sacrifices of self in the fight against patriarchy.

The most successful strategy, ripping off her own clothes, she has learnt from her Chagos friends. The women there 'have no fear of rape, and ... believe they cannot be raped ... therefore cannot be raped' (1995, 150). They know men are scared of women. Sita finds the act empowering and it certainly reverses the emotional situation. Collen now describes her as having '[m]atriarchal confidence in her voice', she is 'dignified ... angry, defiant' (1995, 150). Conversely, Tarquin 'shrank ... quaked ... was terrified ... trembled ... whimpered ... Shame struck him' (1995, 150). In one way she has won. She knows that he will not kill her now but she is still raped. Unlike the Mauritian police faced by jeering, naked Chagos women, Tarquin has no way to evade his intention to rape because he cannot walk away from Sita.

Collen gives these as strategies and suggests situations where each one might be most effective without shying from the horror of the act. However, this is not a simple narrative of events. Interspersed with the story are comments from the narrator, Iqbal, addressed directly to the reader. This commentary tries to pinpoint the exact moment where Sita's bad judgment put her into a rapable space:

This may be the place, the very point where Sita made an error. Should she, on finding out that Rowan Tarquin was separated from his wife, have immediately said: 'I would rather stay in a hotel, thank you.'

This may have been better. Surely, she should have said it. Or would this, on the other hand, have been rather silly on her behalf? Even paranoid?

(Collen, 1995, 133)

The narrative goes on to show how impossible it is to define such a point at which the women can be blamed (and thus take on guilt) for her own rape. For example:

Should a woman never accept to go into the same house as a man is in on his own, even a man she knows? Should a woman never accept an invitation for a cup of tea? And what about the lift? When she steps inside and then, before the doors have time to close, a man comes along, either a friend or a stranger, should she, because she is a woman, leap out of the lift? And take the stairs. And what about the stairway? May she not meet a man alone there? Should a woman take a taxi? What should a woman do if she misses the last bus? Should a woman take the last bus? Or the second last? What time is trespass for a woman? What place?

(Collen, 1995, 133)

Through Iqbal's examples getting increasingly ludicrous, Collen shows how such judgments can always be used to blame women and that their main aim is to divert attention from the perpetrator of the act. By providing a framework whereby some women can be blamed, society does not have to look at its own structures and attitudes, or consider its own culpability in rape. Generally the women can be found to be the guilty party (through dress, trespass, behaviour, even femaleness) which reinforces ideas that "genuine" rape occurs infrequently and is the act of abnormal men. "Normal" men only "rape" when provoked by the woman and this, culturally speaking, is not considered rape at all. If this is the case then a society can assume it can do little about rape, except to punish or control those few deviant individuals through the legal system. By refusing to let Sita call herself guilty, but also drawing attention to the way she could be considered/consider herself to blame through Iqbal's comments, Collen exposes the way society poses the wrong questions in regard to rape. Iqbal's conclusion is that '[m]aybe the guilt is not Sita's, but all of ours' (1995, 135).

This is a strategy which begins to attack and expose those unequal gender relations which allow women to be raped and otherwise abused within the culture.

Although the law may state that rape is wrong, in the interpretation of the law, men have a right to rape if a woman is in the wrong place, or her clothing is inappropriate, or she is behaving improperly. These are apparently rules designed for the protection of “decent” women but Collen exposes the arbitrary nature of such rules for avoiding rape because, as Green notes, ‘any women for any reason or no reason at all is always vulnerable to attack’ (1999, 68). In the end it is being female that makes women rapable. All these rules achieve is the inculcation of guilt over rape as women can always blame themselves for having broken one of the rules, exposing themselves to danger.

Collen shows how arbitrarily the boundaries of sensible and safe behaviour are drawn through Iqbal’s lists of questions. It is pointless to try and draw boundaries when it is the cultural attitude to women that is flawed and which makes them rapable in any circumstance. As Collen points out later, and more seriously, even if women limit themselves to their home they are not necessarily safe: ‘Who is more likely to kill us ... or rape us, or beat us? Husbands, brothers, fathers, friends, acquaintances? Or complete strangers?’ (1995, 189). By the time Collen asks ‘where does rape come from?’ (1995, 193) the answer that it is ‘in the general balance of forces in the sex war’ (1995, 193) is very convincing.

Collen repeats Catherine MacKinnon’s opinion in *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*; consent is meaningless and irrelevant because sexual encounters, and communication about these encounters, take place in the context of unequal gender relations (1989, 172).

Collen’s character Devina explains it in this way:

The woman is supposed to say ‘no’. At least never say ‘yes’, and most certainly never approach the man. The woman prisoner of her passivity. Is not rape excusable and possible in our society because the woman is not free to move towards the man, to propose, to say ‘yes’. Until we can say ‘yes’ in complete freedom, how can we

convincingly say 'no'? Our noes only mean a form of yes. Until the shackles on the word yes are broken.

(Collen, 1995, 180)

The question is, how can women get to this position? One recurrent issue in the texts is the way in which marriage encourages rape. As the Nkyinkyim Project in Ghana discovered:

The implication in most discussions was that there is no legitimacy to claims of marital rape in Ghana ... Justifications for suggestions that forced sex has no legitimacy were linked to perceptions about the nature of marriage ... women have numerous responsibilities to fulfill once they have entered into this contract including giving their husbands unlimited access to their bodies. In the instance of a wife's refusal to have sex and a husband's force, this is not viewed as rape.

(Cusack, 1999, 29)

These attitudes show that marriage specifically denies women the right to refuse sex. The concept of ownership spills into every encounter between men and women, making all these potentially encounters which could end in rape, particularly if men perceive that the woman has broken the rules in some way, perhaps by not being married, or owned, by another man.

Therefore, the end of the institution of marriage in contemporary terms would go a long way in preventing rape. Whilst counselling men, rewriting laws and giving women a voice in the public forum might prevent some instances, rape will never be reduced on a great scale until the structures which support it are dismantled. This is perhaps even more revolutionary than Collen's comments regarding the Chagos women in *The Rape of Sita*. There the fear factor is inverted with female power resting on the men's fear of women. Aidoo's novel re-imagines gender relations but, as she points out, this is not a simple prospect:

To date nobody - least of all women themselves - can remotely visualise a world in which the position of women has been revolutionalized.

... the solution does not lie with you, the individual woman, married or unmarried, no matter how keenly aware you are of the problems in your environment ...

It is obvious that for a long-term answer, if one is at all possible, only collective action would be meaningful. We must organize.

(Aidoo, 1985, 266-7)

And it is within the parameters of friendship and mutual respect, for men and women, that this organisation must take place if things are to change.

Women's ability to re-identify themselves will only be possible if men also change. Head's models of ideal manhood have already been considered, with the recognition that this model operates within marriage. In Collen's work, her "ideal" men, Rahim (*Getting Rid of It*), Dharma and Mohan Jab (*The Rape of Sita*) have abandoned the traditional male role in relationships to some extent. Their partnerships with Jumila, Sita and Doorga operate on the basis of respect and equality. I have already discussed the mutuality of Jumila and Rahim's, and Sita and Dharma's sexual encounters. None of these men attempt to dictate the women's behaviour or limit their movements as noted in relation to Mohan Jab. Rahim is committed to equality as an ideology; he stops attending college because of a distaste for '[a]ll that competition that went on to beat the others' (Collen, 1997, 33). It is inevitable that he becomes active politically in movements like the House Movement and the Socialist Party.

His and Jumila's relationship operates outside of the structures of marriage. At one time he intends to marry Jumila but her forced marriage to someone else prevents this. This ensures that Jumila, cut loose from her biological family by marriage and her family-in-law by leaving her husband, can make her own decisions about whom she chooses as a partner and on what terms. Dharma and Sita chose not to be married which gets the approval of Sita's father, whose unhusbandlike behaviour and refusal to own anyone through marriage clearly extends to unconventional fatherly attitudes.

Dharma, like his counterpart in this text, Rowan Tarquin, has been named significantly. In *The Ramayana* Sita's husband is Rama. Once she has been rescued from Rawan's clutches, Rama takes Sita back as his wife but only once she has proved her sexual purity through an ordeal by fire. This is not enough to convince Rama's subjects:

They are afraid that you have established a dangerous precedent. Women will go astray, and men will treat the matter lightly, for what the king does today, the subject will do tomorrow.

(Lal, 1988, 157)

Rama repudiates her explaining that he was ‘compelled to abandon her by the constraints of [his] dharma’ (Lal, 1988, 165). Dharma is the Hindu concept of ‘right behaviour, law; justice, virtue’ (OED, 1993), or as Lakshmi Lal puts it in her translation ‘righteousness’. Collen cannot accept the original Sita’s treatment because she has not chosen to be with Rawan, neither does she consent to sex nor has she had consensual or non-consensual intercourse with Rawan. Yet, Rama explains his rejection of her as embodying “right behaviour” for a man because Sita is perceived by her society as adulterous. Collen re-articulates a meaning for dharma by personifying it in the character of Dharma, Sita’s partner and showing how his behaviour differs from Rama’s.

Collen never hints that Dharma feels an impulse to reject Sita as “unclean” once he finds out that she has been raped. In fact, Sita is convinced that it is Dharma who will heal her after the rape. When she returns home, she feels ‘safe’ again and is not fearful of Dharma as a representative of “mankind” who has abused her. For Collen, this represents right behaviour. However, through Sita, she acknowledges men’s potential difficulty when “their” women are raped. Firstly, Sita finds it very hard to tell Dharma about her experience; ‘she couldn’t say anything or say she had something to say’ (1995, 176). Secondly, this is compounded by her awareness that Dharma might not know how to react. Sita wonders if she was protecting Dharma by not telling him:

Are not all rapes against the man who loves the women, a rape of him, as well as of her? Why hurt Dharma? ... What would he be supposed to do? Go and beat him up? ... Or was he supposed to ignore the whole thing?

(Collen, 1995, 182)

Sita is doubtful about what Dharma can do with the knowledge if she does tell him.

Defending her honour is the flip side of those cultural norms which enable men to beat and

rape women. It still implies an ownership. This is a realistic possibility in a culture of patriarchy, as is her other fear, that he will blame her for what happened.

Perhaps the most interesting male character in these texts is the narrator of *The Rape of Sita*, Iqbal. Collen chooses to tell this story of rape using a male narrator. This gives her the flexibility to articulate social opinions about rape, that are acceptable in feminist terms, without victimising Sita by having to make her experience guilt and shame. It allows a more objective level of analysis about rape without detracting from the emotions of Sita's experience. This analysis is presented by Iqbal mainly as a series of questions to the reader. He never judges Sita's actions by offering answers but instead readers are prompted to think about their own attitude to rape. It is not a simple case of balance however with clear boundaries drawn between Sita-female-raped-protagonist and Iqbal-male-unraped-narrator. To counteract the authority of a narrator, Collen writes Iqbal as a man in crisis over his male identity; his refrain is '*Iqbal was a man who thought he was a woman*' (1995, 8). This is prompted by his realisation that to write Sita's story he will have to 'almost become the heroine' (1995, 8). Sita identifies him as an ally of women (1995, 193) which is illustrated by his attitude towards his mother. When she is accused of being a whore and stands up for herself against her uncles, cousin and a policeman, Iqbal says: 'I took my mother's side' (1995, 29) against the men with whom he should or could have sided. He has a deep admiration bordering on worship for Ton Tipyer the stone mason because:

he could do with his own hands what women can do with their bodies; produce, reproduce, create, make, invent. And as I tell this, the song words come back to me, the words about myself that haunt me ... *Iqbal was a man who thought he was a woman. No not thought. Not thought I was.* Not exactly that. But what then? Wished I was?

(Collen, 1995, 41-2)

He finds the song re-intruding on his narration when he admires women's strength in laughter and their humour but he also empathises with their fear. When the Chagos women recount their defiance to the policemen who try to rape them, Iqbal is scared for them: 'Fear of rape and fear of male retaliation at resisting rape caught my throat. *Iqbal was a man who thought*' (1995, 86). He is not at all comfortable with his uncertain gender identity.

By the end of the book Iqbal has accepted a type of androgynous identity which silences the song:

I no longer sing to myself *Iqbal was a man who thought he was a woman*. Progress has therefore been made. I am a man now. And I am a woman. Like we all will be ... with our minds that work together. And in unison. We will all be men and we will all be women. And we will love ourselves as we are.

(Collen, 1995, 197)

Collen is not suggesting hermaphroditism here, nor the possibility of creating one gender identity for people who are biologically male and female. What she is reminding the reader of is that current masculine and feminine identities are culturally determined despite their biological basis.

Iqbal has not literally become a woman (biologically) but he has moved to a position where he can empathise with a raped female. That is, in regard to issues of power and domination, he has adopted a feminine place. Sita has already recognised this by naming Iqbal, along with Dharma and Ton Tipyer (the man who can create like women), as an ally of women. Interestingly, Sita's rape is one of the few literary rapes in these texts, that does not result in pregnancy. Iqbal would not be able to follow any woman there as the biological constraints on identity would operate, thus he is still very much a man too. Carolyn Heilbrun's 1973 text, *Toward a Recognition of Androgyny*, might be somewhat dated now and based in western thought (for example, in her definitions of "masculine" and "feminine"), yet she states clearly what Collen appears to be suggesting:

Our future salvation lies in a movement away from sexual polarization and the prison of gender toward a world in which individual roles and the modes of personal behaviour can be freely chosen.

(Heilbrun, 1973, ix-x)

Heilbrun's text goes on to explore the literary tradition of androgyny. Collen contributes to this tradition with her explicit recognition that '[a]ndrogyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes' (Heilbrun, 1973, x). Only through a transformation of gender roles, where men as well as women can be nurturers, where intimate relationships between men and women are not predicated on notions of control, ownership and paternalism, can equality be achieved and violence ended.

Marriage in its contemporary meanings, is rejected by these authors because of the way it encapsulates the patriarchal principle that women are subject to male authority. The authors suggest that this assumption makes women vulnerable to violence. Marriage also denies women opportunities to express themselves sexually by privileging their reproductive role and making them mere receptacles for male sexual pleasure. It is also implied that these attitudes spill over legal and informal forms of marriage⁷ making many interactions between men and women outside of marriage potentially abusive. Motherhood has also been explored as an important component of female identity but also potentially destructive of women's identity where women are forced or coerced into motherhood to prove men's virility and/or continue his genetic line. Of course, marriage is the mechanism whereby men try to assure themselves of their paternity which can necessitate a variety of constraints on women's behaviour (for example, the practice of purdah).

Representations of different gender relationships in the texts imply that for equality to be achieved, notions of masculinity and femininity will have to change. Whilst legal reform

(discussed in Chapter Three) and female solidarity can diminish the impact of abuse on women, it will never achieve an equal society because it does not address the structures in which inequality is embedded. Where individual men and women find ways to co-exist in terms of respect and equality (that is without marrying in the conventional sense), there is the potential that this can spread into a wider community.

⁷ By legal marriage, I mean Christian, Islamic and traditional forms recognised by the law; informal marriage is used to mean cohabitation.

CONCLUSION

I am a man now. And I am a woman. Like we all will be ... with our minds that work together. And in unison. We will all be men and we will all be women. And we will love ourselves as we are.

And we will have wanted to be free. Freedom. And then we will be free. And we will have wanted to be equal. Equality. And then we will become equal.

Lindsey Collen (1995) *The Rape of Sita*, 197.

The intention of this research was to make thematic links across a range of fiction texts written by African women. From the particular examples (i.e. the events in the novels), it was hoped that some coherent positions on gender violence would arise to form the beginning of an “Africanised” theorisation of violence against women – its causes and effects, and useful strategies of intervention and prevention. To do this it has been necessary to use the novels almost as sociological data which is acknowledged to be a somewhat contentious approach. However, as discussed in the Introduction in some detail, there are theories of literary study, based in Marxist thought which accept literature as social commentary and expect fiction to have an impact on culture. It seems that such cross disciplinary use of fiction are increasingly common in academia (for example, the use of oral epics to illuminate historical and political thought in African studies). This study has been able to use the texts to develop some common assumptions about gender violence: for example, it is clear that these authors do not view violence against women as a natural phenomenon nor as one which should be tolerated in deference to “African tradition”. It has to be acknowledged though that the thirty six primary texts referred to in this study, although representative of the West, East and South, in no way represent every social and cultural manifestation of violence against women in Africa.

It became clear that the novels rarely showed violence against women in contexts where men were strangers to the women. As might be expected, where female characters were physically beaten this was located in marital and marital-like relationships. However, this was

also the case with rape, perhaps less likely to be thought of as located here. One of the common rape myths (identified by the Nigerian lawyer, Ayo Oyajobi (1989, 17)) is of ‘stranger rapes’ often incited by the women being in the “wrong” place, dressing inappropriately, or indulging in provocative behaviour. However, female characters in the texts were usually raped by known men – employers, relatives, husbands/boyfriends or aspiring husbands/boyfriends.

Thus, the male characters who perpetrate this violence are not represented by the authors as abnormal individuals who randomly attack women. This implies their belief that violence ‘exists in the very structures of society ... [as part of] men’s social and structural power over women’ (Fawcett *et al*, 1996, 1). The wider society of the novels often condone or encourage this masculine behaviour, reinforcing its normalisation within that social setting. This is not to suggest that these male characters are always just condemned out of hand. In line with some African feminist thought which refuses to alienate men, some of the writers make it clear that men can be coerced into violence against women by the ideologies of their societies which shape ideas of correct masculine behaviour. The element of personal choice is also recognised, however, and this is important to some of the authors’ strategies to prevent violence against women, discussed below.

Because of the identification of violence against women in the structures of society, the research focused on marriage (in its most inclusive sense – that is marital-like relationships such as cohabiting and dating as well as formal, legally recognised marriages). In many African societies the institution of marriage contributes significantly to those ideas of masculinity and femininity which permit certain forms of violence against women. The research showed how other male/female relationships could operate within the same parameters as marital-type relationships by similarly sanctioning men’s authority over others.

Where these are women, they are put at risk particularly of sexual abuse or rape. For example, male employers who demand sex from their female employees; policemen who rationalise their abuse of women as part of their duty to maintain social order; and soldiers whose authorisation to use violence can spill into their encounters with women.

The novels' definitions of contemporary marriage include notions of ownership – of the wife by the husband. This allows men sexual access to wives, regardless of their consent, thus making marital rape a cultural impossibility. Female characters in some of the novels challenge this by naming such intercourse with their husbands as rape – most notably in *Changes* (1991) by Ama Ata Aidoo. Other texts show how the correlation of marriage and ownership holds husband and wife in a relationship of paternalism. For example, the beating of wives is often considered an appropriate way for men to train and chastise their wives, an indication that within marriage men take on a paternalistic role.

In the novels these unequal relationships often result in violence, usually culminating in emotional or physical damage to the woman. The voices of the novelists are united in condemning male behaviour which victimises women (although some unconsciously reinforce cultural norms which allow this), showing how all too often this can force women into suicide at worst, despair at least. When they retaliate in kind, female characters are punished by the law which they might have relied on to protect them. This usefully exposes the devastating effects of violence on women. However, to prevent a completely gloomy message, most authors represent their characters' attempts to resist violence, with varying success.

Most of these strategies expose the institutional and social causes of violence against women. The female characters' inability to survive and/or challenge abuse is frequently

suggested to be an effect of cultural norms which presume that women who behave appropriately will not be subject to violence. Where women can be blamed for the violence inflicted on them, the psychological damage can outstrip any physical harm. This is most strikingly symbolised across the novels in images of bodily disintegration.

The usefulness of the law for tackling violence against women is doubted by these authors. It is either ignored as a feasible option, or shown to be inadequate. As already noted, the police are most often presented as likely or actual rapists in the texts. The legal process appears more effectively used against those women who retaliate violently against a violent spouse or reject motherhood by having abortions. As discussed in Chapter Three, the writers imply that as the institution of the law is maintained by a patriarchal ideology, it has limited use in combating the violence against women also sustained in patriarchy.

Using “tradition” as if it is a transparent concept is also questioned in the texts. The Introduction explains how notions of the “traditional” female have been used by men to recreate a post-colonial nationality which subjugates women. The intrinsically “African” nature of wife-beating, for example, is often used to argue against introducing legislation to make this an offence. However, playing the trump of tradition is not limited to male circles; some feminists cite apparently “traditional” practices as solutions for contemporary African women: for example, the “traditional” strategies used in the past for women to escape violent marriages. As the discussion in Chapter Two suggests, many of these authors question the effectiveness of such strategies, now and in the past, showing that their intention was to sustain marriages.

Where a concept can apparently be employed both for the subjugation and the liberation of women, its application has to be carefully considered. Strategies that have helped women survive in the patriarchal past can certainly be drawn on in the present, but it has to be

recognised that applied to the present these practices will be “neo-traditional” and their function and purpose will be altered. A strength of fiction is that it can engage in a dialogue about current meanings of apparently “traditional” strategies for contemporary women’s survival and resistance by playing out scenarios. This can be seen in the way texts deal with the notion of female collective action. This is perceived as a vital foundation to most African feminisms (in part to differentiate these theories from the individualistic tendencies of many western feminisms). However, it can be romanticised in some theoretical works.

Women writers show in their texts how women supported by a female community have more choices in dealing with abuse. The preference for urban settings in the texts has been noted in the introduction, thus, the support groups available are most often based in friendship (referred to as “sisterhood” in Chapter Four) rather than kinship or age groups. Such support, as Vera’s work shows, is not necessarily universal. There is some representation of the tensions that can exist between co-wives and female in-laws. However, these do not undercut the strength of female friendship. For example, in Aidoo’s novel, *Changes*, Esi faces hostility from her husband’s family. Their criticisms of her do rankle, but her relationship with Opokuya, and her own mother and grandmother are more significant for her. (Esi’s non-patrilocal marriage arrangements and her financial independence also cushion her from her in-laws’ enmity to some extent.) However, the authors recognise the limitations of this type of solidarity in significantly changing structures which oppress women.

Thus, we can have sympathy with those authors such as Head (in ‘The Collector of Treasures’, 1977) and Himunyanga-Phiri (*The Legacy*, 1992) who depict women’s solidarity working most effectively when communities without men are created. It could be argued that in ‘The Collector of Treasures’, Head balances her final all female community with an example of support that operates within the wider society. Kenalepe and Paul’s marriage is

cooperative, and this allows them both to extend friendship to Dikeledi. Whilst Dikeledi reciprocates with practical help, she relies on Kenalepe for emotional support. The fragility of this small dual-sex friendship group is exposed when Dikeledi's estranged husband accuses Paul and Dikeledi of infidelity. Where societies arrange gender relations around marriage, cross-gender friendships are hard to sustain. The rest of the village are 'delighted in making [Paul] a part of the general dirt of the village' (1977, 100), happy to expose his "normality" in his relations with women. So in fact, Head makes a stronger case for her female separatist community as being the only workable alternative to marriage.

The community temporarily created by the three characters defies cultural norms, and is reliant to a great extent on Paul's personality. This does emphasise the significance of choice when considering marital violence. Women can avoid violence by choosing partners carefully, if they have this option. Dikeledi's problem has partly been her lack of choice over a husband. It is important for the novels to promote men's capacity to make choices that go against the prevailing cultural attitudes that encourage them to be violent; however, the most effective strategies for preventing violence against women have to attack those cultural norms and alter them so that the most likely choice men will make is not to be violent towards women. The portrayal of transformatory collective action is limited to the works of Collen, and these address issues of class rather than gender. However, they do show ways in which men and women can act together and Collen is careful to represent these groups as gender-equal.

There is little suggestion in the other texts that marriage or long-term pairings between men and women are undesirable. However, the texts expose the problems which reside in current meanings of marriage. These marriages create an unequal relationship, bound by

notions of ownership and paternalism. They work with other cultural assumptions about masculinity and femininity to allow violence against women to exist within definitions of wifehood. Societies do not inevitably have to be structured in this way, as noted in the introduction. Though rare, some cultures do have ‘social relations ... organized in a way that minimizes or eliminates violence against women’ (Heise, 1994, 1).

An example can be found in Mayotte, an island in the Mozambique Channel. Michael Lambek’s research here has found that abuse in marriage is extremely rare because ‘spouses ought not to be in a moral relationship to each other of a parent and child. A husband should not beat his wife and a wife should not take it if he does’ (1992, 163). Children can be physically chastised by adults but ‘one of the key differences between childhood and adulthood in Mayotte is the autonomy that adults have over their own bodies’ (1992, 164).

Lambek concludes:

I have tried to show that the relationship between spouses is conceptualised at a basic level as one in which violence is inappropriate ... because the very constitution of the marital relationship precludes it. It is not that women are the weaker sex and must be protected or cherished, but that marriage is a relationship between complimentary (but not identical or equivalent) adults who should treat each other with consideration and respect.

(Lambek, 1992, 169)

This illustrates the way the relationship “marriage” can take on a meaning that excludes inequality or violence.

Some of the authors use their texts to develop models of male/female intimacy which do not allow potentially violent power relations to develop. This is particularly apparent in Collen’s work. These are typified by equality, without erasing difference. By elevating those aspects of the “marriage” relationship also found in friendships (respect, equality) over those of ownership, paternalism and sexual rights, the intimacies of the relationship become more a matter of trust than a coercion. Lindsey Collen’s brief portrayal of a lesbian relationship in *Getting Rid of It* (1997) highlights the flexibility of these different relationships. They bring

the paradigms of friendship and marriage into closer harmony, so communities can be formed that include men and women, in marriage and friendship.

Such a community would be genuinely inclusive of men, rather than relegating supportive men to the rather passive role of cheering on women's endeavours. African feminists debate the role of men in women's liberation (as outlined in Chapter One). Many refuse to position men as women's enemy because they have suffered oppression as part of a colonised people. However, others rightly doubt men's interest in supporting feminist movements that will erode the power they do have. By offering men real inclusion in alternative social structures, men will have an incentive to cooperate with women. Collen represents such cooperation in *Getting Rid of It*, where issues of land and class unite the sexes.

The authors show awareness that such communities will not be easily achieved in reality. The male characters in equivalent relationships are somewhat shadowy figures, as if the authors find such men too difficult to imagine clearly. This is certainly true of Dharma and Rahim in Collen's novels. In the earlier novel, *The Rape of Sita* (1995), Mohan Jab is a more fully rounded character. He refuses to marry Sita's mother because he identifies it with slavery, Yet, he relies on his mother to fulfill the domestic (non-sexual) duties conventionally provided by a wife. Significant changes will have to occur in both men and women's gendered identities if equality is to be achieved.

Sociological studies could tell us all this, and in more culturally specific ways, no doubt. However, fiction is not limited to revealing the way society operates. Because it is an imaginative form, it has the additional capacity to present alternative ways for societies, and the individuals within it, to function. The novels being studied here are based in recognisable, (usually) contemporary settings which makes the exposure of abuse very real but also renders

the alternative visions appear viable. In this way, fiction can influence society by providing models to which people can aspire, changing cultural practice to allow such models to be realised.

Neither is fiction required to come to firm conclusions at the end of their exploration of society. In the texts, some confusion seems to be operating around the notion of motherhood and none of the authors manage to resolve this. This probably reflects social uncertainty about this female role. The authors certainly appear to be participating in a debate over the meanings of motherhood for African women and, whilst it is less directly linked to violence against women (because it is assumed that motherhood is about a woman's relationship with her children, not her husband), aspects of motherhood can be defined as abusive. For example, ostracising childless women (whether this is by choice or infertility).

It is constantly asserted by African feminists that motherhood is an important part of African women's identity. I have already noted in Chapter Four, however, that it is not enough merely to assert the importance of motherhood to African women. The statement in *Ngambika* that African feminism 'respects African women's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood' (Davies and Graves, 1986, 9) cries out for more explanation. How can this be achieved? The texts expose this as an under-theorised area of African feminism.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the authors seem to be airing alternative paradigms of motherhood, rather than making clear statements about what it might mean. Significantly, these representations of motherhood are often linked to fatherhood; most often in the abandonment of pregnant women, but also in rape and women's struggles to make choices over when or if to have children. The latter usually involves the woman's decisions about abortion. However, as discussed in Chapter Three, this is a deeply problematic concept for the authors. Vera's Phephelaphi, in *Butterfly Burning* (1998) most poignantly fails to re-identify

herself outside of motherhood through abortion. Collen's novel, *Getting Rid of It*, purports to deal with abortion and it does expose the problems women face when abortion is illegal. Yet, it is hard to pin down what she is suggesting beyond this unless it is seen as part of a wider dialogue about motherhood.

I suggest that this difficulty is related to western ideas of abortion and, more generally, motherhood. In the west the decision whether or not to have a child is argued entirely along personal lines: the woman's right to express her biological uniqueness; her right to fulfill herself personally through motherhood; her control over her own reproductivity; even arguments against abortion focus on the foetus's rights to exist as an individual. Whilst not denying that for African women motherhood too can be a personal fulfillment, the texts suggest other aspects, linked to community, that do not feature in western discussions. Few explicit links are made between community and motherhood in African feminist theory – perhaps a hidden legacy of western feminist thought.

For example, Collen's model of the maternal is not solely linked to the biological in *Getting Rid of It*. Perhaps this is because having children is a social responsibility as much as a personal fulfillment (for women and men). Hence, giving away children to other women is not "unnatural" female behaviour because these children remain a part of the community. If this is the case, the difficulty of abortion becomes that it is not entirely a personal choice but one that is bound with notions of social responsibility. Perhaps this is the dilemma at the heart of novels such as *Butterfly Burning*.

It is motherhood's dimension as a responsibility to the community which creates the tension in Vera's short story 'It Is Hard to Live Alone'. The very womanhood of sterile woman is questioned: 'How can you claim to be a woman without knowing the joy and pain of childbirth' (1992, 43); such women should be ashamed, suggests a mother who has six

children by six different men. It is easy to label this as unfair, yet, in the context of an inability to fulfill their community responsibility, infertile women's feelings of shame make more sense. The young woman who is doubtful about having children is told it is her responsibility, however, her worries are over the ability of the society to manage children: as she points out '[t]here are so many women with no husbands but with a lot of children' (1992, 44). A combination of women doggedly clinging to motherhood as the one thing that gives them status, coupled with men's irresponsibility or inability to provide care, is a problem for the community. So the woman who points the finger at the barren woman, perhaps should be less proud of her six children by six different men and more aware of the burden this creates personally and socially.

For the authors motherhood is not a monolithic concept but there is tension around their desire to uphold the importance of motherhood to African women (as insisted on by nearly all African feminisms) and their realisation that women might not always find this single identity beneficial. The texts recognise that at different points in women's lives, alternative identities might be more desirable. Yet, this is difficult for women to assert where society insists on the primacy of this one identity for women, and difficult for the authors to transcend in portraying alternatives. Thus, characters that reject motherhood (for example, Elizabeth, Phephelaphi and Jayamani) are usually damaged or destroyed in the texts.

Space has not allowed a detailed investigation of motherhood as represented in African women's writing, and its tentative links with violence against women make it perhaps less central to this thesis than wifehood. However, further exploration of the representation of motherhood in African fiction would be fruitful. These authors have exposed a gap in African feminist theory, which needs to be explored. Rather than rely on an imprecise idea of "tradition" in reaction to western feminism's perceived anti-motherhood stance, African

feminists need to interrogate their own use of the term, and how it relates to their sense of themselves as part of a community. The way men can be integrated into this community as equal partners also has to be addressed if African women are to be freed from institutionalised violence.

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