

University of Cape Town

**EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE POSTMODERN FEMINIST VOICE
IN THE
DEVELOPMENT OF THE SCHOOL LANGUAGE TEXT**

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Masters in Education specializing in Language and Literature.

by

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This study is dedicated to the memory of Jasper Perumal, who philosophised that, 'part of the art of being a woman, is knowing when not to be too much of a lady'.

ABSTRACT

Commencing with an abbreviated *herstorical* review of the various strands that comprise feminism's rich tapestry, this study proceeds with an enquiry into the postmodern feminist challenge against patriarchal ideological extravagances that have valorized Enlightenment significations of knowledge. Building on the postmodern feminist insight, that the discourses that constitute women as deficit Other permeate every aspect of the social configuration, language as a social and cultural construct is examined with a view to ascertaining the extent to which it has aided and abetted in the definition, deprecation and exclusion of women and our realities in a male supremacist society. In surveying the sexual/textual pedagogic terrain, the study proceeds from the premise that texts as cultural artifacts are crucial in the transmission of cultural attitudes, values, and the construction of gendered identities.

Exploring the Communication, Literacy and Language component of the Outcomes-Based Learning document, and the interim core English second language syllabus, currently at the centre of educational debate, the study attempts to show that despite the documents' rhetoric to promote gender sensitivity and inclusivity, their allegiance to androcentric multilingual and multicultural concerns entrench phallogocentric binarism, thus making them complicit in furthering patriarchal ideology. The study concludes with a few recommendations for further research in the area of feminist pedagogy.

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THE BLANK PAGE

The Spanish convent functions truly as a house of repute. Along its corridors, perused by all who pass through, hang the enframed wedding night sheets of aristocratic marriages, marked by the blood of defloration. The Rorschach-like bloodstain, signifying simultaneously the presence and absence of virginity, certifies the aristocratic daughter's fulfilment of her destiny and the fragile material basis upon which the aristocratic house rests. The very sheets maintain the genealogy of the...family, testifying as they do to patriarchal values fulfilled, to female sexuality penetrated, appropriated, and framed. Accompanying the sheet's is the princess's name. Both name and stain interchangeably mark the female identity and destiny...Signatures merely of cultural expectations.

Hanging on the walls of the convent, the autobiographical sheets tell the same story, row after row, wall after wall, frame after frame-until the blank page of one autobiographical sheet breaks the narrative pattern in its silence, in its refusal to be framed in the same way. In this one frame the sheet remains white, disturbingly, provocatively barren of the princess's wedding night. The frame in its wordlessness, its bloodlessness, its disembodiment, risks another story. Female sexuality and textuality herein defy the inherited frame of an essentialized embodiment.

The Blank Page & Sorrow-Acre

Dinesen (in Smith 1993:2-3).

This blank space is dedicated to our foremothers whose narratives lie in the graves of lost human creativity, and to sisters everywhere, whose stories have yet to be told.

INTRODUCTION

Like most South Africans of colour, my memory is still fresh with the arduous struggle against the atrocities of apartheid. Caught as we were in the throes of racial prejudice, for many disenfranchised South African women, in particular, the equally crucial struggle against gender discrimination was eclipsed by the overwhelming pursuit for racial emancipation.

I recall, with a flush of embarrassment, my emphatic disassociation with feminism, preferring rather being remembered as a humanitarian activist. The image of Lady Godiva's burning their bras in public protest against patriarchal oppression proved a trifle excessive, even for me, given my charismatic Christian background. Apart from it being a waste of good lingerie (I quipped), the entire enterprise violated my socialized perception of the essence of femininity.

So with my femininity safely intact, like a dutiful daughter I studied the long received wisdom of the fathers and armed with my *identity papers* ventured into the education profession resolute to make teaching a subversive activity. Nothing in the campus crusades of the 1980's prepared me for the roller-coaster emotional ride that my entrance into the labour market would present me with. It was here, that I encountered the potency of patriarchal oppression. Sharing the disillusionment and frustration of fellow female educators, it was as a teacher of English that I experienced the full impact of being a victim of both racial and gender discrimination. Male dominance in the composition of the school management structure, pedagogical apparatuses and rituals that either excluded, trivialised, stereotyped or denigrated female realities, were all engineered to marginalize the female school population, perpetuate gender binarism and ensure our continued subordination.

Assailed by such stultifying practices it was only upon quieter reflection, an heightened enquiry into gender concerns and critical maturation that the feminist light sensitised me to the subtlety of patriarchal deception. My more recent enquiry into postmodern feminism has further deepened my

awareness of the gender bias of masculinist rationality and the hegemonic hierarchical power relations inscribed in socio-linguistic conventions. While I am acutely aware of the fluidity of the postmodern feminist conversation, my alignment with the discourse is founded on its pursuit for gender inclusivity, its realistic acceptance of the relativity of lived experience (whose only guarantee is the permanence of change), and the tenet that nothing is innocent- even the personal is political.

Anchoring my personal philosophy in these tenets, thus, rather than bask in the afterglow of the dawn of South African democracy, I find myself in the company of feminists still in search of a radical democracy. Having anticipated the total demise of gender inequality, and a sharper sensitivity to women's ways of knowing, our hopes were ignited by educational policy documents pledging a commitment towards a unitary, non-racist, and non-sexist service resonant with the prevailing national egalitarian *zeitgeist*. With the jubilation of the newly acquired democracy simmering down, there is a growing perception that lip-service is being paid to gender issues and hard core feminist concerns are being side-lined or subsumed under a multicultural and multilingual educational umbrella. This is the hypothesis that drives my study.

Embarking extensively on library-based research, I ground my critique of English language policy documents currently doing their heats on the educational circuit, on a strong theoretical enquiry into the postmodern feminist paradigm. In so doing, I attempt to procure valuable feminist insights that could inform school-based language policy initiatives. Commencing Chapter One with an overview of the origins of feminism, I provide a cursory survey of feminism's shattered visage and highlight the theoretical and methodological disputations that characterize the feminist discourse. The chapter concludes with an exploration into the fracture in the postmodern feminist conversation, a theme that receives more expansive coverage in chapter three.

In acknowledging the fissures that define the feminist discourse, Chapter Two sees an attempt to situate feminism within the modernist/postmodernist

debate, where I argue that an alliance with postmodernism would prove more fruitful towards realizing freedom from patriarchal enslavement. I proceed to investigate postmodern feminism's challenge against universalistic, masculinist biased, value-free Enlightenment systems of knowledge. The feminist agenda to celebrate difference as it intersects across and beyond the class/race/ sex triad without a subsequent compromise of equality is also explored. Chapter Two concludes with a reinstatement of postmodern feminism's commitment to politicize the personal, thereby validating and recognizing the diversity of female realities.

The postmodern feminist desire to engage a language of critique and possibility enjoys expansive coverage in Chapter Three. In acknowledging language as a human construct capable of de- and re-construction, I investigate the charge that the English language constructs an androcentric worldview that ensures the transmission of patriarchal attitudes. Hence, the semantic exclusion and derogation of women, and discursive practices that promote masculinist supremacy, engender the inferior sociolinguistic socialization of women and ensure that we remain borrowers of the man-made English language. In addressing the methodological schism that marks the Anglo-American logocentric debate, I argue for an eclectic theoretical and empirical stance as a praxis to subvert disempowering phallogocentric practices. Building on the theoretical foundations laid down in the preceding chapters, Chapter Four, turns the postmodern feminist speculum on the Communication, Literacy and Language component of the Outcomes-Based Learning document, and the interim core English second language syllabus, currently being negotiated in South African educational circles. In attempting to denaturalize the taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in pedagogic metaphors, I argue that feminist issues are still being down-staged as those involved in language materials development are merely mouthing equality rhetoric without manifesting an authentic feminist consciousness. The epilogue concludes this exploration into the role of the postmodern feminist voice in school language text development with recommendations for further research into feminist pedagogy.

CHAPTER ONE

HERSTORICAL REFLECTIONS: *HEALING CLIPPED WINGS*

*They clip her wings
and then complain
that she cannot fly...*
(de Beauvoir 1953:316)

1.1 NAMING THE PROBLEM

Many Enlightenment thinkers indulged the extravagant expectation that the arts and sciences would promote not only the control of natural forces¹, moral progress, institutional justice, an understanding of oneself and the world, but also the happiness of human beings (Habermas 1993:103-104). Sadly, however, in the midst of such euphoria, a tumour had managed to survive,² disappointing and frustrating this romantic promise for over half the human population³ (Coppock 1995:13; Fehr 1993:118; Spender 1983:367).

It was a demoralising problem- 'a problem with no name':

¹ Central to Enlightenment epistemology is the concept of binarism. Within the Culture/Nature dichotomy the female is associated with Nature. Nature is referred to as Mother Nature/Earth. Women have been treated by men in ways similar to male exploitation of the natural world (that is subordinated, ravaged, deformed). Modernism's quest to control natural forces also carries implications for the control and taming of women (Usher & Edwards 1994:38; Jordan & Weedon 1995:201).

² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, commenting on U.S. society, (in Ahmed 1992:247), observes that twentieth century history confirms that sexism, instead of declining with the triumph of modernity, has probably become more general and difficult to locate in any single institution because "late capitalism has contributed a bitter twist to the centuries of female oppression".

³ Firestone (1979:43), enthuses that the radical feminist movement has many political pluses that no other movement can claim; a revolutionary clout far higher and qualitatively different from any other in the past. In terms of distribution, unlike minority groups or the proletariat, women have always comprised an oppressed majority (51%), evenly dispersed over all classes. See also Faludi (1995:401).

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of...women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered...Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children...,lay beside her husband at night-she was afraid to ask even the silent question- 'Is this all?' (Friedan 1965:13).

The problem has since been named. The problem is male supremacy; a contagion cultivated in the political economy of gender relations. The reason for this state of affairs is metaphorically alluded to in de Beauvoir's "clipped wings" diagnosis. Women's flight towards the realization of their full potential has been sabotaged by misogynist agendas which have constructed a world in which 'women possess only one-hundredth of the wealth and do two-thirds of the work for only one-tenth of the wages; in which men monopolise public power in government, law, industry, commerce, science, culture, education and religion; and wherein discrimination on the basis of gender is grievously the most socially accepted form of oppression' (Thompson 1983:16; Faludi 1995:397). The oppression of women is not a temporary phenomenon. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression are extensions of male supremacy (Weiner 1994:55). Women have been subjected to male subordination and oppression in varying degrees and societies since pre-capitalistic times through long-standing historical-structural arrangements that have initiated, supported, legitimated and consolidated our subjugation (Farganis 1994a:15).

Anne Phillips, (ibid.:16) writes:

The words women have chosen to express their condition -inequality, oppression, subordination - all have their implications, for each carries its own version of the problem it describes. Inequality notes that women are denied what is granted to men ... Oppression ... carries with it a sense of the weight pressing down on women, alerting us not so much to the anomalies of female exclusion, as to a complex of ideological, political and economic forces that combine to keep women in their place ... Subordination takes this a step further, identifying the agents in the process. The terms are not mutually exclusive, but the particular weight attached to each different period is often a guide to the preoccupations of the moment.

Women's oppression has somehow always been linked to the difference in male and female biologies. This ideology seems to have provided adequate rationale for sanctioning the marginalization of women. Hence, feminism's primary objective remains the dismantling of the oldest, most rigid class/caste system in existence, the class system based on sex: a system that has conferred unwarranted legitimacy on, and apparent permanence to the archetypal male and female roles (Firestone 1979:23; Farganis 1994b:102).

For an equal length of time, however, there have been 'petticoat pioneers' (Laughlin in Gordon 1988:1), who have challenged the authority of the father.⁴

⁴ In her historical overview of feminism, Weiner writes that feminism is often considered a comparatively recent sensation; a residue of the 1960's and 1970's. The 1980's have been termed a post-feminist era in which women can eventually relax, confident in the knowledge that all the essential gains (the vote, equal pay, labour market opportunities, sexual freedom etcetera) have been accomplished.

Although the term feminism is of recent origin, feminism as an ideology has a long history. *Femina* (woman) is of Latin derivation, and initially meant 'having the quality of females', and came into use as a perspective on sexual equality in the 1890's. Its first usage in print can be traced to a book review published in the *Athenaeum*, 27 April 1895 (Faludi 1995:401). This however, does not indicate the birth of feminism as a movement since, prior to this 'womanism' was more frequently used to describe interest in sex equality issues. Nineteenth-century usage of the term 'The Woman Question' to denote interest in the condition of women signalled 'a pre-feminist consciousness' rather than feminism as a political movement, (as it is conceived of today). Feminist historians have found that every era has had its share of women protesting their lot in relation to male supremacy. From Sappho in seventh century BC, through to the middle ages, the modern (and even post-modern) period, there has been an unrelenting feminist presence in history despite patriarchal attempts to control the general currency of thought (Weiner 1994:51-54).

Cott (1987:16), distinguishes three areas of effort in the woman movement, acknowledging that variations existed within each. One which commenced early in the century, lay in service and social action motivated by altruistic intent; this included benevolent social welfare and civic reform efforts. Another, commonly referred to as the first wave, dates from the nineteenth century and extends into the first two decades of the twentieth century. It comprised more focused campaigns for 'woman's rights' equivalent to those that men enjoyed on legal, political, economic and civic grounds (Moi 1985:21; Cott 1990:Chapter 2; Farganis 1994a:22). Second wave feminism emerging from the late 1960's onwards was born in the USA out of other movements of the political 'new' Left. Its mission included broad-ranging pronouncements and activities toward self-determination via 'emancipation' from structures, conventions, and attitudes enforced by law and custom.

If history has failed to chronicle the thoughts and experiences of women this merely confirms allegations of patriarchal missions to ignore and silence women's voices. Venezky (1992:445), for example, draws attention to the 'suspicious blanks' in American history textbooks concerning feminism. Feminist stalwarts from standard versions of American history are repeatedly omitted in preference for 'goody-good' patriarchal assimilators such as Louisa May Alcott and Florence Nightingale (Firestone 1979: 31).

In order to assess the widespread nature of women's subjugation, a sweeping survey of their protest at the omnipotence of patriarchy is visible on an international scale (Rendall 1985:2). Mary Wollstonecraft's 1792 publication, *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, is often cited as being foundational in feminist thought. Other names worthy of mention in the annals of American⁵ and British protest include Aphra Benn (1640-89), Angelina Grimke (1805-79), Elizabeth Stanton (1815-1902), Sojourner Truth, Emily Pankhurst. We can also salute Hubertine Auclert (1848-1914) in France, Ch'iu Chin (1874-1907) in China and Aleksandra Kollantai (1872-1952) in Russia (Thompson 1983:18-21; Weiner 1994:57-58; Forster 1984; Ahmed 1992:248; Cott 1987: Chapter 1). The conspicuous absence of Third World women from this illustrious list is indicative of the double oppression that we have faced, by virtue of our Otherness⁶ (Farganis 1994b: 107-108;

See also Coppock et al. 1995:9-14.

Farganis (1994a:22-25), summarises the three phases of the Women's Movement as follows: The first phase focused on the achievement of gender equity through anti-discriminatory legislation. The second phase glorified the differences between women and men. Young (1990:161 in Farganis 1994a) refers to this women-centred approach as "gynocentric feminism", which sought to valorize the nurturing qualities women are acclaimed to possess. The third phase, which we are in presently, examines differences between women, concentrating on the diversity and variety of women's lives.

See also Farganis (1994b:102-109), for a more detailed discussion of philosophical benchmarks that can be used to characterise three periods in Second Wave feminism in the U.S.

⁵ See Maclagan (1982:24-32) for a comprehensive coverage of female resistance in the USA.

⁶ If the names of Black and Third World women do not feature prominently on this list, it serves to confirm that for the most part when Anglo-American women speak of

Jordan & Weedon 1995:206-207; Lugones & Spelman 1992).

Building on the foundation of these spirited women, 'today we have a movement that boasts no official leaders, headquarters, membership scheme or bureaucracy'. Its members comprise women who recognise the oppressive consequences of male domination and who, in varying contexts, and within diverse but related crusades, are mobilising our resistance to expunge masculinist ideology (Thompson 1983:12; Farganis 1994b:103).

As a testament to tenacity, from its inception, the feminist movement has posed a serious threat to an established patriarchal order that has masqueraded as a democracy (Firestone 1979:25; Thompson 1983:9-12; Farganis 1994a:15; Rendall 1987). The struggle against patriarchy has assumed various guises.

In the ensuing discussion I indulge a fleeting exploration into feminisms' multifaceted portfolio providing an abbreviated comparative review of the various strands that weave feminism's rich tapestry.

1.2 THE MANY FACES OF FEMINISM

Feminism, as is characteristic of many broad-based philosophical perspectives, hosts several 'species under its genus' (Tong 1989:1). Valiantly weathering the scoff and scorn of anti-feminists for being a house divided among itself⁷ (Thompson 1983:18), feminist theories and perspectives attempt to describe women's oppression, explain its causes and

developing a feminist or women's culture, they have worked within the Anglo-American cultural framework. But, even as these women have been saturated in western, white culture with scant knowledge or respect for the cultures of Third World people, the opposite is also quite true (Thompson 1983:22-23).

⁷ The divide which has become feminism's defining feature, goes by many names. Stimpson (in Snitow 1990:14), called it the feminist debate between the 'maximizers' and the 'minimizers'. The minimizers are feminists who want to undermine the category of 'woman', to minimize the meaning of sex difference. The maximizers aim to maintain the category, but re-vision its meaning, to reclaim and elaborate the social being of 'woman', thereby empowering her.

consequences, and strategise towards women's liberation (Agger 1993:57; Farganis 1994b:102-103). Among the daunting challenges facing contemporary feminism is the pressure to reconcile diversity and difference with integration and commonality. Tong (1989:7), wisely suggests that, 'we need a home in which everyone has a room of her own, but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation, a community of friends in virtue, and partners in action'.

Many, although certainly not all, feminist theories are able to identify their approach as essentially liberal, Marxist, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist, existentialist, or postmodern (Banks 1981:8; Tong 1989:1; Watkins et al. 1992:120-121; Forster 1984:2; Firestone 1979:38-43). As feminism diversifies other feminisms continue to emerge: for example, Christian feminism (which is concerned with the creation of a feminist theology),⁸ humanist feminism (which advocates equality that judges women and men by a single standard), (Farganis 1994b:105), Muslim feminism (which sees women's liberation as a greater threat to Islam than western influence),⁹ eco-feminism (whose aims range from a quest for a new spiritual relationship with nature to a concern for the empowerment of women in developing countries)¹⁰

⁸ See also Banks 1981: Chapter 2: The Evangelical Contribution to Feminism; Rendall 1985: Chapter 3: Evangelicalism and the Power of Women; Russell 1985: *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*; MacHaffie 1986: *Her Story: Women in Christian Tradition*; Mollenkott 1989: *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God as Female*; Stott 1984: Chapter 13: Women, Men and God, In: *Issues Facing Christians Today*, and Schmitt 1992: God's Wife: Some Gender Reflections on the Bible and Biblical Interpretation, In: *Constructing And Reconstructing Gender: The links among communication, language and gender*.

⁹ See Ahmed (1992), *Women and Gender in Islam: historical roots of a modern debate*.

See also Moghadam's assertion (1992:225) that, 'The control of women in Muslim societies is commonly, but erroneously attributed to Islam. It is best understood in terms of socio-economic structure and stage of development.

¹⁰ Eco-feminism arose out of the argument that reason and rationality, as masculine values, need replacement. If men's values are equated with technology and capitalism, then women's values emphasize nature (eco-feminism, New Age, spiritualism), a working alliance with the natural world, rather than one of domination (Farganis 1994a:32).

(Weiner 1994:66-67).

Another strand of feminism showing close resemblance to developments in the South African context is evident in trends in Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Unique to Australia and New Zealand, however, the term 'femocrat' is sometimes used pejoratively in reference to those employed in 'women's affairs' and units within the state apparatus. Highlighting the gendered nature of bureaucracy, critics frown upon the collusion of feminists in state structures stressing that the latter does not only function to sustain patriarchal relations, but are themselves patriarchal in form (Franzway et al. 1989:133-135; Amot 1993:187).

'Femocracy' is an indication that prevailing trends point to new feminisms emerging which are more 'reflective of the different cultural, psychological and material concerns of new generation of women, rather than any terminal disappearance or entry into a post-feminist era' (Di Stefano 1990:73; Watkins et al. 1992:166-167; Usher & Edwards 1994:195; Weiner 1994:66; Coppock et al. 1995:Chapter 1; Hewlett 1987:Chapter 16; Faludi: 1995). The point worth remembering is that true post-feminism is impossible without post-patriarchy (Moi 1987:12), and that with every lethal blow dealt to patriarchal discourse, a new line is penned for its requiem.

The different emphases of feminisms have expectedly resulted in theoretical and strategic wrangles (Hollinger 1994:162). Marxists accuse radicals and socialists of being insufficiently materialistic and inadequately aware of class discrepancies among women. Radicals criticise Marxists and socialists for their innocence over patriarchy¹¹ and its apparent need

¹¹ Daly's *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, analyzed a range of oppressive practices: Indian suttee, Chinese footbinding, African genital mutilation, European witchburnings and American gynaecology, as examples of what she called universal or "planetary patriarchy' (Jordan & Weedon 1995:545).

Murray (1995:3), explains that patriarchy, like class domination is multifaceted. She contends that a full understanding of it calls for a large-scale social analysis of macro-structures, organisations, institutions, and ideology. She advocates a non-reductive analysis of the class-patriarchy relationship within the terms of historical materialism as being compatible with feminist and sociological enquiry.

See also Figes (1970): *Patriarchal Attitudes*.

psychologically and even physically to coerce women irrespective of their economic status. Socialists accuse Marxists of being too economic, and radicals for being too subjective. Black feminists accuse all three of being racist, and lesbian feminists, (See Zimmerman in Moi 1985:86-87), point out to women who are not lesbians the oppressive nature of compulsive heterosexuality (Thompson 1983:12; Coppock et al. 1995:19-20; Jordan & Weedon 1995:183).

Each feminist strand, however, provides a partial and tentative resolution to the "woman question(s)" (Spender 1983:367), by offering a fresh perspective with its own methodological merits and de-merits. Of greater intrigue is the way in which these partial and provisional answers converge, both to rue the ways in which women have been oppressed, repressed, and suppressed and to laud the ways in which so many have 'come out of the kitchen'¹² (Farganis 1994a:15), politicised the personal, reclaimed the reins of their destinies, and encouraged each other 'to live, love, laugh, and be happy as women' (Tong 1989:1-2).

Tong (1989:6), contends that the task of synthesizing the various strands of feminist theory seems to have been assumed most effectively by socialist feminists; their foci dwelling on unity and integration, both in the sense of integrating all aspects of women's lives and in the sense of producing a unified feminist theory.

But these attempts to find integration and agreement, to establish one paradigmatic feminist standpoint representative of how women experience the world have not escaped unchallenged. Postmodern feminists consider the whole enterprise as:

... yet another instantiation of phallogocentric thought. It is typical of male thinking to seek the one, true feminist story of reality. For postmodern feminists such a synthesis is neither feasible nor desirable. It is not feasible because women's experiences differ across class, racial, and cultural lines. It is undesirable because the One and the True are-

¹² See lyrics from the soundtrack, *Sisters are Doin' it for Themselves*, performed by soul singer Aretha Franklin, accompanied by the Eurhythmics.

philosophical myths that have been employed to bring into submission the differences that best describe the human condition (Tong 1989:7).

It is this suspicion towards mainstream feminism and its *innocent* collusion with patriarchal and modernist tenets that precipitated the reactionary paradigmatic slide into the postmodern feminist moment.

1.3 EXPLORING POSTMODERN FEMINISM'S FRANCO-AMERICAN DIS-CONNECTION

Evidently, more than any other strand of feminist thought, postmodern feminism shares an uneasy relationship with feminism. Postmodern feminists worry that because feminism purports to be an explanatory theory, it too courts the danger of trying to explain the reason behind woman's oppression, or to provide the winning recipe for the realisation of true liberation. Because postmodern feminists spurn traditional assumptions about truth and reality, they wish to exclude in their writings any rehabilitation of phallogocentric thought (Montrelay 1987:228-230), which is thought centred around an absolute word (*logos*) that is 'male' in style (hence the *phallus*). While threatening the fragile unity of the feminist movement, this new impetus fuels the feminist fires of plurality, multiplicity, and difference (Tong 1989:217; Stanton 1980:73; Jordan & Weedon 1995:203).

Tong claims that until recently, postmodern feminism was referred to as 'French feminism' (Weiner 1994: 65). As many of the women subscribing to this thought were either French nationals or women living in France, Anglo-Americans tagged all of them 'French' (Tong 1989:218). Although the new French women's movement did not emerge until well after the May 1968 uprising (Marks & de Courtivron 1981:28-38; Dunchen 1986), it soon impacted significantly on French intellectual life (Moi 1987:1; Stanton 1980:80).

The term *postmodern feminism* gained popularity as U.S. audiences realized that what such writer as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva had in common was not so much their 'Frenchness' as their

philosophical perspective, which was shared by postmodern philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan (Agger 1993:57; Moi 1987:1). Like Derrida, Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva are deconstructionists in the sense that they exult in illuminating the 'internal contradictions of apparently coherent systems of thought', thereby corroding naturalized notions of 'authorship, identity and selfhood'. Like Lacan, Cixous, Irigaray, and Kristeva are passionately interested in reinterpreting traditional Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice (Moi 1985:Chapter 6; Tong 1989:217-231; Dickens & Fontana 1994:8). A typical French characteristic is the insistence on the primacy of theory over politics, as opposed to American feminist's preoccupation with the socio-historical realities of women's experiences (Moi 1987:3-6; Stanton 1980:79; Thorne et al. 1983:11-12).

Many of the roots of postmodern feminism can be traced to the work of Simone de Beauvoir, the diva who phrased the essential question: Why is woman the *second sex*, or as the question may be rephrased in postmodern terms: Why is woman the Other? (Usher & Edwards 1994:19; Stanton 1980:74). For all the insight the *Second Sex* has to offer, it leaves its readers with the conclusion that to be "second," or "Other" (de Beauvoir 1953:726) is not to be aspired to (Tong 1989:219). It required the emergence of the new feminist movement to alert de Beauvoir to the reality that women's creativity could flourish equally well in a collective, political and all-female environment (Moi 1987:2; Usher & Edwards 1994:20). Postmodern feminists have since revolutionized de Beauvoir's conception of Otherness. Women are still the Other, but rather than interpreting this as something to be despised, postmodern feminists revel in its sheer effervescence. The condition of Otherness empowers women to stand back and criticize the norms, values, and rituals that the dominant culture (patriarchy) seeks to impose on everyone. Thus, Otherness, for all its connotations with oppression and inferiority, is more than an oppressed, inferior condition. Rather, it is a way of being, thinking, and speaking that celebrates openness, plurality, diversity, and difference (Tong 1989: 219; Farganis 1994b:106).

Furthermore, central to any kind of feminist politics or theory, is the

problem of sexual difference. The very reason for women's oppression as a social group resides in their difference from men. Of paramount importance is an identification of what that difference consists, what are its parameters, and how is it constructed in relation to power? French feminism is therefore not alone in addressing the question of sexual difference. It has typically done so via the lens of French psychoanalytical and philosophical theory. Undoubtedly, it was the development of revolutionary theories on sexual difference, femininity and language in the works by Irigaray, Kristeva and Cixous from 1974 and 1975, which produced the myth of the radical difference between French and British/ American feminism. Hailed as the 'Franco-American Disconnection,' (Stanton 1990; Thorne et al. 1983), the phrase encapsulates the fracture in postmodern feminist thought. For British and American feminists (in the mid-1970's) largely unfamiliar with European philosophical and psychoanalytical theoretical tradition (Moi 1985:26-27; Spender 1983:371), the early French feminist texts were misconstrued as being virtually inscrutable, elitist, abstract, and far removed from the experiences of ordinary women (Moi 1987:4-5; Stanton 1980:79; Tong 1989:218).

It was probably this initial perception that created the image of French feminist theory as the awesome Other; the formidable negative of British or American practice (Moi 1987:5; Agger 1993:66). For essentially, 'while the British and American were empirical, the French were theoretical; where the American and British were staunch believers in the authority of experience, the latter questioned not only the category of experience, but even that of the "experiencer" (the female subject herself). If the American and British were looking for a homogeneous female tradition in art or history, they insisted that female writing could only ever be visible in the gaps, contradictions or margins of patriarchal discourse. And when the American and British were looking for woman writers, they sought feminine writing which they claimed, could be produced successfully by men as well' (Moi 1987:4-5).

1.4 CONCLUSION

This fracture in postmodern feminist thought is illustrative of the on-going strategic and theoretical diversity that has strengthened rather than diluted feminism's potency. In recalling the early days of humble beginnings, when individual woman contemplated in isolation their existential validity, I have endeavoured, in this chapter, to present a succinct reflection of the proud legacy of '*strong women*' who have courageously swam against the high tide of patriarchal domination. Having acknowledged the contributions of second wave feminisms and its predecessors, I navigate chapter two through the turbulent transitional waters from a modernist to a postmodern feminist consciousness, arguing that an alignment with the latter offers richer emancipatory prospects than an apologist allegiance to Enlightenment's failed *promised land flowing with milk and honey* deliverance missiology.

CHAPTER TWO

POSTMODERN FEMINISM: RE-SCRIPTING PRE-SCRIPTIONS

What feminists are doing is comparable to Copernicus shattering geocentricity, Darwin shattering our species-centricity. We are shattering andro-centricity and the change is fundamental. Minnich (in Farganis 1994a:21).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Minnich's bold statement which shatters the core of the male constructed worldview, sets the stage for my inquiry into postmodern feminism's revolutionary challenge against naturalized ideological perspectives. Resolute to demythologise the dizzy yarns patriarchy has spun for women, in this chapter, I focus on the postmodern feminist onslaught against an absolutist, masculinist rationality and subjectivity that has trivialised herstorical realities. In drawing attention to women's socialization to privatise the personal, I also endeavour to expose patriarchal anaesthesia over women's kaleidoscopic experiential diversity. However, before forwarding postmodern feminism's schedule to set the world spinning right side up, I address the theoretical and political implications of situating feminism within the modernist/postmodernist debate. A debate that has urged a re-evaluation of some of the most fundamental tenets that have defined and shaped modernist intelligibilities.

2.2 IN SEARCH OF A NEXUS: MODERNISM, FEMINISM AND POSTMODERNISM

The overwhelming sense emerging from my readings in this area confirms that in these 'days of disenchantment' (Lather 1991:102), some of the most fundamental assumptions concerning socio-political relationships have suffered defamation (Lee 1988:166). Revised economic arrangements, the re-shuffling of power equations in world state systems, the challenge to

democracy, and the technological re-writing of birth, life, and death practices, (Farganis 1994b:101-102; Parpart & Marchand 1995:12-13), hint at new scripts exhorting the variability of human nature- all of which are demanding urgent critique and re-assessment. The meanings, and even existence, of concepts pivotal to all genres of Enlightenment metanarratives have met iconoclastic fates and have thrown the utopian 'Kantian-Cartesian rationality' (Graham et al. 1992: 15), into blithering disarray (Flax 1993:136; Farganis 1994a:14; Luke 1992:46; Farganis 1994b:108; Hollinger 1994:72; Maynard 1993:328).

[This] crisis of Western representation, its authority (male) and universalising claims was...first announced by those social groups that had been systematically denied historical representation. The feminist challenge to the patriarchal order of things was in this sense epistemological in that it questioned the structure of representations by interrogating the (male) system of legitimation by which they are endorsed or excluded (Wakefield 1990:21, in Usher & Edwards 1994:19).

The 'crisis' of western thought has in recent years been defined around the tension between modernism and postmodernism (Usher & Edwards 1994:19; Mcrobbie 1994:64-65; Lee 1988:166). Many critics are pessimistic about its resolution since precise definitions of either 'modern' or 'postmodern' or the exact periodisation of the latter remains highly elusive¹ (Dickens & Fontana 1994:3). However, consensus confirms that the dispute assumed its current form with Nietzsche's interrogation of the legitimacy of the Enlightenment-(hu)manist (*sic*) grand narrative. Following Nietzsche, postmodernism questions the foundationalism and absolutism of modernism's emancipatory impulse and proposes instead a 'non-dualistic, non-unitary approach to knowledge' (Glass 1993:1; Hekman 1990:1; Luke & Gore 1992:7; Flax:1993:133; Fehr 1993: 55-93; Maynard 1993:328; Fraser & Nicholson 1994:243).

Contemporary feminism, one of the most influential movements of

¹ Lyotard rejects the modern-postmodern conceptualization, postulating that any attempt at periodization is itself a modernist error (Dickens & Fontana 1994:2).

mid-twentieth century, occupies an anomalous position within the modernism/postmodernism debate (Suleiman 1991:112). On the one hand, feminism seems to share much in common with postmodernism. Like postmodernism, feminism is a radical movement that challenges fundamental assumptions of the modernist legacy. Arguing that the epistemological foundations of Enlightenment humanism, if not all of western philosophy, is fundamentally flawed, both call for its displacement and urge that the description and acquisition of human knowledge be redressed (Hekman 1990:1-2; Usher & Edwards 1994:19-20; Farganis 1994b:109; Flax 1993:132; Luke & Gore 1992:5; Benhabib 1994:77; Fraser & Nicholson 1994:249).

Despite the similarities between the two movements, there remains at best an 'uneasy alliance' between postmodernists and feminists (Docherty 1993:365; Fraser & Nicholson 1994:242). This is partly attributed to the profound ambiguity in the feminist heritage (Mcrobbie 1994:69; Usher & Edwards 1994:20; Lee 1988:167). On the one hand, because feminism challenges the modernist Enlightenment epistemology it is an intellectual ally of postmodernism, on the other hand, contemporary feminism is both historically and theoretically² a modernist project berth in the emancipatory impulse of liberal-humanism and Marxism (Benhabib 1994:90; Maynard 1993:328). The contradiction between these values thwart attempts to neatly categorize feminism as modernist or postmodernist (Weiner 1994:63;

² Lovibond (1993:396-408), forwards three themes which for her create doubts as to whether postmodernism can be adopted by feminism as a theoretical ally. She labels her three postmodern themes as:

- (a) 'dynamic pluralism': arguing for a "sceptical response to this postmodern position which she maintains is informed by an irrationalism whose historical origin rests on an aversion to modernist social movements, and specifically for the movement towards sexual equality".
- (b) 'quiet pluralism': perceives this as an effort to obstruct the pursuit towards political theory thereby coercing the theorists back into the ideological field of 'mythology', where feminists are content with the existing 'life-stories' currently on offer to women.
- (c) 'pluralism of inclination': supports the idea of subjectivity as socially or discursively constructed, and thus as inherently fluid, but once this insight is divorced from the feminist agenda to reconstruct sensibility in the interest of women it will lose its political potency.

Hekman 1990:2; Flax 1993:133; Farganis 1994a:24; Usher & Edwards 1994:20; Di Stefano 1990:64).

Postmodernism challenges, among other things, the fundamental dichotomies of Enlightenment thought (rationality/irrationality)³, the homocentricity of Enlightenment knowledge and even the status of 'man' himself. These are not issues on which feminism can remain mute or ambiguous. If all 'feminisms' have one unifying strand, it is the challenge to the masculine/feminine dichotomy as it is defined in western thought (Luke & Gore 1992:7). On these, among other key issues, feminism can profit from an alliance with postmodernism. An alliance with modernism, on the other hand, can only perpetuate Enlightenment epistemology which inevitably condemns women to subordination (Usher & Edwards 1994:21-22; Hekman 1990:2).

The modernist legacy of feminism is not a superficial aspect of contemporary feminism. Questions such as whether a postmodern feminism offers an adequate political schedule (Suleiman 1991:117; Benhabib 1994:78), and whether the emancipatory impulse of both liberalism and Marxism must be abandoned remain valid.

³ In Plato's *Republic* it is maintained that the "practice of dialectics fortifies our intellectual grasp of truth and goodness, enabling us to picture ourselves as progressing towards perfect mental integration. Since its invention, this ideal of integrated subjectivity has been linked to that of personal freedom ('positive liberty') emanating from the proper internal organisation of the mind (autonomy). To be free in this sense is to be emancipated from the influence of beliefs and desires which war against our critical judgement". The logical conclusion to this trend of thought is that freedom can be attributed only to a perfectly rational being (Lovibond 1993:393). The insistence of imaging women as irrational, thus presupposes a blanket disqualification from being truly liberated.

Gilligan (in Usher & Edwards 1994:193-194), has argued that the notion of the healthy personality and 'normal' human development embedded in psychological discourses has a male gender-specific basis. 'Normal' development aims towards autonomy, independence and separateness, goals which are linked more specifically to the gender identity of masculinity. Development not consistent with male constructed norms relegates women to the domain of inadequacy with differences turned into deficits. On the other, in developing male norms, women are constructed as failures because of our abandonment of femininity.

See also Fraser & Nicholson (1994:256).

Hekman contributes to this resolution by advocating a postmodern approach which involves:

1. arguing that a postmodern position can resolve certain contentious issues in contemporary feminism;
2. chronicling similarities between postmodernism and feminism, and
3. arguing that feminism can contribute 'gender sensitivity' (Usher & Edwards 1994:195): a dimension lacking in many postmodern accounts (Hekman 1990:3; Suleiman 1991:114; Flax 1993:132).

Feminists, like the postmoderns, are sceptical toward Enlightenment epistemology, specifically its rationalism and dualism (Hollinger 1994:158; Lovibond 1993:390). But, unlike the postmoderns, feminists reject Enlightenment thought because of its gender bias (Hekman 1990:5; Di Stefano 1990:64; Giroux 1992:61; Bordo 1990:137). Thus, for example, they display an aversion to the claim that only 'rational, abstract, universalistic thought can produce truth as a claim about the masculine definition of truth' (Luke & Gore 1992:2). Similarly, feminists assert that the dualisms at the root of Enlightenment thought are a product of the fundamental polarity between male and female, reducing woman to man's opposite, his *other*, and not Otherness, (that is, as difference in her own right) (Stanton 1990:74; Hekman 1990:5; Luke & Gore 1992:3; Di Stefano 1990:64). In each of the dualisms which support Enlightenment thought: rational/ irrational, subject/object, culture/nature, the male is associated with the privileged first element and the female with the disprivileged second (Hekman 1990:5).

According to Derrida (in Scott 1992:256):

...the leading terms are accorded primacy; their partners are represented as weaker or derivative. Yet the first terms depend on and derive their meaning from the second to such an extent that the secondary terms can be seen as generative of the definition of the first terms.

Thus, while impressing the notion that binary oppositions should not be taken at face value, the feminist critique extends the postmodern critique

of rationalism by revealing its gendered character⁴ (Scott 1992:256; Hekman 1990:5).

The first problem lies in the fact that many feminists while identifying Enlightenment dualisms and the privileging of the male, refuse the postmodern recommendation for their dissolution, preferring that the dualisms be maintained but reversed thereby privileging the female characteristics associated with, 'caring, intimacy, community and aesthetic appreciation' (Usher & Edwards 1994:7; Scott 1992:256; Hekman 1990:5). Postmoderns respond pessimistically that any attempt to privilege the other side of the dualisms will result in their reinstatement (Hekman 1990:5).

Second, feminism must attend to the charge that because postmodernism rejects values, it cannot provide a viable political programme (Parpart & Marchand 1995:8). If, as the postmoderns insist there is not one but many truths, this leaves postmodern feminism in an awkward position because unlike postmodernism, feminism is necessarily a political as well as a theoretical movement (Farganis 1994b:122-123; Agger 1993:62). A related problem involves the fact that a postmodern stance in feminism entails rejecting the idea of an innate 'female nature.' Many contemporary feminists want to talk about the 'essentially feminine' (Jordan & Weedon 1995: 201). Both of these problems reveal that, although the rejection of male-defined absolutism would seem an obvious goal of feminism, its repercussions are not easily reconciled to the feminist programme either politically or theoretically (Hekman 1990:6; Usher & Edwards 1994:21).

⁴ For example, "woman" is defined as a deficient/deviant man (Fehr 1993:115), in discourses from Aristotle through to Freud. The superior member of the pair maintains his innocence. Unlike the inferior, he is secure in his independence and natural superiority. "Like Aristotle's master/husband, his is the active matter, determining the generative within, but never affected by his coupling. There is no disorder within him but there may be disorderly objects requiring his mastery. Inextricable to Enlightenment self-understanding, is the optimistic eventuality that all difference/disorder will be brought within the beneficent sovereignty of the One" (Flax 1993:139).

Understandably, feminists have devoted extensive discussions to these issues and have established three principal positions on where to situate feminism within the modernism/postmodernism divide (Hekman 1990:6).

The first position, discounted for its eclecticism, counsels that feminism retain the 'good' aspects of modernity while discarding its problematic features (ibid.:7).

The second advises simply avoiding the issue, (ibid.:7), and the third position is one that a number of feminists both in France and America are attempting to formulate: a postmodern approach to feminism (Hollinger 1994:163). This position sports important advances. The attempt to preserve the 'good' aspects of modernity, or even to privilege the feminine over the masculine cannot escape the inherent sexism of the Enlightenment epistemology (Hekman 1990:8). A postmodern feminism, on the other hand, can reveal some of the errors of contemporary feminist positions. The postmoderns see the error of Enlightenment dualism but the feminists complete this critique by defining them as gendered. The two movements are thus, complimentary and mutually corrective (Hekman 1990:8; Giroux 1992:61).

Further, the attack on the dualisms of rational/ irrational, subject/object and culture/nature is central to both the postmodern and the feminist critiques. Organising the discussion around these dualisms reveals the relationship between postmodernism and feminism and can provide a forum for the formulation of a postmodern feminism (Hekman 1990:8-9). Irrespective of whether feminism salvages postmodernism (Morris 1988:15-16), or whether the reverse is more accurate, for many feminists there seems to be more scope in resisting male hegemony rather than clinging uncritically to Enlightenment assumptions (Usher & Edwards 1994:24; Farganis 1994b:109). Essentially, a postmodern feminism would reject the masculinist bias of rationalism without attempting to substitute a feminist bias and it would contend that there is not one but many truths, none of which is privileged along gender lines (Hekman 1990:9).

Having addressed the tensions that exist among modernism, postmodernism and feminist discourses, in what follows, I present an exploration into germane issues informing the feminist postmodern paradigm. Central to my discussion in the rest of this chapter is an evaluation of the extent to which postmodern feminism has critiqued, amplified and politicized postmodernism's interrogation of rationality, totality, subjectivity and contingency. Apart from exploring the issue of difference and agency, I acknowledge its pervasive commitment towards providing a self-consciously political feminism undergird by a language of critique and possibility. I entertain a more expansive discussion of postmodern feminism's campaign for linguistic intervention in chapter three.

2.3 POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF REASON AND TOTALITY

Various feminist discourses have contributed a theoretical and political dimension for enhancing postmodernism's analyses of rationality and totality. Whereas postmodern theorists have foregrounded the historical, contingent, and cultural construction of reason, they have neglected to indicate how reason has been promoted as part of a masculine discourse (Green 1992:x; Benhabib 1994:78). In response, postmodern feminists have provided an insightful challenge to this position by unveiling the ways in which reason, language, science and objectivity, (Rosaldi 1994:171), have produced knowledge/power relations that have legitimated the silencing, disenfranchisement, misrepresentation and misinterpretation of women (Flax 1993:143-135; Luke & Gore 1992:5).

Feminist theorists have also reconstructed the postmodern discussion of reason in two significant ways. First, while acknowledging that all claims to reason are partial, they have argued that the emancipatory opportunities resident in reflective consciousness and critical reason are foundational for social criticism (Green 1992:x). hooks among other feminists caution that those denying the power of critical reason and abstract discourse often

collaborate in the perpetuation of patriarchy by disempowering women into silence. A fear to engage theory invariably begets anti-intellectualism. Such an intimidation is further consolidated by theorist who display a territorial mentality, encouraging the belief that their work is impossibly complex to decode. In so doing, they propagate the belief that women are incapable of engaging theory because 'guided by emotion rather than reason' (Hall in Jordan & Weedon 1995:178), they are unable to think abstractly (Flax 1992:4; Elam 1994:59).

Lugones and Spelman (1992:24), also highlight the hierarchical distinctions between theorizers and those theorized about maintaining that, 'these are endorsed by the same views and institutions which support hierarchal distinctions between men/women, master race/inferior race, intellectuals/manual workers'.

In the same vein, Braidotti (in Butler 1994:158), ponders on whose behalf do critical feminist intellectuals think and what their obligations are in this regard? She asks whether it isn't, in part, their duty to think about thinking, and thus expose some of the power hierarchies invested in knowledge categories? (Mcrobbie 1994:67; Kenway & Modra 1992:144; Elam 1994; Farganis 1994b:110).

In concurrence, Scott (1992:253), suggests that:

We need theory that can analyze the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations - ideological, institutional, organizational, subjective - accounting not only for continuities but also for change over time. We need theory that will let us think in terms of pluralities and diversities rather than of unities and universals. We need theory that will break the conceptual hold, at least, of those long traditions of (western) philosophy that have systematically and repeatedly constructed the world hierarchically in terms of masculine universals and feminine specificities. We need theory that will enable us to articulate alternative ways of thinking about (and thus acting upon) gender without either simply reversing the old hierarchies or confirming them. And we need theory that will be useful and relevant for political practice.

Second, feminists such as Flax have modified postmodernism's approach to rationality by arguing that reason isn't the only locus of meaning. At issue here is the rejection of a modernist version of reason that is

totalizing, essentialist, and politically repressive (Hollinger 1994:57-75).

While we cannot ignore modernism's advocacy for rationality, the existence of a universal rationality is equally unacceptable. The concept of rationality cannot be fixed. This is clearly evident in the following example where mathematically speaking $2+1=3$, however, theologically speaking (in reference to the trinity), $3=1$ (Latour 1993:4).

Furthermore, in asserting that gender matters, feminist theory also addresses sexual properties and its ensuing gender relationships (Farganis 1994a:17). While acknowledging hybridisation, varying nuances and alternative positions, debates engaging gender differences are generally identifiable in three strategic forms for addressing the relationship between contemporary feminism and the Enlightenment legacy of humanistic rationalism. These are: feminist rationalism, feminine anti-rationalism, and feminist postrationalism. Feminist rationalism, which uses a minimalist notion of gender differences, regards a critique of sexism as an irrational and hence illegitimate set of beliefs and practices. Feminine anti-rationalism, committed to a stronger version of gender difference mobilizes its protest against the rational/ masculine: irrational/feminine construct and attempts to revalorize traditional feminine realities and activities. Combining greater gender sensitivity and scepticism, feminist postrationalism rejects the terms and strategies of the previous two and argues that feminism must initiate a break from the rationalist paradigm by disengaging the 'assumptions of generic humanism, on the one hand, and a feminism construed as a theory and politics for the subject "woman" on the other' (Di Stefano 1990:66-67).

In addition feminist theory also questions ideas of objectivity and neutrality challenging what feminist regard as western-oriented/masculine-biased thought. While discounting the notion of value-free social and cultural theory it supports a social analysis that can be employed to improve society along feminist lines. It defies any social science that distances itself from the objects into which it is inquiring, preferring rather analyses that emphasize 'interactive engagement', (Farganis 1994b:108), and 'praxis' (Weiner 1994:121-130). It always "genders" ideas, citing, for example,

science and rationality as being male (Jordan & Weedon 1995:181), and critiquing them for perpetuating male oppressiveness (Spretnak 1991:246-257).

In condemning puritanical veneers within the scientific community, Bleier (1986:63), writes that, 'Scientists cannot simply hang up their subjectivities on a hook outside the laboratory door...rendering science as the objective pursuit of a body of knowledge that is itself free of cultural values and social commitment'. She continues that:

It is the lab coat, literally and symbolically, that wraps the scientist in the robe of innocence-of a pristine and aseptic neutrality-and gives him, like the klansman, a faceless authority that his audience can't challenge. From that sheeted figure comes a powerful, mysterious, impenetrable, coercive, anonymous male voice (ibid.:62).

While postmodernism critiques master narratives that favour a single standard claim to universalize experience, postmodern feminism, in contrast does not define all large or formative narratives as oppressive. It validates grounding narratives in the contexts and specificities of people's lives with a supplementary argument for metanarratives that encourage 'dialectical, relational, and holistic' social criticism (Fraser & Nicholson 1994:250). Metanarratives play an important theoretical role in situating the particular and the specific in broader historical and relational contexts. Thus, to reject all notions of totality risks entrapment in 'particularistic theories that are unable to explain the ...mediations, interrelations, and interdependencies' that configure and empower larger socio-political systems (Giroux 1992:67-68; Benhabib 1994:85).

Furthermore, postmodern feminism is also abhorrent of the deification of universal laws at the expense of specificity and the contingent, favouring rather the Lacanian, non-linear conception of history. This preference subverts the Marxist's masculinist variant of the Enlightenment dream (Agger 193:57) wherein 'history itself is ultimately rational, purposive, unitary, law governed, and progressive' (Graham et al. 1992:16); (that is, historical events are connected by an underlying, meaningful, and rational structure, comprehensible by reason/science, history does not occur randomly). Since

history, like reason, has an 'essentially teleological and homogeneous content', we can anticipate its end (Flax 1993:134; Lloyd 1991:175; Benhabib 1994:77).

However, Partner (in Smith-Rosenberg 1986:31), points out that:

'Historians' growing sensitivity to the power of words, has greatly enhanced the subtlety with which we explore the past. Historical evidence consists of words arbitrarily imposed to make time into chronology, to turn the uncharted chaos of reality into a simple story complete with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It is almost always linguistic, someone's story about reality'.

Hassan (1993:149), confirms this in his assertion that, 'history is a palimpsest', and culture is permeable to time past, present, and future. Taking responsibility entails situating ourselves firmly within contingent and imperfect contexts, acknowledging *privileged* differences of race, gender, geographic location and sexual identities (Flax 1993:146; Coppock 1995:16-17; Papart & Marchand 1995:9). Within the postmodern feminist discourse, contingency emerges as the key term, for history is in the process of being constantly rewritten, thereby rendering our perspectives temporal and elusive. Historians and social analysts can, at best, engage 'multiperspectival cultural analyses' (Best & Kellner 1991:213), and record the cacophony of myriad voices' (Farganis 1994a:41).

In ensuring the audibility of women's voices amidst myriad tongues, consciousness-raising campaigns have typically commenced with women's concrete experiences and relationships. By encouraging us to trust in our own perceptions, and inner autobiographical voice (Farganis 1994a:19; Spender 1985:28-29; Fehr 1993:114), feminist theory contrasts experience against 'analytical reasoning, subjective assertions and a pseudo-objectivism'. Always preceding from the province of masculine domination, it maintains that only through understanding women's experiences, will we wrest free the suppressed or hidden events in women's lives which offer alternatives to received knowledge. Apart from requiring the politicization of the private (Jordan & Weedon 1995:187), it also begs that those attempting to write women's narratives engage the restrictions that historiographic

methodology has imposed; methods which in themselves determine how the question of women may be phrased (Elam 1994:35; Benhabib 1994:88).

Within the discipline of history, new knowledge about women has surfaced which dethrones the exclusively Eurocentric, male subject traditionally valorized in historical narratives (Jordan & Weedon 1995:186-187). Emerging *herstorical* accounts are only valuable to the extent that they encompass commissions and omissions (Elam 1994:36-37; Farganis 1994b:110-111). An unpardonable injustice is committed when any ONE history purports to speak of all women everywhere, and when it fails to underline the incompleteness of its own narrative. Elam (1994:42), suggests that 'the history of women, should be written in a kind of suspension, written in a present that is not at ease with its past or its future'. The implications that this has for a sound epistemology encompasses:

- (a) the concern that women's voices have been muted because women's issues have either been overlooked or certain scientific, objective, and/or masculinist rules of analysis and verification have been privileged;
- (b) the need to validate the voices of women to uncover social reality , and
- (c) the need to commence with an appreciation of women's experiences (Farganis 1994a:20).

This transformative process of resocialization can be activated through the affirmation and celebration of women's pluralized and contextualized differences: an aspiration deeply engrained in the postmodern feminist politics of difference and agency.

2.4 POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE AND AGENCY

In the foregoing discussion I attempted to highlight the inherent flaws in masculinist rationality and objectivity. Prominently featured on this 'faultlist' is the fundamental misconception surrounding the concept of "difference".

Capitalizing on the sexual differences between women and men, patriarchal discourse has not only ignored the heterogeneity of women and their experiences but has misrepresented women's differences as deficits. In highlighting and expanding on the postmodern feminist celebration of difference, Snitow (1990:29-30), writes:

Feminism encompasses central dilemmas in modern experience, mysteries of identity that get full expression in its debates. The electricity of its internal disagreements is part of feminism's continuing power to shock and involve large numbers of people in a public conversation far beyond the movement itself. The dynamic feminist divide is about difference; it dramatizes women's differences from each other- and the necessity of our sometimes making common cause.

Many feminists are sceptical toward the postmodern celebration of difference. While welcoming postmodernism's recognition of lost local narratives, cultural and ethnic differences, and its challenge to hegemonic power relations parading as universals (Parpart & Marchand 1995:6-7), postmodern feminists have raised serious questions about differences being understood in ways that reproduce prevailing patriarchal power relations. For many postmodern feminists, the issue of difference has to be engaged around wider concerns⁵ (Giroux 1992:68).

In the most general sense, the postmodern emphasis on difference calls for a re-thinking around the concept of truth, man, woman, and subjectivity, while avoiding a reduction of difference to 'opposition, exclusion, and hierarchic arrangement' (Butler 1994:164-165). In this regard, postmodern feminism has made emancipatory strides in identify the

⁵ "Difference theory tends to emphasize the body (and more recently the unconscious where the body's psychic meaning develops); equality theory tends to de-emphasize the body and to place faith in each individual's capacity to develop a self not ultimately circumscribed by a law of gender. For difference theorists the body can be 'either a site of pain and oppression or the site of orgasmic ecstasy and maternal joy'. For equality theorists, neither extreme is as compelling as the overriding idea that the difference between male and female bodies is a problem in need of solution. In this view therefore, sexual hierarchy and sexual oppression are bound to continue unless the body is transcended or displaced as the centre of female identity" (Snitow 1990:24-25).

"differences that make a difference" (Giroux 1992:68-69; Di Stefano 1990:78).

Scott (1992:257-261), has assisted in dismantling one of the debilitating dichotomies in which the issue of difference has been situated. Rejecting the idea that difference and equality, constitutes an opposition, she indicates that the opposite of equality is not difference but inequality. Here a binary opposition has been created presenting a choice of either endorsing equality or its presumed antithesis- 'difference'.

If individuals or groups were identical or the same there would be no need to ask for equality. Equality, therefore, might well be defined as a deliberate indifference to specified differences. In this sense, the issue of equality does not discount the notion of difference, but depends on acknowledging those differences that either promote or eradicate inequality. The 'equality-versus-difference' debate is illustrative of meaning expressed in a 'politically self-defeating way'.

For Scott, the category of difference is pivotal as a political construct to the notion of equality itself. Its implications for a feminist politics of difference requires two important theoretical moves:

...the first, [a] systematic criticism of the operations of categorical difference, exposure to the kinds of exclusions and inclusions-the hierarchies-it constructs, and a refusal of their ultimate "truth". A refusal, however, not in the name of an equality that implies sameness or identity but rather (and this is the second move) of an equality that rests on differences...that confound, disrupt, and render ambiguous the meaning of any fixed binary opposition. To do anything else is to buy into the political argument that sameness is a requirement for equality, an untenable position for feminists...who know that power is constructed on, and so must be challenged from, the ground of difference.

The challenging of power by focusing on both exclusions and inclusions prevents one from slipping into a facile elaboration or romanticization of difference. This implies, for example, that to treat all cultural products as texts may situate them as historical and social constructions (Graham et al. 1992:4-5). It becomes imperative to distinguish among the institutional mechanisms and power relations in which different

texts are produced (Giroux 1992:69). This facilitates an understanding of how such texts make a difference in terms of reproducing particular meanings, social relations, and values. It suggests that meaning is not immanent in a text but has to be constructed rather than simply discovered (Birch 1989:20; Bordo 1990:135).

On the one level, this emphasis on "differences" creates a problem for political strategizing. Basically, for a social/political movement to be cohesive, there must be an adequate sense of a shared identity so that shared politics can ensue (Farganis 1994a:35). Bordo (1990:140), contends that 'regardless of how local and circumscribed the object is and regardless of the scholar's attentiveness to the axes that constitute social identity', we delude ourselves if we believe that postmodern theory is attending to the 'problem of difference' so long as so many concrete others are excluded from the conversation. Even though women share certain qualities and perspectives, their differences over policies such as pornography, domestic violence, and reproductive rights need explanation (Fraser & Nicholson 1994:259; McRobbie 1994:69).

In what Haraway (1994:91), names "cyborg politics", she proclaims this as the imminent time to stand steadfast on those certainties that we can provisionally claim essential to our nuances of otherness. The multiplicity of our differences need not degenerate into 'a view from everywhere and thus from nowhere'. Even feminists have discovered that they cannot arrive at finite certainties about feminine subjectivity, identity or location (Luke & Gore 1992:4-5).

Contradictory standpoints are not the same as 'positions that float uncommitted on a sea of postmodernist theoretical indeterminacy' (Fehr 1993:114; Farganis 1994b: 112). A feminist postmodernism does not disclaim foundation; instead, it grounds its epistemology on a foundation of difference (Luke 1992:47-48; Fraser & Nicholson 1994:259). A similar issue at work concerns the postmodern notion that human subjectivities and bodies are 'constructed in the endless play of difference'. Such relativity threatens to erase not only any possibility for human agency or choice, but

also the theoretical means for understanding how the body becomes a site of power struggles around issues of race, class, and gender (Parpart & Marchand 1995:5).

In modern, and increasingly so in postmodern societies there is a shift from seeing sexual identity as a natural category toward seeing it as socially constructed and internalized (Elam 1994:42-58). Foucault (in Farganis 1994a:34), argues that:

sociality of sex is a political battlefield [and that]
politics means looking at how sexual bodies are ...constructed, sexual identities assigned, and sexual politics formulated.

The parameters of identity have become more negotiable as technological developments and global awareness have increased lifestyle options, via advertising, (Lee 1988:169-170), medical surgery, and socio-political movements which debunk traditional classifications of body imagery (Farganis 1994a: 46; Fehr 1993:119; Giddens 1991:81-88; Haraway 1994:83). This implies that persons are not simply their physical body but are the result of socio-historical attitudes and policies toward that body and what it represents (Jordan & Weedon 1995:194). The body, an object which is essential in sustaining a coherent sense of self-identity and in which we are all privileged, or doomed, to dwell (Giddens 1991:98-99), has become increasingly subsumed into the 'reflexive organisation of social life'. Bartky points to the disciplinary measures of dieting and physical exercise, the pressures of slenderness and fashion, and other technologies of control (Lee 1988:168-169), which make it a site of resistance linked to a broader theory of agency (Giroux 1992:70-71; Fehr 1993:118-119).

Closely allied to the classification of body imagery is the distinction between sex and gender. Although there are disagreements within feminist theory over the precise distinctions between sex and gender, there is agreement that sex is organised into gendered hierarchies, privileged in some instances and discriminated against in others (Di Stefano 1990:66-73). In acknowledging that gender matters, we have to ask what else besides gender (class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, physical ableness) matters, and to what extent? (Farganis 1994a:18; Glass 1993:Chapter 1).

In addressing these issues, many feminist theorists insist that female experience is constituted through shifting and multiple streams of consciousness constructed via "chronotopical change(s)" (Calinescu 1991:171), but always open to interrogation through critical introspection (Tiemey 1993:126-129; Giroux 1992:70; Luke 1992:47). Julia Kristeva, a practising psychoanalyst, who describes herself as "divided", maintains that this 'does not eliminate her capacities for commitment and trust but makes them literally *playful*'. The Kristevan subject is a subject-in-process, but a subject nonetheless (Glass 1993:18-19; Farganis 1994b:112; Lather 1991:118).

Confronted with such relativity, feminist writers have asked how, if at all, can we distinguish between a "true/unencumbered" self and a socially constructed self? They recognise the quandary we get into by speaking of the individual as a 'social actor' (Butler 1994:165-166), shaped by law, science, and history. The other complexity debated is, "how can feminist theory base itself upon the uniqueness of the female experience without concretizing a single paradigmatic definition of femaleness? (Farganis 1994a:18; Jordan & Weedon 1995:185). The answer remains as enigmatic as feminine mystique itself.

Clearly, wherever we situate ourselves in this equality/ difference discussion affects our assessment of the more difficult 'task of moral and social transformation'.⁶ If we ask whether we can change the ways in which women are treated without requiring that they be treated like men, we are asking that hegemonic educational and employment practices, as points of entry, be looked at with fresh perspective (Farganis 1994a: 22). Such pertinent issues are at the heart of postmodern feminism with one of its coronary arteries being the primacy of the political, and it is this concern that I proceed to deliberate.

⁶ See Bauman (1993:1-15), Introduction: Morality in Postmodern Perspective.

2.5 POSTMODERN FEMINISM AND THE PRIMACY OF THE POLITICAL

Of paramount importance to postmodern feminism is the advocacy of a feminism that is self-consciously political. Not particularly impressed by postmodernism's preference to obscure the political and ethical in favour of issues that converge towards epistemological and aesthetic concerns, it asserts that intellectual and cultural work must be energised by political questions and issues which attempt to fathom and confront patriarchal inscriptions in every facet of our daily lives. It is suspicious of those feminisms which dwell exclusively on sexual difference, while ignoring women's differences as they intersect across other tiers of power, particularly with regards to race and class (Agger 1993:61). The essentialist tendency to speak of women as if they are all white, middle-class, and professional smacks of an insensitivity to women's diversity and concomitant life choices (Fehr 1993:114; Farganis 1994a:33). In this regard, hooks (in Giroux 1992:64) staunchly advocates:

Working collectively to confront difference, to expand our awareness of sex, race, and class as interlocking systems of domination, of the ways we reinforce and perpetuate these structures is the context in which we learn the true meaning of solidarity. It is this work that must be the foundation of feminist movement...While the struggle to eradicate sexism and sexist oppression is and should be the primary thrust of feminist movement, to prepare ourselves politically for this effort we must first learn how to be in solidarity with one another.

In developing this theme, Lugones and Spelman (1992:24), provide a cautionary word concerning the development of feminist theory. They draw attention to substantive evidence showing particular theories as being 'androcentric, sexist, biased, and paternalistic'. Feminist theory is no less immune to such characterization; 'it can also be arrogant, disrespectful, ignorant, ethnocentric, and imperialistic. While it may purport to be about "women", it may in fact be only about certain women' (Fraser & Nicholson 1994:256-257). The experiences of lesbians, women of colour, economically disadvantaged as well as women outside the overdeveloped world (Flax 1993:145; Luke & Gore 1992:7; Di Stefano 1990:65; Parpart & Marchand 1995:7), invariably tend to get mapped on blind spots in a

'democratic' socio-political topography⁷ (Luke 1992:36; Bordo 1990:135; Parpart & Marchand 1995:15-17).

The reactionary move to postmodernity can thus be contextualized against such stultifying practices. Even as rebellions against colonialism argued for heeding voices that were not those of the colonizers, and feminists argue against the dominant articulation of masculine voices, similarly, marginalised women seek placement at both the centre and periphery of feminist discourse (Birch 1989:19; Jordan & Weedon 1995:213-214). The emphasis is not on what people have in common but on what makes them different one from the other (Parpart & Marchand 1995:18). Within this milieu the more inclusive feminist theory, spotlights multiple subjectivities, plural and contextualized human experiences, and the autobiographical dimension of lived experience. The idea of stratification transcends its more basic class/race/gender triad by delineating a whole spectrum of variables (race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, ableness, sexual orientation, sexual preference; theoretical positions- essentialists, culturalists, structuralists, separatists, Freudian, anti-Freudian), (Lee 1988:172), which previously received cursory reception⁸ (Farganis 1994a:40).

In this shift toward self-determination, it is argued that, 'groups cannot be socially equal unless their specific experiences, culture, and social

⁷ See Lugones and Spelman (1992:24-26): Ways of Talking or Being Talked about that are Helpful, Illuminating, Empowering, Respectful.

⁸ The complexity of multiple subjectivities is dimly evident in the following tabloid article which appeared in *The Rising Sun* (October 15-21, 1996:2). Recently crowned Miss South Africa, Peggy Sue Khumalo, was severely criticized by a member of the Minority Front for vowing to sacrifice a white goat and a cow to her ancestors if she walked away with the title. In pointing out that the cow is a sacred Hindu icon, Ms Khumalo was questioned as to how she would meet Hindus in Bangalore, India the following month, where she would participate in the Miss World finals, when she had desecrated their holy emblem? She was asked to be banned from the pageant. Despite a subsequent apology from the spokesperson of the political party for being intolerant of Ms Khumalo's religious convictions, the issue that beauty pageants are a 'cattle parade' in themselves continues to be hotly debated.

contributions are publicly affirmed and recognized. In order for feminist theory to "initiate a politics that is actionable," it has to reconcile its earlier challenge against male oppression (Farganis 1994a:41-42) with a broader politics of solidarity' (Giroux 1992:64-65; Parpart & Marchand 1995:8-11).

Postmodern feminism has extended the political significance of this issue in important ways. First, it has argued vociferously that feminist analyses focus not only on the various ways in which women are inscribed in patriarchal representations and relations of power, but also how gender relations can be used to problematize sexual identities, differences, and commonalities of both men and women⁹ (Giroux 1992:65; Jordan & Weedon 1995:191-193). Prefaced by the concern that, 'what women signify has been taken for granted for far too long, [There is a call] to...expand the possibilities of what it is to be a woman' (Butler 1994:170).

As a remedial measure, the category of women has to be released from the anchoring which feminism felt it needed, submitting to the variability and historical contingency of gender so as not to reduce it to a simple consequence of anatomical or biological processes (Flax 1992:140). Such a postmodern feministic stance defies a categorical isolation of gender, while engaging in a transformative personal and social politics. Clearly, feminist postmodernism does not eliminate the subject or the self but recognises its operation 'as a series of parts' within the context of social relations. Politics must therefore imply subjectivities (McRobbie 1994:70).

Second, feminist theorists have redefined the relationship between the personal and political in measures that develop some vital postmodern assumptions. Theorists such as de Lauretis, for example, have argued that central to feminist social criticism is the need for feminists to maintain a 'tension between the personal and the political through an understanding of identity as multiple and even self-contradictory'. To ignore such a tension often collapses the political into the personal, thereby contracting the sphere of politics to the language of pain, anger, and separatism. hooks argues that

⁹ See Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism And The Subversion Of Identity*.

merely naming one's pain in relation to structures of domination often devalues an understanding of its multifaceted nature.

Countering the notion that feminists must be perpetually angry, postmodern feminism offers a politics of possibility which transcends the language of domination, anger, and critique (Giroux 1992:66). Theorist, Bakhtin has shown that:

...anger is not the only revolutionary attitude available to us. The power of laughter can be just as subversive, as when carnival turns the old hierarchies upside-down, erasing old differences, producing new and unstable ones' (Moi 1985:40).

In this regard, postmodern feminism has transcended the era of gender protest and now channels its energies towards harnessing male power with the intention of mobilizing the male ego. This entails confronting men with their maleness and ensuring that they assume responsibility for their masculinity.

Central to the feminist movement in the United States since the 1970's has been the argument that 'the personal is political' (Firestone 1979:44). This powerful slogan is the umbilical cord connecting the self to political reality; redefining the personal as the political (Farganis 1994b:108). The idea of a private space where intimate matters are kept from the scrutinizing eye of the public is a recurring source of tension in feminist theory, for it offends disempowering practices of privatizing the personal. The realm of personal experience (the private) has always been trivialized, particularly for women. However, an emancipatory strategy accepts that what transpires in the private sphere has political import, and that women apart from wanting to be included in the 'polis' also want issues concerning the 'oikos' publicly adjudicated (Farganis 1994a:18-19). In so doing, women are calling for the demolition of yet another male privileging binarism, that between the public and the private.

Furthermore, phallogocentric knowledges in institutional structures have traditionally been 'procedurally and epistemologically administered by men and masculinist signifiers' (Luke Gore 1992:2). Within this context, subjectivity was constructed via the historical configurations of power,

language, and social formations (Parpart & Marchand 1995:8; Giroux 1992:65). Without a re-invention of the masculine public subject, women remain doubly inscribed 'in material, public positions and in caretaking positions in the private domain. Public man liberated from the routinized *home executive* drudgery and the needs and interests of children, remain free to defend public, universally human interests as a full-time (pre)occupation' (Luke 1992:32). Fehr (1993:114), comments that, 'People's homes are often their castles to the degree that they are their spouses' prisons'. More accurately: *homes are often men's castles to the degree that they are their wives' prisons.*

Third, postmodern feminism attempts to understand the broader workings of power by examining how it functions other than through specific technologies of control. Foucault writes that:

...the elaboration of meaning involves conflict and power, that meanings are locally contested within discursive "fields of force" which overlap and appeal to one another's "truths" for authority and legitimation. Assigned the status of objective knowledge, they seem to be beyond dispute and thus serve a powerful legitimating function. Apart from being articulated in words, the power to control a particular field is contained or expressed in organizations and institutions (hospitals, prisons, schools, factories), and in social relationships (doctor/patient, teacher/student, employer/worker, husband/wife).

de Lauretis develops this insight by arguing that while postmodernism provides a theoretical service in recognising that power is 'productive of knowledges, meanings, and values, it is necessary that we distinguish between the positive effects (enabling/creative) and the oppressive effects (disabling/coercive) of such knowledges' (Luke & Gore 1992:2). Rich with the politics of possibility, it suggests that power can be utilized to rewrite the scripts of disenfranchised groups not merely in reaction to the forces of domination but also in response to the construction of alternative visions and futures (Giroux 1992:66).

2.6 CONCLUSION

We have already seen that postmodernism shares a number of assumptions with various feminist theories and practices. Both discourses view reason as plural and partial, define subjectivity as multi-layered and contradictory, and reference contingency and difference against various essentialisms.

As a political and ethical practice, postmodern feminism has also criticized and extended a number of assumptions pertinent to postmodernism. First, by prioritizing political struggles over epistemological engagements, it has redefined postmodernism's challenge to universalistic and foundational principles. Second, postmodern feminism has refused postmodernism's indiscriminate rejection of all forms of totality or metanarratives. Third, the historical contingency of the feminine subjectivity remains central and the erasure of human agency by decentering the subject does not feature in the feminist theoretical or political project. Fourth, it has located difference within the wider struggle for ideological and institutional transformation capable of subverting disempowering practices, rather than merely accentuating the postmodern approach to difference as a pastiche lacking a language of power.

The centrality of language has elicited diverse responses from feminists regarding the language and power equation. There seems to be, however, widespread consensus that the study of language is vital toward understanding how phallogocentrism has aided and abetted the definition, deprecation and exclusion of women and their realities in a male supremacist society. Postmodern feminism, in particular, has issued a clarion call for a language of possibility and critique. It is this issue that occupies my attention in chapter three. Eager for a linguistic deconstruction and reconstruction initiative that will render language more reflective of multiple gender voices, I perceive that feminist postmodernism holds out the promise for a therapeutic, *creative-evolutionary-revolutionary* intervention through the appropriation of both theoretical and empirical logocentric contributions.

However, before probing the subtlety of phallogentric deception, let's pause to contract the urgency of the long-awaited linguistic revolution as encapsulated in Astra's poetic rendition: *Women's Talk*.

what men dub tattle gossip women's talk
is really revolutionary activity
and would be taken seriously by men
(and many women too)
if men were doing the talking

women's talk is women together
probing the privatised
pain isolation exclusion trivialisation
in their everyday lives
if situations were reversed
men would react with identical symptoms
to what women feel in their gut-
worthlessness self deprecation depression

what men call prattle babble chatter jabber blather
gabbing hot air small talk rubbish gibberish verbosity
clearly shows how language reflects
the deep misogyny that's penetrated our lives
and become common sport
but from this day forward
spare me
 I'm sick of being bait

men denigrate our talk at their peril
but that's because they're in ignorance
of its power
our power
those precious few of us who see ourselves
as powerful
 serious
 and deadly.

Women's Talk: *Astra* (in Spender 1980).

CHAPTER THREE

MAN-MADE LANGUAGE: *PATENT REJECTED*

*...if I come into a room out of the sharp misty light
and hear them talking a dead language
if they ask me my identity
what can I say but...I am the living mind you fail to describe in your
dead language the lost noun, the verb surviving
only in the infinitive
the letters of my name are written under the lids
of the newborn child*

The Stranger: *Rich* (in Heilbrun 1990:259).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

It is often said that the most distinctively human quality we possess is the ability to communicate with each other by means of languages. Linguistic communication is crucial to the organisation of human societies and people with an interest in the workings of any society must concern themselves with its languages.

Feminists are deeply interested in the workings of their societies, since in order to fight their oppression, they must first understand it. Much feminist effort is directed, therefore, to re-analysing society as a patriarchal system, within which language as a patriarchal construct has been crucial in maintaining male supremacy (Cameron in Mills 1991:xi). In recognising that knowledge of the world, of others, and of self is determined by language, this chapter explores the role that phallogocentrism has played in ensuring that women remain borrowers of man-made language. The feminist agenda to re-negotiate this sociolinguistic arrangement is visited, with a view to acknowledging the power and culture of women's linguistic behaviour. It proceeds to register the quest for a female voice in culture by interrogating the de facto erasure of women's specificities in androcentric naming and representation practices. The chapter commences with the assertion that language as a human construct is capable of de- and re-construction, thus

accommodating possibilities for challenging and changing disempowering sociolinguistic conventions.

3.2 CHANGING THE RULES OF THE LANGUAGE GAME

Both Rich's, *The Strangers*, and Astra's, *Women's Talk*, document the inferior socio-linguistic status of women and prompt an urgent challenge against the patriarchal violation of women's rights. Only then can the world be reconceptualized towards fuller gender inclusivity.

Reconceptualization is central to the postmodern paradigmatic shift. Lyotard observed that, 'the advent of postmodernism is marked by a shift from truth to fiction and narrative, by a change from the world of experience to that of language, and the demise of the three great metanarratives of science, religion and politics'. Their replacement by local language-games, leaves the science of linguistics in a quandary, yet in a privileged position. As a science it must submit to the general fate of metanarratives, and at least change its concept of truth (Lecerle 1990:76-77).

It is against this scenario that postmodern feminism emerges justified in its refusal to reject all metanarratives. For although linguistics is integral to the technological revolution in communications, its field of study is at the centre of the postmodern crisis. This contradiction means that linguistics, unlike other sciences, cannot be fully inserted into one great narrative, since its very essence is that of which narratives are made (ibid.:78).

Postmodern literary theorists have espoused the philosophies of Wittgenstein and Heidegger who, in different ways have underlined the primacy of language and its essential groundlessness. Heidegger maintained that language needs to be 'rid of the metaphysics which has falsified our understanding of it' (Graham et al. 1992:4-5; Harris 1990). Wittgenstein emphasized the *activity* of speaking a language and

participating in a 'language-game'.¹ Language in this sense does not represent but rather *gives* us our world. Thus, any representation of the world expressed through the medium of language cannot be 'objective or disinterested in any ultimate sense' (Graham et al. 1992:16; Harris 1990).

Disputing Wittgenstein's understanding of language, McLennan (in Mcrobbie 1994), asserts that:

The contemporary world, in spite of patches of surface civilization, remains too ravaged by oppression, ignorance and malnutrition for privileged intellectuals to trade in seriousness for the sparkling interplay of language games.

Mcrobbie's counter response (ibid.:62), argues that:

Postmodernism represents neither an absence of seriousness, nor a kind of political immorality or irresponsibility. It works as a critique because it forces precisely this kind of response to redefne and [scrutinize the political and intellectual pillars that have supported the Enlightenment project].

In rejecting the Enlightenment grounding of language, Derrida develops Saussure's insight that, 'language consists of a system of relations among arbitrary signs whose meanings are defined by difference'. Derrida's philosophical concern with the way the 'fundamental ambiguity of meaning has been suppressed to impose a single interpretation, parallels Foucault's studies of how 'social institutional practices within a particular historical period privilege discourse about their objects' (Dickens & Fontana 1994:8).

In acknowledging the groundlessness, arbitrariness (Trask 1995; Carter 1994:13-16), and non-neutrality of language, the lesson to be learned is that no one language (or one voice) can be privileged over another. Hence postmodernism's association with multiple voices (Graham et al. 1992:17)

¹ More often the expression 'language-game' refers to how a word or expression is used in a family of contexts. Language-games include all linguistic activities and 'mediate' between linguistic and non-linguistic activities. It explains the multiple ways in which language functions, its creative nature, the structuring and regulating of rule-following activities, while also boasting a flexibility to account for evolutionary-changes in meaning and ideas. Rules, then, are dependent on language-games rather than the reverse (Werhane 1992:116-118).

See also Lyotard & Thébaud: *Just Gaming* (1985).

A point of affinity between postmodern feminism and postmodernism is their mutual recognition of the primacy of a language of possibility and critique. Supporting the argument that language is itself a social system subject to cultural and historical variability (Dickens & Fontana 1994:7; Hekman 1990:33), feminist writers are employing deconstructionist techniques to analyze phallogocentrism by appropriating the poststructuralist terms of "language" and "difference".² The term, "language" is used to mean not simply words or a set of grammatical rules but, rather, a meaning-constituting system without a basic or ultimate correspondence to the world (Scott 1994:282-284; Graddol & Swann 1989:157-165). The concept of "difference", on the other hand, accepts that any unitary concept contains repressed or negated material established in opposition to another term. Opposition rest on metaphors and cross references which serve to encode or establish hierarchical dichotomies (Scott 1994:285-286; Stanton 1990:73). Repeatedly, sexual difference, embodied in the culturally determined conceptual couple masculine/ feminine; rational/emotional; active/passive have been used to establish meanings that are arbitrarily related to gender or the body (Stanton 1990:73; Lakoff & Johnson 1980:17; Cixous 1994a:37-39).

In combining these concerns, feminists have developed a 'critique of language'. The feminist critique of language is really a 'shorthand,' by virtue of its fragmentary and constantly fluctuating ethos. Although critics of research on language and sex portray 'generic pronouns' as the entire issue, the critique is in fact more sweeping. Studies of society and power in recent years have focused increasingly on how language reflects and reproduces socio-cultural values, thereby confirming that it is culture and not an independent world of objects that is encoded in language (Dickens & Fontana 1994:8; Chaika 1994:357; Bonvillain 1993).

² Derrida developed the concept of "*differance*" to explain how social identities are defined through binary logic of language. Unlike, "*difference*" which refers to the distinction between identities, "*differance*" captures the way identities are always measured against each other so that they can never be explained in isolation: "man", for example, means something only when seen in relation to "woman" (Lewis 1995:27; Tong 1989:222).

This has led feminists generally to concur that the study of language is important both for considering how gender hierarchies and identities are maintained, and for strategising challenges against patriarchal hegemony (Graham et al. 1992:16; Cameron 1990:1; Lewis 1995:24).

In addressing these challenges, scholars fall into two main groups. The first concerns itself with historical and social change and argues that the 'theft of language' is part of women's relative powerlessness. Thus, women have been encouraged to rework and subvert traditional forms in order to create women-centred-language and meaning. Such pragmatic and empirical approaches, attentive to daily linguistic usage, dominate thinking about gender in the United States (Thorne et al. 1983:230; Jordan & Weedon 1995:200).

The second group assumes the existence of a naturally different female/feminine language. In drawing close ties between symbolic structure and experience the voices of certain American feminists harmonize with those of contemporary French feminists such as Cixous, Kristeva, Irigaray and Wittig, who regard language both as 'critical restraint and release' (Thorne et al. 1983:11; Cameron 1990:1; Jordan & Weedon 1995:200).

Although there are crucial differences among these French feminists, they 'share an intellectual and political tradition anchored in existentialism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and post-structuralism'. Arguing that women's oppression/repression is embedded in phallogocentrism and that our perceptions of the real are but a 'manifestation of the male constituted symbolic order' (Kaplan 1990), they are determined to inscribe women's experiences in language and thought, not through altering specific usages such as sexist pronouns (which the French see as minor repairs), but through relating language to the unconscious and to the body (Stanton 1990).

From such diverse perceptual perspectives, feminist writers on the subject of language return to the exploration of three major themes: the theme of behavioural differences in language, (their relation to male dominance and female culture); the silencing and exclusion of women from

language, (which also raises the question of finding an authentic female voice); and the theme of 'naming' or representation, (in which the meaning of gender is constructed and contested) (Cameron 1990:3).

In the remainder of this chapter, I join in the exploration of these themes, commencing the journey with an investigation into the difference and dominance paradigms which attribute the variations in male and female linguistic usage to the cultural conditioning and the power struggles that characterize patriarchal societies.

3.3 MAKING LANGUAGE A FEMINIST ISSUE

3.3.1 DOMINANCE AND DIFFERENCE: POWER AND CULTURE IN WOMEN'S LINGUISTIC BEHAVIOUR

Historians of folklinguistics have unearth interesting findings about language and gender differences. From these there appears to be a long received perception that women and men differ significantly in their linguistic usage. The differing styles of language -particularly speech- used by women and men, apart from providing another perspective on women's exclusion from some areas of language, also highlights cultural representations of the feminine (Cameron 1990:20-21). Feminists concerned with socialization processes confirm that an individual's speech reflects culturally learnt identities. Such a sociolinguistic focus has now become linked to a feminist critique of gendered roles and socialization³ (Crawford 1995; Boois 1993;

³ "Children acquire not only gender-appropriate behaviour, but also a knowledge of the folklinguistic beliefs of our society. Expressions such as, 'Little girls don't say that,' mean that children are taught the gender-appropriateness of some linguistic terms. As happens with other features of child language, when a rule is learned it is frequently over-generalised, so it seems that they over-generalise the rule for gender-appropriate language and treat such differences as gender-exclusive rather than gender-preferential" (Coates 1986:156-157).

Lewis 1995:25; Coates 1986; Andersen 1988:194-196; Kuykendall 1981:133). This has led anti-feminists to argue that since women speak differently from men, men and women must naturally be unequal and different. While it would be shortsighted to deny the gendered patterns in particular speech communities, the uses to which such findings may be put are often disturbing (Lewis 1995:25; Coates & Cameron 1989).

Linguist Jespersen (1990:201-219), for example, 'castigated women for their lack of innovation', calling their language 'languid and insipid' (Andersen 1988:196-198), and referred to men as 'the chief renovators of language'. He wrote that women speakers and writers are, it appears:

conservative, timorous, overly polite and delicate, trivial in their subject matter, and given to simple, repetitive or incomplete/illogical sentence structures, softly spoken and soft in the head.

Faced with such skewed reality, a feminist critique could respond severally. One option being to challenge the stereotypes. But the contemporary feminist critique has accepted that stereotypes may contain a measure of truth. It has therefore settled for the reinterpretation of what stereotypical behaviour means. This reinterpretation has assumed two distinct forms embodied in the Dominance and Difference paradigms (Cameron 1990:23; Ting-Toomey & Korzenny 1989:228-229; Tannen 1994).

The first, referred to as the DOMINANCE approach, retains a traditional, negative evaluation of women's language. Viewing women as an oppressed group, it interprets linguistic differences in women's and men's speech in terms of men's dominance and women's subordination and it contends that although females and males may use the same linguistic resources, they utilize them in different ways (Vahed 1994:65; Andersen 1988:201).

Early research considered talk to be simply an index of identity: one of many behaviours learned through socialization and forming part of men's and women's different social roles and positions in a patriarchal society. However, recent reconceptualization of gender, rejects this theory and argues that gender is better understood as a system of culturally constructed relations of power, produced and reproduced in interaction between and among men and women. Language is manipulated to service patriarchal

ideology, thereby ensuring that women remain 'borrowers of the man-made English language' (Gal 1991:176).

Lakoff, in her investigation, acknowledges female linguistic *inadequacies* as pointed out by people like Jespersen; but she judiciously explains these *inadequacies* in political and cultural terms, rather than simply as natural sex differences. She maintains that, 'women are forced to learn a weak, trivial, and deferential style as part of their socialization, which is essentially a training in how to be subordinate'. She regards women's style as being indicative of their relative powerlessness in patriarchal society (Lakoff 1981:60-67).

However, Lakoff erroneously identifies the differences between men's and women's speech as differences between men's and women's language (Valian 1981:74). In her analysis of the speech of women, Lakoff concluded that the tentativeness, hesitancy, incomplete sentences, descriptions, hyperbole, euphemisms, quotes, the use of the passive voice, and tag questions cumulatively contributed towards rendering women's speech lacking in assertiveness, conviction and confidence. Even women's co-operative, consensus-reaching linguistic strategies⁴ (Fishman 1990:234-240), have been described as indecisive and lacking in authority (Vahed 1994:65-66; Penelope 1990:xxi-xxiii; Chaika 1994:373; Baron 1986:87-88).

The speech of men, on the other hand, is seen as powerful, authoritative and confident because it is full of instructions and commands. Men choose the topic of conversation (often politics or sport), control its direction, avoid the personal, interrupt at will and are perceived as forceful, decisive and in control (Andersen 1988:202-203; Lee 1992:122). Their lower pitched voice

⁴ Studies conducted in a Tenejapan village of southern Mexico, showed that women are more polite than men in two ways: they use many more linguistic strategies that emphasize solidarity. Women's intent to impose by requesting, commanding or criticizing is often veiled in irony. Because irony requires the listener to infer the speaker's intent, it allows the speaker to disclaim the intent if it results in a challenge or a threat. Men were found to use less irony and show considerably less sensitivity to the details of social relationships and context (Gal 1991:183).

is viewed as authoritative while the higher pitch of women is viewed as emotional, irrational and hysterical (Andersen 1988:195-196). One common claim is that women's speech is more 'emotive, impulsive and rambling while men's is considered relatively direct, unadorned, rational and logical' (Lewis 1995:25; Baron 1986:81-83). Men use shorter sentences, slang, the active voice, are experienced at rhetoric (persuasion) and paraphrase - and this is valued because of the powerful positions they officiate in patriarchal society (Vahed 1994:66; Gal 1991; Penelope 1990:xxiv; Chaika 1994:377-379; Lee 1992:122).

Studies referred to (in Chaika 1994:381), show that basically girls learn to do three things with words:

1. create and maintain relationships with closeness and equality,
2. criticize each other in acceptable ways, and
3. interpret accurately the speech of other girls.

Boys, on the other hand, use speech to:

1. assert their position of dominance,
2. attract and maintain an audience, and
3. assert themselves when other speakers have the floor.

Although such disparities in speaking practices result in male dominance in many situations, it must be noted that female "weak" practices are often socially preferable, and are less likely to lead to confrontation and hostility. Also, there are low-key, soft-spoken men who do not overpower others in their speech (ibid.:381-382).

The DIFFERENCE approach, on the other hand, emphasises the idea that women and men belong to different subcultures. In linguistic terms, the differences in women's and men's speech are interpreted as reflecting and maintaining gender-specific subcultures. This relatively new approach, seems to be a reaction against women's invisibility and their treatment as a minority group in patriarchal culture (Coates 1986:12-13).

The difference paradigm acknowledges that women use language in a different way from men, and perhaps exactly as stereotypes suggest, but it celebrates this positively (Lee 1992:121). Interpreting it as an authentic

manifestation of a female culture, women are now asserting that they 'have a different voice, psychology, and experience of love, work and the family from men'. This implies that we can cease from assessing things by the chauvinistic male bureau of standards. The features labelled 'trivial' and 'deferential' now emerge as 'women-centred' and 'supportive' (Cameron 1990:24).

Both the Dominance and Difference paradigms seem to yield valuable insights into the nature of gender differences in language. Many sociolinguists have adopted a compromise position (Coates 1986:13), while maintaining a healthy scepticism about the actual facts concerning male and female use of language. Fruitful further discussion requires sifting through the stereotypes to ascertain their validity. Researching actual behaviour is also vital in so far as it confirms that 'women' and 'men' are heterogenous groups; class, ethnic, and cultural divisions are important (Spivak 1994:103; Cameron 1990:24). The speech of middle-class white South African women, for example, cannot be seen as representative of all groups of women.

Linguistic differences are quantitative not absolute. For example, linguists have found that women in a number of communities tend to make more use of hedges like 'sort of, y'know, well,' than men. This is seen as a 'sex- preferential speech tendency,' (Lee 1992:120), rather than a 'genderlect', and does not warrant the development of a separate women's language (Cameron 1990: 24; Andersen 1988:205).

Both the dominance and difference perspectives are valuable for the theoretical and political insight they offer. At a theoretical level, they encourage an appreciation of women as complex social beings whose speech styles may appear as either a strategy of negotiating powerlessness, or as reflective of their alignment with alternative, women-centred values. At a political level, each approach underpins important strategical options. One strategy feminists have used is to develop more assertive styles, to prevent being constantly interrupted and ignored in verbal encounters. Yet confrontational, unsupportive styles of discourse, common in public arenas

are not always appropriate. Apart from being destructive to group solidarity and a spirit of democracy, they also hinder the achievement of collective goals. As is typical of feminist politics, two differing approaches become complementary, urging us to effect a linguistic intervention and appropriation that promotes gender sensitivity (Cameron 1990:26). Despite what 'English has always said about women and their speech', feminists have encouraged women to resist being defined in terms of their sexual relations to men. Coupling such resistance with efforts to find an authentic women's voice in culture is the theme that I spotlight in the following segment.

3.3.2 SPEECH and SILENCE: THE QUEST FOR A FEMALE VOICE IN CULTURE

There is an old belief that women talk too much. English literature is saturated with characters who substantiate the stereotype of the talkative woman (Coates 1986:35; Chaika 1994:376). The flip side of the coin is the image of the silent woman, often held up as the ideal: making silence synonymous with obedience⁵ (Coates 1986:35-36; Gal 1991:175; Penelope 1990:xxiii).

Yet, regardless of gender, language is in a sense the birthright of every human being. However, some forms of linguistic activity are probably associated more with women than with men. These include gossip, (see Jones 1990:242-248), storytelling, private letters, and diaries. This list of 'female genres is valuable in indexing the constitution of women's silence' (Coates 1986:35). As private forms of language, they wield little or no

⁵ The idea that silence is the 'desired state for women' is supported by the theory of 'muted groups' proposed by anthropologists Shirley and Edwin Ardener. Briefly, they argue that in any society there are dominant modes of expression, belonging to dominant groups within that society. If members of a 'muted group' want to be heard, they are required to express themselves in the dominant mode. While muted groups are not necessarily silent, their muteness means that they have difficulty making themselves heard because they are silenced by rules laid down by the dominant group (Coates 1986:35-36).

currency in the public domain.

The socio-linguistic status of women is clearly articulated in *Astra's* poem: *Women's Talk*. An entire subset of verbs:
chatter, prattle, gossip, nag, wheedle, babble, chat, tattle, natter,
blather, prattle, dither, blabber, gibber, jabber,

describe women's speech as infantile, insignificant and worthless. Studies on the cultural links between speech and power show that some linguistic strategies and genres are decorated with greater value and authority than others (Cameron 1990:4; Gal 1991:175-177; Vetterling-Braggin 1981:54).

Since women's speech is treated so contemptuously, we find that in society's most prestigious linguistic registers, (religious ceremonial, political rhetoric, legal and scientific discourse), women's voices for the most part silent or rather silenced. It is not that women do not speak, often they are explicitly prevented from speaking, either by social taboos, custom or practice⁶ (Cameron 1990:4-5; Coates 1986:35-36).

Struggles about gaining a women's voice in public life, draw attention to a clichéd and influential metaphor currently brandished in social discourse. Terms such as 'women's language,' 'voice,' or 'words' are generally used not only to designate everyday talk but also to "denote the public expression of a particular perspective on self and social life, rather than accepting patriarchal representations. It is in this broader sense that feminist historians have rediscovered women's words. Here 'word' becomes a synecdoche for 'consciousness'. Studies of 'women's voice' have focused on ascertaining whether women have cultural conceptions concerning self, morality, or social reality, different from those of the dominant discourse" (Gal 1991:176-177).

Gal (ibid.:178), concludes that women's ways of knowing do differ significantly. She writes that:

If we understand women's everyday talk and linguistic genres as forms of resistance, we hear, in any culture, ...linguistic practices that are more ambiguous, often contradictory, differing among women in

⁶ For example, sacred ritual silence may be imposed on women in synagogues, and in Greece, after weddings, secular social rituals require women to be silent (Cameron 1990:4-5; Coates 1986:35).

different classes, and ethnic groups and ranging from accommodation to opposition, subversion, rejection, or autonomous reconstruction of reigning cultural definitions.

Similarly, the terms 'silence' and 'mutedness' are used not only in their conventional sense as, 'an inability or reluctance to create utterances', but also as the failure to produce one's own separate, socially significant discourse' (Gal 1991:177). It is particularly in the second context that feminists have strained to shatter the silence barrier and to orchestrate women's realities.

In western societies, silence is generally deplored, because it is construed as a symbol of passivity and powerlessness. Those who are denied speech cannot make their experiences known and consequently cannot influence the course of their lives or of history (McConnell-Ginnet 1990:158; Stanton 1990:77).

While severing the 'Gordian knot' of women's silence, and exclusion, many studies exploring the links between linguistic practices, power and gender have shown that, in certain contexts, silence and inarticulateness are not necessarily signs of powerlessness (Gal 1991:175-176).

For example, the masculine strategy of stressing silent strength and the masking of emotions is very prevalent in western culture. Male inexpressiveness is linked to the positions of power and prestige that men are socialised to aspire to.⁷ Exuding the aura that all one's behaviour

⁷ That male inexpressiveness in interpersonal situations has been used against women is illustrated in the following excerpt from Jong's sketch of upper-middle-class sexual etiquette, *Fear of Flying*, (1973:108-109, in Sattel 1983:120-121):

She: Why do you always have to do this to me? You make me feel so lonely.

HE: That comes from you.

What do you mean it comes from me? Tonight I wanted to be happy. It's Christmas Eve.

Why do you turn on me? What did I do?

Silence.

.....

It was something in the movie, wasn't it?

.....It was the funeral scene..The little boy looking at his dead mother....That was when you got depressed.

Silence.

Well, wasn't it?

emanates from unemotional rationality is strategic in exercising power (Sattel 1983:118-120; Gal 1991:189-196). Men talk, but they seem always to need a reason- which often amounts to another effort at establishing who really is stronger, smarter, or ultimately more powerful: an effective control-mechanism in both homogeneous and heterogenous interactive contexts (Sattel 1983:122-123).

Apart from patriarchal endeavours to hinder, ignore and denigrate women's speech, writing and particularly the production of literature, subjects women to a different set of exclusions. Like most technologies it has been dominated by men. Thus, illiteracy in global and historical terms has been crucial in silencing women and denying them opportunities for creative expression (Cameron 1990:5-6; Coates 1986:28-29; Penelope 1990:xxvii).

Though literacy is an obvious prerequisite for women's writing, illiteracy has not been its only obstacle. Often women have alluded to the lack of economic independence and the practical and psychological difficulties of writing while keeping the home fires burning. Even those women who have had the time and means to write have encountered barriers and 'incitements to silence' (Cameron 1990:6; Kaplan 1986).

Furthermore, bent on monopolising the role of narrator, sons of patriarchy have systematically and incessantly excluded women and their contributions from the stories of science and history. In the field of primatology, for example, a feminist commitment to researching and documenting the behaviours of female primates has only recently challenged the study of male primates and their presumed universal dominance (Bleier 1986:64;

Silence.

Oh, come on, Bennett, you're making me *furious*. Please tell me. Please.

(He gives the words singly, like little gifts).

(She puts her arms around him. He pulls away- she falls to the floor holding onto his pajama leg. It looks less like an embrace than a rescue scene, she's sinking, he reluctantly allowing her to cling to his feet for support).

Get up!

(Crying). Only if you tell me.

(He jerks his leg away). I'm going to bed.

Keller 1992). Similarly, feminist historians have urged the 'redistribution of the narrative field' to recover "herstories". This therapeutic process of crafting new meanings enables us to re-form social memory and to narrate women's stories with fresh insight (Smith-Rosenberg 1986:32).

In addition, many women have also felt constrained to keep silent about specifically female experiences and concerns. The pressure to avoid discussing female experience is not confined to the literary domain. Initially, consciousness-raising groups aimed at politicising the personal by discussing and testify to socially taboo subjects like incest and backstreet abortion (Cameron 1990:6-7; Coates 1986:8).

Thus, central to the feminist analyses of women's silence has been the quest for an authentic 'women's language' or 'feminine writing'. Feminists in some traditions have questioned whether it is adequate for women to speak and write as men do? A passport into literature and culture only on condition that we accept conventional, masculine ways of expressing ourselves, is tantamount to trading in one silence for another (Cameron 1990:7). In lamenting the plight of the literate woman, Woolf (in Coates 1986:29), confessed:

But it is true that before a woman can write exactly as she wishes to write, she has many difficulties to face. To begin with, there is the technical difficulty - so simple, apparently; in reality, so baffling- that the very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use... And this is a woman who must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing or distorting it.

The idea popular among many feminist literary critics in the seventies and eighties was the urgency to find ways of writing which acknowledged and embodied women's difference. 'Difference' in women's writing does not only refer to what is written about, but also the language in which it is written. For many women, the kind of writing that addresses female sexuality and experiences requires a new form of language (Cameron 1990:8; Lewis 1995:26; Moi 1985).

Felman's summation of the preoccupations in the 1970's (Cameron 1990:9), records that:

The challenge facing the women today is nothing less than to reinvent language...to speak not only against but outside the structure ...to establish a discourse the status of which would no longer be defined by the phallacy of male meaning.

French feminists in particular have pursued this line of argument. Irigaray claims that the 'style and grammar of the written sentence is irredeemably male', and urges a new 'feminine syntax' (Coates 1986:30; Cameron 1990:9). Irigaray (1994:94-100), and Kristeva (1994:45-51), have argued for the development of a language linked to the maternal and to the uniqueness of female sexuality, while Cixous (1994b:78-93), encourages women to 'write their bodies'.

Particularly concerned with expressing a less linear conception of time and space, "feminine writing" gravitates towards a temporal and spatial that is 'cyclic, durative, and renewable' (Landar 1965:25; Cameron 1990:10). This inclination is exemplified in Leclerc's (1990:77), autobiographical testimony:

My body flows with the vast rhythmic pulsation of life. My body experiences a cycle of changes. Its perceptions of time is cyclical, but never closed or repetitive. Men, as I can judge, have a linear perception of time. From their birth to their death, the segment of time they occupy is straight. Nothing in their flesh is aware of time's curves...They can only see History, they fight only for History. Their sexuality is linear...

In the writing of many women influenced by these ideas, there is a challenge to the notion of 'rational discourse', an interest in toying with language forms so that 'its less rational aspects, like puns⁸ and parapraxes,'

⁸ Punning is not innocent, it disrupts the model of language by evoking prior meaning and producing meaning with a 'looseness, unpredictability, and excessiveness. As a paradigm for the play of language, it is caught in 'the structure of alliance and dominance'. The effect is social and political. This is part of the violence exerted by language: the violence of arbitrariness. Precisely because the linguistic sign is arbitrary, discourse works incessantly, deviously to motivate, opening up new possibilities for language' (Lecerle 1990:88).

The important act of playing with language is not only for negotiating one's meaning with the language, but also for deploying the strategies of language games within concrete

are fore-grounded. Feminists subscribing to these views insist that 'feminine writing' done by either sex is progressive because it challenges essential patriarchal myths about rationality and unity (Cameron 1990:10).

This strand in the feminist critique of language is based on the writings of Jacques Lacan (1994:37-44). 'Language, for the Lacanian constitutes a 'symbolic order' which is the cornerstone of culture, and it is as s/he acquires language that the child becomes a cultural being. But language acquisition is affected by gender because in a patriarchal culture the most privileged symbol or signifier is the phallus'. Hence the fallacy that those who do not possess the phallus should remain marginal to language; in the culture but not entirely of it.

In prophesying doom over the pragmatic empiricism of American feminist criticism, French feminists regard any enterprise for equality within the Logos, as a reinstatement of the dominant phallogocentric order (Stanton 1990:78). American feminists, on the other hand, have criticized the development of "feminine writing" on the following grounds: First, apart from disagreeing over the meaning of "women's experiences" they express concern over the extent to which women's experiences derive from natural, biological/sexual differences or from cultural norms. They argue that although French feminists reverse the patriarchal values attached to male and female language and experience, they create sharply dichotomized worlds thereby reproducing gender binarism: an ancient oppressive patriarchal strategy (Lewis 1995:26-27; Cameron 1990:10-11).

Second, 'feminine writing's' thematic preoccupation with the body, sexuality, and irrationality is closely related to traditional anti-feminism, in which women are identified with sex, the body, and passion while men are identified with reason and the mind. In this regard, Beauvoir recommends that reason and emotions should not be gendered. Rather the whole spectrum of human possibilities should be opened to humanity (Cameron 1990:11).

cultural situations (Lecercle 1990:94; Culler 1988:3-14; Chaika 1994:20).

Finally, much of the feminist project of Irigaray et al. misconceives the nature of language. Irigaray's vision of a totally different language, outside the grammatical structures we know, cannot be an actual possibility because as a social practice, language is grounded in history. Whatever changes in perception and expression collectively effected, we will always be saddled with an historical linguistic baggage (Cameron 1990:11-12; Sellers 1991:37-38).

By accepting the characteristic diversity of feminist discourse, feminists caught in the linguistic cross-fire, can contribute more meaningfully if they first, systematically interrogate the prevalent empiricist notion that linguistic change follows rather than determines social change, and second, combine pragmatics with theoretical speculations thereby 'bridging the Franco-American logocentric divide' (Stanton 1990:81).

Terminating the silence and oppression of women is integral to feminism, an achievement that can be realised by empowering women to be producers and not consumers or victims. The objective of such resocialization being to create a society that is gender sensitive and equitable.

3.3.3 NAMING AND REPRESENTATION: THE STRUGGLE FOR MEANING

I have discussed women's aspirations to be speakers and writers in all domains of culture, now I will consider a slightly different issue: not women speaking but women spoken about.

Were it simply the case that a "rose by any other name would smell as sweet," we would have no offense with the use of certain terms to define and describe human beings and their experiences. 'But even as a technical language affects understandings of actions; a gendered language structures our perceptions of people' (Farganis 1994b:113-114). Contrary to the assurance given in the old nursery rhyme that, 'Sticks and stones may break our bones/But words can never hurt us', sexist language is a crude weapon that has been used to bruise, injure, denigrate and oppress women.

Scott (ibid.) points out that:

...language broadly understood, matters because of the role it plays in constructing and communicating cultural practices. Language and discourses, texts and the like, construct what kind of women exist, and women themselves can use the power of discourse, language and texts to construct their own lives.

Names, as a cultural invention, are employed in codifying what will actually constitute reality. Many feminist linguistic critiques have specifically concerned themselves with analysing naming and representation conventions. They have concluded that generally our languages are sexist: they represent or 'name' the world from a masculine perspective in accordance with stereotyped beliefs about the sexes (Cameron 1990:12; Graddol & Swann 1989:90; Andersen 1988:187; Ross-Munro:1987).

Although most contemporary linguists reject or express scepticism about strong determinist theses, a number of strands in the feminist critique of language have adopted Whorfian views (Lee 1992:132; Graddol & Swann 1989:147-157). The contribution made by these feminists is to assert first, that many languages act as a fortress for sexist assumptions which are underpinned by a 'naturalized semantic or grammatical rule' whereby male is positive and superordinate and female is negative and subordinate (Cameron 1990:13; Boois 1993).

The second reason has been linked to the fact that rules and meanings have literally been 'man made': women have been excluded from naming and definition. Consider Rich's, *The Strangers*, once again to understand how this exclusion accounts for existing sexist expressions, and also for the absence of words to describe certain feelings and ideas that are extraneous to the official man-made worldview (Cameron 1990:13; Mills 1991:xiii; Graddol & Swann 1989:99). For example, 'lexical gaps' exist for the naming of "female penetration" and no equivalent exists for the word 'uxorious,' (overly loving one's wife) (Mills 1991:xv).

The pervasiveness of sexist language became a focal challenge for feminist in the 1970's. Feminists showed that language as a transmitter of cultural beliefs perpetuated dichotomised gender stereotypes. In this regard,

interest in linguistic gendering focused mainly on vocabulary: the use of individual words to define gender roles and statuses. Of major concern was the use of the "he/man" generic (Martyna 1983:33), to refer to both male and female subjects. What has subsequently been dubbed 'pronoun envy' is actually a protest against the social and psychological exclusion of women by installing man as the official representative of human beings (Hill 1986:Chapter 4; Mills 1991:xii; Andersen 1988:192; Lee 1992:114; Lewis 1995:24).

Confirming that the discriminatory story of English (Roberts et al. 1992:366-371), is intertwined with 'misogyny, elitism, and racism', Bodine's investigation (1990:170), revealed that the generic masculine was fully established as a norm of correctness in the history of English by the concerted efforts of conservative prescriptive grammarians. For centuries prescriptive grammar has served men's agenda for 'linguistic colonisation' (Penelope 1990:xvi).

Like the cars and boats that men possess, English is referred to as if it were female-the "mother tongue". Men will tolerate only proper women and proper English. Linguistic deviance, like social deviance, must be suppressed or forced into conformity. Mother-Tongue is seen as a damsel in distress and men must rescue her from contamination to maintain linguistic purity' (ibid.:17).

Incensed by such patriarchal persistence to propagate phallogocentric deception, postmodern feminism is enthusiastic to debunk disempowering linguistic practices. Hence, its open contempt for the concrete Word in preference for figurative genres such as metonymy, euphemisms and the metaphor. In its quest to promote a language of possibility, postmodern feminism is equally interested in engaging a language of critique. For example, in rejecting 'etymological oppression', (that is, the charge that the ancient roots of ordinary English words- by themselves- render those words oppressive), it traces sexism in language to metaphoric identification. Preceding from the premise that metaphors often express attitude, feminist postmodernism claims that the metaphors implicit in sexist language express attitudes of contempt and disdain towards women (Ross 1981:194-195).

Among the more familiar categories of metaphorical identification employed are: animal terms, toy terms (doll), juvenile terms (babe, sis), food terms as well as more explicit sexual and/or anatomical terms (Ross 1981:204; Andersen 1988:189).

Schulz (1990:134-145), provides an insightful and extensive coverage of the semantic derogation and devaluation of women, indicating that words originally neutral in both meaning and sex reference assume pejorative connotations when used in reference to women. For instance 'tart' (an affectionate person) and 'spinster' (a spinner) have been devalued into 'prostitute' and 'old maid' (Andersen 1988:189; Vahed 1994:66; Cameron 1990:16). In addition, there are over 220 words to describe women of 'ill-repute' in the English language as opposed to 20 for men (Graddol & Swann 1989:110; Mills 1991:xv). Words like 'lord', 'king', 'master' and 'sir' have remained words of power whereas 'lady', 'queen' and 'mistress' have all suffered devaluation (Vahed 1994:66; Hill 1986:Chapter 5).

The semantic derogation and devaluation of women can roughly be classified as follows:

1. as euphemistic, that is, whether a word or phrase showed disdain for women or concealed it, eg. painted lady, corner girl, lady of the night. All female kinship terms can be used as pejoratives, and many have been used euphemistically to mean 'prostitute' (Chaika 1994:355-359).
2. as metonymic, (part for whole), if the word or phrase referred to women as part of their bodies, for example, buxom broad;
 - 2.1 metonymic euphemisms, for example, lightheels, roundheels, bedroom eyes (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:37).
3. as metaphoric, if the term or phrase named women as animal (bitch, fox, chick); food (tart, crumpet, dish); object (old bag);
 - 3.1 dysphemistic metaphoric, for example, bat, meatcooker, bedpan (Penelope 1990:122-125; Chaika 1994:359-361).

From the above classification, we note that linguistically, women are repeatedly identified with the sexual. In this vein, it is interesting to note that Reddy (1979), observed that the prevalent metaphor in western descriptions

of language, including attempts to improve and understand communication, is the Conduit Metaphor. According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980:10-13), the Conduit Metaphor represents a three part sequence:

- a) ideas (or meaning) are objects
- b) linguistic expressions are containers
- c) communication is sending

But what Reddy, Lakoff and Johnson failed to explore is why in patriarchal society, are so many ideas, like language, understood in terms of the Container metaphorical concept? Penelope (1990:30), postulates that the proliferation of the container metaphor is attributable to the phallic narcissism that men possess for "penetrating spaces". This is based on the male perception that the sole reason for the existence of objects is to serve as containers/receptacles for their occupation. Hence the erroneous conclusion that, "LANGUAGE IS A CONTAINER, and WOMAN IS A CONTAINER: LANGUAGE IS A WOMAN".

The metaphors that reflect the underlying concept LANGUAGE IS A WOMAN are all too familiar- the "penetrating style," "the seminal idea," "sentences pregnant with meaning," etcetera; a style that is not "strong", "forceful," "masculine," is "weak," "limp," "effeminate" (ibid.:32-33).

Evidently, English words typically name, define, and divide the patriarchal universe into two unequal, stereotypical spheres, one female and the other male (Baron 1986:1), for example: "waiter/waitress, cosmos/cosmetic, grammar/glamour" (ibid.:38), where the first term is accorded primacy (Best & Kellner 1991:207).

Following the patriarchal dichotomy of sex-based task assignment, the inside of a house becomes the female realm, and the outside, the male sphere of activity. This, for example, is clearly evident in the English lexicography related to the word "tool". Men use tools, instruments (with the exception of musical instruments), implements, and machines outside. For 'in-house' activity, women use utensils, appliances, and gadgets. In English we speak of kitchen utensil, kitchen appliances, and kitchen gadgets (Penelope 1990:43). That tending a house is a specifically [-male]

occupation is explicitly marked in 'charwoman', 'cleaning woman,' 'housemother'. There are no 'charmen' or 'housefathers,' and a 'cleaning man' is a janitor or sanitation engineer. 'Occupational deviations transgressing cultural assumptions', are marked by using phrases like 'career woman' or 'working mother'. English has no phrases such as 'career man' or 'working father'. The telling distinction is finance-related: the labour women perform inside a dwelling for males (to whom they are related) is unpaid (Irigaray 1993:119-131). This explains why many men proudly announce: 'My wife does not work. She's a housewife'. Allied to this is the aspect of male domination in the economic arena and the stereotypical misconception that money matters transcend the intellectual abilities of women (Penelope 1990:108; Andersen 1988:190-191). Postmodern feminism's urgency to politicize the personal, is in part, a reaction to the patriarchal agenda to domesticate women.

The magnanimity of the oppressiveness of sexist language is compounded when we observe how 'semantic violation, becomes semantic exclusion and how semantic exclusion eventually becomes social exclusion' (Penelope 1990:103). Patriarchal egotism persists in the English language which assumes that all persons are male (Graddol & Swann 1989:99-100). For example, doctors, lawyers, artists, mayors and jockeys are assumed to be male unless a special form such as: woman doctor, lady lawyer, sculptress, majorette, is used to specify otherwise (Fortunata 1981:81). The diminutive suffix -ette/ress signals the social barriers and hierarchies between male and female occupational positions. Often the occupational labels assumed to be inherently female: secretary, prostitute, teacher or male nurse refer to low prestige, and low paying occupations (Baron 1986:5).

The secondary status of women is also reflected in many female names, for example, Pauline, Georgina, Henrietta are diminutive: taken from the male forms Paul, George, and Henry. In addition, many male names, like Victor and Lionel, conjure images of strength, activity, competition or warfare, while female names reflect smallness, passivity or beauty. Hope,

Charity, Joy, Patience, are girl's names typifying virtues expected of and associated with the feminine (Andersen 1988:189; Adams & Laurikietis 1976:28).

The image of the passive, delicate, and moral female is reinforced by the fact that women are closely connected with plants. At a dance we feel sorry for a girl who is a 'wallflower'. Names of girls also find their origin in plants, for example, Daisy, Lily, and Rose and when a woman is deflowered she loses her virginity (Adams & Laurikietis 1976: 32 & Andersen 1988:189).

Predictably, sexism uncovers itself in the field of sexual intercourse. The 'ms-calculated' (*sic*) oppositional equation: man=active and woman=passive sums up the 'clinical and colloquial discourse' on the subject. Generally, men are seen as the 'agents and doers of language whereas women are the passive objects- persons to whom things are done' (Coates 1986; Vahed 1994:66; Cameron 1990:15; Graddol & Swann 1989:110).

Furthermore, linguistic convention do not just mark women as sex objects but also as male property. In our own time, a clear example of women being represented as male property appears in our naming conventions. Women traditionally take their surname from the man to whom they *belong*. The name changing at marriage is symbolic of the passage from father's property to husband's. The titles Miss and Mrs indicate whether a woman is 'still on the market or not'. Feminist attempts to erase the female-specific distinction by urging adoption of the title Ms. has been interpreted as a strategy 'single women' use to "hide" the *embarrassment* of being unmarried (Cameron 1990:16; Vahed 1994:66-67; Spender 1980:220; Chaika 1994:363; Mills 1991:xvii; Andersen 1988:187; Graddol & Swann 1989:96; Penelope 1990:103). Ranking marriage as the ultimate destiny of women, patriarchal priorities diarise the nuptial ceremony as being a more important event for women than for men. Hence, the word "bride" appears in: bridesmaid, bridal gown, bridal attendant, and even "bridegroom". The word groom does not appear in any of the words pertaining to weddings except for bridegroom (Adams & Laurikietis 1976:29).

Faced with a biased and sexist lexical heritage, many feminists in the 1980's resorted to a policy of affirmative action by engaging in their own critical re-writings of feminist dictionaries and other works of vocabulary (Kramarae & Treichler 1990:148-158). In this area attention was being drawn to the authoritarian and sexist nature of malestream (*sic*) lexicography (Cameron 1990:20). Lexical forms like "malestream" (as a substitute for mainstream), "herstory" (as a substitute for history) register defiance against a '*received* androcentric lexicography' (Coates 1986:30). Since history is conventionally understood as the past shaped, defined and studied by men, "herstory" captures the feminist's rejection of male versions of social memory in an attempt to resurrect women's suppressed narratives. Such re-visioning of 'neutral' words highlight the 'essential androcentricity' of the written Logos, and its cultural representations (Coates 1986:30; Graddol & Swann 1989:101). This substantiates the view that women have had their identities and experiences defined for them (Lewis 1995:25). The 1990's show an increased sensitivity to the inherent power hierarchy inscribed by the generic masculine, and many language users consciously employ non-gendered referents like "humanity", "person" or an inclusive s/he pronoun reference.

The argument that linguistic renovation is trivial and cosmetic because "real" feminist struggles need to be waged over material relationships and concrete sexist practices, ignores the impact of language as a material social practice. It dilutes, for example, the role that language plays in a child's acquisition of social identity (Lewis 1995:24; Coates 1986:156-157).

However, sexist language should not be dismissed as just a matter of certain words being offensive. It is better understood as occurring in a number of quite complex systems of representation, embedded in historical traditions (Cameron 1990:14). The battle against sexist vocabulary must be seen as part of a broader political struggle against the subtle naturalization of gender entombed in stereotypes (Lewis 1995:24).

Our ways of talking about things reveal attitudes and assumptions that testify to the deep-rootedness of sexism. An example of this is evident in the

following two reports involving a married couple whose house was broken into.

A man who suffered head injuries when attacked by two men who broke into his home in Beckenham, Kent, early yesterday, was pinned down on the bed by intruders who took it in turns to rape his wife.
(DailyTelegraph)

And

A terrified 19-stone husband was forced to lie next to his wife as two men raped her yesterday. (Sun) (Cameron 1990:16-17).

The above reports show that we are dealing with a 'discursive practice'.⁹ There are a number of linguistic features which support the interpretation that the reports are making rape into a crime against the man by foregrounding his experience. The sequencing of events create the impression that the rape itself was less appalling than the fact that the husband was forced to witness it (Cameron 1990:17).

This kind of analysis shows the limitations of considering sexism in representation exclusively in terms of specific single words or expressions. The report contains no generic masculines, or overtly derogatory descriptions, just a series of syntactic and textual preferences that construct an androcentric worldview (Cameron 1990:17; Lee 1992:111).

The above example stresses the need for us to recognise the human agency in constructing and changing linguistic practice (Penelope 1990:xxvi; Andersen 1988). This is especially important in the light that:

...some ways of talking about language portray it as a sort of triffid: an organic growth that develops a life and will of its own. This might be a useful image for discussing certain processes..., but it is hardly

⁹ Ward (in Lee 1992:111), identifies a number of principles in journalistic practice which clearly exemplify sexist ideology. They ride on stereotypical assumptions that: 1. All people are males unless proven female.

2. A woman's relationship to (a) man/men is her defining identity.

3. A women's appearance always requires comment, whether she defies or epitomises a popular stereotype.

4. A woman can safely be identified as 'his wife'; it is unnecessary to identify her by name.

5. After marriage, a man remains a man and a woman becomes a wife.

6. Homemaking and parenting are not work.

applicable to the linguistic representation of gender. We need to look at languages as cultural edifices whose norms are laid down in things like dictionaries, grammars, and glossaries-all of which have historically been compiled by men, and conservative men at that (Cameron 1990:18).

In certain strands of opposition to the feminist critique of language we find a retreat from political action. Such 'political quietitude' requires remediation through an acknowledgement that the conventions of naming and representation have been socially and historically constructed, they can therefore be de- and re-constructed. Increased sensitivity to the non-neutrality of naming and representation; our notions of the naturalized dichotomies of the masculine and feminine, the active and the passive, can now be challenged and changed (Cameron 1990:19; Lewis 1995:25; Mills 1991:xvi; Chaika 1994:18; Lee 1992:119; Baron 1986:200).

Poynton (1985), suggests four options regarding sexist language for the future:

1. To maintain the status quo in which patriarchy is dominant;
2. To teach men the female code of language.
3. To teach women the male controlling code of language.
4. To challenge the status quo and dominant patriarchal ideology.

3.4 CONCLUSION

What was previously accepted with passive reverentiality in our linguistic usage has become the terrain for the negotiation of meaning. This consciousness-raising process towards developing a critical language awareness would strike at the very root of disempowering linguistic practices that have nurtured gender discrimination (Fairclough 1992). Such an awareness is the first step towards self and social emancipation because it encourages us to interrogate the apparently monolithic authority of phallogocentrism thereby debunking time-honoured myths about

naturalization (Fairclough 1989:223; Cameron 1990:20; Andersen 1988:207). Only when women recognize the highly fluid nature of linguistic categories (Lee 1992:134), and begin engaging collectively in using language in a consciously critical, sensitive and confident way, will we contribute to the continuing struggle against phallogocentrism: the right-hand of patriarchy (Cameron in Andersen 1988:208). Such an empowerment enables us to reconceptualise rather than just add in women's meanings to a patriarchal world and language (Vahed 1994:70; Penelope 1990:35; Andersen 1988:207; Chaika 1994:352; Lee 1992:133).

Among the many material sites available for initiating and effecting such a reconceptualisation, school texts provide a fertile terrain. In grasping the urgency for the re-mapping of the pedagogical terrain to promote gender inclusivity, in the next chapter, I draw attention to the gender equality rhetoric in discussion language policy documents. I argue that merely professing gender equality, without challenging phallogocentric rationality is not likely to effect radical gender reform, given further that, educational institutions have perennially been the province of male domination.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHEN THE WORD BECOMES TEXT

It is not the intelligent woman vs. the ignorant woman, nor the white woman vs. the black, the brown, and the red, -it is not even the cause of woman vs. man. Nay, 'tis woman's strongest vindication for speaking that the world needs to hear her voice... The world has had to limp along with the wobbling gait and the one-sided hesitancy of a man with one eye. Suddenly the bandaged is removed from the other eye and the whole body is filled with light. It sees a circle where before it saw a segment. The darkened eye restored, every member rejoices with it.

A Voice From The South **Cooper: 1892 (in Minnich 1990).**

4.1 INTRODUCTION

I anticipate an era of great renewal when the educational healing and restoration alluded to in Cooper's, *A Voice From the South*, becomes a South African social reality. South African education has been plagued by many evils, and ranking high on this list is gender inequality. In this chapter, I investigate briefly the role that the text as a cultural artifact has played in propagating this violence against women. Using the Communication, Literacy and Language component of the Outcomes-Based Learning document,¹ and the interim core English second language syllabus, as a

¹ "The focus of outcomes-based education and training is on what learners know and can do. Outcomes-based curriculum development processes will, therefore, have as their starting point the intended results of learning in terms of knowledge, skills and values rather than the prescription of content to be learnt. The intended outcomes are explicitly stated, and serve to guide the teaching and learning process, and makes possible appropriate evaluation of these processes, and ultimately, of the selection of the outcomes themselves.

Outcomes are seen as being of two kinds, namely, essential outcomes and specific outcomes. Essential outcomes are generic and cross-curricular. Essential outcomes are working principles, and as such they should direct teaching, training and education

point of reference, I argue for the advocacy of a postmodern feminist critical language pedagogy as essential in unpacking the androcentric bias of taken-for-granted, naturalized pedagogic metaphors that feature repeatedly in these texts.

4.2 SURVEYING THE SEXUAL/TEXTUAL PEDAGOGIC LANDSCAPE

The wobbling hesitancy of gender reform has been inextricably linked to the fact that education, the eldest child of Enlightenment-humanism, has failed to liberate over half the human population, despite its baptism into the spirit of emancipation. Faced with such a legacy, it is not surprising that education does not fit easily into the postmodern moment. As a socio-cultural structure and process it is intimately connected with the creation, reproduction and dissemination of foundational knowledge. Lyotard (in Usher & Edwards 1994:24-25), observes that:

the project of modernity is deeply intertwined with education, modernity's belief being that progress in all areas will emancipate the whole of humanity from ignorance, poverty, backwardness, despotism ...thanks to education in particular, it will also produce enlightened citizens, masters (*sic*) of their own destiny.

practices and the development of learning programmes and materials. Education and training must aim, therefore, to develop in all learners irrespective of age, race, geographical location or gender the essential outcomes accepted as appropriate for the South African education and training system.

Specific outcomes are context-specific. They are informed by essential outcomes but formulated within the context in which they are to be demonstrated. They describe the competence which learners should be able to demonstrate in specific contexts and particular areas of learning at certain levels. It is these outcomes, therefore, and not the essential outcomes, which should serve as the basis for assessing the progress of learners and thus, indirectly the effectiveness of learning processes and learning programmes" (Draft document: *Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training*: July 1996:16-19).

See also: *Understanding the National Qualifications Framework: a lifelong guide 1996*).

Consistent with the sweeping socio-economic and political changes reshaping the global community, education is itself undergoing profound changes in terms of purposes, contents and methods. (vide Chapter Two). It is through these changes that the Enlightenment tradition, and the place of education within it is increasingly being questioned; urging a critical examination of foundational pedagogical theories and practices (ibid.:25). While welcoming the postmodern corrosion of Enlightenment educational conventions, postmodern feminism extends the critique by adding gender sensitivity to the conversation, thereby offering possibilities for producing analytical frameworks and counter-hegemonic discourses that challenge existing patriarchal relations (Weiner 1994:101). Dominating discussion on gender and schooling, is the curriculum, often conceived of as syllabus, course guide, or frameworks with associated textbooks. Feminists' ideological critique of these texts has exposed, 'the curriculum as being heavily gender-inflected, either misrepresenting and misrecognizing, or neglecting and denying- but invariably undervaluing - the social contributions and cultural experiences of women (Kenway & Modra 1992:141). This distortion has intensified the call for a critical re-assessment of the taken-for-granted assumptions about language use in texts.

In studying the centrality of texts, postmodern feminism's main aim is to unpack or deconstruct the text. Being heavily inscribed in educational practices and emanating from a complex interplay of political, economic and cultural skirmishes and compromises, the text becomes a vibrant site for power struggles among class, race, ethnic, gender and religious enclaves (Weiner 1994:111; Arnot 1993:186; Apple & Christian-Smith 1991:2; Luke & Gore 1992:2-4). This, coupled with the fact that it is 'authored by real people', whose shared knowledge, beliefs, values and interests dictate the content and rhetorical form of their work (Crismore 1989: 142), often shroud texts in an aura of having been penned under divine inspiration: oracles for transmitting sacred, revelatory knowledge (Olson 1989:232-238; Crismore 1989:135). Thus, as a transmitter of values, attitudes and content, the text embodies far reaching educational implications (Krut 1993:12). Feminists

remind us that even as South African educational publishing fuelled the furnaces of apartheid ideology (Samuel 1993:12-13), similarly, texts are central in the production of patriarchal relations and the construction of femininity (Weiner 1994:112).

- Gender relations and representations in texts potentially affect students as language learners and users (Sunderland 1992:86), because our worlds are constructed by and through language. Feminist postmodernism assumes that meaning is constructed within language and is not guaranteed by what the author intends, thus, any analysis of the impact of the text has to consider its interpretation as well as its intent (Weiner 1994:99).

Language policy documents, as texts, comprise several interlocking networks with specific moments of production, circulation and consumption. Being fully conversant with the relativity of meaning, postmodern feminism is concerned with the way in which meaning is made, circulated among interested parties, and its likely impact on dynamic, and multiply constituted subjectivities (Blackmore et al. 1994:186-187).

This is particularly relevant in terms of the level of gender awareness and receptivity in schools. Teachers who have a proclivity to gender reform will more actively produce new text in a 'writerly' manner, while those romancing the text are more likely to read it uncritically in a 'readerly' fashion, neglecting to re-evaluate fundamental and more subtle aspects of their attitudinal and pedagogic linguistic idiosyncrasies (ibid.:186-199).

Feminist critiques of texts have until recently, concerned themselves with the identification of gender bias or distortion. Retrospective research methodologies which favoured scientific and quantitative analytical frameworks, have subsequently been criticised for being reductionist and superficial (Weiner 1994:112-113). Recognising such 'objective' approaches to text analysis has called for a link between the text and competing social practices. Research processes have since grown more flexible and interactive, operating as 'dynamic responses to problems in particular situations, subject to test and alteration in experience'. However, any definitive 'method' of postmodern feminist textual analysis is difficult to

identify. Gilbert (ibid.), claims that work containing elements of the following might be conceived of as postmodern feminist:

- critique rather as a continuous rewriting of ideology in contesting discourses...including a permanent auto-critique in our analysis...seeing interpretation and critique as an historically grounded social practice...recognizing discursive practices...[as] frameworks for exerting power.

In recognizing the fluidity of both the postmodern feminist discourse, and the '*non-definitive*' framework for textual analysis, among the various material sites available to effect a postmodern feminist sensibility, I have selected, for the purposes of this study, to turn the postmodern feminist speculum on the Communication, Literacy and Language component of the Outcomes-Based Learning document, and the interim core English second language syllabus currently at the centre of educational debate. In acknowledging the constellation of draft and interim language policy documents constantly rolling off the educational desk, I use these documents to highlight the lack of an express feminist consciousness, despite broad sentiments professing equality. I make a modest attempt to offer and expand a feminist postmodern interpretational perspective, roused by the scepticism that despite the documents' equity rhetoric, their overwhelming concern for multilingual matters and skills training may inadvertently confer peripheral status on and incidental recognition to the postmodern feminist perspective which places a high premium on a language of possibility and critique.

Language education has repeatedly been acclaimed as strategic in effecting democratic citizenship. Its propensity to develop a critical consciousness that can expand learners' potential in deciding whether to challenge or conform to naturalized sociolinguistic conventions is consistent with postmodern feminist inclinations (Fairclough 1992:15-27). In this regard, school contexts provide a rich source of text material steeped in naturalized language use, thus making the advocacy of a critical language awareness pedagogy pivotal in demolishing disempowering linguistic practices. Institutional language tends to naturalize hierarchical power

relations through the use of 'neutral commodity language'. For example, the categories by which we differentiate 'high-flyers' from 'slow learners,' and even 'students' from 'teachers' are all 'commonsense constructions which grow out of the nature of existing institutions' (Apple 1979:150). Adorning the mantle of objective, scientific status and the commitment to 'helping students', educationists often unwittingly employ sociolinguistic conventions to maintain 'bureaucratic cultural and economic rationality, control and consensus' (ibid.:133-143). Thus, an immediate recognition of the non-neutrality of labels is paramount toward reconceptualizing key pedagogic terms in ways that do not reproduce inequitable practices (Blackmore et al. 1994:199).

The repertoire of apparently innocent, naturalized metaphors that we have accumulated in our pursuit for emancipatory educational reform, and by which we continue to teach, suddenly become suspect, and urges, what I would like to call, a postmodern feminist critical language awareness. Such an awareness will force us into an evaluation of the extent to which we have compromised or sustained our noble ideals towards birthing an all-inclusive, transformational curriculum initiative.

In reviewing the Outcomes-Based Learning document, and the interim core English language syllabus draft documents, the varying degrees of frequency in which the following pedagogic metaphors, (*teacher/student relationship, child-centred pedagogy, appropriacy and competence/skills, empowerment, equal opportunity, and democratic education*) occur, alerted me to the 'internal contradictions of apparently coherent systems of thought', that postmodern feminism is sceptical of. In the ensuing discussion I attempt to briefly unpack some of the commonsense assumptions enshrined in these metaphors.

4.3 DEMYTHOLOGISING THE METAPHORS WE TEACH BY

4.3.1 Teacher/Student Relationship; Child-Centred Pedagogy; Appropriacy, and Competency/Skills Training

The portrait of the teacher as protagonist in the classroom pageant, entrusted with the most scripted/unscripted lines, and sovereignly commissioned to lead the young and uninformed along the straight and narrow path, is a familiar patriarchal 'top-down' power convention.

This disempowering *shepherd-flock* paradigm often rests on an instrumental, transmission model of teaching which fails to problematize either the learner, teacher or knowledge, and the relationship among them. Given the instrumental motivational psychology directing English second language teaching and learning in South Africa, such a pedagogical conception often positions students as disprivileged, deficit Other and displays a naivety concerning broader social relationships embodied in the teaching/learning process. Further, the dichotomy between teacher/student masks enormous variation in age and capacity, and requires that teachers apply the kind of auto-critique that they demand of students in order to deconstruct dichotomised ideologies (Kenway & Modra 1992:140).

Like the division between male and female, the dichotomy between teacher/student is 'socially created, historically changing, filled with ambiguity and contradiction, and must be continually negotiated' (Thorne 1993:4-6). (vide Chapter Two). The postmodern feminist discourse on agency and the subject gains credence in its affirmation of our inability to fix our identities, thereby facilitating the process of *denaturalization* and change (Orner 1992:74).

Such a reconceptualization allows students and their language experiences to be made central in the learning process, giving them the status of 'experts' while simultaneously challenging traditional classroom relations which ascribe expertise exclusively to teachers (Fairclough 1992:24-25).

While the teacher/student dichotomy demands immediate reconciliation at chalkface, the taken-for-granted metaphor of **child-centred pedagogy** is also in need of urgent re-assessment.

Schools have often been seen as masculinity-making devices charged with the task of producing 'industrious, technocratic competitors' (Connell 1993:91). Feminists have criticised child-centred pedagogies for constructing a masculinist subject which renders any emancipatory agenda for gender reform theoretically and practically problematic (Kenway and Modra 1990:7).

Studies in Education Sociology consistently confirm that males receive more teacher-attention than do females. From the selection of subject content through to the design of classroom activities and presentation formats, there is a tendency to favour boys' interests and learning strategies. Feminists argue that given such socialization, women become a 'symptom of man' (Herbold 1995), as they are assimilated into the world of male educational values and lifestyles. The transition from teacher-centred to child-centred pedagogy obscures the reality that the latter invariably becomes synonymous with 'boy-centred pedagogy' (Jardine 1992)

A glance at women's academic profile reveals our saturation in cultures steeped in phallogocentric knowledges. The fact that I present this study in fulfilment of a **Masters** Degree and that I gained entry on the proviso that I possessed a relevant **Bachelors** Degree, apart from drawing attention to the lexical gaps describing female experiences, is also reflective of the androcentric ethos of education in general.

Thus, in rejecting the tradition that has accepted the male, universalistic model of education, postmodern feminism questions the adequacy of traditional male education even for men. This concern becomes increasingly relevant in the light of the draft language policy documents' preoccupation with **appropriacy and skills training**.

Postmodern feminism's alignment with a language of possibility and critique is incredulous towards a language education that repeatedly stresses 'determinate appropriateness relations' between **varieties**,

contexts, purposes, style and audience.

The appropriateness models of language variation can be criticized on the grounds that, because they are ideological, they are susceptible to hegemonic interpretations and an allegiance to particular interests. Further, they also project an idealised image of the sociolinguistic order. The compromises and skirmishes characteristic of real sociolinguistic border crossings often transgress masculinist assumptions of what is appropriate/inappropriate for certain contexts and purposes. Thus, **context, purpose and audience** appropriacy considerations may not be good examples, as certain interactive episodes combine, *inter alia*, counselling, conversational, and/or interview permutational features. Interactive encounters are plural, fluid, ambiguous and uncertain, and if the toning of language to context is characterised by 'indeterminacy, heterogeneity and struggle' (Fairclough 1992:36-52), language education cannot be reduced to skills training in appropriacy language awareness. The application of the competence/skills model to language teaching wields staggering doses of ideological and political undertones and casts aspersions on 'the appropriacy of an appropriateness model' of language education (ibid.:42).

Fairclough, (ibid.), contends that language education cannot be simply: a matter of training people in skills and techniques, increasing their know-how, making them more skilled in language as one might make them more skilled in handling tools.

Jardine (1992), echoes similar sentiments in his critique of Enlightenment systems of education, which are propelled by 'mega-mania' ; the quest for bigger and better. This predisposition towards problem-solving leaves us bereft of opportunities to return to the 'original difficulty of life'. Postmodern feminism rejects such a linear, solution-driven pedagogy. Feminist educators conceptualize a democratic society which celebrates the rich diversity of human beings, 'not as *capital*, but as *creative*, intelligent, and feeling beings' (AAUW Report 1992:67).

4.3.2 DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION, EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND EMPOWERMENT

Democratic education, equal opportunity and empowerment constitute yet another constellation of stock pedagogic metaphors which gained popularity in South Africa during the struggles against a divisive apartheid regime. Driven by the commitment to usher in a social order consumed by a spirit of social unity, much ink, blood, sweat and tears have been spilt over these ideals, yet the metaphor of '**democratic education**', fails to satisfy feminists who argue that, despite the advent of South African democracy, women still remain unequally located in political, and socio-cultural formations; often expected to assimilate to masculinist definitions of democratic citizenship.

In an attempt to develop democratic citizenship, the draft Outcomes-Based Learning document, and interim core English syllabus have placed elaborate emphasis on the development, integration and participation of learners in political, social, economic, cultural and spiritual life. This emphasis alerts us to the postmodern feminist insight that, 'the discourses that constitute women as subordinate... permeate every aspect of society' (Luke 1992:40). (vide Chapter Two); and explains postmodern feminism's incredulity toward modernized gender relations which have converted private forms of patriarchal subordination to public, institutionalized variations.

Naturalized gender division between the male public and female private, Culture/Nature, Reason/Emotion, Work/Play, Formal/Informal, Academic/Non-Academic, Mind/Body, Object/Subject, Meaning/Text are deleterious to transformational language teaching as they succeed mostly in perpetuating *cultural schizophrenia*. A truly democratic language education pivots on the ability to subvert the subtle oppression built into the warp and weft of phallogocentric binarism.

For example, in the Culture/Nature coupling, rationality, as an historical construct has become definitive of Culture, a domain in which men have been identified as empowered creators. Women, on the other hand, have

traditionally been linked to Nature, passivity, irrationality and, deficit Other (Hekman 1990:105).

In attempting to reconcile the racial and cultural fragmentation that characterized the apartheid era, writers of the draft language policy documents have emphasized an appreciation of cultural and linguistic diversity as the cornerstones for successful nation-building. Language teaching governed by these ideals has to be sensitive to the reality that in celebrating the differences and values of a multicultural and multilingual society, we may quite innocently be appreciating an androcentric version of a group's cultural and linguistic heritage, considering that women's cultural contributions, values and intelligibilities have invariably been relegated to the outskirts of oblivion. Postmodern feminism has launched a scathing onslaught against the patriarchal legitimation of power through the ownership of cultural and linguistic capital. (vide Chapter Three).

The oppositional, confrontational, instrumental and dominating ethos of androcentric relations have traditionally manifested themselves through the production, competition, control and exchange of knowledge, commodities, nature, and women (Luke 1992:42-43). Influenced by such androcentric cultural values, the modalities of Speech, Listening, Reading and Writing that constitute integrated English language teaching has driven at break-neck speed down the highway of Enlightenment-humanism. A postmodern feminist pedagogy is incredulous of a democratic education premised on such tenets, and demands a re-assessment of pedagogic practices based on these values.

Studies on classroom power dynamics, (See Blackmore et al.: 1994; AAUW Report:1992), repeatedly confirm that male *paralinguistic domination schemes* (the use of body, space and sound), which are often equated with intelligence, authority, competition and power are entrenched norms in classroom sociolinguistic contexts. Girls are socialized to emulate these speech patterns as a training in 'educated speech' (Houston 1993:127). Those resisting **equal opportunities**-assimilation/ compensatory strategies have often done so in reaction to the implied message that women should

be more like men if they wish to succeed (Kenway & Modra 1992:139-140).²

Language teaching further distinguishes between formal and informal speech patterns. Factual and remote speech strategies have been promoted to obscure the 'messiness' of our feelings and emotions, thereby ensuring that we present ourselves as rational and detached, autonomous, 'Cartesian constituted subjects' (Hekman 1990:189). The Outcomes-Based Learning document's call for students to 'express their feelings logically', is commentless about the reality that, sometimes emotional expression defies the realms of logicity and cannot even be captured in words. The discourse on rational and detached speech training is yet another strategy to separate the personal from the public, thereby reinstating phallogocentric duality.

Allied to this, is the androcentric, cathartic thrill for competition and conquest, based on the value assumption that only winning matters. School debate societies, for example, usually accept as commonsense the adversarial, win/lose dualism that has characterized the genre. This relates to what Gilligan names "the ethos of justice" (negotiating rights and responsibilities) rather than an "ethos of care" (working relationally to make and maintain human connections (AAUW Report 1992:63). Debate techniques invariably require that students develop an argument defending a single point of view rather than reflect on a variety of perspectives that consider both feelings and actions. Even current events curricula, which resource topics from news and media, tend to focus on news as controversy and conflict, thereby ignoring much of the texture of daily life (ibid.).

In this regard feminist discourse has repeatedly argued for the primacy of friendship in classroom relations, which apart from shattering the traditional

² The futility of the pursuit for equal opportunity is highlighted by Watkins et al. (1992:165):

...you struggle to climb a few rungs up the promotional ladder, and you find that you are not going to rise any further. You've reached the 'glass ceiling', the invisible barrier that no amount of legislation seems to be able to break. It teaches you that equal opportunity is a myth. Gaining ground and finding the glass ceiling.

silence of women, will promote an atmosphere of empathy, care and co-operation. Such an atmosphere is conducive to sensitising students to a spectrum of lifestyles, cultural and linguistic differences, thereby facilitating the exploration of diverse opinions, and perspectives. Within this milieu, **equal opportunity** does not become synonymous with equal treatment, but rather with treating students according to their multiple experiential differences and needs. In such an atmosphere we can celebrate our differences as pluses rather than as deficits.

Apart from valorizing confrontational speech strategies, the modality of Speaking itself occupies low status when compared to language education's preference to the written Word. Rosen (1986:133-134), points out that, 'it is as speakers that we come closest to being free negotiators of meaning'. Conversation depends on the dual roles of speakers and listeners. Listening is an art form that does not construe conversation as a competition where the aim is to be the speaker. This has important implications for 'turn-taking' in classroom discussions, where studies show that teachers and male students have a tendency to monopolise *floorspace*. (vide Chapter Three).

Buying into androcentric cultural norms, the interim core English syllabus recommends that 'Speaking and Listening activities account for only 'one-third of the final mark in any year', with the remainder being allocated to Reading and Written work. This bias towards the written Word also highlights the 'interrelated issues of standards, grades and assessment as corollaries of the authority question. Androcentric education systems, which are hierarchical and based on competition and credentialing' (Kenway & Modra 1992:155-156), stereotypically rely heavily on written interrogative and impersonal instruments of assessment, which invariably test 'vertical thinking'. School calendars mark prominently the sacred dates on which students will perform the ritual of written examinations; when the written Word will sit in judgement, either to redeem from or damn them to another year of academic torment.

In his discussion on oral tradition in the west, Ong (in Hekman 1990:190), observes that, 'the defeat of oralism in the academic world coincided with the

advent of women into academia'. His observation reifies the importance that language teaching has placed on the written Word where the male libidinal economy and its preference for a teleological, and homogeneous conception of time and space is a defining characteristic. (vide Chapter Three). The postmodern feminist call for women to write their bodies suggests an open defiance to male versions of rationality and unity, the hallmarks of phallogocentric writing. Language teaching that encourages students to experiment with feminine writing, respects the postmodern feminist assertion that students as subjects-in-process, will reflect in their writings, multiple-streams-of-consciousness that combine parallel ways of knowing, thus rendering nebulous the imaginary boundaries between 'convergent and divergent, propositional and imaginative, lateral and vertical, holistic and analytic, intellectual and intuitive' cognitive styles.

By acknowledging both the biological and cyclical rhythm of daily life, both students and teachers will combine to make textbooks of their lives in an extravagant celebration of personal, cultural, and linguistic diversity. In this light, attempts to maintain the grand narratives of linguistic purity and prescriptive grammar will have to yield to the arbitrariness and relativity of language (vide Chapter Three); liberating teachers from the obligation of dispensing a 'nerveless language...obsessed with proprieties. The vacuum left by the abandonment of traditional grammar teaching can be filled by inviting students to study their own language, the diversity which surrounds them and the linguistic myths which have kept them in their place' (Rosen 1986:138). In this way students will develop an appreciation of language as a human construct capable of de- and re-construction.

The interim core English language syllabus recommends that students consult the 'English dictionary to find the **appropriate meaning** of words encountered in reading'. Such a recommendation uncritically accepts the authority of androcentric lexicography and its parochial definition of reality. Language lessons will, of necessity, have to become transformational experiences so that students are exposed to critical re-writings of dictionaries and so that they can also creatively produce their own re-visionings of

disempowering lexical items and discursive practices. Gender-inclusivity and sensitivity can be promoted by encouraging students to challenge and change the lexical gaps, semantic exclusions and derogation of women which have produced naturalized, phallogocentric definitions of reality. This will rout the 'empiricist notion that linguistic change follows rather than determines social change'. (vide Chapter Three). Armed with a sharpened critical awareness of phallogocentric subtleties, students whose encounters are swamped by texts rife with tokenism, omission and gender stereotyping can enter into a new relationship with their material worlds, alert to the non-neutrality of sociolinguistic conventions.

In this regard a postmodern feminist critical language awareness across the curriculum is indispensable. It urges an interrogation of the grand narratives that have typically informed knowledge content and teaching methodologies. Central to such an interrogation is the acceptance that knowledge is partial and incomplete (Nash 1994:68-69), and is produced from particular vistas of power. Language teaching needs to sensitise students to the non-neutrality of social theory by encouraging them to critique discourses they have not questioned before. This is consonant with the postmodern feminist call to engage theory, rather than to be intimidated by it. (vide Chapter Two).

For example, scientific discourse, traditionally an androcentric domain, has prided itself on its objectivity, rationality and neutrality. In debunking this myth, postmodern feminism provokes the disembodied, transcendental persona from behind the 'klansman's sheet' (vide Chapter Two), to emerge with a revealed authorial voice (Hekman 1990:190; Latting 1995).

By developing a postmodern feminist critical language awareness across the curriculum, students become vigilant to the power dynamics in gender relations, and the various loci of power. In this regard, Luke and Gore (1992), indicate that **empowerment** has carried with it connotations of deficit. 'Teachers whose lived experiences are entirely different from students, but who care about provoking students to a sense of agency, often express concern about making them Other, thereby demeaning as well as

distancing them'. However this can be circumvented by adopting negotiation skills (which are often associated with women's culture) (Kenway & Modra 1992:143), thereby involving students, individually and collectively, in the negotiation of the language curriculum. Negotiating the curriculum is a way of addressing the educational issues associated with gender, class, ethnic, racial and cultural differences, and promotes empowerment, gender esteem, and solidarity.

In acknowledging that students are not only constituted by discourse but are capable of resisting hegemonic ideology, language teaching will have to address the androcentric youth cultural industry (fashion, music, print and electric media), which capitalizes on a culture of romance, physical presence and *emphasized* 'heterosexualized femininity' (Thome 1993:170; Christian-Smith 1989:22), which are often key ingredients in the promoting the patriarchal familial formation of breadwinning husband and dependent wife. This effectively names, and divides the androcentric universe into two unequal, stereotypical spheres, one female, and the other male. (vide Chapter Three).

In addition metaphoric identification, sexist language, sex-role stereotyping and discursive practices market a falsely patented 'man-on top' sociolinguistic package often perpetuating the myth that women's bodies are a legitimate inheritance of patriarchal cultural capital. This has serious import in a culture that uses the female body to advertise just about everything, and where man-made language defines female roles as service oriented (vide Chapter Three). The onus rests on language teaching to educate girls to the reality that their bodies are their own and not objects to be appropriated by others. (vide Chapter 3).

This is especially important given that youth is traditionally a time of healthy bodies and carefree minds which render many young people susceptible to social influences that can result in eating disorders, substance abuse, early sexual activity, unintended pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and suicide.

An understanding of one's body as a site of power- struggles is central to an understanding of self (vide Chapter Two), and is an often evaded curriculum. By presuming that what occurs in school (public) should be separated from what transpires out of school (private), (domestic violence, sexual and child abuse) such matters are often given the status of classified information, unsuitable for discussion in the language classroom. This marks a betrayal of young women's lives. Thus, the feminist agenda insists that we make masculinity problematic - that boys and men are confronted with their masculinity and that the male ego is mobilised and harnessed, so that 'masculinity' does not remain synonymous with sexual virility.³ Language education needs to challenge this violence to prevent future generation of women from becoming:

a mass of scar tissue that aches when it rains and wounds that bleed when you bump them and memories that get up in the night and pace in boots to and fro (Piercy in Chopp 1989).

However, the association of sexuality and health instruction exclusively with danger and disease belies the human experience of the body as a site of pleasure, joy, and comfort. An awareness that relationships with others and the development of intimacy involve both the body and the mind should be critical components of language education, to avoid tapping back into phallogocentric binarism that eventually exalts the Mind OVER the Body, thereby reinstating the dichotomy between feelings and emotions on the one hand, and logic and rationality on the other hand.

Apart from the influence of androcentric youth culture, male writers whose ideological assumptions have been used as a benchmark in the construction of gender relations must also be subjected to special review. An examination of prescribed literary text lists often reveal that the writings of male literary *giants* enjoy acclaimed, die-hard status. While the more recent attempt to feminise the literature curriculum by including women writers is welcomed, not all female writers manifest a feminist consciousness and

³ See Salisbury & Jackson (1996:Chapter 7) for innovative and practical language lessons that could be employed to sensitise adolescents to gender issues.

many often display femocratic tendencies that collaborate in perpetuating patriarchal ideology. (vide Chapter One).

Further, traditional methodologies of literature teaching would have to be re-evaluated in light of the postmodern feminist assertion that meaning is not immanent in the text but has to be constructed, thereby acknowledging that the text is re-written with every new reading. (vide Chapter Two). Thus, we should no longer ask: "What" but rather, "How" does the text mean? In so doing another dichotomy, that between Meaning/Text can be debunked. Text questioning styles that have a postmodern feminist bias would favour activities that activate the plural and lateral, the imaginative, and the unpredictable; questions that constantly stir and replenish the reservoirs of curiosity and playfulness. It is on the playground of such a classroom that the postmodern feminist spirit is truly released, encouraging us to develop comradie, to play around with the less rational forms of language, to parody the stern conventions that have disciplined us into servitude, and to subvert the Work/Play cultural dichotomy, yet another phallogocentric duality that has falsified and trivialised the full spectrum of our ways of being and knowing. Women, who have been confined to patriarchal imprisonment, are well acquainted with the delusionary notion that, 'the status of manhood is attainable only through stress of thought and much technical exertion' (Lloyd 1991:166).

From the foregoing discussion it is evident that in aiming to promote an appreciation of the multilingual and multicultural mosaic of South African society, the draft language policy documents continue to perpetuate patriarchal ideology, thereby rendering any significant attempt at gender reform ineffective.

In this light, the documents call for an appreciation of a core South African culture also becomes highly suspect. For example, sport has already been accepted as a unifying agent that will assist towards developing a core culture. Sadly, however, the androcentric ethos of this domain has been celebrated with little protest. The only reminder one gets that South Africa has a female population as well, comes in commentaries of a *maiden over*

being bowled, or the *red cherry* being caught *between the slips*.

In writing on the designing of *Core Culture And Core Curriculum In South Africa*. Alexander (1994), remarks that the core curriculum should be neither Eurocentric nor Afrocentric, and that it should:

promote the unity and accommodate the diversity of a population which is destined either to lay the foundations for a model of 'multicultural' harmony or become one more bloody example of ethnic conflict, fragmentation and 'cleansing'.

No cognisance is given to the fact that:

If this was a war largely fought on the battlefield of words and images, where the dead and wounded fell without notice into the mass grave of lost creativity, it was no less destructive than many real wars (Dijkstra in Noddings 1992:665).

It is this patriarchal, symbolic violence and war against women that has remained un-remediated, and for which we have yet to convene a Truth(s) and Reconciliation forum.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In reviewing this chapter, it becomes clear that education, like other social constructs has been epistemologically and procedurally administered by male and masculine signifiers. This is particularly evident in school language texts. As integral components of the pedagogic apparatus, language texts have ensured the exclusion of women and their realities through omission, misrepresentation and marginalization. Text curricula reforms endeavouring to render language teaching more 'girl friendly' have only succeeded in assimilating and accommodating girls into androcentric ideological frameworks.

Despite the express commitment of the draft Outcomes-Based Learning document, and the interim core English language syllabus, to promote a language education based on gender equality, many of its egalitarian principles are likely to fall prey to the subtle deceptions of phallogocentric

naturalization. Naturalized pedagogic metaphors, the promotion of skills training, and a failure to problematize the patriarchal culture of binarism threaten to reconstitute, under new guise, old patriarchal cultural and linguistic ideologies.

* It is these gaps, silences and ambiguities in the draft language policy documents that the postmodern feminist voice challenges, urging for a subversion of old patriarchal orders *so that the bandage can be removed from the other eye and the whole body filled with light; so that we can see a circle where before we only saw a segment*. It is only by challenging this myopia in educational practice that has verged on blindness, that we will be able to restore the feminine that has been lost in education. With cleared vision, we will begin to see that the desire for education and life is bound with the desire to live with love, wonder, tenderness and an appreciation for one *anOther*.

EPILOGUE

A DANCE WITH LIFE, A DANCE WITH POSSIBILITIES

It is not impossible that the female might resemble wild, scrawny grass...which manages to grow in the chinks of old stones and - why not - finally loosens cement slabs, however heavy they may be, with the power of what has been contained for so long a time.

Gauthier (in Stanton 1980:76).

Gauthier's depiction of women's latent power and potential encapsulates the essence of this study. Stripped of our birthrights to linguistic liberty, and the full expression of our creative potential, women have been like clay in the potter's hand, obedient to the master's moulding.

But gradually women are being roused to the reality that the master's tools will not dismantle the master's house, and with this realisation, has come the postmodern feminist call to unlearn the lies of the father's tongue.

It is such an unlearning that is at the heart of a postmodern feminist pedagogy, whose voice cautions us to the reality, that gentle genuflections alone do not demonstrate a reconceptualization towards gender inclusivity. This becomes particularly significant in light of the increased audibility of gender rhetoric currently reverberating down the corridors of South African education. More often than not, such rhetoric reveal themselves as mere adornments to lend respectability to a politics of gender sensitivity.

Sceptical as ever, the postmodern feminist voice provokes a full-scale, critical interrogation into what lies below the surface. It calls for a renewed attentiveness to the permeability of knowledge and the meaning of life. It invites both female and male, to go in search of new, ever-widening emancipatory horizons that refute, challenge, and change the old authorities and institutional controls. For unless we encourage such receptiveness to new insights which further illuminate agents of female oppression and repression, we remain vulnerable to ensnarement in the sameness and

repetitiveness for which the male libidinal economy has been criticised.

However, in promoting gender inclusivity, a feminist framework need be no more 'true' than a patriarchal one, but this does not disqualify it from being a good deal better! The patriarchal world-view has shown scant respect for women's experience where it differs from men's. The feminist world-view, on the other hand, begins with women's experience of the world, and is inclusive of patriarchal experientiality and rationality. But this, is not the only reason for extolling the feminist paradigm. Its merit lies in the rationale that it is more just, and also because it offers half of humanity a means of explaining their oppression in terms other than having to accept the blame for their victimization. As an emancipatory discourse, it abounds with a transformative potential for gaining a better world-view, in that primarily, it seeks a better world. In this light the charge, 'Out of your mind' is a reasonable representation of feminists, for in a sense we do have to get 'out of our minds', that is, 'out of the mind-set we have been socialised into', to mind that history does not repeat *himself*.

Thus, postmodern feminism beckons us to an openness, to a celebration of diversity, plurality, and difference. It invites us to join in on an unchoreographed dance to a million unsung melodies, where we circle each other like twin stars, in constant tension and mutual dependency. For this is the Dance of life, a dance with endless beginnings and a million possibilities...

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

As a cultural artifact the textbook, whatever its form, must remain an object of study and research to determine how it constructs students and teachers as gendered subjects. Because students and teachers are social actors-in-process, the text should be continually re-evaluated to ensure its positions are sensitive to altered subjects and fluctuating circumstances.

If there is any sincerity at all in rhetoric to eradicate gender inequality in South African education, then an exploration into what it means to be a feminist teacher demands urgent investigation. The personal, cultural, institutional and professional factors which either facilitate or hinder positive changes for feminist pedagogy must be examined.

Furthermore, studies into postmodern feminist methodology and text interrogation still remain largely under-researched. In view of the acclaimed status that school language textbooks occupy, a postmodern feminist analysis of specific texts would contribute substantially towards informing and expanding the postmodern feminist textual conversation.

A strong woman is a woman who is straining
A strong woman is a woman standing
on tiptoe and lifting a barbell
while trying to sing Boris Godunov.
A strong woman is a woman at work
cleaning out the cesspool of the ages
and while she shovels, she talks about
how she doesn't mind crying, it opens
the ducts of the eyes, and throwing up
develops the stomach muscles, and
she goes on shovelling with tears in her nose.

A strong woman is a woman in whose head
a voice is repeating, I told you so,
ugly, bad girl, bitch, nag, shrill, witch,
ballbuster, nobody will ever love you back,
why aren't you feminine, why aren't you
soft, why aren't you quiet, why aren't you dead?

A strong woman is a woman determined
to do something others are determined
not to be done. She is pushing up on the bottom
of a lead coffin lid. She is trying to raise a
manhole cover with her head, she is trying
to butt her way through a steel wall.
Her head hurts. People waiting for the hole
to be made say, hurry, you're so strong.

A strong woman is a woman bleeding
inside. A strong woman is a woman making
herself strong every morning while her teeth
loosen and her back throbs. Every baby,
a tooth, midwives used to say, and now
every battle a scar. A strong woman is a
mass of scar tissue that aches when it rains and wounds that bleed
when you bump them and memories that get up
in the night and pace in boots to and fro.

A strong woman is a woman who craves love
like oxygen or she turns blue choking.
A strong woman is a woman who loves
strongly and weeps strongly and is strongly
terrified and has strong needs. A strong woman
is strong in words, in action, in connection, in feeling;
she is not strong as a stone but as a wolf suckling
her young. Strength is not in her, but she
enacts it as the wind fills a sail.

What comforts her is others loving
her equally for the strength and for the weakness
from which it issues, lightning from a cloud.
Lightning stuns. In rain, the clouds disperse.
Only water of connection remains, flowing through us.
Strong is what we make each other. Until we are all
strong together, a strong woman is a woman strongly afraid.

For Strong Women: Piercy
(in Chopp 1989)

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