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**AN ASSESSMENT OF RESPONSES TOWARDS AFRICAN WOMEN'S  
THEOLOGY IN SELECTED INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA**

**BY**

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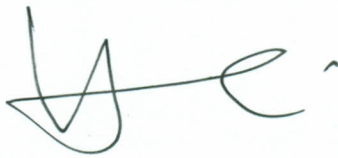
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**DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my mother Mrs. Janes Kemunto Okemwa,  
my husband Eng. Michael Ochieng' and our children Edward  
Okemwa, John Otieno and Felix Omondi.

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is an assessment of responses to African Women's Theology in selected institutions. The study centres on why Feminist Theology which emerged in the developed countries of the West and has spread to other parts of the world under different labels has not been wholly embraced in Africa. It has focused on selected public institutions of higher learning and theological schools.

The main argument in this study is that, African Women's Theology has not been included in the Theology and Religious Studies curriculum of many institutions because the meaning of the term feminism commonly used is considered foreign. Besides, the methodology and concerns of this theology have not been wholly contextualized. The study selected some church-sponsored institutions of higher learning as well as public universities for our research. The data were gathered by use of oral interviews and questionnaires and library research among other methods. The overall data were then collated, analyzed, interpreted and presented in six chapters.

The study established that Feminist Theology in general and African Women's Theology in particular has been subordinated in most of the institutions. This is because it has also been seen as a foreign

importation. To correct this, it is argued that African Women's Theology should be contextualized so as to highlight local societal concerns as opposed to Western theologies. More courses on African Women's Theology should also be taught at undergraduate and graduate levels.

The study argues that women in Kenya have concerns that arise from their unequal status in relation to men in society. The whole society suffers from subordination of gender issues in the academy as only male perspectives and participation are considered. It is therefore suggested that favourable recognition of gender perspectives will prepare service providers such as church ministers, teachers, managers and economists to readily explore and exploit female and male talents for the good of the whole community.

In light of the above, it is suggested that women theologians and gender sensitive male theologians need to campaign for the upgrading of the status of Women Theologies in general and African Women's Theology in particular and also participate in preparing appropriate curriculum. This will ensure that the whole society benefits from gender sensitive formation that prepares students for equitable regard of both women and men.

The study recommends that there is need to include African Women's Theology in the curriculum of all theological schools and institutions of higher learning that offer Theology and Religious Studies.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION .....	ii
DEDICATION .....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iv
ABSTRACT .....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiv
ABBREVIATIONS .....	xv
KEY TERMS IN THE WORK.....	xvii
<b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Background to the Study .....	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem.....	6
1.3 Objectives of the Study .....	8
1.4 Research Premises .....	8
1.5 Significance of the Study.....	9
1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study.....	11
1.7 Literature Review .....	13
1.8 Conceptual Framework .....	22
1.9 Research Area.....	32
1.10 Methodology .....	34
1.10.1 Acquisition of Data.....	34
1.11 Data Analysis.....	40
1.12 Problems Encountered During Research .....	40

**CHAPTER TWO: BACKGROUND OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY .....41**

2.0 Introduction.....	41
2.1.1 The First Wave of Feminism .....	41
2.1.2 The Second Wave of Feminism .....	49
2.1.3 The Third Wave of Feminism.....	54
2.1.4 Categorization of Feminism and Feminist Theology .....	56
2.2 History of African Women's Theology.....	70
2.2.1 The World Council of Churches (WCC) .....	74
2.2.2 The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT).....	82
2.2.3 The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle).....	103
2.2.3.1 Objectives of the Circle's Theology.....	107
2.3 Conclusion .....	121

**CHAPTER THREE: MEANING, PLACE AND OBJECTIVES OF****AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGY IN KENYA.....125**

3.0 Introduction.....	125
3.1.1 Terminologies Used in Naming Women Theologies in Kenya	125
3.1.2 Feminist Theology .....	131
3.2.1 African Women's Theology.....	139
3.2.2 The Nature of African Women's Theology.....	147
3.3 The Place of African Women's Theology in the Theological Curriculum.....	150

3.4 Objectives of African Women's Theology in Kenya.....	169
3.5 Conclusion .....	175

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN WOMEN**

<b>THEOLOGIES IN KENYA .....</b>	<b>178</b>
4.1 The Procedure in Women Theologies in Kenya.....	179
4.1.1 Four Steps in Women Theologies in Kenya .....	180
4.2 Theoretical Orientation in Women Theologies in Kenya.....	188
4.2.1 Feminist Theories .....	195
4.2.2 Gender Theories.....	199
4.2.3 Methodologies in Women Theologies: The Cases of Teresia M. Hinga and Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike .....	204
4.3.0 Background to the Teaching Women Theologies in Kenya....	228
4.3.1 Methods of Teaching Women Theologies in Kenya .....	233
4.3.2 Lecture Method.....	234
4.3.3 Seminar Method .....	239
4.3.4 Role-playing.....	243
4.4 Popular Methods of African Women's Theologizing .....	245
4.4.1 Story-telling .....	247
4.4.2 Songs.....	252
4.5 Conclusion .....	254

**CHAPTER FIVE: EMERGING THEMES IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S****THEOLOGY IN KENYA.....258**

5.0 Introduction.....258

5.1 African Culture .....259

5.1.1 Cultural Practices that are Oppressive to Women .....267

5.1.2 Cultural Practices that Enhance the Wellbeing of Women....274

5.2 The Bible .....279

5.2.1 The Bible as Composite of Books.....282

5.2.2 Past Approaches to Biblical Interpretation.....284

5.2.3 Women Reading the Bible .....293

5.2.3.1 Why Women Read the Bible .....293

5.2.3.2 Ways of Reading the Bible .....303

5.3 The Position of Women in Society.....312

5.3.1 The Role of Women in the Church .....319

5.3.2 The Church and Empowerment of Women .....329

5.3.3 Violence Against Women .....342

5.4 Conclusion .....346

**CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION .....349**

6.0 Introduction.....349

6.1. Summary and Assessment of the Study .....349

6.2 Recommendations.....362

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research .....365

BIBLIOGRAPHY .....367

**APPENDICES**

APPENDIX I: GENERAL QUESTIONNAIRE .....	390
APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SELECTED RESOURCE PERSONS .....	381
APPENDIX III: WORSHIP SERVICE AND SONGS BY WOMEN IN NEW LIFE CHURCH .....	384
APPENDIX IV: PROGRAMME OF STUDIES FOR VARIOUS COLLEGES AND INSTITUTIONS .....	392
APPENDIX V: NAMES OF RESOURCE PERSONS .....	407

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 3. 1: Naming of women theologians in Kenya .....	126
Table 3. 2: Courses taught in Faculty of Divinity and Theology at St. Pauls' United Theological College and Catholic University of Eastern Africa respectively.....	153
Table 4. 1: Aspects Characterizing Women Theologizing.....	181
Table 5. 1: Themes in African Women's Theology in Kenya .....	258

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 3. 1: Response to the question on whether women Theologians in Kenya ape those in the West.....	164
Figure 4. 1: Original from National Assembly of Women Religious, USA 1984 .....	180

**ABBREVIATIONS**

AACC	-	All Africa Conference of Churches
ACK	-	Anglican Church of Kenya
AIC	-	African Instituted Churches
AQOCI	-	Association Q'uebecoise des Organismes des Cooperation Internationale
CCIC	-	Canadian Council for International Corporation
CIRA	-	Centre for Inter-disciplinary Research on AIDS
"CIRCLE"	-	Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians
CPK	-	Church of the Province of Kenya now ACK
CUEA	-	Catholic University of Eastern Africa
DRC	-	Democratic Republic of Congo
EAAAT	-	Ecumenical Association of African Theologians
EATWOT	-	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
ECA-WIDNET-	-	East & Central Africa Women in Development Network
ESEAT	-	Ecumenical Symposium of East African Theologians
FGM	-	Female Genital Mutilation.
HIV	-	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
AIDS	-	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
KCS	-	Kenya Catholic Secretariat

MATCH	-	MATCH International Centre
MCK	-	Methodist Church of Kenya
NCKK	-	National Council of Churches of Kenya
NEGST	-	Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology
NOW	-	National Organization for Women
PCEA	-	Presbyterian Church of East Africa
SDA	-	Seventh Day Adventist
SNCC	-	Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee
UK	-	United Kingdom
UN	-	United Nations
UoN	-	University of Nairobi
USAID	-	United States Agency for International Development
WCC	-	World Council of Churches
YDS	-	Yale Divinity School
YWCA	-	Young Women Christian Association

## KEY TERMS IN THE WORK

**Women Theologies** - These are theologies that seek to free society from systemic injustice and violence against women due to patriarchal domination. They are based on women's experiences of resistance, survival and struggle against all forms of dehumanisation. Women's experiences of hope, of a life-giving spirituality are underlined. The plural form designates the distinct theologies' discourses rooted in particular social locations. These include but are not limited to, Womanist Theology, Asian Women's Theology and African Women Theology.

**Women** - Female human beings. When used in the plural form the term underlines diversity in women's lived experiences. This critiques the tendency to use the generalised monolithic category woman as a generic category.

**Feminism** - Term has several meanings, three of these are presented.

- It is a movement committed to the eradication of women's subordination in society in order to ensure equality and freedom of all persons regardless of gender.
- The term underlines the unequal distribution of power between the sexes as being essentially political. This calls for

political commitment to change society in a way that ensures justice for both women and men.

- Is a social theory through which women's lives and experiences are understood and explained.

**Third world** - It is not a fixed geographical location, instead it is used with more fluid boundaries as it is also applied to women minorities and all those who live on the margins in societies of great wealth. The same regions are also referred to as Two-thirds World in this work.

**African Women's Theology** - The articulation of theology from the vantage point of African women of all walks of life. It is keenly contextual, taking into account religion, culture, socio-economic, and political developments in Africa. It is liberative, hence it consists of words and transformative action aimed at addressing gender inequalities occasioned by religion, culture, colonialism and neo-colonialism among others.

**Feminist Perspective** - Acknowledges the participation of women in human existence. It utilizes gender specific analysis to break down generalizations and to reclaim the category 'human being' for women.

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Since the 1960s, theologians within the Christian tradition have reacted to movements towards the liberation of oppressed persons around the world with a growing body of literature. These movements have been specific and contextual. For instance, Black Theology which emerged in the United States of America (USA) and spread to South Africa is concerned with oppression of black people by the white people (King 1994). Feminist Theology which emerged in the USA and Britain, spread to Latin America, Asia, Africa and other parts of the world underscores the plight of women. Its objective is the emancipation of women from male chauvinistic structures of racial, economic and social domination (Loades 1990).

Feminist Theology is an increasingly significant feature of theological reflection today. This is mainly due to the awareness created by the women's liberation movement of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century which helped to create a feminist critical consciousness. The consciousness, interacting with the Bible and Christian

theological traditions has called for new investigation of past paradigms and a new agenda of study (Ferguson 1988).

Feminist theologians argue that the patriarchal culture and Christian theology as a manifestation of that culture is sexist. The male has been thought to represent the whole humanity. The half has been mistaken for the whole (Loades 1990). They have also observed that the interpretation of the Bible perpetuates and legitimizes patriarchal structures. Feminist theologians also argue that most Bible texts are articulated in grammatically masculine language – a language which is embedded in a patriarchal culture and religion. Besides, the Bible is canonized, interpreted and proclaimed by a long line of men. Hence, it is a male-centred book (Gottwald & Horsley 1993; Fiorenza 1983).

Three models<sup>1</sup> of Feminist Theology have emerged in response to the above views. These are, the Post-Christian model, the evangelical model and liberation model. These models are as a result of critical reflection and assessment of traditional academic theological teaching. This kind of theologizing has mainly been a privilege of white Western women and those women from advanced theological training institutions in Europe and USA (Loades 1990).

The feminist theological movement, targets not only gender construction and class privilege but also racism. This has been so since black feminist consciousness emerged as a means of black women's struggle against the sexism of black men on the one hand and the racism of white men and women on the other (King 1994; Loades 1990). As a result of these sexist and racial tensions, black women in USA proposed their own theology, namely 'Womanist' Theology. Its main concern is liberation of women from white-female domination, and black-male and white-male sexism and how these affect their reflection of scripture (Loades 1990).

Women Theologies in developing countries in general and Africa in particular has developed as a result of women's deliberations in associations and conferences such as the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT). These have been key fora for sharing ideas between male and female theologians. In these meetings, women theologians were confronted with the sexism of their male counterparts. Women have also benefited from reading publications by leading feminist theologians in the West. These have made the women theologians aware of their situations by providing critical analysis of the situation of women in the West.

Women in Africa face different socio-economic problems from those experienced by either white or black women in USA and Europe (King 1994). Accordingly, the emphasis of women theologians is very much on "doing theology". African Women's Theology puts emphasis on praxis. It is a theology primarily concerned with concrete issues of life as experienced (King 1994). Thus Women Theology in Africa calls for contextualized methods which address the challenges and needs of women in their specified social locations. The women theologians who formed The Circle in 1989, targeted contextual concerns. Among others, the initiative was meant to create a forum through which African women could research, analyse and reflect upon their experiences in the multiplicity of contexts in which they live (Kanyoro 1996).

The emerging African Women's Theology as envisioned by The Circle is all-inclusive. This is in the sense that it includes the experiences of women of different faiths such as Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. The Circle calls for dialogue with all African women from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds.

The Circle intends to voice women's concerns in Africa through theological writing (Kanyoro 1996). A number of publications have

resulted from the efforts of The Circle. What emerges from these publications is that the desired liberation of women is multifaceted. The most urgent and pertinent issues include, voicing women's oppression in religion and culture, political empowerment and economic justice, among others. The Circle's theology is, however, limited to those women who can write and publish. This reality excludes the views of many women who cannot publish. Hence doing theology in Africa calls for a more inclusive approach.

The present study focuses on the Kenyan situation. In Kenya, there are many women concerned with African Women's Theology as individuals and as members of The Circle. We also focus on those teaching Women Theologies and gender-related courses in religion as these have a forum for influencing the attitudes of their students. Most of these are Christians and members of the mainline churches (Kanyoro 1996:150f); hence limiting our study to Christian women theologians.

Through these women's efforts, most universities and theological colleges are now offering courses on women in religion and culture. This is a new area of study in the Kenyan higher education curriculae as it dates to late 1980s and early 1990s

and therefore, calls for investigation in order to find out people's attitude towards it. It is also important to contextualize it to reflect local concerns. The present study hopes to make a contribution towards understanding the ambivalent attitude towards Women's Theologies in Kenya.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

It has been noted that the terms Feminist Theology describe the theology done by women in the so called developed countries of the West. How is Feminist Theology understood in Kenya? Granted that by definition, Feminist Theology is contextual, is this theology, therefore, relevant for Kenyan women? Does it reflect the diverse struggles of Kenyan women in all spheres of their lives?

During a pilot survey carried out in June 1998, we noted that some institutions of higher learning offered various courses on women in religion and culture under Faculty of Theology and departments of Religious Studies. The approach and content also differed from one institution to another. In some institutions, Women Theologies were dismissed as a concern for the idle women in the developed countries of the West but not African

women who know their role and position in society. In others, Women Theologies were considered as a gift to the Church and a gift to women. Institutions which held the latter view were convinced that these theologies constitute an important area of study. These varied opinions imply that the subject is valued differently even in academic circles. It is, therefore, important to find out what entails Women Theologies in these institutions. Does it have a place in the curriculum? How is it viewed and why?

During an earlier study (Okemwa 1993), we noted that some religious women saw feminist ideals as a threat to their ministry and faith. Their position was that one cannot be a Christian and a feminist at the same time. This was also expressed by some ordained women during the Pan -African Conference of The Circle in August 1996 in Nairobi. In this conference women doing theology from all over Africa had met to deliberate on their experiences within their African cultural and religious heritages. It became apparent that there were disagreements between ordained women and academicians on the issues that were discussed. Such differences pose a problem especially when we consider the fact that Feminist Theology has been developed by religious women right from its very inception (Loades 1990), and

that such differences have at times been used to divide and subordinate women in various spheres of life. It is important to find out why some women and men have a negative attitude towards feminist theological perspectives while others have a positive attitude towards them. These issues underlined the need for this study which hopefully give clarity to the meaning, content, methodology and relevance of Women Theologies in Kenya.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study include the following:

1. Trace the history of Women Theologies in Africa and its relevance in the Kenyan context.
2. Examine the response of Kenyan theologians to Feminist Theology.
3. Identify and evaluate the methods used by women theologians while doing theology in Kenya.
4. Identify and discuss the major themes of African Women's Theology in Kenya.

### **1.4 Research Premises**

- 1 The history of Women Theologies in Africa has influenced the development of African Women's Theology in Kenya.

- 2 The response of the theologians in Kenya to Feminist Theology is both negative and positive.
- 3 Women theologians in Kenya utilize formal and popular methods of doing theology.
- 4 The major themes of African Women's Theology in Kenya are Christology, the Bible, women's role in the Church, eco-feminism, violence against women and women's well-being in religion and culture.

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The inclusion of feminist perspectives in theology has been affirmed as one way of preparing theologians to respond in a dynamic way to the needs of women and men in society. Various institutions of higher learning have responded to this need by introducing various courses on women and gender issues in religion and culture in Africa. Available literature, for example Martey (1994), Oduyoye (1997), Phiri (2001); indicate that gender sensitive courses are missing or have been introduced in various institutions of learning. Consequently, a great variety in approach, content and concerns is noted.

The process of engendering theological education therefore, calls attention to the need to circumscribe the terrain of this particular

discipline as a way of responding to the needs of both students and lecturers. In response to the above need, the study considers the meaning, methods and themes in African Women's Theology in Kenya.

The study has established aspects that have to be addressed in the teaching of African Women's Theology. Examples include, objectives, content, methods of teaching and theories. The study therefore, provides contextual literature and knowledge in African Women's Theology. Engendering the theological education curriculum is a current concern in Kenya. The study, is therefore, significant as it clearly defines key terms while adequately addressing the complex, diverse political and cultural differences within feminism. The study encourages the managers of institutions of higher learning to ensure that women's experiences in theology are taken seriously. It presents the possibility of inclusive and contextual interpretations of Christian symbols and texts.

Conceptually, the study contributes towards an understanding that feminist methodology and perspective is a part of an overall project of liberation of the oppressed especially women.

## **1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The study covers the period between 1980 and 2005. The 1980s are notable as issues concerning women were called into focus by the WCC and the AACC (King 1994:9ff). The United Nations (UN) also sponsored a global women's meeting in Nairobi in 1985. This secular meeting gave the women's movement a global voice and dramatic visibility particularly in Kenya. The focus of the conference was liberation of women.

With regard to the teaching of Religion, the period was marked by dramatic revision of syllabi to reflect contextual concerns. Thus, the scope of Religious Studies was widened to encompass women's perspectives, religious pluralism and Religious Studies was considered as an academic discipline (Hinga 1996b:222).

The study also restricts itself to responses towards African Women's Theology in selected institutions of higher learning. This, to a large extent, excludes responses from women in the churches except in so far as this relates to our focus in the study. Although the practice of Women Theologies in the churches presents issues such as the history, doctrines, polity, beliefs and practices all of which could influence Women Theologies but this

could make the study too broad and unmanageable due to financial and time constraints.

Finally, we selected eight institutions for our study, but only analyzed in detail the curriculum of two institutions namely St. Paul's United Theological College, Limuru (St. Paul's) and Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). We however, considered views of lecturers in our sample. This was because of the following reasons:

- 1) All the public universities offer a single elective course directly focusing on women and gender in religion.
- 2) Daystar University and University of Eastern Africa (Baraton) had none.
- 3) St. Paul's had four courses offered as cores and electives while at CUEA, there was no course focusing on women at undergraduate level, but at masters level, there was one seminar course in the Faculty of Theology.
- 4) The 1980s were also notable as, the emerging voices of women in theological reflection in the Two-thirds World distinguished themselves as independent and distinctive (Fabella & Oduyoye 1988, Marty 1990).

The year 2005 is notable due to the marked rapid expansion of higher education in Kenya. The increase in the number of students seeking higher education introduced new challenges. These include but are not limited to; the need for customer driven course and developments in the telecommunications industry.

Reference is made, however, to other years before or beyond this time frame as need arises.

### **1.7 Literature Review**

This section comprises a review of literature related to the study. The literature is reviewed thematically as follows: the need and place of, naming, objectives, methods and themes in feminist perspectives in theology.

#### **Feminist Theology: Its Meaning and Objectives**

Feminist Theology was not regarded as important in Africa until the late 1970s. This is because, in Africa, women were expected to view other questions as more pertinent and urgent – the political, economic and racial problems were supposedly a priority (Oduyoye 1990:1). In this regard, Nthamburi (1991), Kanyoro and Njoroge (1996), Phiri (2001) point out that African Theology did not include women's perspectives in theology. The content of

African Theology is not the focus of this study, however, its evaluation underlines the need for African Women's Theology. Nthamburi (1991) therefore, observes that African Theology cannot be considered as credible if it does not take into consideration the issue of women.

The forementioned observation is significant for this study as it emphasizes the need to consider both female and male voices in theology. But whereas Nthamburi calls for a Feminist Theology in Africa, he does not identify important aspects that this theology has to address. This study addresses some of these in chapter three through to six.

A number of authors have defined Feminist Theology. These include Oduyoye (1985), King (1994), Loades (1990) and Getui (1990). They point out that Feminist Theology is the proclamation of women's experience as an integral part of human experience. They emphasize that women's experience is a legitimate part of the data for theological reflection. Therefore, they call for the incorporation of the women into the community of interpreters of what it means to be objects of God's love. The authors also underline the pluralistic and dynamic nature of Feminist Theology. These definitions and explications on the nature of

Feminist Theology are important in this study, as they underscore the importance of contextuality in Feminist Theology.

In a bid to emphasize the nature of Feminist Theology as diverse and contextual some authors have underlined the need for self-naming. In this regard, Grant (1989:211), Isasi-Diaz (1996:331), King (1994:14ff), Fiorenza (1996:xx) and Clifford (2001:25) discuss the importance of self-naming in Women Theologies. It is emphasized that although the term 'feminist' is used globally, it is a pointer to the White middle-class women's context. Thus, there is need for other names to underline the diverse contexts in Women Theologies. This study shows why African Women's Theology is preferred in naming women's theological perspectives in Kenya.

The objectives of Feminist Theology considerably differ from one region to another. However, the need to underscore the humanity of women is repeated in the various contexts. For this reason, Loades (1990), Getui (1990) and King (1994), point out that the objective of Feminist Theology is to create a whole society where the humanity of all individuals is recognized, utilized and appreciated regardless of gender. The mode of achievement of this objective differs from one community to the other. This study

therefore, identifies and discusses the objectives of African Women's Theology in Kenya. This underlines the issues of concern as discussed in chapter three.

### **Methods and Themes in Feminist Theology**

Works on the method of doing Feminist Theology are discussed by Loades (1990), King (1994) and Oduyoye (2001). These authors underline the methods in both the developed countries and those in the Two-thirds World respectively. The methods of theologizing used by feminist theologians in the developed countries are governed by training and traditional theology as developed in seminaries. In the Two-thirds World countries, women speak from their experiences in their underprivileged status in society. Most of these women have not formally trained in theology yet their experience of God compels them to action. The present study establishes women's methods of theologising in Kenya.

A number of authors have discussed issues of concern in Feminist Theology. These include, language, the role of women in the Church, violence against women, the Bible and Christology. Examples of such authors are Hinga (1989), Nthamburi (1991), Chopp (1991), and Martey (1994). They concur that, language is

important in Feminist Theology. Chopp observes that it is in language that peoples' subjectivity is formed. The characteristics a man or a woman portrays vary with culture, times and places. All these definitions are expressed through language. Hinga, Nthamburi and Martey point out that the male language about God has tended to alienate women. These authors recommend that there is need for an all-inclusive language about God. Chopp, on the other hand, observes that women's words and voices should revise the social and symbolic rules of language and transform the ordered hierarchy in language, otherwise they will always be strangers in discourse. Similarly, Oduyoye (1992:2) points out that, "as long as men and western strangers continue to write exclusively about Africa, African women will continue to be represented as if they were dead". This study shows the need for both men and women's voices in theology.

Kanyoro and Njoroge (1996) express women's voices from the African continent telling their own stories. The contributors in this book *Groaning in Faith: Women in the Household of God*, are members of the Circle. They are firmly in touch with the realities of the African continent and each is aware of the inherent power of culture and traditions that inhibit women. They question the structures, beliefs and attitudes that oppress women. The

Circles' feminist theologizing is unique in the sense that it hopes to maintain a mutuality and a sensitivity for building up both men and women in Africa to face the challenges of the day and for the glory of God who created them male and female (1996:xi). On the same note, Getui (1996:31) observes that the male and female are components of which nature should be reflected equitably in all spheres of life - the Church, family and society. The views of these authors inform this study on the need for a theology that benefits both genders in the community.

Nasimiyu-Wasike (1990), Mbuy-Beya (1990), James (1993), Okemwa (1993) and Kanyoro (1996) point out that the role of women in the Church is subordinate to that of men. They observe that women have been denied leadership roles mainly because Church structures are male-dominated. Nasimiyu-Wasike argues that there is need to separate Church governance and priesthood so as to give all women and men of ability a chance to participate in decision-making in the Church. It is argued in this study, that the same machinery that has been used to exclude women from priesthood can also be used to exclude them from Church governance. Therefore, women ought to participate equally in all areas of Church ministry. James and Okemwa however, argue that women can liberate themselves and be able to claim

leadership roles for themselves if they are aware of what is wrong with the system and can analyse the situation they find themselves in. This study considers the role of women in the Church in chapter five (5.3).

Ruether (1985) explores the possible liturgies for women responding to the failure of Christian institutions to meet their needs. She identifies women-Church as one aspect of Church for today. The author observes that institutional churches do not have a monopoly of truth, salvation and grace. She therefore, advocates for a symbolic universe that deals with various forms of dualism such as the masculine and the feminine, mind and body, society and nature and between races and classes. What can be done to address the role of women in the Church in Kenya? The present study establishes the role of prophetic women in addressing the place and the role of women in the Church.

Okemwa (1993), Hinga (1994), Nasimiyu-Wasike (1994), Fiorenza (1995), Oduyoye (1995), Tamez (1995) and Wamue (1996) discuss various forms of violence against women. These authors concur that violence against women is not limited to one specific class, culture or race. It cuts across social differences in life. Feminist theologians address the issue of violence so as to conscientize

women on the various forms of violence and to explore ways of dealing with them. The authors also question what the Church is doing for women as victims of violence. Hinga suggests that women should take up the pastoral challenge and be pastors unto themselves as well as to the Church. This will give them a forum for pointing out where the Church errs and/or fails in its mission of liberation. The above discussion raises the following questions for our study. First, are women in Kenya aware of all forms of violence, meted against them? What has been the role of women theologians in fighting violence against women?

Hinga (1989), Nasimiyu (1989), Nthamburi (1991), Martey (1994), Hopkins (1995), mention that Christology is contextual and multifaceted. The beliefs and practices around Christ have to be shaped and given content by different faith communities. Hence, contemporary Christology must address specific contexts. Hinga discusses the various images of Christ. For her, Jesus is a personal saviour and friend. Other African theologians have conferred on Jesus titles such as 'elder', 'chief', 'warrior', 'king'. These are exclusively male titles and as a result, they have been used to isolate women from sharing the image of Christ. Since Christology is contextual and multifaceted, there is need to

identify the images and beliefs about Christ in the Kenyan context.

Fiorenza (1983), Stanton (1985), Oduyoye (1990) and Okure (1990) underline the value of the Bible in the lives of women. The authors also observe that the Bible is strongly patriarchal. They call for a re-reading and a new interpretation of the biblical stories from women's perspective. Okure (1990) re-reads Genesis 1, 2 and 3. In her understanding, the fact that all the ills of humanity are blamed on woman is based on a misreading of these accounts and the failure to identify the distinctive purpose of each of the narratives. This study notes that no reading of the Bible is neutral.

The above literature review clearly shows that African women are interested in Feminist Theology. The issues of concern are numerous due to the varied circumstances in which these women live in. As King (1994:13) observes: "Feminist Theology has been seeded in the Two-thirds World with the result that it is growing in different soils, all producing rich harvests of their own kind".

The growth of Feminist Theology as a subject of inquiry, however, demands that its dimensions are identified and developed contextually. This calls for studies on various aspects of the

subject in various socio-cultural locations. This study focuses on the definitions, methods and the major themes in African Women's Theology in Kenya as a contribution towards the development of the subject.

### **1.8 Conceptual Framework**

A number of feminist theories could be used in this study as they have been critical of the existing unequal relations between women and men. They also underline that whenever women were subordinated, they recognized and protested that situation in some form (Lerner 1993). Feminist protest of the minority in status always threaten and therefore, is opposed by the more dominant majority – men. But such protests have hardly improved women's position in relation to men in society. Let us consider a few examples:

Liberal Feminism, (Friedan, 1963, Bem 1993) identifies the basis for inequalities as the sexual division of labour and the existence of public and private spheres of social activity. Men's primary location is the former and women's is the latter. Consequently, children are socialized to fit into spheres appropriate to their gender to ensure the status quo. The key forces in the system is sexism which "partly consists of prejudices and discriminatory

practices against women and partly of taken-for-granted beliefs about the natural differences between women and men that suit them to their different social destinies (Lengermann & Niebrugge 1996:450).

To eliminate gender inequalities, liberal feminists propose the use of existing political and legal channels for change, developing equal economic opportunities and provision of education among others. This will ensure that people are no longer socialized into rigidly compartmentalized sex roles. Sexism will also be challenged wherever it is encountered in daily life. (Jaggar 1994, Lengermann & Niebrugge 1996). The above position is important for this study as it identifies modes of change. This study underlines the important role played by education on gender and women's concerns in eliminating gender inequalities.

Marxian feminism intellectually elaborates social theories of oppression. It brings together Marxian class analysis and feminist social protest. Using Marx and Engel's ideas as a basis, Marxian feminism identifies the family as an institution in which a system of dominant and subordinate roles are developed. The patriarchal nature of the family ensures that authority is vested in the male head of the household and that property is passed through the

male line. The woman's role is to bring forth offspring and care for them. This arrangement allows men greater material advantage and freedom.

For contemporary Marxian feminism, gender relations within the structure of capitalist class system are important in explaining inequalities between women and men. It is argued that the "quality of each individual's life experiences is a reflection first of his or her class position and only second to his or her gender" (Lengermann & Niebrugge 1996:456). Hence, women of different classes have fewer life experiences in common than women of any particular class have with the men of their class. But, within any class, women are less advantaged than men in their access to material goods, power and status. The causes of inequality lie in the organization of capitalism itself. The solution to gender inequality, therefore, is the destruction of class oppression through revolutionary action by a united wage-earning class.

The above theories are based on the European and American conceptualisation of society and family. As such, they do not reflect the African reality. For instance, Lewis (2004:28) identifies culture as a site of localized struggles and transformations. For Lewis, there is need to consider cultural studies to precisely

account for gender relations in Africa. This is a valid observation, however, the dynamism and fluidity of culture need to be taken into account as there is no monolithic African culture.

A number of authors have argued that there is a marked difference between African and western societies. For one, not all African communities are patriarchally organized. Amadiume (1997), therefore, demonstrates that a strong matriarchal legacy throughout Africa has allowed women to acquire unique powers, wealth and positions of authority. This means that some of the fundamental assumptions in the investigation of gender do not fit the African reality. In this regard, Steady (2004:46) identifies the belief in the universal subordination of women and the separation of the public and private spheres into gendered spheres. In her view, this gives men an advantage for participating in the public sphere while seeking to explain asymmetrical relations between women and men. However, such theorization ignores how social location confers power and privilege. For example in Africa, women may derive power from their position in religious systems as well as their roles as mothers in both matrilineal and patrilineal societies. Changes in lifecycle can also alter women's status so that "postmenopausal women can assume political

functions and serve as elders and advisers on the same basis as men” (Steady 2004:48).

Another notable challenge in conceptualising relations between women and men in Africa is that sex – gender distinctions developed in the West do not necessarily apply to the African context. Amadiume (1997) argues that biological categories can be misleading in studying gender since either sex can assume socially viable roles as male or female.

The discussion above underlines the need for conceptual frameworks that take into account the diversity in the African reality and the need to address specific political goals. In line with the above, this study adapts the Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework as developed by Moser (1986). It is also presented in “Two Halves Make a Whole: Balancing Gender Relations in Development” developed by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC, MATCH & AQOCI, Ottawa 1991).

The starting point in this conceptualization is the recognition of women’s subordinate position in diverse societies. The need to account for contextual differences in such subordination is

underlined. It is noted that in any society, what women and men do, and what are seen as male and female characteristics vary enormously. Yet women's work (perspectives) are usually valued less than men's. This lower valuation of perceived female characteristics and activities results in women being viewed as subordinate to men economically, academically and in terms of power status by both women and men.

To improve this situation, it is important to take conscious and systematic effort by various stakeholders to ensure gender equity. This would imply identifying ways of overcoming the underlying barriers to equal participation such as unconscious bias and aiming at equity of impact and not equality of opportunity.

Second, gender is seen as a social construct. Thus, gender characteristics and identities are not universal but vary from culture to culture. They are also dynamic and change over time. Both women and men create and maintain what women are and do. Men and women however, suffer unequally from the current situation. To address such imbalances, it is important to consider how the relationship is structured attitudinally, socially, institutionally politically and economically.

Third, the Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework underscores the need to take into account the variations in women's experiences which differ with class, race, culture, age and sexual orientation among other variables. The needs of women in specific contexts ought to be identified. In this effort, women's strength and uniqueness, self-respect and the complementarity of male and female aspects are considered. Finally, it is important that change strategies take into account specific immediate needs as well as the concerns of wider populations.

What then can be said to be the import of Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework for African Women's Theology in Kenya? What questions and analyses does it afford a study of this magnitude? In this regard, the following points are valid. First, the conceptualization affords us an opportunity to position African Women's Theology in the institutions of higher learning and seminaries selected for the study.

Second, the consideration of gender as a social construct that is dynamic and varies over time, space and culture is important for this study. This enables us to consider varieties in the development of African women theology. Of particular importance is the identification that both women and men create and

maintain what women are and do. The relationship between women and men in the various ecumenical theological consultations spurred the development of African Women's Theology as we shall see in chapter two. Thus, Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework offers constructive critique of existing ideas and practices in institutions of higher learning hence paving way for improvement by including feminist perspectives in theology.

Finally, the framework accounts of diversity in women's experiences is worth noting. These explain the differences in the issues of concern in Women Theologies in various contexts. In chapter five, the selection of themes in African Women's Theology in Kenya is a pointer to the significance of diversity in Women's Theologies. Consequently, the framework caters for the need to formulate a change strategy that targets specific aspects, in our case, the lack of women's perspectives in the Theology and Religious Studies curriculum.

The Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework also underlines the importance of understanding the dynamics of power relations between men and women in order to articulate the participation of both genders in all spheres of life. This is in line with the

emergence of Women's Theologies in Africa which depended on associations and sharing of ideas between men and women interested in theology.

Throughout the work, a feminist perspective is utilized. This enables us to acknowledge the participation of women in human existence and to reclaim the category – human being for women (Schmidt 1993:93). This approach invalidates the traditional universalist claims that man is the measure of all things and that this does not change over time. Thus, generalizations are broken down and constructive critique of existing ideas and practices is offered. In essence therefore, a feminist perspective enables the researcher to consider women's experiences as the starting point and also take into account male perspectives in order to provide a human reality.

The use of Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework in research is beneficial in that first, it enables the researcher to be specific and particular. One therefore, has to underline the context of the research. Once contextuality is underlined, it is possible to verify the findings and generalized views are avoided. For example, with regard to the role of women in the Church, the researcher would have to name the Church and inquire into the structure and

organization of the particular Church. Thus, he/she would have to ask, who are the leaders? Are they women or men? What is the ratio of men to women?

Second, researchers have to ask gender responsive questions. For instance they ask: How many members does the Church have? What is the ratio of women to men? Are there roles reserved for a specific gender? Which ones? Why is this the case? Third, visions of hope are explored from the perspective of both women and men. Thus, the researcher may ask: What is to be done in order to change the situation? By whom? When will it be done? How will these changes influence the role of women and men? What would be the benefits of such changes to all members of the Church?

Finally, gender sensitivity is stressed. The relationship between male and female contributions, participation and definitions are analyzed as these are of basic importance in Gender Analysis Conceptual Framework. This is pertinent in the present study on the response to African Women's Theology in Kenya. This is because the participation of women and men in studying theology has influenced the development of the theology.

## 1.9 Research Area

Research was carried out in eight institutions of higher learning. These included four public universities and four institutions owned by specific religious organizations as follows:

### (a) Public Universities

- University of Nairobi
- Moi University
- Egerton University
- Kenyatta University

### (b) Private Universities

- St. Pauls United Theological College, Limuru (St. Paul's)
- Daystar University
- Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) and
- University of Eastern Africa (Baraton).

The above named institutions were selected for the following reasons:

1. During a pilot survey, the researcher noted that there are theological institutions in Kenya that offer theological education to both men and women. Some of these are sponsored by particular churches. It was also

noted that most of the students are members of specific churches such as the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA) the Methodist Church of Kenya (MCK), and the Anglican Church of Kenya (ACK). By use of purposive sampling, we selected St. Pauls United Theological College as Women Theologies is studied at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

2. These institutions of higher learning offered Religious Studies as an academic discipline.
  - (i) The last four are church-sponsored. They also offer a specialization in both Theological Education and Religious Studies.
  - (ii) The first four are public universities, which offer Religious Studies as an academic discipline. The sampled institutions therefore, are representative of the kind of universities that are found in Kenya.
  - (iii) Egerton University has an established Department of Gender Studies. It was noted that the presence of this department influences the teaching of courses related to gender in Religious Studies as well as other academic subjects. Also, Kenyatta University has Centre for Gender Studies.

(iv) The ratio of male and female staff in the departments of Religious Studies in these institutions greatly varies.

Research was carried out at the headquarters of church-based organizations. In this category, we selected the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), Seventh-Day Adventist (SDA) and the Kenya Catholic Secretariat (KCS). These organizations were chosen because they had women's desks, which are in charge of women activities in the churches and in society. These desks were an important source of information on women and men who are interested in Women Theologies as well as those women who are ordained and their whereabouts.

## **1.10 Methodology**

### **1.10.1 Acquisition of Data**

Two research methods were used to facilitate the acquisition of both primary and secondary data. These are field and library research.

#### **A. Field Research**

This was carried out by use of the following methods: Interviews, respondent questionnaires, and participant observation.

## 1. Interviews

Interviews were conducted with the following respondents:

(a) Faculty members in departments of religious studies in universities and members of staff teaching theological courses in the theological institutions. The researcher used stratified sampling method to identify respondents as follows:

- Where the members of staff were less than ten, half of them were interviewed.
- Where the members were more than ten, the researcher first classified them according to gender, then randomly selected half from each gender. When the group was homogenous than half, the population was randomly selected.

In all the aforementioned institutions, we interviewed the heads of departments and at least two members of staff. Consequently, we interviewed:

- Heads of departments ( $1 \times 8 = 8$ ).
- At least two staff members of teaching staff ( $2 \times 8 = 16$ ).
- At least two other members of staff handling theological courses in the institution ( $2 \times 8 = 16$ ).

At the headquarters of the NCKK, SDA and KCS, we interviewed the co-ordinators of the women's desk and their assistants. In this category, we interviewed at least eight people. The researcher also identified and interviewed other feminist theologians through the organizations mentioned above. In total, forty-six people were interviewed.

We also interviewed students who had studied Women Theologies in two institutions. These institutions were randomly selected and the groups were constituted by their lecturers. The institutions whose students we interviewed are Kenyatta University and St. Pauls' United Theological College. At Kenyatta University, the number of students identified was ten – five women and five men. These were divided into two groups each with male and female representation. The students from St. Pauls were six. They were interviewed as a single group. The information was recorded on cassette tapes and notebooks as was appropriate.

## **2. Respondent Questionnaires**

Two types of questionnaires were used. First, there was a general questionnaire, which was filled by all the people identified in various institutions. The first questionnaire was aimed at determining the respondents' attitude and knowledge of feminism

in general and feminist perspectives in theology in particular. The responses enabled us to select those who were concerned with and were resourceful in Feminist Theology for in-depth research. Resourcefulness of individuals depended on their responses to the general questionnaire.

The researcher then administered a second questionnaire to those who were identified as resourceful persons by use of the first questionnaire. Specific questions on our area of study were asked. These included definitions and content of courses on Women Theologies, among others. The number of respondents to the second questionnaire was determined by the responses to the first questionnaire. The researcher administered the second questionnaire to sixteen respondents. Most of these were those individuals teaching courses on Women Theologies and gender. It is them who were in a position to respond to specific questions on the various aspects of our study.

The second questionnaire was also administered to ordained women ministers, Roman Catholic nuns and women who have studied theology. These were identified through the women's desks and the headquarters of Church organizations. In this category, eight women were interviewed.

### 3. Participant Observation

The researcher participated in a church service focusing on women's experiences. This was an illuminating experience outside the lecture room.

The service was organized to mark the World Women's day celebrated on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March yearly. The selection was based on the fact that this was the only time of the year when all aspects of worship in the S.D.A. church were conducted by women and the service focussed on issues concerning women.

One of our informants (name withheld) influenced the choice of New Life S.D.A church on Ngong Road in Nairobi. In her view, the church had a vibrant congregation majority of whom were women. Many of these were professionals in various fields; namely: teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers and secretaries among others.

During the service, the researcher noted the names of six women who took leading roles during the different stages of the service. We later asked them questions on the service. The discussions were illuminating as our observations were explained and their

objectives clarified. The following are some of the questions we asked:

- Who prepared the sermon?
- What were the sources of the teachings presented during the worship service?
- How did the congregation respond? In this regard, we asked whether the presenters received specific messages from male and female members of the congregation after the service.
- Why did the presenters choose to focus on women in difficult circumstances?

We noted that through the various activities, the congregation was conscientized on various issues affecting women. Their participation in the religious, economic, social and political spheres of life were critiqued.

### **Library Research**

Secondary data were collected from libraries in the following institutions, Hekima, the Jesuit School of Theology, Tangaza College, University of Nairobi, AACC, NCCCK, KCS, Kenyatta University and St. Pauls' United Theological College, Limuru.

Books, journals, magazines, bulletins, newsletters on the area of study were also utilized.

### **1.11 Data Analysis**

The primary and secondary data were then organized according to the research objectives. By use of descriptions, interpretations comparisons, analysis and frequency tables as the main methods of data analysis, the data were collated and presented in six chapters.

### **1.12 Problems Encountered During Research**

We set out to collect data from several institutions but this was not possible because in one institution, the male lecturer who taught a gender related course declined to be interviewed for what he referred to as personal reasons.

### **Endnote**

1. The models of Feminist Theology are classified and named differently by various authors, this is only one such classifications. Another classification is presented in chapter 2.

## CHAPTER TWO

### BACKGROUND OF FEMINIST THEOLOGY

#### 2.0 Introduction

African Women's Theology cannot be considered apart from the history and development of global feminism in general and Feminist Theology in particular within the so called First World countries. This is because these countries, especially Europe and North America emerge as a "source" of the feminist consciousness. This chapter addresses the history of global feminism in its three waves, Feminist Theology in the West and; African Women's Theology.

#### 2.1.1 The First Wave of Feminism

There may have been a long gestation period, before the first wave of feminism as vast as up to six hundred years. Although the term "feminism" was not in use, there were many individual women who worked to alleviate the problems faced by women of their time. Examples include, Christine Pizan and Mary Wollstonecraft (Sapiro 1999, Clifford 2001). These two analysed the experiences of women in their time and noted that women were not inferior to men because of their sex. Rather, it was women's disadvantaged access to education and training that

relegated them to the periphery of society due to lack of knowledge in politics, economics and religion among other spheres of life. They underlined the need to accord women and men similar education and training opportunities instead of confining them to the home and restricting their lives. Besides, they underlined the need to remunerate women and men's work equally for similar tasks (cf. Levine & Hole 1979).

The first wave of feminism emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Europe and North America. This was a period when societies were also experiencing many changes such as industrial development, geographic expansionism, a general intellectual fervent with a philosophical emphasis on individual rights and universal education (Levine & Hole 1979: 533 ff). The 'women issue' was also discussed extensively in various circles. Pioneers of the feminist movement revealed that women were an oppressed group and that this would impact negatively on human improvement (1979:534). In the present study, we refer to the emergence and development of feminism in the United States of America (USA) and occasionally draw comparisons with Britain. This choice is based on the multi-dimensional development reflected in the American case particularly the interaction of slavery, racism and sexism.

The women's rights movement had its political origins in the abolition movement of the 1830s. With the formation of the female Anti-Slavery Society in 1833, women began working in earnest on the abolition of slavery. They then quickly learned that they could not function as political equals with their male abolitionist counterparts as they were barred from membership in some organizations. In some cases they were not even allowed to speak in public. These experiences were a clear indication to them about the connection between the oppression of slaves with the subordination of women. In this regard, the activities of the Grimke Sisters –Sarah and Angelina are noteworthy. (cf. Clifford 2001:11; Levine & Hole 1979:534).

The Grimke Sisters challenged both the assumption of the 'natural superiority of man and social institutions such as the Church predicated on that assumption. This stirred the wrath of the Church, forcing the Council of the Congregationalist Ministers of Massachusetts to underline in a pastoral letter the weakness and secondary place of woman in relation to man as stated in the New Testament (cf. Levine & Hole 1979:535). Sarah and Angelina, thereafter, not only condemned slavery but also the various manifestations of male superiority that had caused a lot of suffering to women.

The subtle connection between slavery and sexism was demonstrated at a world Anti-Slavery convention held in London in 1840. During this event, women delegates were relegated to the galleries and prohibited from participating in any of the proceedings. American women delegates including Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton demanded to be accepted as full members, a demand that was contrary to English practice at the time (Rendall 1985:252). Commenting on the treatment of women delegates, Levine and Hole (1979:535) note:

. . . that society at large frowned upon women participating in political activities was one thing; that the leading male radicals, those concerned with social inequalities should also discriminate against women was quite another (issue).

These events reinforced women's growing awareness that the battle for the abolition of slavery could never be won without a battle for the abolition of women's slavery. Thus, on returning to America, Mott and Stanton continued their abolitionist work as well as pressing for state legislative reforms on women's property and family rights (cf. Levine & Hole 1979; Rendall 1985).

Eight years after the London abolitionist convention, a women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. It was organised by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, among others. It was

officiated entirely by women – no man was allowed to sit on the platform, speak or vote. For the first time in the world's history, men learned how it felt to sit in silence when questions in which they were interested were discussed. The Declaration of Sentiments at Seneca is perhaps the most famous document in the history of feminism. Led by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the convention presented sentiments and resolutions with regard to the place of women in relation to men in society as well as their rights as human beings. Examples include the right to elective franchise, the equality of men and women, the right to proper education and profitable employment, among others. (cf. Rothenberg 1998; Rendall 1985; Levine & Hole 1979).

Clearly then, the first wave of feminism aimed at ensuring equal economic and legal rights for women and men. The best-known champions of this first wave of feminism were Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Due to their persistence, women in USA won the right to own property. This also paved the way for the success of women's suffrage.

In the course of this struggle, the pioneers of the first wave of feminism were met with the argument that these activities were not only unnatural for women but also against the commands of

the Bible. This accordingly implied that the secondary status of women in the Church and society was a reflection of God's plan for the organization of the human society. Anybody who challenged this was therefore, going against God's will. In this regard, the Seneca Falls convention denounced the perverted application of the Bible which restricted and degraded women. Consequently in the 1880s, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and a number of her colleagues directed their efforts to systematically exploring the actual status of women in the Bible. The result was "The Woman's Bible" published in two parts, in 1895 and 1898 (Clark 1996:246ff).

In the Woman's Bible, the writers argue for women's rights as reflected in the Old and New Testaments. The writers hoped to reclaim the Bible for feminism. They believed that by doing so, a major obstacle would be removed from the path of equality for women. Indeed, leaders of the time had quoted the Bible to impress on the position of woman as secondary to man and her 'natural' place being the home. Here, she could fulfill her religious role as mother and wife.

Commentaries by Stanton and her committee were informed by the enlightenment movement that influenced intellectual

endeavours in Europe and America at the time. As a result, they reflected the belief of that time that the Bible was not an infallible book. Rather, it was a human document which was written in a number of cultural contexts. But they concurred that the Bible contained divine truth. In it, God the creator “had established laws for the smooth operation of the world” (Mac Haffie 1986:114). These laws were to ensure justice, liberty, happiness and the wellbeing of all human beings- women and men.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her committee embarked on interpreting biblical texts where women were mentioned. Where women were degraded and made subordinate, such material was regarded as a reflection of ‘the male domination of the cultures in which it developed’ (Mac Haffie 1986:115). Biblical authors were also praised for ‘writing in a manner that suggested the equality of the sexes’ (Clark & Richardson 1996:249).

From the above discussion, we note that the first wave of feminism addressed itself to a variety of concerns. These were fairly similar to those raised by individual women before this wave. However, their activities were effectively planned and executed in ways that could not be ignored. Consequently, Stanton found it important to write commentaries on biblical

passages relating to women. In her view, the Bible was a primary source of Western values. Its interpretation constituted a powerful form of internal bondage for women. This is in view of the fact that all aspects of it were presented as the divine law. She argued that, liberation could only be possible if women were also liberated from restrictive and repressive social authority, especially internalized religious authority. Thus, the commentaries were meant to prove that all they were asking for was justice which God also affirmed for all human beings. It is noteworthy that much of the work done by this group of women is remarkably similar to contemporary biblical scholarship being conducted by women today.

After the Nineteenth Amendment to the USA Constitution in 1920 that gave women the right to vote, feminism in the USA seemed to die off. This is because, for many, suffrage was the ultimate goal of feminists at this period. What followed was a quiet time devoted to an intense and active rethinking of the terms of feminism and feminist action.

It is also noted that in the 1920s, feminists had difficulties attracting young women to their cause. As Sapiro (1999:510) rightly observed:

. . . young women, especially those who were college educated, believed that there really was no battle left to fight . . . They could vote, drink, smoke and it seemed, dress as they liked . . . women had gained their freedom and the public press agreed with them.

This was, however, only as far as the public eye was concerned; some women continued to fight for feminist change through their jobs, through women's organizations or; through religious and ethnic associations (cf. Sapiro 1999:512ff). It is the two World Wars and the economic depression that overshadowed the efforts and demands of feminists. Thus by the end of the 1950s, feminism was associated with ancient history. Since younger women did not refer to prior struggles and events, the women did not even have a name for the problems they faced at the time as reflected in Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963.)

### **2.1.2 The Second Wave of Feminism**

The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s in North America and Western Europe (cf. Sapiro 1999; Clifford 2001). In the USA, this wave converged with the struggles of African-Americans for civil rights. At this time, America was increasingly affluent and its growth potential seemed unlimited. Besides, the post World War II economic boom drew women into education and the job market at a higher rate than it was in the 1950s.

These events that occurred influenced people's perceptions of their situation. For example, divorce rates began to rise leading many people to question whether life was as good as it could be (cf. Sapiro 1999:511).

In due course, a number of new social movements unfolded that called people to critically evaluate their lives. Examples include, the Black Civil Rights Movement and the Free Speech Movement. These movements sparked student activism nationwide and provided training ground for many social activists who went on to lead the emerging women's liberation movement.

The first real signs of a new womens' movement came in the mid-1960s. This was as a result of the activities of the women who were involved in various political activities on behalf of women, especially those who had been commissioned to research on "The Status of Women in the USA" by President John F. Kennedy in the 1960s (cf. Sapiro 1999: 510). Besides, between 1964-1966, various events occasioned the rise of a new mass movement. The events involved a variety of women: the young, old, college educated and political activists, among others. The events incited parallel developments and consequently, a large complex social movement on behalf of women.

One part of the movement originated in the South. This was the Student Non-violent Co-ordinating Committee (SNCC) which directed its efforts on registering African-Americans to vote. White men and women from the North joined the SNCC efforts in a remarkable bi-racial political effort organized by African-Americans (Sapiro 1999: 511). Several issues emerged in the course of the political effort. These included:

- Relations between Black and White activists.
- Treatment of women within the movement.
- Sexual relations.
- Suspect motives among African-American men, White men, African-American women and White women. (Sapiro 1999:511).

In due course, women began to raise questions and debated about the position of women in the Civil Rights Movement. The reason for this was that women were being subordinated and their efforts thwarted in the movement. This prompted two White women-Casey Hayden and Mary King to write a paper on the "Sexual Caste System" they saw within the Civil Rights Movement. What was more frustrating was that subordination of women's efforts was repeated in other organizations and activities too. For instance, at an annual conference of state commissions,

the women involved identified and "thoroughly documented women's second-class status". But these women were not allowed to do anything to correct the problems they had been assigned to study. This is because their ideas were in opposition to those of the political mainstream (Freeman 1984:514; Sapiro 1999:512).

In 1966, the women decided that the way to address their secondary status was through the formation of a distinct organization aimed at women's rights which they called National Organization for Women (NOW) with Betty Friedan as president. NOW had a formal organizational structure and paid-up officers. It concentrated on legal and policy change matters. As a result of rigid structure, it was viewed as conservative. This made many women to break away from it to form other groups.

Between 1968 and 1969, women associated with the women's movement formed small groups such as the Chicago Westside group, the Redstockings in New York and Bread and Roses in Boston. These groups' members were younger and more radical in their approach to issues of unequal status between men and women. Soon, these women working in the many groups realized that these same problems were faced by other women. This realization helped to mobilize the women into action.

Consequently, women began to organize demonstrations to attract national attention to their demands. Examples are the 1968 protests staged at the Miss America Contest and August 1970 Women's Strike for Equality (cf. Sapiro 1999:512f).

From the above discussion, we note that the second wave of feminism was as a result of many different groups working towards varied goals. At certain stages, these groups could work together to achieve a common goal. Within the various groups, rifts could develop due to varied concerns, issues and varied viewpoints of priority for the groups or even individuals within groups leading to fragmentation. Sapiro (1999:513) mentions that:

. . . feminists could specialize in particular concerns; abortion, childcare, employment discrimination, sexuality . . . . Some women felt that their concerns were being neglected and some argued that concentration on such issues as professional employment, higher education and women's studies was elitist and of little relevance to most women.

As a result of these developments, discernible branches of the women's movement emerged. Some were labelled radical, and others, conservative.

Another notable development in the women's movement was occasioned by the inclusion of women studies as a new academic discipline in higher education. Thus, elaborate studies were undertaken on feminism. These showed that feminism encompassed many perspectives, largely because of the different experiences of women in various social milieu. Analysis of the different manifestations of the movement has resulted in many categorizations of feminism by scholars as discussed in 2.1.3.

### **2.1.3 The Third Wave of Feminism**

The third wave of feminism is traceable to the International Women's Year (1975) which launched the UN Decade for Women at a conference held in Mexico City. During the conference, it became clear that European and Euro-American women's experience of discrimination was different from that of other racial and ethnic groups whose history included slavery and colonialism. Such analysis was made possible by the international contacts, occasioned by the UN sponsored conference. From then on, interrogating differences among women and particularly the impact of specific women experiences on their lives became an ever important concern.

Since the early 1980s, increasing attention has been given to the difference that social location makes in the lives of women especially in the degree and kinds of struggles women face. Thus, as we noted in chapter one, African-American feminists identify themselves as 'Womanist' to draw attention to the fact that their struggles are different from those of White feminists. In this regard, Grant (1996:325) asserts that Womanist

. . . accents our being responsible, in charge, outrageous, courageous and audacious enough to demand the right to think theologically and do it independently of both White and Black men and White women.

Similarly, Hispanic women in the USA call themselves '*Mujeristas*' in order to demarcate their particular social locations and identities. Nature calls them together and helps them understand their oppression. It underlines the nature of their theology as one that always used liberative lens in its reflection on Christianity and Hispanic culture (Isasi -Diaz 1996:331 ff).

In highlighting diversity, the third wave of feminism recognizes differences among women even those who consider themselves feminists. These differences account for the great variety of women's experiences. Differences create awareness of the rich scope of feminism and underline the interlocking systems of

oppression (racism, sexism, ethnicism and classism) operating in society.

Thus, one important development in the third wave of feminism is the fact that differences among women are not ignored or merely explained away. They are recognized and accepted as part of a healthy process which ensures respect for varying human experiences.

In the course of the third wave of feminism, feminist voices challenge the Christian tradition with renewed vigour. The basic argument for women's rights is justice and the Church cannot be exempted from ensuring justice for women and men. Christian feminists have challenged practices of churches that force them into subordinate roles and exclude them from shaping fair Church policies and doctrines. They also criticize the values and ideals of Christianity that have abetted the subordination of women (cf. Clark 1996:309).

#### **2.1.4 Categorization of Feminism and Feminist Theology**

We have noted earlier that there are varied categorization of feminism by scholars. In this study we shall consider one such categorizations by Clifford (2001:23) who identified four major

types of feminism. The categories are liberal, cultural, radical and socialist feminism. These underline various theoretical orientations that have been utilized in feminist studies. Let us discuss these four categories below.

First, is liberal feminism which emphasizes civil rights. Feminists who are classified as liberal are concerned with the achievement of the full equality of women with men in all spheres of societal life. Such equality is possible if all the barriers that deny women full access to legal, political, economic, religious and civil rights as autonomous adults are removed. Liberal feminists also insist that women and men should have equal access to all structures of society including ministerial positions in the Church.

Since the 1960s, the struggle for equality between women and men has expressed itself in a variety of ways. Examples include:

- Passing legislation that ensures equity in pay for women.
- Women gaining access to leadership roles that have been traditionally closed to them such as holding political office and being chief executive officers in societal institutions.
- Emphasis of individual freedom of women. Thus women can freely make decisions about their own bodies, sexuality and reproductive health.

Second, there is cultural feminism. It emphasizes the moral superiority of women over men due to their maternal role. Cultural feminism also underlines the importance of values traditionally associated with women namely; compassion, nurturance and peacemaking. It exists wherever women and men emphasize the notion of complementarity to define the roles of women and men as distinct while positively disposed to female partnership with males.

Thirdly, there is radical feminism. This is a 20<sup>th</sup> century development that envisions feminism to be concerned with more than social equality for women. In their social analysis, they emphasize patriarchy as the main cause of societal problems. They therefore, seek to eliminate every form of male domination in every facet of societal life.

The fourth is socialist feminism. Unlike radical feminism which attributes women's oppression solely to patriarchal ideals, socialist feminism locates women's oppression within the broader context of an economic class struggle. It, therefore, blames capitalism for the subordination of women since in capitalist societies, "those who control the means of production also define the division of labour according to sex and race" (Clifford

2001:24). They stress that liberation of women is possible through a major social reform. Thus, women and men of all classes should have the same opportunity to be gainfully employed and to be actively involved in domestic work.

Feminist scholarship around the globe has also indicated that feminist practice and theory that developed globally was different across countries because of distinctive histories, culture, social structure and problems (Sapiro 1999:514). The women who reflected on the issues affecting their gender belonged to specific churches. Consequently, feminist theological explication reflects the secular divisions of feminism discussed above. This is because Feminist Theology is public in character and as Clifford (2001:33) explains, "part of the public situatedness of feminist theologians is in their relationship with feminism that exists today". A look at the different types of feminist theologies illustrates this. In this work, we adopt Clifford's classifications of feminist theologies as revolutionary, reformist, and reconstructionist (Ibid:32ff). Clifford clearly outlines the position and proponents in each group. The causes and remedies of women's secondary status according to each group is also clearly discussed as shown below.

## 1. Revolutionary Feminist Theology

This type of Feminist Theology is influenced most by the radical wing of secular feminism. According to this group of feminists, the problem with Christian religion is that it is irredeemably patriarchal. Because of this, many revolutionary feminist theologians such as Mary Daly are post-Christian. They have insisted that if women ever hoped to be liberated, they must cast aside Christianity and the patriarchal legal codes influenced by the Bible. This is because of:

. . . the centrality given to the revelation of a male God, whom they believe is used to legitimate the patriarchal oppression of women by Christian churches (Clifford 2001:33).

Thus, Mary Daly proclaims that "the death of God the father is necessary for the liberation of women" (1973:19). This is because as long as God is perceived as male, "the male is God". This is in view of the fact that there exists a world-wide phenomenon of sexual caste. This global sexual caste system involves birth-ascribed, hierarchically ordered groups whose members have unequal access to goods, services, prestige and wellbeing. This exploitative system is masked by gender role segregation. Christianity, a patriarchal religion legitimates and reinforces this unjust system by spiritualising it.

As a result, many revolutionary feminist theologians have abandoned Christianity as oppressive to women. They have turned to ancient goddess traditions and envision goddess to be an appropriate symbol for the creative power of women (cf. Clifford 2001:34). Daly recommends that women should form 'sisterhoods.' For her,

. . . sisterhood is an exodus community that goes away from the land of the fathers . . . . It is an exodus community that, perhaps for the first time in history is putting --- the liberation of women first. It is . . . a sisterhood of women (that) opens out to universal horizons, pointing outward to the sisterhood of man (1972:327-333).

What this means is that the sisterhoods have to go out from the land of the fathers into an unknown place because of the unfulfilled promises in women's lives. Such promises have remained unknown as the women's voices have remained muted for a long time. Consequently, whole new religions must be constructed in which women name reality for themselves. In this, new concepts, images and stories have to be formulated to replace the old. These will come out of women's experience of the supreme being.

## **2. Reformist Christian Feminist Theology**

This is the second type of Feminist Theology. Unlike revolutionary feminist theologians, reformists are not looking for sweeping changes that totally revolutionize Christianity. They do not want to replace God with a goddess or other spiritual being as they are committed to the Christian tradition.

Reformists are opposed to gender bias in the treatment of women in their families, churches and civil societies. They are however, divided on what should be done to eradicate this bias. Thus, those in Protestant circles assert that they can solve the problems of women's secondary status with resources such as better translation of the Bible and more emphasis on egalitarian passages in the Bible. In the Roman Catholic church, proponents hold deep respect for the Roman Catholic tradition and its institutional authority, yet maintain that women need to be more included in the life and leadership of the Church (cf. Clifford 2001:33ff).

It is in line with the above sentiments that Ruether seeks to interrogate and reformulate Christian traditions in a manner conducive to the full humanity of women. Her guiding principle is that:

. . . any aspect of tradition or scripture that diminishes the full humanity of women is not redemptive and cannot be seen to reflect an authentic relation to the divine (1983:18ff).

On the contrary, what promotes the full humanity of women is for the Holy. These facts are there in the Bible; some of it has, however, been concealed by traditions of biblical interpretation and translation. This is why, in reference to African Women's Theology, Kanyoro suggests that the first step towards doing African Women's Theology is cultural hermeneutics. This implies, reading the Bible with African women's cultural eyes. Cultural hermeneutics also seeks to find ways to raise the questions of accountability of the society and the Church to women and the accountability of women in taking responsibility of their lives (cf. 2001:164). Hence, African women can neither celebrate nor reject all cultural practices as discussed in chapter five.

### **3. Reconstructionist Feminist Theology**

This wing of Feminist Theology is committed to Christianity. Like revolutionary feminist theologians, they criticize patriarchy as this has led to the subjugation and secondary status of women in society. But, instead of rejecting Christianity, they believe that re-interpreting the traditional symbols and ideas of Christianity without abandoning the God revealed in Jesus is possible and

desirable. Clifford (2001:33) underlines that reconstructionist feminist theologians seek,

. . . a liberating theological core for women within the Christian tradition while also envisioning a deeper transformation, a true reconstructionist, not only for their Church structures but also of the civil society.

For this reason, reconstructionists believe in the reign of God which was proclaimed by Jesus. When properly understood, the reign of God as presented by Jesus liberates and empowers women for the fullness of life. This is mainly because of Jesus' powerful social vision incarnate in the inclusive community of women and men drawn together by him and, empowered to preach the good news of Gods' coming reign.

Many reconstructionist feminist theologians embrace the ideals of liberation theology. Hence, for them, Feminist Theology is a liberation theology that speaks from the life experience of the poor and engages in praxis that liberates them from socio-economic poverty and political oppression. And, in line with the third wave of feminism, they underline the difference that social milieu makes in studying theology. Thus, reconstructionist feminist theologians seek partnerships that transcend denominational lines and stretch across the lines of race, class, sexual orientation

and religion (cf. Clifford 2001:35). These lines of demarcation are recognized as respectful acknowledgement of difference.

Key voices in reconstructionist Feminist Theology include Jacquelyn Grant, Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, among others. Their main agenda is to incorporate women's experiences of God in primary theological sources. They also recognize the voices of male theologians in patriarchal societies. Yet, they criticize the application of these words to women and subordinate men. Consequently, reconstructionist theology praises some theologies, critiques others and draws into discussion the voices of women that have been ignored for a long time. In hearing each other in speech, these theologians seek to create transformed societies marked by equality and mutuality of women and men.

In studying theology, reconstructionist feminist theologians employ three steps. These are first, attending to people's experiences of patriarchy and androcentrism by listening to one's own experience and that of other women and subjugated men. Listening to people's experiences is important: it underlines the importance of one's social location in studying theology. These efforts reveal the impact of discrimination and subordination that

patriarchy and androcentrism promote, thus unmasking them as not of God and therefore, sinful.

Second, reconstructionist methodology involves bringing people's experiences into dialogue with a feminist reading and interpretation of the Bible and Church teachings. This requires that one is attentive to what liberates or inhibits women and men from the effects of patriarchy. Texts that contribute to the diminishment of persons are rejected. Instead, those that illuminate the struggles of women and subjugated men and provide a reason for hope in the God of life are accepted.

Lastly, reconstructionist Feminist Theology identifies liberating action as the final step in its methodology. This is because there should not be a gap between the language of liberation or what is said and the reality. Such action seeks to make a difference in the Christian community and society. In view of this, Clifford (2001:38) observes that

. . . feminist theological talk must be walked, taken into the churches, the market place, the courtroom - everywhere. The theological insights articulated by Feminist Theology flow into and out of action that seeks an end to sexism, oppression of subjugated people and by humans to the earth.

This promise of transforming lives of people, their relationships is in our view the most important aspect of reconstructionist Feminist Theology.

The three types of Feminist Theology in the foregoing discussion underline the diverse expressions of Feminist Theology. The proponents clearly give reason for their standpoints. These draw both positive and negative responses from both those who accept feminist ideals and those who do not. In our view, therefore, there is need to understand the various manifestations of feminism. It is also important to critically analyse the ideas of each strand and to identify both their positive and negative points. It is incorrect to reject all feminist ideals as extremely radical. Whereas this is true for the revolutionary feminist theologians, it is not for the reformist or the reconstructionist feminist theologians.

During the research, efforts were made to ascertain if these strands of Feminist Theology were prevalent in Kenya. However, as indicated earlier, few people outrightly admitted that they are feminist theologians. But from the responses to the questionnaire, we noted that women theologians in Kenya could be classified as reformist or reconstructionist feminist theologians. This is largely because of their response to biblical

material. Clearly, the Bible was seen as a powerful book that played a positive central role in women's lives. Thus, unlike revolutionary feminist theologians in the West, women theologians in Kenya cannot afford to reject the Bible as shown in Chapter Five (5.2).

We also noted that those who have studied feminist perspectives in theology are able to assess the various strands of Feminist Theology.

They critically analyze the ideas of each strand and place them in their proper context. They argue that rejecting any idea labelled 'feminist' is unfair to women theologians and the Church as a whole. Such wholesale rejection shuts out even the positive ideals of feminism from being utilized for the good of the Church and society as a whole. The total rejection of anything feminist was noted during the study especially during informal discussions with persons who had a negative attitude towards Feminist Theology.

Another problem with feminism is that, in the past, the feminist movement was associated with White middle class college educated women who were fighting for equal rights. In some cases, such women were either divorced or single. This may have

been due to their rejection of the kinds of violence against women common in marriages. Any individual woman calling herself feminist, therefore, stands the risk of inquiry into her private life. Woe unto her if she is single, divorced or has a marital problem. Her status will be blown out of proportion; it will be underlined that she is feminist because of her status in relation to men. This view is also recounted by Oduyoye who argues that in Africa, feminism is associated negatively with, "women who have difficulty relating to men, that is, difficulties in keeping their marriages intact through thick and thin" (1994:169). Such stereotypes have obscured the meaning of the term 'feminism', Feminist Theology as well as their noble goals.

The above discussion demonstrates why many women avoid the label feminist. In this regard, we underline that African women theologians avoided the term feminism for similar reasons. Their choice of 'African Women's Theology' in naming their theological activities is beneficial as it ensures acceptance and support for their activities. This is especially the case for those in professional Church ministry who require permission and support to attend consultations organized away from their churches. Thus, "one does not have to spend a lot of time defending their position,

ideas and motives” as long as the label feminism is avoided (Njiri O. I. Aug 2000).

It is however, worth noting that it is not possible to totally abandon the terms feminism and Feminist Theology as these are part of the history of women’s struggle against gender inequalities globally. Hence there is need to reclaim their meanings for Women’s theologies.

The discussion above has underlined different manifestations of feminism and Feminist Theology. As noted earlier in the chapter (2.1.3) such differences indicate the diversity in women’s experiences. It is within this framework of differences among women and the struggle for justice that we situate African Women Theology. Oduyoye (2001:9) sees it as a theology that “expresses aspects of global and African Christian theologies from the vantage point of African women’s experiences and locations”. This theology is discussed in the next section.

## **2.2 History of African Women’s Theology**

African Women’s Theology cannot be considered apart from the history and development of Feminist Theology in other parts of the world, especially the so called First World countries. This is

because the developed countries of the North especially Europe and America emerge as a 'source' of the feminist consciousness. But while Feminist Theology dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century as indicated in an earlier section of this chapter, African Women's Theology is much younger. We note a handful of women getting involved in theological enterprise in mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.

African Women's Theology has developed as a result of African women's association with ideas, institutions, publications and people in the First World. This is in view of the fact that women from the Two-thirds World who received theological education at various institutions in the North played a key role in planting feminist theological ideas in their home countries. African Women's Theology is, therefore, seen as having developed due to women's access to theological education up to the highest level. This is in spite of the fact that such access was given late and often grudgingly (cf. Loades 1990). Commenting on the importance of theological education, King (1994:5) notes:

. . . (it) was an important initial catalyst, but once women have become theologically empowered, Feminist Theology flourished more through informal networks ... at the grassroot level rather than in the context of traditional academic teaching.

Oduyoye also underlined the important role played by theological education in her early training. She mentions the experiences she had in various cultures of the world as having played a role in nurturing her views on the place and role of women in the Church and society. In her words, "Cross cultural experiences fueled my commitment to the promotion of the visibility of women in Church, academy and society (1990:170)". Such authors, therefore, identify the influence of other cultures, especially the feminist theological ideas in the North as having been crucial in awakening in them their own ideas of Women Theologies.

Another notable aspect in the development of Women Theologies in the Two-thirds World in general and Africa in particular is the role and initiative taken by ecumenical Christian organizations. National, continental and intercontinental ecumenical theological consultations provided a forum at which women met and had a chance to reflect on their experiences together. These reflections broadened women's understanding of their socio-cultural, political and religious situation. Besides, activities in these consultations awakened experiences of consciousness raising. The need to take seriously, women's contributions to theology were underscored.

Maluleke (1989), Lagerwef (1990) and King (1994) identify organizations whose consultations have been instrumental in the development of Women Theologies in the Two-thirds World in general and Africa in particular. These include: The World Council of Churches (WCC), Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT), Young Women Christian Association (YWCA), All African Conference of Churches (AACC), The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle) and the Institute of Contextual Theology in South Africa.

It is by participating in activities organized by such associations that women theologians met, networked and were able to reflect on issues of common concern to them. Besides, during such activities, the women were able to confront issues of sexism, classism, racism, ethnocentrism and their marginalization. They were also able to declare their stand on the position of women, to challenge the use of sexist language and the poor representation of women in various theological and ecumenical consultations (cf. Fabella Oduyoye 1988; Martey 1990; King 1994; Mpumlwana Thoke and Jordaan Roxanne 1994).

This section considers the contributions of three organizations in the development of African Women's Theology. We shall highlight

the significant moments, contacts and connections that contributed to the implanting of feminist perspectives in theology within different cultures in the Two-thirds World and Africa in particular. It is worth noting that these bodies did not always play a positive role. Sometimes, it was by omission and/or discrimination that feminist thought was highlighted (cf. Fabella & Oduyoye 1988; Lagerwef 1990).

Religion has played a double role, both as an oppressive force and as a liberating one in women's lives. On one hand, women are being oppressed by patriarchal religious institutions. For instance, some churches such as the Roman Catholic church adhere to traditions that uphold the exclusion of women from priestly ordination. At a different level, religious organizations help to bring about the transformation of women's lives and thought which lead to fundamental changes within these institutions themselves. In the next section, we discuss the WCC.

### **2.2.1 The World Council of Churches (WCC)**

The WCC is an ecumenical organization that brings together member churches worldwide. Its headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland. Because of its global influence and importance, this organization has played a particularly important role in providing

a supportive network and various forms of resources. All these have facilitated the theological development of women in many parts of the world. In this regard, King (1994:11) underlines that:

. . . in many parts of the World, the WCC has acted as an enabler for women: it has provided a supportive network, financial and human resources and many opportunities through workshops, conferences, publications and places of study all of which have helped the theological development of women in different countries.

We shall highlight a selection of significant events for the development of a feminist consciousness among Christian women worldwide and Africa, in particular. It is, however, noteworthy that the WCC did not initially consider sexism as a theological issue. This implies that even though sexism may have existed within the institution, it went unnoticed and unchallenged since it was regarded as secular.

A study on the place of women in the Church in the 1930s conducted by the world YWCA was a significant contribution in awakening the WCC to issues of sexism in the Church. It is after the presentation of the findings at the WCC inaugural meeting in 1948 in Amsterdam, that a commission was created to coordinate studies and activities relating to women within the churches. This commission received a permanent place in the

structure of the WCC in 1953 when it was incorporated in the department for the co-operation of men and women in the Church and society (Fredriks 2003:68f).

In 1967, Brigalia Bam was appointed to head the WCC department for the cooperation of men and women in Church and society. Due to her efforts, global issues of women's development and rights as human beings came on to the WCC agenda. Thereafter, sexism became recognized as a deficiency in human relations and an evil that had to be resisted and uprooted. From then on, the WCC made conscious efforts to address issues of sexism in the Church, thereby keeping pace with the developments of women in the secular society.

To address sexism, the WCC organized a consultation in West Berlin in 1974. One hundred and seventy women worldwide were gathered. The theme of the consultation was "Sexism in the 1970s". From this meeting, the participants gained important insights on the various manifestations of sexism in the Church and society. Examples included the use of sexist language in Church and the reservation of theological education for men alone in most theological seminaries (King 1994:9).

Consequently, a WCC sub-unit on Women, Church and Society established a world-wide programme on rural development. Under it, the WCC was to organize and fund consultations and programmes that placed development within the context of empowerment of women. In a period of about ten years, the WCC had funded some two hundred and thirty programmes around the globe. These programmes helped to realize a new awareness and new openings at grassroots level. These helped to forge solidarity between rural and urban areas.

In 1978, the WCC sub-unit on Women in Church and Society held a consultation for 53 women students of theological institutions at the retreat center at Cartigny in Switzerland. For the first time in the Church's history, it was noted that a growing number of women were studying theology. This was mainly because some churches had decided to ordain women. In addition, many women were taking interest in the study of theology, even if their churches did not approve of the ordination of women.

The WCC had gathered these women to ask them about their vocation, their thoughts on ministry, their dreams for the life and work of the Church. The WCC also asked them what they thought

they brought as women theologians to the Church and to theology. In response to this question, Oduyoye who was one of the participants intimated:

. . . Women theologians bring to theology the selfless way in which women are expected to live, because they are not used to power (Scott & Wood 1979:45).

In this group, there were eight women from various African countries. Pleased to discover one another, they concluded that once back in Africa, they would contact other women studying theology and bring as many as possible together in a consultation of African women in theology. For this was the "kairos moment" for African women and the real beginning of the construction of theologies and ethics from their faith experiences and perspectives (Njoroge 2001:252). The aim of this planned consultation was mainly to know one another and share their experiences, more especially, the Cartigny experience.

The Cartigny meeting is noteworthy because it empowered the women from Africa to look at theological education critically and to question the meaning of ministry. These women were also determined to discover how the Church could be responsive to the needs of women. African women theologians who were in this group and have made a visible mark in their theological work

include from Ghana, Elizabeth Amoah and Mercy Amba Oduyoye and from Kenya, Jane Nyambura Njoroge (cf. Scott & Wood 1979).

The WCC in conjunction with the AACC organized a conference in Ibadan, Nigeria in 1980 under the theme, "Women Theologians Partners in the Community of Men in Church and Society". This meeting brought together more than thirty women from eleven African countries. The position of African women who had some theological education in relation to the Church was examined. It is at this meeting that the women who were to form the backbone of The circle resolved to work towards forming an organization that would bring together women interested in theology from all over Africa. This was because of the realization that they needed to spearhead their own struggle to improve their status and the role they played in the Church and society. It was clear to the women that they would no longer depend on consultations organized by associations such as the WCC and AACC as the position of women had not changed much, despite the fact that these organizations had sponsored a number of conferences.

At the end of the United Nations (UN) decade in solidarity with women in 1985, it was observed that the position of women in

the Church had not changed much. After a number of consultations, the WCC launched an "Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity With Women" in Geneva in 1988. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, the then Deputy Secretary General of WCC took advantage of the WCC project "The Churches in Solidarity with Women" to contact EATWOT Women's Commission and to create the Biennial Institute on African Women in Religion and Culture. Besides, through the Department of Co-operation Between Men and Women in the Church and Society, the WCC was to be engaged in women issues. The WCC also vowed to support programmes related to the empowerment of women globally.

In Africa, the WCC decade was launched in Lome Togo in 1989 under the theme "Arise and Shine for the Light has Come". By this decade, the WCC was:-

... asking that the churches to respond to women's faithfulness by becoming more open to the full humanity of women through an explicit recognition of the women the churches baptize unto Christ (Maluleke 1998:54).

The decade was also an opportunity for the churches to assess how women – power functions in the Church community and what women's resources the Church must acknowledge and make use of.

Ten years later however, it was lamented that the decade did not bear much fruit. In our view, ten years would not make much difference within the context of the Church's patriarchal history of over two thousand years. Consequently, the position of women in the churches had not improved nor was there much regard for women issues. This is because most of the churches paid lip service to the pertinent issues raised by the WCC. Moreover, they lacked pragmatism with regard to the issues concerning women. Thus Maluleke (1998:56) laments:

... for African women in particular, the night of weeping is continuing for even in the most progressive Church circles, African women had not received automatic support and recognition.

This is because issues concerning women – such as their role and position had not been placed high on the agenda of the Church in Africa. Such issues and even the participation of women in theological circles has always been an afterthought. Even then, sessions dedicated to women's cause are viewed as a waste of time (cf. Maluleke 1998).

The WCC through its Department of Theological Education has contributed to the development of African Women's Theology by deliberately seeking scholarships to promote doctoral studies of African women. These scholarships are reserved for women from

the African continent. This is because it had been noted that if such a regulation was excluded, then the scholarships would easily be passed on to either men from the African continent or women from other parts of the world who are readily encouraged and supported to study theology (cf. Phiri 2001).

In conclusion, it is noted that notwithstanding the WCC's efforts to improve the status and role of women in the Church, not much has been achieved at the grassroots level churches and communities in Africa as these have not changed much. Any change must, therefore, start from these communities and target individuals' attitudes towards women for there to be any remarkable improvement. Efforts from above as exemplified by the work of the WCC are bound to fail as they are presented as directives which the grassroot communities deem foreign and hence ignore. In the next section, we address the contributions of EATWOT towards the development of African Women's Theology.

### **2.2.2 The Ecumenical Association of Third World**

#### **Theologians (EATWOT)**

The Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians (EATWOT) is an association of the theologians from the Two-

thirds World (continents) namely Africa, Asia, Latin America as well as the minority groups from the developed countries of the West such as the African-Americans, Asian Americans, Latinos and indigenous Indians in U.S.A. EATWOT's existence dates back to the mid-1970s when African students studying in Louvain Belgium under the leadership of Oscar Bimweji of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) expressed a desire to promote a theology that addressed the actual living contexts of the peoples of the Two-thirds World. These students later made contacts with those in Latin America.

The desire for a theology that addressed the Two-thirds World context was born out of the realization by the students that the theological models of the West which the students were studying did not concern themselves with the life and faith realities of the Two-thirds World. Besides, they wanted to dialogue among themselves on the common yet different theological concerns of their continents as a way of developing this theology. This initiative led to the formation of the Ecumenical Dialogue of the Third World Theologians' inaugural meeting in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania in 1976 (Okure 1995:48).

The inaugural group in Tanzania laid down its objectives as follows; first, the association was to promote dialogue, fellowship and solidarity among themselves across continents regardless of gender, class, race and denominational boundaries. This implies that from its inception, dialogue constitutes the main aim of EATWOT as a theological association. EATWOT, in the first place, seeks to dialogue with all theologies, ideologies and traditions of the members. This component plays an important role in EATWOT's self-understanding and way of studying theology.

Second, EATWOT was set to develop a theology that would be rooted in the gospel of Christ. Such a theology, would interpret the gospel of Jesus in a more meaningful way to the peoples of the Two-thirds World and promote their struggle for liberation. The theology would also take into account the life situations of the peoples of the Two-thirds World.

Third, EATWOT also desired to achieve a true and full humanity for all in Christ through making a serious analysis of the socio-cultural, political and economic contexts of these people. This is due to the fact that such context would influence people's understanding of Christ. Finally, EATWOT endeavoured to overcome the structures of dominance and injustice which keep a

wide gap between the rich and the poor among and within nations through its method of theologizing. This method begins with life and action at the grassroots, action which leads to reflection and returns to action, that is, a praxis oriented theology (Okure 1995:49).

Although the inaugural meeting in Dar-es-salaam 1976 was male- dominated, women have always attended the regional, continental and intercontinental meetings of EATWOT. In fact, much credit for the nurturing of Women Theologies in Africa and the Two-thirds World at large goes to EATWOT. This is because, the organization allowed women the opportunity to be members and therefore gave them a voice. Hence, although at the inaugural meeting in 1976 there was one woman observer whose name is not recorded in any of our sources, womens' presence steadily improved in consultations that followed.

In 1977, the Pan-African Conference of Two-thirds World theologians in its perspectives for the future underlined the need to struggle against sexism. It was impressed that African Theology must take seriously the role of women in the Church as equals in studying theology (cf. Appiah -Kubi & Torres 1979). Consequent meetings of EATWOT recorded an increment in the number of

women participants. Thus in 1992, four women were elected onto its executive committee of seven, and in 1996 a woman, Mercy Amba Oduyoye was elected as president of the organization.

The emergence of Women's Theologies within EATWOT was a result of women naming their oppression and challenging the men on it. This is because the need for Women Theologies was not automatically recognized by the men in this organization. But by the insistence of women, members of EATWOT had to hear their voices. For instance, an event which first gave a challenging orientation to African theological thinking was the EATWOT meeting held in Accra, Ghana, 1977. Then it was decided that sexism be considered as an issue of theological concern. A decisive step was taken to struggle against sexism and to reflect this in African Theology. Thus, in the final communiqué of the conference, it was stressed that if the struggle against sexism was to be taken seriously by the Church, African Theology had to take candidly the role of women in the Church as equals to men in theological praxis and in the doing of theology (cf. Marty 1990).

It was, however, at the 5<sup>th</sup> conference of EATWOT in New Delhi India in 1981 that the process of Two-thirds World women's theological reflection began. Women's voices had been emerging

and growing strong with time and quite independent with each proceeding meeting. At the Delhi meeting:

. . . it became clear to the women as a group that although EATWOT men were naming all the structures that oppress and dehumanize; everything was not taken care of and the demon of sexism existed even among liberation theologians. (Martey 1990:69).

A woman by the name Marriane Katoppo drew the meeting's attention to the need to watch the language about God and before God. Mercy Amba Oduyoye spoke of the presence of women as "the irruption within the irruption" (Oduyoye 1994:12).

On the Delhi conference, Virginia Fabella wrote;

... for the majority of EATWOT men, practice did not match theory. As liberation theologians, they spoke against all forms of oppression and their interrelatedness but they remained basically sexist in their attitude toward women's liberation and theological intervention (Fabella & Oduyoye 1988:172).

The women had realized that the evils of patriarchy and sexism not only existed in the Church and society but also in EATWOT. This is because, although the women were visible enough, their voices were not being heard.

The women took a bold step in challenging sexism and patriarchy. As a result, they refused to be victims of domination and realizing that only the oppressed can name their own oppression, EATWOT women demanded that their voices be heard. The result was the creation of a women's commission within EATWOT. This commission was seen as a sisterhood of resistance to all forms of oppression and was also expected to seek creative partnership and dialogue with the men of the association (Maluleke 1997:52).

Soon, the women developed a programme proposal that was aimed at formulating a liberation theology from a Two-thirds World women's perspective. Through national, continental, regional and international conferences as well as dialogue between the Two-thirds World women and First World women, the women hoped to reflect on what it means to study theology from a Two-thirds World women's perspective.

In 1983, the women members of EATWOT held a consultative meeting with women from the first world countries in Geneva, Switzerland. This meeting was authorized by the executive committee of EATWOT. The women in the meeting were faced with a two-fold struggle. They had to challenge the sexism of male

Two-thirds World theologians and the racism of White women of the first world. This was possible because of the women's realization that women all over the world suffered oppression because of their gender and therefore, there were commonalities in their experiences.

Another consultative meeting on Women Theologies in Africa was held in Cairo, Egypt in 1985. At this meeting, the need to reflect on women's situation was underlined. Thus, two continental meetings of respectively Anglophone and Francophone Africa were to be held. Anglophone African women met in Port Harcourt, Nigeria in August 1986. The aim of the consultation was to broaden the understanding of the women's situation in the economic, political, cultural and religious spheres. At this meeting, African Theology was described as a masculine theology. One of the participants, Rosemary Nthamburi, therefore, described it as an incomplete and inhuman theology. She impressed on the need for an African Women's Theology to complete and correct the masculine African theology. This, she argued, would make African Theology more meaningful and liberating to everyone in society (1987:107).

Francophone women met in Yaounde Cameroon in August 1986. While pinpointing the need for women's voices in African Theology, these women hoped that EATWOT would organize a Pan-African meeting between African women theologians including those of the Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox churches as these had been absent for a long time. The series of meetings culminated in an international women's commission of EATWOT conference in Oaxtepec, Mexico in December 1986.

The Oaxtepec meeting brought together about thirty women representing Two-thirds World and minority groups in the USA. The objectives of the meeting were;

- a) to broaden understanding of women's situation in its socio-economic, political, cultural and religious dimensions.
- b) to discover the vital aspects of the experiences that Christian women are having in new areas of spirituality.
- c) to re-read the Bible from the perspective of Two-thirds World women, with a view to the total liberation of women.
- d) to put into words faith reflections on the realities, the struggles and spiritualities of women.
- e) to deepen commitment to and solidarity with the goal of attaining fullness of humanity for all (cf. Fabella & Oduyoye 1988).

At this meeting, it was clear that the guidelines that had been suggested by the women's commission at its formative stages had been followed diligently. The participants recommended that the women's commission set up a network among women of the three continents namely, Africa, Asia and Latin America. The commission was also expected to pursue its programme of colloquia on both national and continental levels. The proceedings of this meeting were published in *With Passion and Compassion* and edited by Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (cf. Fabella & Oduyoye 1988).

Unfortunately, after the 1986 conference in Mexico, the international co-ordinations of the affairs of the women's commission were abolished albeit temporarily as they were proving too expensive. This negatively impacted on the development of Women Theologies within EATWOT. It meant that the women would not focus on any particular issue as a group for lack of co-ordination. They, however, took part in the affairs of EATWOT as individuals.

In May 1989, the African-American women took initiative and organized a dialogue between women of the Two-thirds World and of ethnic minorities in the USA. This was in lieu of the

recommendations that were made in Mexico, 1986. Seventy women from the Two-thirds World, and the minority groups met to analyze the contexts in which Two-thirds World women lived their various situations. The various ways these contexts affected the lives of women were discovered. This consultation, designed to begin a North-South dialogue of women, enriched their experience and shed light on their point of view concerning the many different situations lived by women in Two-thirds World contexts. Some difficulties in mutual understanding were encountered by Black women due to linguistic and cultural differences (cf. (Mbuy-Beya 1990).

A preparatory conference for the EATWOT Third General Assembly of Nairobi was held in Harare, Zimbabwe in November 1991. Seven African countries were represented at this meeting. These were Kenya, Namibia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Uganda, Tanzania and Zaire. As a result of the discussions based on various presentations, a number of recommendations were made.

" First, the centrality of the gospel of Christ as a source of messages of liberation for women was impressed on. The message of the gospel would help women to discern between the positive and negative values contained in tradition and culture.

Second, the participants challenged EATWOT to employ a methodology which would accommodate the struggle and cries of women. Christian women in Africa were also asked to think about what they would be doing to combat death and protect the lives of their children. At the end of the conference, different messages telling of the hopes and fears of African women were sent to religious women, EATWOT, Church ministers, leaders of the countries and the churches in general. These messages underline the need for the women's voice in the Church and society; dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor, justice, the need for theological education for women and the participation of men and women in the total liberation of the oppressed in society.

In 1992, the international co-ordination of the affairs of the Women's Commission which was earlier abolished was reinstated. This enabled the women members of EATWOT from all the regions to focus on a common theme. Thus, in the following five years, the women theologians focused their theological reflection on violence against women adapting the theme; "Theology of Life: Struggling Against Violence". An international dialogue on this theme was later held in Costa Rica in December 1994 by women theologians from twenty-four countries, including the First World (cf. *Voices From the Third World* 1995 Vol. XVIII No. I).

Three publications have come out of these encounters, they include:

- *With Passion and Compassion*
- *We Dare to Dream*
- *Women Resisting Violence; A Spirituality for Life.*

In 1996, the fourth general assembly of EATWOT held in Tagaytay City, Philippines adapted the theme. "A Quest for a New World Order: Challenge to Theology". This meeting was significant for Women Theologies and the EATWOT women theologizing in particular. This is because Feminist Theology and gender issues were explicitly discussed "although in a very controversial and even emotional way". (Estermann, 2003:51). All the women walked out of the room at a critical moment protesting against male refusal to give them more space within EATWOT. The meeting recommended that half the participants and speakers at subsequent EATWOT meetings would be women.

In line with the new theme adapted at Tagaytay EATWOT women's commission undertook the theme "Women for a New World Order: Response of Third World theologians". It was projected that in the subsequent five years, EATWOT women would focus on the impact of globalization on the peoples of the

Third world particularly women. The women were to make a more penetrating analysis of the reality from a gender perspective. This was because prior reflections on globalization had failed to account for its impact in a balanced manner<sup>1</sup>.

Members of the women's commission for African region focused on globalization in order to generate a more holistic and penetrating analysis of the existing reality of women in the context of a globalized economy. They noted that women and children are the most vulnerable victims to globalization as reflected in increased poverty; gender inequalities and injustice and disempowerment of the poor. The members also highlighted the need for suggesting alternatives that would result in the creation of a new world order which ensures the wellbeing and dignity of all (ibid: ix).

The fifth general assembly of EATWOT was held at Quito, Ecuador. This meeting was also a Silver Jubilee of the existence of EATWOT. It was attended by thirty-four women and twenty-eight men. For the first time in the history of EATWOT, the number of females was higher than that of male participants. A gender balance was maintained among the speakers in all aspects of the conference namely; worship, paper presentations, session chairing and panel discussions among others. Besides, gender-

sensitive theologizing was also notable on the level of theological method and language. Thus, EATWOT women's protest during the fourth general assembly made way for these significant changes in the fifth assembly.

The theme for the following five years was identified as 'Giving an Account of the Hope that is in You: Weaving Threads of Our Continuing Struggle into a Tapestry of Hope in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century'. The major issues to which a theology of hope has to give answers to include; abuse of mother earth, annihilation of indigenous peoples and invasion of the global market. It was noted that globalization has marginalized whole continents; indigenous peoples, religions and cultures. Women are still far from being equal to men while HIV and AIDS continues to spread and swallow the whole generations. EATWOT would, therefore, continue reflecting on issues on women, interfaith dialogue and indigenous peoples (cf. *Voices from the Third World* Dec. 2001 Vol. XXIV No. 2).

EATWOT has been instrumental in exposing to the world the sentiments of the women of Africa and the Two-thirds World as a whole. This is through their journal *Voices From the Third World*.

Through it, EATWOT has provided a forum for dialogue by bringing together the happenings of all the regions.

The discussion above underscores women's contributions to EATWOT's theologizing as well as EATWOT's contributions towards the development of Women Theologies. African women have contributed unique insights to EATWOT's theology. For example, in analyzing the position of women in African societies most of which are patriarchally organized, the women have brought new thinking into ecclesiological reflection. They have underlined the persistent scandal of male dominance in the Church that obscures the full symbolic presence of the Church as a sacrament of communion between God and humanity. The women have emphasized that women could perform sacramental ministry in the Christian Church. This is in view of the fact that in African religion, women's participation in the same ministry is positive. Women have also mentioned some of the benefits that would be reaped from inclusion of women in spiritual leadership. These include, the possibility of self-less service and tapping of women's talent and abilities for the wellbeing of the Church.

Women theologians in Kenya have actively participated in EATWOT's activities of international, continental and national

levels. In this regard, we underline the participation of Mary N. Getui who served as African Regional Co-ordinator, Philomena N. Mwaura who has been the co-ordinator for Women's Commission of EATWOT in Africa and Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike.

Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, organized the 1992 EATWOT general assembly in Nairobi and at this assembly, she was elected as the African regional women's co-ordinator. At the end of the same year, she was elected as the General Superior of her religious congregation, The Little Sisters of St. Francis of Assisi. The two involvements proved too much to handle therefore, in 1994, she requested Mary N. Getui to take on the work of being the African regional women's co-ordinator, which she did until the next EATWOT general assembly when she was officially elected as the African regional women's co-ordinator.

It is, however at national level where the contributions of women to EATWOTs theologizing has been notable. EATWOT Kenya was inaugurated in 1993. Pioneer members of EATWOT international endeavoured to bring together theologians in Kenya who would reflect on life challenges from their social location as Kenyans. EATWOT Kenya, therefore, set out to reflect theologically on the various themes put forward by EATWOT international from their

context. Thus, between 1993 and 1996, the members met regularly to discuss the theme of reconstruction. This was necessary because too much time had been spent on liberation yet the lives of African peoples had not improved much. There was, therefore, need for a critical appraisal of the theologies of liberation and inculturation that had informed African Christian theology during the 1980s. In this regard, Mugambi observed:

\* ... perhaps we had lingered in the wilderness for too long ... Africa had to rebuild its own ruins – from the rubble of crumbled walls and broken societies, which institutionalized racism, colonialism and the cold war legacy bequeathed to Africa's youth (1999: Forward).

In this statement, Mugambi failed to capture the reality of sexism and its impact on the African continent, African women in general and Kenyan women in particular. However, other members of EATWOT Kenya especially the women have always reflected on the issues of concern from their own perspective as women. This is largely as a result of the awareness occasioned by Mwaura's constant reminders to EATWOT women at each meeting that it was their duty to highlight the issues of concern to them as women since these were likely to be left out by the male theologians.

The contributions of EATWOT (Kenya) women theologians underline the need to consider women's perspectives, participation and efforts in all spheres of life. What comes out clearly is the fact that consideration of feminist perspectives provides new categories of thinking about God's relation to nature, human beings as well as human relations in society (cf. Gecaga 1999:28ff, Ayanga 1999:90ff, & James 1999:107ff). Besides women's vulnerability as victims of macro-economic structures such as globalization and Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) is underlined. The solution to this is

... adoption of gender-responsive and integrative policies to alleviate the condition of women .... Need to empower women to make decisions that affect their lives. (And) their talents and perspectives should be considered in the development of a new just world order in both the Church and society (Mwaura 2002:15).

Clearly, the subordinate status of women in relation to men in the Church and society as well as a need to liberate women from all that oppresses them are underlined (James 2003: 169; Ayanga 1999:104; Okemwa 2003:157). Socio-cultural practices that affect women include; imbalanced gender-based division of labour which ensures that women work for long hours, female initiation rites, polygamy and leverite marriages among others (Kahindi 2002:40). Women also bear the brunt of the devastating HIV and AIDS pandemic due to their biological make-up, secondary status

in relation to men, which underscores their inability to negotiate for safe sex and their role in society as care-givers (Gitome 1999, Samita 1999; Otieno 2002; Shisanya 2002, and Wamue 2002). The solution to all these lies in empowering women to enable them to manage their affairs, and make informed decisions for their own good, the Church and society as a whole.

EATWOT Kenya is currently focusing on the theme of Hope that was identified by EATWOT International at Quito, Ecuador. EATWOT Kenya has, however, reworked the theme in order to focus on current concerns in Kenya.

In conclusion, we note that, first, within the framework of EATWOT, African women theologians met and were able to know one another. EATWOT also enabled them to pool their experiences, to re-examine their doubts, dreams and have hopes about the future. This is because EATWOT consultations brought the women together, thus enabling them to reflect on issues of concern to them and share their experiences both formally and informally.

EATWOT Women's Commission has also done a lot in the development of African Women's Theology in Africa in particular

and the Two-thirds World in general. Here, their struggle in ensuring that any analysis is made from a gender perspective in order to present reality in a balanced manner is commendable. This is in view of their realization that the gender perspective had on many occasions been left out. The women have noted that it is vital to underline the life experience and struggles of women in order to sharpen a gender analysis, which would help in formulating humane life fostering alternatives in society.

Projects undertaken by the women's commission of EATWOT are contextual. Issues of current concern such as violence against women, the effects of the globalization process on peoples of the Two-thirds World and currently, a theology of Hope from a Holistic perspective through Inter-faith Dialogue are being addressed. It is noteworthy that the employment of gender theory in their analyses has helped in unearthing new perspectives on the issues in question. In the next section, we discuss The Circle, one of the organizations commended in its efforts towards the development of African Women's Theology

4 The idea of the formation of an African sisterhood or The Circle was also conceived within the framework of EATWOT. It is the contacts availed by EATWOT that finally put the African Women theologians together. Thus, The Circle was finally launched in

1989 following intense networking and co-ordination that had been made possible by EATWOT activities.

### **2.2.3 The Circle of Concerned African Women**

#### **Theologians (The Circle)**

The Circle was inaugurated in Accra Ghana in 1989 by about seventy-seven women from twenty-four countries. The planning had however, begun earlier in 1980 when a planning committee met during an EATWOT meeting held in Ibadan, Nigeria. Those who met comprised Elizabeth Amoah, Brigalia Bam, Rosemary Edet, Betty Ekeya, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, which Musimbi R.A. Kanyoro, Marie Bernadette Mbuy-Beya and Rose Zoe – Obianga. Their agenda was to discuss the possibilities of forming an organization that would bring together women theologians from all over Africa to deliberate on issues of concern to them. These women were responding to the dream of one woman Mercy Amba Oduyoye, had gained enthusiastic support of EATWOT women in Africa and many more. (cf. Phiri 1997; Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1990). Commenting on this dream. Musimbi Kanyoro (1962:2) mentions that:

... a dream becomes a vision when that dream is shared and passed on to others. A dream that is possessed and owned by the dreamer has little possibilities to become a vision. Leaders of vision listen to the shared wisdom of others and in the context of a community, they are able to articulate

a vision that mirrors peoples hopes and dreams. In this way, it becomes the vision of the community, arising out of the needs of the community and implemented by the community.

The women who met in Ibadan were, therefore, sharing this dream. They made a covenant to make it possible for other African women who had had theological education to discover one another and to seek how they could be a source of inspiration and encouragement to one another and an asset to both the Church and the society.

While taking into account the background of the WCC Consultation at Cartigny and the concerns that surfaced from the survey that followed it, the following objectives were placed before the participants of the inaugural meeting:

- i) To evaluate the role and contribution of African women theologians in religious institutions, family life and national development.
- ii) To analyse the content and present trends of theological education in Africa.
- iii) To discuss ways of using theological education to foster total development in Africa.
- iv) Discuss experiences and concerns of Church women with regard to the ordination of women.
- v) Undertake research geared to unveiling positive and negative cultural factors, religious beliefs and practices and myths that affect and/or influence women's lives or hamper women's development.

- vi) To encourage and empower the critical study of the practice of religion in Africa.

Through the use of EATWOT contacts, the women were to convoke more women who study theology in Africa.

During the meeting in 1989, The Circle inaugurated the Biennial Institute of African Women in Religion and Culture for a sabbatical period (1989 – 1996). Within this period, the African women were to concentrate their efforts on producing literature from the base of religion and culture to enrich the critical study of culture and the empowering practice of religion in Africa. This was because of the critical need for literature by and for African women in academia. The institute therefore, offered African women the chance to write and to be heard particularly with respect to the impact of religion and culture on the lives of women. Thus, each participant was invited to offer her written contribution in various workshops.

Women in The Circle are called “Concerned African Women Theologians” because they want to get rid of the African (male) assumption that issues of sexism only belong to a minority of disgruntled, leisure – saturated middle class women of the capitalist West. Mercy Oduyoye, commenting on whether or not African women have issues of concern notes:

... the fact is that sexism is part of the intricate web of oppression in which most of us live and that having attuned ourselves to it, does not make it any less a factor of oppression (Oduyoye M.A. & Kanyoro R.A.M. 1990).

The point underlined here is that, women in Africa suffer oppression due to their gender and they have a right and reason to be concerned. Other issues of concern are discussed in Chapter Five of this work.

The name 'Circle' gives us an understanding of the nature and direction of the organization of the women's theological voice in Africa. The use of The 'Circle' as a symbol emphasizes that this is not a hierarchical institution, although the initial founders have worked to ensure the survival of The Circle's business. Like a round table, all members have the right to share that which they feel is of concern without any inhibitions about their individual differences be it in academic level, religious affiliation or socio-economic status.

The women also include that term 'Africa' in their self - designation drawing attention to the fact that The Circle's theology is based on an African cultural context. With regard to

this, The Circle points out the distinct history of Africans, a history marked by colonialism. In Hinga's (1996:36) view:

. . . the inclusion of the term Africa then was an attempt to name the cultural and socio – historical location which is the springboard to their theology.

The objectives of the circle are discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.3.1 Objectives of the Circle's Theology**

The women who started The Circle were lonely and isolated. This is in the sense that they lived far from one another and only met occasionally in conferences and workshops organized by either African male theologians or by feminist theologians from the Euro-American North. The first objective of The Circle therefore, was to keep the African women theologians working together, communicating, and deliberating on issues that concerned them. The creation of 'the Circle' fulfilled the need of a forum through which these would be achieved.

During the inauguration meeting, The Circle embarked on a project of compiling all the books, articles in journals as well as unpublished research done by African women theologians. This was because much of these had remained unread and may be unknown in theological circles as well as in the academia (cf.

Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1990). Yet, these women were talking about their experience of God which is different from men's experience which is well covered. In response to this reality, Isabel Apawo Phiri (1997:16) of Malawi notes:

... African Theology had marginalized women and women's issues (and women's writing). The assumption here is that men's experiences of God are the same as women's experiences.

Similarly, Oduyoye (1990:22) of Ghana underlines the existing differences between men and women's experiences in religion and culture. She observes:

... We live on the same continent and belong to the same Church, but the reality is that there are many African continents. The Africa of the rich, the Africa of the poor ..., the Africa of men who command and the Africa of women who obey is experienced differently.

It is unfortunate to note that in Africa, studies on religion demonstrate that it is His-story and not Her-story that is recorded. Both stories are necessary in order to make up the human story in Africa.

The Circle also committed itself to embarking on advocating for the inclusion of studies on women in religion and culture in departments of African studies, Religious Studies and Theology in theological colleges and institutions of higher learning in Africa.

The aim was to ensure that women in religion and culture in Africa is accepted and recognized as an academic area of study.

The major project of The Circle is to contribute literature to the theological world. Hence, since its inception, the organization has encouraged and supported women to do research, write and publish their findings. This is because African women theologians realized that men and foreign researchers continued to write about them as if they were objects of research. The Circle therefore, encourages African women theologians to write and speak about the reality of being African, women and religious in a continent where religion shapes the lives and thinking of the people. To this end, The Circle has organized conferences at national, regional and continental levels. Proceedings from these consultations are in various publications<sup>4</sup>.

As indicated earlier, The Circle operates at national, regional, continental, and sometimes city and institutional levels. It has held three continental consultations to date. The first was the inaugural meeting held in Accra, Ghana in September 1989. The theme of the conference was "Daughters of Africa Arise". This was based on the story of Jairus' daughter in Mathew 5:21-43. In Phiri's (2003:5) words,

... it symbolized the rising of African women to speak for themselves on issues that concern religion and culture as they experienced them.

The second continental Circle conference was held in Nairobi in 1996 from 26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> August under the theme: “Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God”. In this meeting, officers were elected to co-ordinate The Circle’s activities. Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro was elected co-ordinator, secretaries were Dr. Teresia Hinga (English speaking) and Rev. Dr. Bernadette Mbuy-Mbeya (French speaking). The African continent was also divided into five zones according to geographical proximity and linguistic zones (Oduyoye 1997:3).

The third Pan-African consultation was held in Addis-Ababa, Ethiopia from 4-8<sup>th</sup> August 2002. The theme of the conference was: “Sex: Stigma and HIV and AIDS – African Women Challenging Religion, Culture and Social Practices”. This meeting was held six years after the second conference thereby breaking The Circle’s own tradition of meeting after every seven years out of necessity. Phiri (2003:6ff) points out that:

... the 2002 meeting was an emergency call for Circle members to respond to HIV and AIDS more systematically as The Circle – and together with the Church of Africa ... the conference marked the space in which The Circle sought ways to consolidate its acts in a systematic response.

In the spirit of solidarity, co-operation and unity, African women theologians deliberated on the need to challenge the HIV and AIDS pandemic from the perspectives of religion, culture and social practice in order to save life. The fourth pan-African Circle conference will be held in September 2007 in Cameroon.

The Circle also operates at national, regional, city and institutional levels. In Kenya, for example, there are institutional Circles, such as the NEGST, Tangaza and St. Pauls' Circle. Although the aims of these Circles are similar to those set by the continental Circle, they also have the leeway to deal with specific issues in their own social locations. In line with this, St. Pauls' Circle was inaugurated on the 20<sup>th</sup> of October 2000. The aims of this Circle were to "give each other support while working and studying theology, to share experiences, about ministry in the Church, to introduce women's perspectives in the study of theology and to do research and writing on issues of theology, religion and the Church" (cf. The Circle Newsletter Nos. 2-3, Nov. 2003- April 2004).

At its initial stages, St. Pauls' Circle membership comprised staff and students within the college. With time, The Circle widened to include alumni and women from Church organizations. It is a

mult-racial and multi-cultural Circle that reflects the St. Pauls' community and society at large. The St. Pauls' Circle is still working on its first publication on "women and violence". It is however, noteworthy that some of the members of their Circle have published in other forums of the Circle and other publications (cf. Mombo 2002, Onyango 2003).

St. Pauls' Circle has worked hard in making the institution gender responsive. Through the spirit and conviction of The Circle the number of women students studying theology has steadily increased from one or two to forty within a period of 25 years (cf. Circle Newsletter Nos. 2-3 Nov. 2003 – April 2004). This looks like a tiny number as compared to the number of women who attend Church. But a lot of effort has been put in by individual Circle members and groups to sensitize the women and encourage them to study theology. This has meant challenging some of the rules and regulations laid down to admit students which bar women from coming to the college. For instance, a student has to be recommended by his/her church to the institution. Often, the sponsoring church pays the fees. For women students, such sponsorship has been rare due to the patriarchal nature of the churches. Consequently, it has taken efforts in fundraising to bring women to the college. In this regard, the efforts of

Nyambura Njoroge, a member of the St. Paul's Circle in the Diaspora is commendable (Mombo O. I. August 2001).

The presence of Circle members in the St. Paul's faculty has ensured the inclusion of women's perspectives in the study of theology. In this regard, there are units taught at St. Paul that are worth noting. These are:-

- a) Gender and Theology
- b) African Women's Theologies
- c) Gender, Theology and HIV and AIDS.

These courses are offered both at undergraduate and graduate levels.

Teaching these courses could have been a difficult task considering that inclusion of women's perspectives in theology only dates back to the late 1990s. However, the Circle coordinator then, Musimbi Kanyoro responded by collecting and donating library resources on women and theology to the St. Paul's Theological College Library. These books and journals have been very useful for both the staff and students taking the courses mentioned above (cf. The Circle Newsletter. Nos 2-3, November - April 2004).

National Circles in Africa have authored a number of books<sup>5</sup> covering a variety of contextual concerns. This is in view of the fact that the Pan-African Circle had encouraged the establishment of independent Circles in nations, and even institutions. These Circles are free to identify issues of concern in their context, research and write on them. Once such writing is completed and peer reviewed, the continental Circle is approached for funding to publish that which they have written depending on whether the project is considered viable, in view of the content and academic writing procedures.

The Circle also encourages individuals members to publish. In this regard, we note that there have been a number of publications by individuals<sup>6</sup>. Information on such achievements is published in the Circle Newsletter and Website.

In 1996, The Circle formed commissions through which research on four specific areas was to be channelled. Individual members from various African countries were expected to conduct research and present their findings to these commissions. Then, depending on the area covered, a specific commission would hold a consultation with all the researchers. Thereafter, the findings would be published. However, at the Addis Ababa conference in

2002, The Circle did away with the commissions and developed a new plan of action to guide its activities for the next five years. In this plan of action, the need to be responsive to contextual concerns in Africa was underlined. Areas of concern were identified as follows:

First, it was noted that there was need for further research and writing on HIV and AIDS. Circle members were encouraged to bring to the fore stories of women living with AIDS and explore other forms of publication such as videos and oral histories. This was based on the fact that HIV and AIDS pandemic has gravely impacted on all spheres of life of the people of Africa. Since not all people in Africa are able to read the books, other forms of publications would reach a wider population, and hopefully counter the negative impact of HIV and AIDS.

Second, with regard to educational programming and curriculum, The Circle chose to support the WCC with regard to HIV and AIDS by:-

- i) Training counsellors for HIV and AIDS work.
- ii) Incorporating HIV and AIDS training in ministerial formation courses in the theological institutions.
- iii) Training theological faculty in HIV and AIDS.

- iv) Training both current seminarians and alumni to use the WCC HIV and AIDS curriculum.
- v) Incorporating HIV and AIDS training in gender courses in colleges and universities.
- vi) Promoting safe sex practices through educational programmes and workshops in the home, faith communities and society.
- vii) Promoting good health and nutrition and regular medical checkups.
- viii) Advocacy to counter harmful cultural and religious practices and retrieve positive ones.
- ix) Honouring women's bodies and increasing women's self-esteem.

It is important to underline that Circle members participated in the WCC consultations on HIV and AIDS. In this regard, we note that Musa Dube, one of the Circle members was employed by the WCC to become a consultant on HIV and AIDS and theological education (cf. Phiri 2003:7).

Third, the action plan also touched on areas of communication and publishing. It was noted that there was need to regularly update the membership database. This is in recognition of the fact that the institutional, national and continental Circles are

ever growing. Besides, it was important to maintain and circulate the bibliography of Circle members' publications and continually collect and collate information for the development of The Circle's website, newsletters and database.

Fourth, the general Circle membership and their mandate was outlined. In this regard, members are expected to commit themselves to research and writing especially at grassroot level and ensure that they acknowledge their respondents in the outcome of research. The members are also encouraged to volunteer their time, skills and resources in order to enhance the work of The Circle. This is particularly pertinent in editing papers presented at conferences, editing of Circle books and contributions to The Circle's website.

Lastly, it was underlined that there was need for The Circle to institutionalize itself instead of continuing to function as a movement. Exploration on a constitution as well as a permanent voice would be agreed on over the next five years. This action plan would call for more strategic budgeting and fundraising in order to meet all these commitments.

At the Addis-Ababa meeting, new Circle officials were appointed. Professor Isabel Apawo Phiri of Malawi was elected the general co-ordinator. The general co-ordination of The Circle, therefore, moved to the University of Kwazulu Natal where Phiri is based. This gathering also elected three Linguistic research co-ordinators. Dr. Helene Yinda of Cameroon, Dr. Dorcas Akintunde of Nigeria and Rev. Felicidade Cherinda of Mozambique became the co-ordinators for the Francophone, Anglophone and Lusophone regions respectively. They were to serve one non-renewable term of five years.

At a business meeting held in the course of the consultation, the African conference agreed upon changing The Circle's cycle from seven to five years. This implies that the pan-African Conference will be held every five years until further notice. The change was prompted by the members' observation that seven years was too long a period to wait in order to respond to emerging issues. For instance, due to the devastating impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, the Circle was forced to hold its continental meeting after six years. As Circle, the women of Africa had to respond to this challenge by underlining pertinent aspects of the pandemic. In this regard Kanyoro emphasized that:

. . . HIV and AIDS had challenged women in Africa to break the silence about sex and

sexuality . . . women and men ought to claim the power of speaking and to reject all harmful practices that render women vulnerable to HIV and AIDS. (3<sup>rd</sup> Pan-African Conference Report p.10).

Some of the harmful practices that render women vulnerable to HIV and AIDS were identified. These include, FGM, domestic violence and other forms of dehumanizing activities. Members felt that there was need for immediate adequate knowledge on HIV and AIDS. Prompt response to the challenges occasioned by the pandemic was mandatory. Besides, through awareness raising on various aspects of HIV and AIDS, the spread and impact of the pandemic would be checked.

The Circle's responses to HIV and AIDS were to be published in three books. Two of these are ready while the third one is still with the publisher. To equip Circle members with adequate knowledge on HIV/AIDS, The Circle entered into a partnership with the Yale Divinity School (YDS) in the USA to work in solidarity. The aim of the partnership is to examine the intersection of gender, faith, poverty and AIDS. Other partners in this project are United States AID for International Development (USAID) and Center for Interdisciplinary Research (CIRA). Under this project, African women theologians who are Circle members are invited to become Yale Research Fellows, who are funded for

training and research through CIRA. The first beneficiaries of this partnership in 2003, were Fulata Mayo from Malawi, Vuadi Vibila from the DRC and Sylvia Amisi from Kenya. They spent four months at Yale Divinity School. Professor Letty Russel of YDS commented that:

. . . the women were so successful that CIRA has proposed that we have two Research Affiliates at YDS for 8 months beginning next fall. (Circle Newsletter 2003:7).

To come up with all-inclusive holistic HIV and AIDS research projects, the participants are offered courses in sexual ethics, feminist liberation and feminist pastoral theologies, research methods, epidemiology, community health (planning and evaluation), prevention and ethics in human investigation research. These are complemented by seminars and conferences as well as peer reviews.

An assessment of the circle's objectives, initiatives and publications reveals some recurring themes. These are discussed in chapter five of this work. At this point, however, we emphasize that the issues of concern are addressed from the vantage point of African women. These are societal concerns as they affect all members of society regardless of gender. Consequently, a two-

winged theology, a theology of women and men balancing each other as they work in the Church and society is emphasized.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have briefly discussed the history of global feminism, Feminist Theology and African Women's Theology. We have highlighted the significant contacts, moments and organizations that played a key role in the development of Women Theologies in the Two-thirds World in general and Africa in particular. This development is patchy. The efforts in initiating and developing the theology are also scattered in time. This characteristic is significant as it indicates the little support and half heartedness with which issues concerning and affecting women were approached by Christian organizations. Such issues have always been secondary to the main agenda of the various organizations.

The scanty history is also a result of the dependence on Christian organizations that characterized the formative years of African Women's Theology. The women who were to implant feminist theological thought depended on the contacts occasioned by the affairs of the various organizations that they participated in. During the meetings of the various Christian organizations,

women theologians met very briefly during free time. However, with inauguration of The Circle in 1989, the efforts of African women in doing theology became more systematic. The Circle's efforts are progressive and consistent as it is clear from the literature that has been written by members. The efforts of The Circle members throughout Africa are slowly ensuring that issues on the status and role of women in the Church and society are an integral part of mainstream discussion and writing. What then are the objectives of African women theology? The following chapter addresses, the meaning, place and objectives of African

↓ Women's Theology in Kenya.

### End Notes

1. Some volumes of the Journal are noteworthy as they focus on Women's theology. These include: Women in the Two-thirds World (Sept. 1985), EATWOT Women's Theology (June 1989), Emerging concerns of Two-thirds World (1993), Spirituality for Life, Women Struggling Against Violence (June 1994) and EATWOT women on Violence (June 1995).
2. EATWOT Kenya has authored three volumes. These are *Theology of Reconstruction. Exploratory Essays* edited by Getui M. N. & Obeng E. A. (1999). *Quests for Abundant Life in Africa*, edited by Getui M. N. & Theuri M. M. (2002). *Quests for Integrity in Africa*,\_edited by Theuri M. M. & Wamue G. N. (2003).
3. The theme for EATWOT Women's Commission, adapted by the Kenya Chapter is "Towards a Theology of Hope from a Holistic Perspective through Inter-faith Dialogue". In April 2005 a consultation was held in Nakuru on this theme. The proceedings are with the editors and will be published soon.
4. - Oduyoye M. A. & Kanyoro R.A.M (eds), *Talitha Qumi* Proceedings of the Convocation of African Women Theologians 1989. Daystar Press, Ibadan Nigeria (1990).

- Oduyoye M. A. & Kanyoro R. A. M. (eds). *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition and the Church in Africa*. Orbis Books, Maryknoll N.Y. (1992).
  - Oduyoye M. A., *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*. Orbis Books Maryknoll, New York, (1995)
  - Oduyoye M. A., *Transforming Power: Women in the Household of God*. Proceedings of the Pan African Conference of the Circle of 1996 Sam-woode Ltd. Accra. (1997).
  - Oduyoye M. A., *Introducing African Women's Theology* Sheffield Academic Press Ltd. Sheffield ( 2001).
  - Kanyoro R.A.M. & Njoroge J.N. eds. *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God*. Acton Publishers, Nairobi. (1996).
  - Njoroge N. J. & Dube M. W. (eds). *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Cluster Publications Pietermaritzburg (2001).
  - Phiri I. A., Govinden D. B. & S. Nadar (Eds). *Her Stories. Hidden Histories of women of Faith in Africa*. Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg (2002).
  - Phiri A. I, Haddad B. & Masenya M. (eds). *African Women, HIV and AIDS and Faith Communities*. Cluster publications. Pietermaritzburg (2004).
  - Dube M. & Kanyoro M. *Grant Me Justice! HIV and AIDS & Gender Readings of the Bible*. Pietermaritzburg.
- 5
- Amoah Elizabeth (ed). *Where God Reigns*. Sam-Woode Ltd Accra – Ghana Circle (1997).
  - Wamue G. N. & Getui M.N. (Ed). *Violence Against Women: Reflections by Kenyan Women Theologians* Acton Publishers, Nairobi Kenya –Circle (1996).
  - Getui M. N. & Ayanga H. (eds). *Conflicts in Africa. A Women's Response*. Faith Institute of Counselling; Nairobi – Kenya Circle (2002).
  - Akintunde D. O. (Ed). *African Culture and the Quest for Women's Rights*. Sefer books, Ibadan-Nigeria Circle (2001).
6. Some of the publications by individual Circle members include:
- Dube M., *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. St. Chalice Press. St. Louis (2000).
  - Gachiri E.M., *Female Circumcision. With Reference to the Agikuyu of Kenya*. Pauline's Publications, Nairobi (2000).

- Mbuy-Beya B., *Woman Who Are You? A Challenge*. Pauline's Publications. Nairobi (1998).
  - Njoroge N.J. *Kiama Kia Ngo: African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*. Asempa Publishers. Legon (2000).
  - Phiri A. I., *Women Patriarchy and Presbyterianism: Chewa Women of Malawi*. Kachere Monograph No. 4 CLAIM. Blantyre (1997).
7. Titles that have been written by the specific commissions include:
- Phiri I. A. Govinden D. B. & Nadar S. (eds). *Her stories. Hidden Histories of Women of Faith in Africa*. Cluster Publications. Pietermaritzburg (2002).
- Njoroge N. J. & M. W. Dube (eds). *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*. Cluster publications. Pietermaritzburg (2001).
8. The books that are already published are:
- (i) Phiri I. A., Haddad B. & Masenya M. (eds). *African Women, HIV and AIDS and Faith Communities*. Cluster Publications. Pietermaritzburg (2004).
  - (ii) Dube M & Kanyoro M. (eds). *Grant me Justice! HIV and AIDS & Gender Readigns of the Bible*. The both is published simultaneously by Cluster Publications, Pietermaritzburg & Orbis books N. Y. (2004).
  - (iii) Akintunde D. O., Amoah E. & Okoto D. (eds) *Cultural Practices and HIV and AIDS : African Women's Voices*. Sam Woode. Accra (2005).

The title with the publisher is:

- (a) Hinga T., Kubai A., Mwaura P. & Ayanga H. (eds) *Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS in Africa. Responding to Ethical and Theological Challenges*. Cluster Publications Pietermaritzburg.
  - (b) There is also a French book which is part of the 2002 conference edited by Yinda Helene. Its manuscript is with a publisher in Cameroon.
9. (cf. Voices from the Third World 1999 vol. XX11 No.1). EATWOT women's reflections on the impact of globalization on women in the African continent were published in 2005 (cf. Mwaura & Chirairo 2005).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **MEANING, PLACE AND OBJECTIVES OF AFRICAN WOMEN'S THEOLOGY IN KENYA**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, we presented a brief background to feminism in general and African Women's Theology in particular. We noted that the global context was significant as it contributed in various ways to the development of African Women's Theology. In the present chapter, we focus on the meaning, objectives and relevance of African Women's Theology. This is based on our assumption that one of the problems with the teaching of Women Theologies is the meaning of the term feminism, the objectives and the relevance of feminist perspectives in theology in the Kenyan context.

#### **3.1.1 Terminologies Used in Naming Women Theologies in Kenya**

Among other concerns, our interviews and questionnaires sought to find out what label was preferred in naming Women Theologies in Kenya. We identified four names that were regularly used in secondary sources particularly those by African women theologians. The names and the respondent selections are presented in the table below.

**Table 3. 1: Naming of Women Theologies in Kenya**

<b>Name of the theology</b>	<b>No. of Selections</b>
African Feminist Theology	15
Womanist Theology	18
African Women's Theology	35
Wakina Mama Theology	7

From the table, we note that out of the sixty-five respondents, thirty-five selected African Women's Theology" as the title preferred in naming their theological activities. This was the most frequent choice because of a number of reasons. First, the label did not draw much animosity especially from the Church. It was argued that the term 'feminist' had bad publicity as it was associated with some of the activities of radical feminists in the West. Thus, women theologians, particularly those in professional Church ministry maintained that the male clergy and leadership are always ready to let them attend conferences and workshops as long as these are promoting African Women's Theology but not Feminist Theology. This implies that any title which included the term 'feminist' was bound to be rejected.

In this regard, Njiri (O. I August 2000) noted that:

... 'feminist' is a provocative concept. Men react to it negatively, because it is viewed as a threat to men's place and role in the Church and society.

On a similar note, Ali mentioned that feminist ideals “were dangerous as they would eventually break down the family unit” (O. I. May 2005).

The responses above underline the bad publicity that the term feminism has acquired over time. Consequently, anything labelled feminist is rejected even before adequate research and effort to understand the meaning and usage of the term is done.

The qualifier ‘African’ in the name ‘African Women’s Theology’ seemed to make the label and the theology more acceptable. From the discussions, we gathered that this was because of the assumptions that the theology non-judgementally upholds African cultural values, beliefs and practices especially, male supremacy over women and the prescribed roles of women in the home. In our view, this is largely because, gender relations are power relations. Those in control both in the Church and society will definitely dissuade forms of theology that attack the superior role of men in society.

Various labels have been used by theologians in Africa in naming women’s theological perspectives in Africa. Let us consider a few of these.

First, in her introduction to *Talitha Cum! Theologies of African Women*, Dube notes that some of the authors employ the term “Feminist Theology ” while others prefer “African Women’s Theology” in the various chapters. She points out the fact that the choice is determined by various factors such as “one’s context, the rhetorical ends sought, as well as the theoretical understandings and dispositions” (2001:10).

Second, in reference to the same theologies, Maluleke (1997:20) is at pains to try and name them. He titles his work “African Feminist/Womanist theologies” in reference to African women theological events. This naming recognizes that African Women’s Theology acknowledges and shares the concerns of several genres of Women Theologies such as ‘Womanist Theology’ and ‘Feminist Theology’ as propagated by women in the African-American community in the USA and Euro-American-white-middle class in the First World countries of the West. African Women’s Theology however, does not work on identical themes with other global Women Theologies due to the different social locations of these theologians. In view of this, Oduyoye (2001:11) indicates that:

In doing theology, (African) women adopt a perspectival approach rather than analysis and critique of existing works. They grant that there are unique insights that come from individuals from contexts other than one’s own and that there is

something to be appreciated from that which is different.

In our view, the various titles used to name African Women's Theology recognize the roots of Women Theologies in the West. Further, they indicate that after originating in the West, Women Theologies have been seeded in various locations in the globe, all producing rich varieties of the theology. This emphasizes the need for a unique name "African Women's Theology" that recognizes that the theology has similarities with other global Women Theologies but it has some unique aspects due to its social location.

The use of the phrase 'African Women's Theology' dates back to 1989 when 'The Circle' was launched. This event marked the emergence of formal and systematic Women Theologies in the African continent. The pioneer African women theologians deliberately avoided the term 'feminist' in their self-definition because they were seeking to give analytical weight specifically to the experiences of African women. Aware that women's experiences are diverse, these women concluded that their experiences are sufficiently different from those of women elsewhere to warrant a distinct label and analysis. This label

indicates the cultural context as well as the history of the continent of Africa.

The pioneers of The Circle were keen to give African women a distinct voice in theological discourse. This was because of the realization that the legacy of imperialism and paternalism had characterized relations between the West and silenced African women. Implied in these relations is the belief that Africans are to be guided, represented and spoken on behalf of since they are either unable or unwilling to speak for themselves (Hinga 1996:37).

African women have also been victims of sexism. Therefore, even when it was considered viable to listen to Africans, the voice of African women was still unheard. It was assumed that their voice was included in that of men. This is mainly due to the influence of African culture which embraces male leadership and direction in all spheres of life.

The above discussion, therefore, underlines the need for a distinct label for women's theological perspectives in Kenya. Such self-naming for diverse women's communities is important because Women Theologies are specific and speak to a particular

experience. A distinctive name, therefore demarcates specific women's social contexts and identities. It is in line with this view that Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz (1996:331) passionately stresses that for Hispanic women in the U.S.A,

... a distinctive name (Mujeristas) will call us together ..., help us understand our oppression ..., identify the specificity of our struggle without separating us from our communities.

A name provides the conceptual framework, and mental constructs that are used in thinking, understanding and relating to a person or group. We therefore, underline that, self-naming is in line with the current trend in theology which is to move away from universal theology to ethnotheologies. The identification of a specific name is also in line with the third wave of feminism in which emphasis is on recognition of the diverse social locations of women as discussed in chapter two (2.1.3). In the next section, we consider the meaning of Feminist Theology

### **3.1.2 Feminist Theology**

We asked our informants the question: What in your view is Feminist Theology? This is because the phrase commonly names women's perspectives in theology particularly in the West as indicated in chapter two. The responses were varied. Some of these are presented below:

According to Ogutu, "Feminist Theology, refers to God's relationship with the female gender" (O.I March 2000). This informant sees in Feminist Theology the articulation of the relationship between God and the female gender. In our opinion, critical analysis enables us to comprehend ourselves, others and God. This is in line with the scope of theology which is the critical reflection on one's experience of God.

Indeed, women were created by God and both women and men bear God's image and likeness (Gen 1:27). This implies that God has both feminine and masculine aspects. Neither the masculine nor the feminine alone bears the complete image of God. The Bible, because of its patriarchal origins and interpretations presents God as a male. This is an impoverished image of God as it leaves out God's motherhood. Such patriarchal biblical images and interpretations have been used to deny women leadership and decision-making roles in the Church (Tappa 1988: 30-34).

Another problem with the definition mentioned above is that it does not tell us anything about Feminist Theology. What is the nature of this theology? Is it liberational, dogmatic, systematic or other theology? When such a definition is given to students, it fails to arouse their interest in or even guide their imagination as

to what Feminist Theology entails. This prompted one of our informants' comment that, "it is always important to give a concise definition of terms when teaching Feminist Theology " (Mwaura O. 1. Aug 2000). In her view, this acts as a guideline to the students' imagination and thinking.

Another respondent defined Feminist Theology as:

... the motherly attitude of God and Jesus in the Bible. The role of women in the Bible and the need to neutralize patriarchal terms in the Bible are implied (Nandi, O. 1. August 2000).

The first part of this definition indicates that God and Jesus have the attitude of a mother. The second part mentions what we would refer to as themes in Feminist Theology. These are the role of women in the Bible and the patriarchal nature of the Bible. This is because the Bible is presented in patriarchal language and imagery.

These, in our view, are some of the themes of the theology rather than the meaning. This definition limits the scope of Feminist Theology and does not allow for further expansion of meaning, scope and articulation according to social location and experience.

A number of responses in the study were similar to the two aforementioned definitions. They include the following:

- i) It is a theology which seeks the wholesome development of humanity (Sule-Saa O. I. August 1999)
- ii) It is aimed at placing the woman in her rightful status in the society (Ndungu O. I. March 2000)
- iii) It is a theology that avoids patriarchal mistakes. It recognizes women as active and part and parcel of the theological discourse (Samita O. I. August 1999)
- iv) Feminist Theology seeks to voice the concerns of women as far as their rights and rightful place in society are concerned (Ongori O. I. August 2000).

What these definitions reveal is that the respondents had knowledge of certain aspects of Feminist Theology. Although many of them had not studied Feminist Theology during their formation, they were aware of its existence and influence on certain people in the society.

The definitions referred to above impress on the rightful place of women in society as well as the role of patriarchy in the subordination of women. By interpretation, they also underline

that women and men make up humanity. Thus both should occupy their rightful place in society as equal partners before God. This is in line with St. Paul's teaching in his letter to the Galatians where he observes; "there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female and for you are all one in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:28).

Clearly therefore, there is no room for dominance and supremacy as embraced by the patriarchal ideology that seems to govern the relationships between women and men in the Church and society. Besides, wholesome development of humanity implies the consideration of both men and women as equal players in the life of the individuals and society.

Another set of responses indicate what type of theology Feminist Theology is.

Below are selected examples:

- a) It is basically a liberation theology that highlights awareness of abuses against women (Kinoti O. I. March 2000).
- b) It is a study that seeks to give the woman the dignity she was created with, that is male and female are created in the

image and likeness of God and are of the same nature. They should, therefore, complement each other (Lumbasi O. I. August 2000)

- c) Feminist Theology is a liberation theology. It is contextual and takes into account theory, praxis and commitment in transforming society's attitude towards women (Aringo O. I. March 2000).

These set of definitions were from people who were interested in Feminist Theology and had read about it. Within these groups are individuals who have taught and learned or read something in the line of Feminist Theology. This was quite evident from the responses to the question.

We also asked our respondents to identify who/what influenced them to study Feminist Theology? A number of respondents mentioned the works of Mercy Amba Oduyoye or her presentations on the subject in conferences. The works of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Letty Russell, Mary Daly, Musimbi Kanyoro, Nyambura Njoroge, Teresia Hinga and Anne Nasimiyu Wasike were mentioned. More Western scholars were mentioned than African scholars. This means that it is not possible to sever ties with the West as their ideas

continue influencing our views in various fields and more so Women's Theologies.

African women are however cautious of the colonizing mentality of the North in relation to the South. Therefore, they have challenged "essentialist notions of womanhood while insisting on recognizing and interrogating difference" among women (Steady 2004:26). In view of this, African Womens' Theology considers the ideas of feminist theologians in the West but often utilize African centred approaches based on an understanding of African socio-cultural realities. In this regard, we particularly underline the use of oral stories from Africa in challenging feminist ideas from the North as well as voicing the concerns of African women theologians. A magnificent example is Dubes' "Jumping the Fire with Judith: Postcolonial Feminist Hermeneutics of Liberation" (2003:60ff). In this essay, Dube utilizes a South African tale:

to highlight that postcolonial feminist hermeneutic(s) of liberation is a search for a relationship of liberating interdependence between genders, races, nations, cultures, economics and political establishment – at national and international levels (Ibid:65).

During informal discussions, a number of male respondents, however, displayed a negative attitude towards feminism in general and Feminist Theology in particular. Our analysis showed

that these attitudes were based on popular biased beliefs and assumptions about the subject. Below are a selection of such observations:

- 1) Those who claim to be feminists are women who have difficulty in relating with men as in marriage.
- 2) Feminists in Africa are aping the ideas and actions of the Euro-American middle class white women, sometimes blindly.
- 3) Some of the terms used by African feminists such as 'Oppression' and 'Female Genital Mutilation' are out of context in the African setting where men and women know their place and role and strive to maintain it.

What these views imply is that Feminist Theology has not been accepted wholly by the wider community. It is still viewed as a dark or dirty label which is problematic for all that try to use it. It is worse if the person wearing the label feminist is a single or divorced woman. For although one's private life has nothing to do with the content of Feminist Theology, it is assumed that such radical views are repugnant to marital ideals in the African societies. In our view, there is nothing wrong with women seeking and being champions of justice. A negative assessment of their

efforts closes out visions of justice that would be of benefit to their communities.

Although the term 'feminist' is often assessed as a threat to masculinity, it is of critical value for Women Theologies. The term underlines a specific political position that women are people, and that advocacy for their rights is on the ground of gender equality.

The feminist discourse is that

. . . women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied, and that the satisfaction of these needs would require a radical change in the social, economic and political order is *crucial* (Delmar 1994:5).

This implies that the qualifier 'feminist' is critical for Women Theologies as it positions them together with other emancipatory theologies worldwide. What the unique label such as African Women's Theology does, therefore, is to determine for women theologians in Kenya the specific context from which they theologize, the meanings and the goals of their lives. In the next section we consider the meaning of African Women's Theology.

### **3.2.1 African Women's Theology**

Our informants offered various definitions of African Women Theology as follows.

- a) It is a theology proposed by African women which seeks to fight and remove obstacles that marginalize a section of humanity because of their sex (Sule-saa O. I. August 1999):
- b) It is a theology which seeks to critically consider women participation in the Church and society (Muga O. I. August 2000).
- c) It is a theology that desires and proposes that African women be treated with the dignity they deserve (Ongori O. I. August 2000).
- d) African Women's Theology addresses marginalization of women in the African context. It names aspects of the African culture and gender role division both in the Church and community as some of the avenues of marginalization (Mogoba O. I. May 2005).

These definitions identify African Women's Theology first with the African context. Specific reference was made to concerns that arise from women experiences in the African society.

From the above discussion, we note that African Women's Theology takes cognisance of the wide spectrum of African women's experiences and reality for its inspiration and insights. Being contextual, this theology is informed by the African reality.

This reality has mainly been influenced by a history of missionary Christianity, colonialism, and neo-colonialism as well as African cultures and religion. Oduyoye, therefore, underlines that “the roots of poverty, racism and militarism are nourished by this history” (2001:9). Thus, African Women’s Theology is influenced by, and reflect these realities.

Second, the respondents’ views indicate that African Women’s Theology is about and by African women. It identifies women as actors, agents and thinkers of the theological enterprise. In this regard, Oduyoye describes it as “African Christian Theology in a women-centred key” (2001:10). These women’s social locations are diverse as they are dictated by ethnicity, class and Church traditions, among other variables. These differences do not divide them. These women are united by their desire to give African women a voice in theological discourses. Thus, the lay, ordained, academicians in the various institutions of higher learning and all concerned women, who are keen Church adherents come together to study theology.

Third, it is noted that African Women’s Theology addresses the marginalization of women in the African context. It takes cogzance of the fact that the women are marginalized as a gender.

Therefore, it seeks to critically consider women's participation in the Church and society and desires that women are treated with the dignity they deserve. In view of these, we note that African Women's Theology is liberational as it advocates for change in women's condition by removing obstacles that marginalize women and ensuring justice for all human beings.

It is however, noteworthy that marginalization of African women differs according to religion, class, social-cultural location among other variables. Thus, African women theologians' concerns are diverse as they reflect varied needs, concerns and aspirations of the women in question. A definition by one of our respondents illustrates this:

African Women's Theology is a liberation theology that heightens awareness of abuses against women in an African setting. Such abuses are occasioned by cultural demands such as FGM and subordinate roles of women in the Church and society. (Kinoti O. I. March 1999).

It is worth, however, to emphasize that the abuses occasioned by culture differ greatly from one community to another. Hence, even in considering FGM, there is a variety of operations and practices that characterize it hence the need for contextual analysis.

Fourth, African Women's Theology takes women's experiences seriously. A number of responses reflected this view as shown below.

- i. It is theology seen from the looking glasses (perspectives) of African women. It analyses why/how women are discriminated on the basis of their gender (Mogoba O. I. May 2005).
- ii. African Women's Theology enables women to critically consider their experiences in the home, Church, workplace and community in general. It helps them differentiate between abuses, responsibilities, needs and privileges in various settings (Mosoti O. I. May 2005).
- iii. It is a theology that takes seriously women's experiences. It is done from the point of view of women and recognizes African women as active as well as part and parcel of the theological discourse (Kimani O. I. May 2005).

Reference to women's experiences implies that African Women's Theology is personal. This is because it begins with the stories of individual women. These stories speak of the struggles and the faith of the individual women. An examination of the personal stories has, however, indicated that these women stories are "predictably similar" (Phiri, Govinden and Nadar 2002:2, Oduyoye

2001:16). Thus, African Women's Theology goes beyond the personal to encompass the community of all women of Africa. Through the personal and communal stories, African Women's Theology creates a sisterhood of solidarity. This affirms the voices of all women of Africa regardless of the social location.

Taking women's experiences seriously does not imply a rejection of the male gender as this does not reflect the African reality with regard to gender relations. In view of this, it is noted that African Women's Theology goes beyond gender to embrace humanity in its integrity. In Oduyoye's words, this theology highlights the, "women's world and her worldview as she struggles side by side with the men to realize her full potential as a human being" (2000: 121). Thus, the theology emphasizes the wholeness of the community as made up of male and female beings. It, therefore, impresses that the female humanity is a partner with the male humanity and that both expressions of humanity are needed to shape a balanced community within which each will experience a fullness of being. In this way, it complements African Theology which is male-centred. Consequently, African Women's Theology seeks to add what is missing in African Theology in order to create "a two-winged theology" (Oduyoye 1997; Njoroge 1997:77).

The use of women's experiences also implies that African Women's Theology is an interfaith enterprise. Women from various faiths mainly Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion study this theology together. This has enabled those who profess different faiths to intently listen to one another. This is very significant as through such dialogue, women "begin to clear those misunderstandings and biases created over the years as Christianity and Islam rooted themselves into African Traditional Religions and cultures" (Njoroge 1997:79). Each of these religions reflects diverse expressions. For instance, Christians belong to many denominations. Consequently, this experience of diversity has taught African women theologians the necessity of addressing differences. They realize that such differences have been used to "divide, silence, oppress, marginalize and even kill" (Njoroge 1997: 79) often in the name of religion and scriptures.

In view of the above discussion, we submit that 'African Women's Theology' refers to the explication of African Theology from the vantage point of African women. It is, therefore, a distinct name that seeks to underline the unique social context from which African women study theology. It is true that these women's theological heritage is made of European and American theologies of various types such as feminist and womanist theologies.

However, African Women' Theology takes a critical distance from them in order to communicate African women's own understanding. This allows them to address specific themes emerging as a result of their context. Some of these themes are addressed in Chapter Five of this work.

In our study, it was noted that the name African Women's Theology is used as synonym of African Feminist Theology. African Women's Theology is, however, preferred by those who do not wish to engage in a struggle to highlight the positive elements of feminism or reclaim the meaning of the term. As we noted earlier, in section 3.0, feminism is still seen as a 'dirty' label worn mostly by women of questionable character. We however, concur with Fiorenza who points out that "feminism is the radical notion that women are people" (1996:xvii). We also note that the term has socio-historical roots that have nothing to do with the context of African women hence the need for a unique name 'African Women's Theology'.

It is however, important to underline that the term 'feminism' is significant in the teaching of Women Theologies. This is because, it calls into attention specific theories and analysis of gender relations in society. It is therefore, one of the terms that should be

clearly defined and placed in perspective in the teaching of women theologies. The term has political and methodological implications that are indispensable as we shall see later in this chapter. In the next section we consider the nature of African Women's Theology.

### **3.2.2 The Nature of African Women's Theology**

This section considers important aspects of African Women's Theology. These have influenced its development and are important pointers as to how this theology should be regarded.

The following are worth noting:

First, the patterns of Women Theologies in Africa in general and Kenya in particular can be seen as having developed within a context that views human life from a total rather than dichotomous and exclusive perspective. Women and men are, therefore, not the 'other' but part of the human same. Thus, in her analysis of African Women's Theology, Filomena Chioma Steady (1987:8) reckons,

Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement despite the possession of unique features of its own. Sexual differences and similarities ... enhance sexual autonomy and cooperation between women and men, rather than promote polarization and

fragmentation.... Both male and female principles encompass life and operate jointly to maintain cosmological balance.

The importance of the female-male relationship is also expressed by Christina Landman who sees African Women's Theology as a theology of interrelatedness since, "it acknowledges the interrelatedness of women and men ... of people and nature" (2001:90).

This means that unlike some western strands of Feminist Theology, African Women's Theology does not entail a rejection of association with men. Rather, it demonstrates a determination to maintain a mutuality and a sensitivity for building up both men and women in Africa to face the challenges of the continent "for the glory of God who created them male and female" (cf. Kinoti 1996:xi)

In this regard, one of our respondents described women theologians in Africa as, "... counterparts of many fine men in the continent of Africa alongside whom they have fought for justice and human dignity" (O. I. Kinoti March, 1999).

Second, the sacred cannot be separated from the profane in African culture. Religion cuts across all spheres of life. The

experience of the sacred can, therefore, not be limited to specific spaces, experiences or institutions. With regard to African Women's Theology, this implies that the God-talk cuts across the various spheres of life, namely: the cultural, social, economic, political and religious, among others. This is demonstrated in our analysis of the emerging themes in African Women's Theology in Chapter Five. Clearly, these include socio-cultural issues as well as theological themes. This is in opposition to Feminist Theology in the West whose themes cover just the religious sphere such as God, christology, ecclesiology and women spirituality, among others (cf. Loades 1990).

Third, women and men in Kenya have definite roles in the social, economic, political and religious spheres. Although there are notable differences in gender roles from community to community, the reproductive roles and wifery duties of women often receive supreme value since they ensure the continuity of life. These roles have over time become equated with life itself.

Lastly, the African society emphasizes communal living and co-operation. Therefore, "to be human is to belong to the whole community" (Mbiti 1969:2). This means that the dominant ideology is group preservation and wellbeing. Communalism has

influenced the way women do theology. For instance, Oduyoye, thought it prudent to initiate The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (The Circle). This organization brings women to a community in order to concentrate their efforts on producing literature from the base of religion and culture. Kanyoro noted that “The Circle was to be a space for women to mentor each other by doing communal theology” (2002:19). Consequently, the community is the basis for explanations and individual expectations.

The aforementioned factors are significant in African Women’s Theology as they have influenced its theological content and methods of teaching. Besides, they have become a ‘spring’ of African Women’s Theology as shown in Chapter Five. The next section addresses the place of African Women’s Theology in the theological curriculum.

### **3.3 The Place of African Women’s Theology in the Theological Curriculum**

During the research, we sought to find out the attitudes towards African Women’s Theology and other courses on women and gender in the theological curriculum. We did this by identifying courses in the curriculum whose subject is women and gender in

theology. The programmes of studies from the various institutions were a major source (cf. appendix III).

An examination of the various programmes of study and course offerings from the institutions in our study indicates that there are differently titled courses on gender and women in religion and culture as follows:

- 1) African Women Theologies (core course) (St. Paul's United Theological College).
- 2) The role of women in the Church (elective course) (St. Pauls' United Theological College).
- 3) Gender and Theology (core course) (St. Pauls' United Theological College).
- 4) Women in African Religion and Culture Department of Religious Studies (elective course) Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)
- 5) Women in Acts of the Apostles: A Feminist Theology of Liberation (seminar course) Faculty of Theology (CUEA).

- 6) Women in Religion and Culture in Africa. (Elective course) University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Egerton and Moi University.
- 7) Feminist Interpretation of Christian Scriptures (elective course) (Tangaza College).
- 8) Daystar University and University of Eastern Africa Baraton offered no course targeting women or gender in both the departments of Religious Studies and Theology.

The question we need to ask at this point is whether any of the institutions is capable of training well-equipped individuals in Women Theologies at undergraduate and graduate levels. To formulate a response we shall tabulate below courses offered in St. Pauls' and CUEA's Faculties of Divinity and Theology respectively (cf. Appendix III A & B).

**Table 3. 2: Courses taught in Faculty of Divinity and Theology at St. Pauls' United Theological College and Catholic University of Eastern Africa respectively.**

<b>St. Pauls' United Theological College</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)</b>	<b>Status</b>
<b>Year 1 First Semester</b> Biblical Greek (Elementary) Biblical Hebrew (Elementary) O.T. Introduction <b>Second Semester</b> Advanced Biblical Hebrew Advanced biblical Greek N. T Introduction	Core Core Core Core Core Core	<b>Year 1</b> Penteteuch Historical Books Synoptics – Mark & Mathew Luke and Acts	Core Core Core Core
<b>Year 2 First Semester</b> O.T. Exegesis (Hebrew Text 1) O.T. Exegesis (English Text 1) N.T. Exegesis (Greek Text 1) N.T. Exegesis (English Text 1) <b>Second Semester</b> O.T. Exegesis (Hebrew Text II) O.T. Exegesis (English Text II) N.T. Exegesis (Greek Text II) N.T. Exegesis (English Text II)	Core Core Core Core Core Core Core	<b>Prophetic Books</b> Wisdom Literature & Psalms Letters of St. Paul	Core Core Core
<b>Year 3 First Semester</b> Christian Ethics African Theology Pastoral Care <b>Second Semester</b> Pastoral Counselling African Women's theologies	Core Core Core Core Core	Johanine Literature Letter of the Hebrew Apocalypse of John	Core Elective Elective
<b>Year 4 First Semester</b> O.T. Theology Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics Gender and Theology <b>Second Semester</b> N.T. Theology Jesus Christ in African Theology Women in Christianity	Core Core Core Core Core Core		
		<b>Languages</b> Latin I & II Greek I & II Hebrew I & II French I & II Italian I & II German I & II	

## Summary

St. Pauls'	CUEA
13 Core course in Biblical Theology	8 Core courses in Biblical Theology
4 Language courses	6 Language courses
2 Core courses in Women's Theologies	0 Courses in Women and Gender
1 Elective in Women's Theology /Gender	

Our findings indicate that St. Paul's United Theological College offers the highest number of courses on women's perspectives in religion. Two of these courses are offered as cores while the third course is an elective. This implies that the institution has a positive attitude towards women's perspectives in theology. Besides, it is worth noting that those involved in Church ministry such as Church ministers trained at St. Pauls' United Theological College study issues concerning women and gender during their formation. However, the courses on women/gender offered at St. Pauls' are too few. In our view therefore, St. Pauls' does not offer adequate training in Women Theologies.

The Faculty of Theology at CUEA offers no course on gender or women issues at undergraduate level. This implies that a student may complete the first degree in theology without studying gender issues in religion, Church and society or focussing on women as

subjects. Thus, those charged with preparation of the programme of studies did not make any effort to include women's perspectives in the curriculum (cf. The Catholic University of Eastern Africa Faculty of Theology Programme of Studies 2004-2007 p. 19-21).

At Masters' level, the Faculty of Theology has no core or elective course on gender or women issues. But, they offer one seminar course titled "Women in Acts of the Apostles; A Feminist Theology of Liberation". According to the course description, the aim of this seminar is to study closely a number of selected passages in the book of Acts in order to discover the role these women played in the social, religious and economic life of their communities in Early Christianity. The following references are highlighted:

Acts 5:1-11 The case of Sapphira

Acts 9:36-43 The Miraculous story of Tabitha

Acts 16: 16-18 The Prophetic slave girl in Philippi

Acts 17:13, 18-19, 24-28; Priscilla the artisan and missionary.

The inclusion of this seminar is commendable. However in our view, the scope could have been widened by including studies on

women in other New Testament texts. Besides, feminist methods of biblical interpretation could be utilized in order to include the often muted voices of women in biblical interpretation.

It is important to emphasize that Feminist Theology of liberation is a credible area of study that is variously recognized worldwide. It utilizes specific methods, content and theoretical orientations as exemplified in the works of Elizabeth S. Fiorenza, Rosemary R. Ruether, Anne Clifford, Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Musimbi Kanyoro, Musa Dube and Nyambura Njoroge among others.

The seminar as described in the official CUEA Faculty of Theology Programme of Studies 2004-2007 p.21 focuses on the works of Ironi Richter Reiner only. In our view, the works of one person are not representative enough for a seminar on Feminist Theology of Liberation. This is because contemporary feminist thought is largely contextual and diverse both in terms of content and methodology among other differences. Besides, seminar depends more on students' input and a wider selection of authors would cover a broad range of social locations, contexts and issues in Feminist Theology of Liberation.

The exclusion of women's voices in such a seminar is critical particularly because;

... women are most effectively effaced by simple neglect. By going unmentioned, they become easily forgettable – “unmentionable” in the loaded sense of the word (Spencer 2004:7).

Spencer's observation underlines the need to consider, appreciate and engage feminist authors in the study of Women Theologies. This is to avoid “colonization and patrination” which may arise when male authors attempt to speak for and about women's experiences (ibid: 8).

The fact that the only course on women is offered as seminar is worth noting. On average, a student is expected to undertake at least three seminars at Masters' level. Since there are eight seminars from which to choose, it means that a student does not have to attempt Feminist Theology during the course. Thus, a student can possibly complete a Masters' programme in theology without ever learning anything on Women Theologies. In our view, this is a serious omission as these students are mainly trained to offer service in the Church and community which are made up of women and men.

At Doctoral level, there is no taught course that focuses on women or gender issues. Although the programme is quite flexible with regard to what one might choose to study, it is difficult to select Feminist Theology or any other Women Theologies owing to the poor preparation of students in this area at preceding levels.

In view of the above presentation, we note that CUEA does not regard Women Theologies as an important area of study. Therefore, Feminist Theology appears only once as a seminar course at Masters' level. This is however, not surprising, considering the fact that the faculty is male-dominated, as only two out of forty-two faculty members are female. This scenario is as a result of the fact that the Catholic church tradition upholds male leadership in the church as well as in the institutions that prepare the clergy (cf. *The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Faculty of Theology Programme of Studies 2004-2007*). It is also reflection of the churches' conservative attitude towards liberation theologies (Fugerson & Wright 1988:387ff).

To address the question of relevance of Women's Theologies in Kenya, we asked two related questions, first, Is there need for Women's Theologies in Kenya? Second, are women theologians in

Kenya aping those in the West? The responses to these questions were illuminating as indicated below.

First, we observed that all the informants noted that there was need for Women Theologies in Kenya. They, however, gave different reasons for this affirmative response. A selection of these responses illustrates this:

Women Theologies offers opportunities for younger generations to uproot biases and prejudices against women and therefore help in creating a more just society (Ongori, O. I. August 2000).

This informant noted that the study had enabled him to identify the biases and prejudices against women both in the Church and the society in general. He further noted that these unfair practices and beliefs were accepted by the majority of society members as normal and acceptable ways of relating to women. These were, however, as a result of the socialization of individuals in the male-dominated cultures.

Addressing the issue of cultural practices, Kanyoro has observed that African culture has silenced many women in Africa and made them unable to experience the liberating promises of God. She concedes that although there are favourable aspects of our culture, which enhance the wellbeing of women, such aspects are

suppressed, "Those aspects which diminish women continue to be practised at various degrees in our societies, often making women objects of cultural preservation" (1996:5).

There are several beliefs and practices legitimised by our own African cultures that are oppressive to women. Examples include, rituals widows go through (Shisanya 1993), cultural taboos (Wamue 1996) and death dealing practices such as the various forms of female genital mutilation (Okemwa 1996), among others.

Ongori (O.I. Aug 2000) is convinced that the study African Women's Theology is capable of creating a just society where men and women are regarded equally. This is because it offers an objective critique of African culture and Christianity as it was presented to our society by the West. This kind of exposition allows students to notice the socio-religious beliefs and practices that are sources of oppression for women. Such exposure may have prepared Njoroge (1996:4) for the male-dominated parish sessions she had to attend as a Church minister. She bitterly laments thus;

... I listened to language that put women down: women are like children; do not tell your wives because they are professional gossipers; women are immature ... , poor single women cannot make good leaders

among women .... I was helpless and frustrated because I had no way out.

This author indicates some of the negative myths about women held by members of the society - Christian or otherwise. Women Theologies address these myths and stereotypes in order to raise people's awareness and also seek ways of dismantling them. This allows the creation of a just society where women and men can be regarded as equal beings created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 1:27f).

Kinoti indicated that there was need for Women Theologies in Kenya as this would help to even the ground for women and men in the Church, public life and the home (O. I. August 2000). This observation implies that the society is unfair to women in various spheres of life and institutions. Women Theologies address issues that affect women both in and outside the religious assembly. Perhaps this is best illustrated by Njoroge's (1996:4) poignant observations with regard to her role as a Church minister. She incisively remarks:

I am angry and hurt because I have encountered many women in great pain and suffering in my ministry. Most of these occasions I felt powerless and ill-prepared because my initial seminary training never brought to my attention women's issues and concerns in the life and work of the Church. Neither was I prepared to minister to people in

extreme poverty . . . Poverty means more than lack of economic resources, it also means loss of human dignity ... In my training I was not prepared to minister to prostitutes, victims of domestic violence and sexual harassment in the work place ... I discovered in a practical way the pain and anguish of women in the Church. I have discovered that although my Church pioneered in ordaining women in the country, the Church is far from addressing women's concerns in a concrete way.

The above remarks underline the importance of Women Theologies for students of theological institutions and all who are being prepared to offer various services in the community of women and men. This is in view of the fact that women have gender specific needs that are not addressed by all the other assumed more important course units offered in such institutions.

Ndung'u felt that there was need for Women Theologies in Kenya because it may be able to "correct the oppression of women within the Church and the community at large" (O. I. March 2000). The underlying notion is that of awareness of the oppression of women in society. Ndung'u therefore, sees Women Theologies as a course unit that has the ability to counter the oppression that women face in society today. This is because it addresses the types of oppression or violence that women face because of their gender. These include domestic violence, rape, discrimination

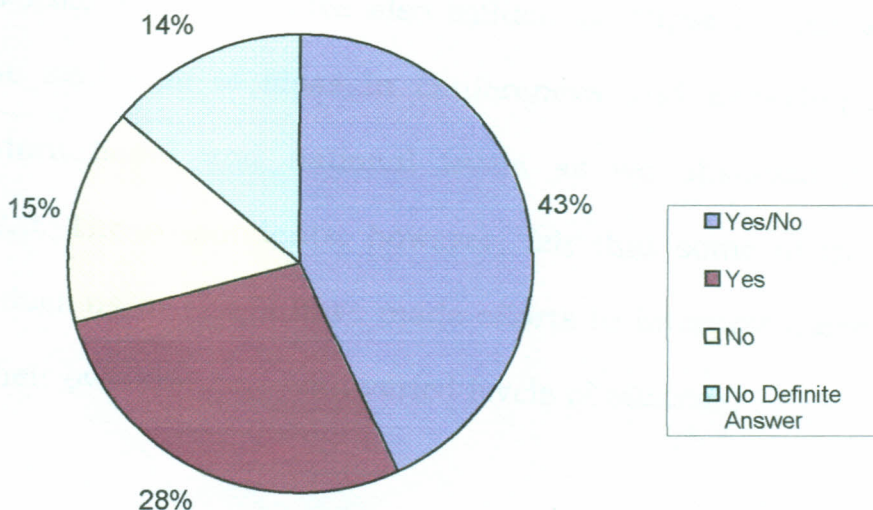
against women and girls and the consequent inequalities in education, employment, ecclesial responsibilities as well as in other spheres of life (cf. Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996; Wamue and Getui 1996). Within the Church, these translate to women performing certain types of roles especially those that are related to the roles assigned to them within the home. This arrangement reserves leadership and ministerial (all-powerful) positions to men (cf. Okemwa 1993; James 1993).

Another reason given by the informants is that there is need for Women Theologies because of the rising global concern towards gender issues. According to this respondent, "Gender issues have become sensitive globally. Therefore, we in Kenya cannot afford to be left behind" (Nandi O. I. Aug 2000).

It is true that gender issues are a current concern globally. But, in our view, this may not necessarily affect the selection of course units taught at various institutions of higher learning in Kenya. Most of these institutions seek to be relevant to their social context. They are therefore, tailored to meet the human resource requirements in the society. In the past, only men have participated in identifying the societal requirements hence the omission of gender-related courses from the syllabus. In this

context, we make reference to publications such as; Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996, Oduyoye and Kanyoro 1992 and others and submit that the need for a Women Theologies in Kenya has been governed by women's experience of oppression and marginalization in Kenya and consequently, the need to correct it.

The second question was on whether women theologians in Kenya were merely imitating those in the West? We received mixed responses. Out of the sixty-five respondents, twenty-eight gave responses that were both Yes and No; eighteen answered affirmatively; ten gave a definite No, and nine did not give any clear answers. The pie chart below graphically demonstrates this:



**Figure 3.1: Response to the question on whether women Theologians in Kenya ape those in the West**

The explanation given for the position taken by respondents mentioned above were varied. Below is a selection of some responses from the questionnaires. First, a number of those who gave Yes and No as their response to the question felt that Western feminist theological discourses have, to a large extent, influenced the development of Women Theologies in Kenya for two main reasons.

First, it was observed that to a large extent, the West had spread ripples in Africa in general and Kenya in particular. This means that the respondents felt that the Western feminist theologians have influenced those in Kenya. This is mainly through their publications which are read widely by those interested in the area and those who have to teach gender-related courses. Feminist theologians from the West have also influenced those in Kenya through the exchange of ideas in conferences and workshops both at international and national levels as we observed in chapter 2.2.0. The respondents, however, felt that some of the women theologians in Kenya have made efforts to interpret these ideas into their own contexts with varied levels of success.

Second, it was felt that some women theologians in Kenya “gang with the West and uncritically dismiss or attack African

indigenous societal values and practices” (Nandi O. I. Aug 2000). What this means is that there are some women theologians who merely imitate the ideas and behaviours of the Western feminist theologians out of context. Examples mentioned included the onslaught on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), polygamy and the role of women in the African society. The use of the word ‘gang’ in the above-mentioned response is curious. It implies some sort of dislike, distrust or even disapproval of the women theologians’ agenda. This is in view of the fact that the word ‘gang’ is mostly used to refer to people who act together especially for negative or even criminal purposes. Our data indicate that eighteen respondents had no doubt in their minds that women theologians in Kenya were imitating those in the West.

Below is a selection of these responses:

- 1) Feminist Theology is stronger in the Western world and most of the women theologians in Kenya have contacts with those in the West; some even studied there (Lumbasi O. I. August 2000).
- 2) Women theologians in Kenya merely echo the ideas of Western theologians on what entails oppression of women. African women theologians should base their

discourse on African motherhood (Ogutu O.I. March 2000).

- 3) The world has become a global village (hence ideas are effectively communicated to people in various parts of the world) (Nandi O. I. August 2000).

What emerges from these responses is that Women Theologies in Kenya is associated with Feminist Theology in the West. A dependence on ideas from the West by Kenyan women theologians is also implied. Some of these observations have an underlying negative connotation. This is especially true for the second response which indicates that women theologians in Kenya merely echo the ideas of the Western feminist theologians. Our observation is that when an echo is received, it always has some additional sound that was not part of the original. This means that even when the Kenyan women theologians are echoing the ideas of Western feminists, they include their own voices and ideas which is commendable too. This is demonstrated in Chapter Five where we examine the emerging themes in Women Theologies in Kenya.

Women theologians in Kenya are not merely echoes of their sisters in the West. They are determined to study a contextual

theology that is rooted in and characterized by ideas and methods that are uniquely African. This is displayed by their unique relation with African indigenous beliefs and practices. Indeed, African women theology offers an objective critique of African culture. Thus, many who have written on specific values and practices have sought to expose the oppressive strands within their culture. They also identify those aspects of the culture which enhance their wellbeing as women (Kanyoro 1996:5). Besides, the works of Kenyan women theologians indicate a deep understanding of their context. This is in opposition to the work of Western feminist theologians on African culture or male African theologians. This is clearly illustrated by reference to the work of Hannah Kinoti in her study of the *Nguiko* practice among the Agikuyu. She notes that this practice was helpful to society and the individual young women and men as it encouraged them to regulate their sexual behaviour (Kinoti 1996). The work of Hinga on female initiation rites among the Agikuyu also demonstrates African women theologians' critical response to culture. She thus underlines the positive and negative aspects of these rites. Further, she argues that the rituals that enhanced the wellbeing of the girls should not have been outlawed (cf. 1998. 168ff). African women theologians' response to African culture is

revisited in 5.1. In the next section, we address the objectives of African Women's Theology in Kenya.

### **3.4 Objectives of African Women's Theology in Kenya**

There are many classes of women concerned with African Women's Theology. Their voices are varied too. Some are urban/rural, formally educated/informally educated and women clergy/laity, among other categories. Oduyoye is careful to recognize that there is no idealistic African woman. Rather, there is a common cry from many women yearning to have their oppression recognized (Oduyoye, 1989:442). This means that there are different objectives governed by the various contexts in which the women find themselves. How are all these issues addressed in the classroom situation? What is the goal of African Women's Theology in Kenya? What do the lecturers of this theology hope to achieve at the end of the study and why?

Studies in African Women's Theology in Kenya are conditioned by the social, cultural, political, religious and economic environment. The goals drawn therefore, reflect the experiences of women and men in all these spheres of life and social locations. The objectives discussed below illustrate this.

In the first place, there is need for definition of the terms which are commonly used in Women Theologies, for instance, feminism, feminist, and violence against women. This is because the terms and phrases are used in a new way pointing to the specific context. Besides, terms such as 'feminism' and 'feminist' have been negatively associated with womens' dress, marital status among other social issues. Therefore, there are people who speak and write about feminism without naming it feminist for fear of being ostracized by their churches and communities. Consequently, one objective of African Women's Theology is to liberate the term from the negative publicity that it has acquired over time. In this regard, Mwaura noticed that "People assume they know the meaning of these words yet they do not" (O. I. August 2000).

Second, African Women's Theology is aimed at raising the student's awareness on gender issues in society. There is an imbalance in power relations between women and men both in the Church and in other societal institutions. This is due to the patriarchal social system that has ensured male domination and female subordination in all spheres of life. In the African communities, this social structure has been taken as the norm. There is, therefore, a need to challenge the subordinate position

of women in Kenya as this acts against women's dignity and worth. Awareness-raising is key to exposing the stereotyping of women's roles in culture and Church so that the cry of those entrapped can be heard. Sentiments like, "this is tradition" – rule women's lives and they accept these patriarchal relations almost as God-given (Okure 1996:59).

Third, African Women's Theology in Kenya seeks to include the women's voice in theological discourse. Theology in Africa in general and Kenya in particular has been male-dominated. Thus for a long time, only men could join theological institutions, theologize, and publish their experiences. It was assumed that the women's voices were included in those of men. The injustice implicit in this enforced silence led Oduyoye, a pioneer and leading African woman theologian to impress the need for women's voices in theology (Oduyoye 1992:10). It also explains why Hinga, a Kenyan woman theologian sees African Women's Theology today as both, "a protest against the forced silence and also as a wake-up call to African women to rise and fight against the forces of injustice that surround them" (Hinga 1996:38).

Women theologians in Kenya hope to break this silence by publishing their theological reflections and sharing their

experiences in every forum possible. In view of this, the Kenyan Chapter of the Circle makes efforts to meet regularly and reflect on issues of common concern. This is in line with the objectives of the Pan-African Circle to produce literature from the basis of religion and culture to enrich the initial study of religion in Africa (Oduyoye 1990:1). Since then, The Circle has embarked on a sustained, systematic research and publication initiative, focussing on the critical analysis of the impact of culture and religion in the lives of women.

Women theologians in Kenya have lived up to the challenge of producing theological literature from their context through the various organizations<sup>1</sup> they belong to. Indeed, the women's voices represented in these publications are as diverse as the social contexts of these theologians. Their discussions cover various topics all reflective of their everyday life struggles and experiences. Examples include issues on violence against women, the role of women in Church, politics, education, poverty eradication, gender relations in society, and the impact of some African cultural beliefs and practices on women.

The women's voices in theology already indicate that there is a difference between the female and male viewpoints in theological

discourse. In view of this, Maluleke an African male theologian admits that African Women's Theology are mounting a critique of both African culture and African Christianity in ways not done by previous theologies/theological discourses in Africa. He therefore, submits that from these theologies, African Christians "may learn how to be truly African and yet critical of aspects of African culture" (1997:22).

Fourth, women theologians in Kenya seek to study the Bible from their own socio-historical reality. In this regard, Njoroge underlines the centrality of the Bible in the lives of Christians in Kenya. She recommends that

... tracing the history of the Bible in Kenya and how it has been translated and used is critical. Learning how ordinary Christians in different socio-economic classes articulate the Bible's message should be a necessary part of the curriculum (2004:91).

This is in view of the realization that the Bible is culturally situated and speaks to people out of their own life experiences. What this means is that re-reading it demands critical in-depth engagement with the African religious worldview. Thus, religio-cultural hermeneutics is crucial in appropriating the biblical message.

Unlike some Western feminist theologians who have rejected the Bible as a patriarchal text that legitimises the oppression and dehumanization of women, women theologians in Kenya see the Bible as containing the word of God. As Kanyoro (1990:52) notes,

The Bible is a message of liberation for African women much as it is also used to deny their freedom. For women to find justice and peace through the texts of the Bible, they have to try and recover the women participants as well as their possible participation in the life of the text. Second, women will need to read the scriptures side by side with the study of cultures and learn to recognize the boundaries between the two. Such recognition will help women to interpret biblical passages within the proper hermeneutical understanding of ourselves and our contexts as Christian women.

What emerges from this observation is that women theologians in Kenya read the Bible from their own contexts. These women have also shown that they prefer a reader-centred approach to scripture. They however, note that due to illiteracy, many of the women at the grassroots level depend on the reading and interpretation of the minister who in most cases, is a man (James 2000).

Lastly, issues of liberation and empowerment of women are of interest to women theologians. There is a realization that women in Kenya are marginalized in all spheres of life that is, politics, economy, education and religion. Thus, Ayanga maintains that

Women's Theology expresses discontent with the male-dominated structures both within and outside the Church (1999:91). It is worth noting that liberation and empowerment of women is possible if all members of society are conscientized to appreciate women as worthwhile creation of God. For in creating the human race, male and female, God gave women and men equal personal dignity, endowing them with inalienable rights and responsibilities proper to the human person.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have defined the phrases African Women's Theology and Feminist Theology. We have also made efforts to situate them in the Kenyan context. It is noted first, that a clear understanding of the terms used in Women Theologies is critical in inspiring/stirring student interest in the subject as well as determining its scope. According to our findings, we therefore, contend that in the teaching of Women Theologies, it is important to present the correct definitions of important terms to students. Any erroneous meanings attached to the terms have to be dismantled as these influence the student attitude towards various brands of Feminist Theology in general and African Women Theology in particular, and notably the possible impact of the subject content in their lives.

Second, we submit that Women Theologies have a place in Kenya. It is a relevant area of study as it addresses issues that could improve the life of women as well as human relationships in the society. However, for it to have the desired impact, Women Theologies must be contextualized. They have to take into account the actual life experiences of the Kenyan people in their varied social realities.

Lastly, the chapter lists the objectives of African Women's Theology in Kenya. What comes out clearly from this discussion is that these objectives answer the concerns of Kenyans. Thus, they address the influence of the peoples' culture and religion on the life of women and men. Other objectives are the concern for empowerment of women, the need to re-read the Bible from their own context and inclusion of the voices of women in the theological discourse. Consequently, it is agreed that African Women's Theology which addresses gender issues in religion and culture in Africa in general and Kenya in particular is a significant area of study. All institutions should teach it in order to guard against the negative effect of male-centred theological discourse. For this reason, we underline that Women Theologies ought to be developed as an area of specialization comparable to Biblical Theology, Dogmatic Theology, Moral Theology and

pastoral Theology among others. The required number of courses – properly weighted as common, core, electives and seminars ought to be offered so as to adequately train women and men as professionals in Women Theologies so that these can train more people - women and men, whose work may transform theology for the betterment of human relations in society. In the fourth chapter, we analyse methodological issues in African Women's Theology in Kenya.

### **Endnotes**

1. Kenya Circle publications are *Violence Against Women (1996)*, *Conflicts in Africa: A Women Response (2002)* and women in EATWOT – Kenya Chapter as well as the Ecumenical Symposium of East African theologians, have chapters in the following publications. Mugambi and Magesa (eds) 1989, 1990, Mugambi and Nasimiyu-Wasike (eds) 1992, 1994. Kinoti and Waliggo 1995 (eds), Getui and Kanyandago (eds) 1999, Magesa and Nthamburi (eds); Getui and Obeng (eds) 1999. Getui and Theuri (eds) 2002, Theuri and Wamue (eds) 2003, among others.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES IN WOMEN THEOLOGIES IN KENYA

#### 4.0 Introduction

In chapter three, we addressed the meaning, scope and relevance of Women Theologies in Kenya. We underlined the importance of defining the important concepts utilized in the study. This is in view of the fact that such definitions are a way of dismantling the popular negative notions about feminism in general, and African Women's Theology in particular that are prevalent in the society. We also noted that while many of our respondents felt they knew the meaning of feminism, our analysis showed that some of their definitions were inadequate.

In this Chapter, we discuss methodological issues in Women Theologies in Kenya. In this regard, we shall make reference to the body of conceptual orientations utilized as well as the considered principles of procedure in Women Theologies in Kenya. We shall also discuss pedagogical and some popular methods of theologizing. This is in view of the fact that while African Women's Theology is an academic area of study, it addresses issues of life in the community. Thus, the elements of daily life are intertwined with speaking about God. These ordinary

and seemingly insignificant activities are therefore resources in Women Theologies.

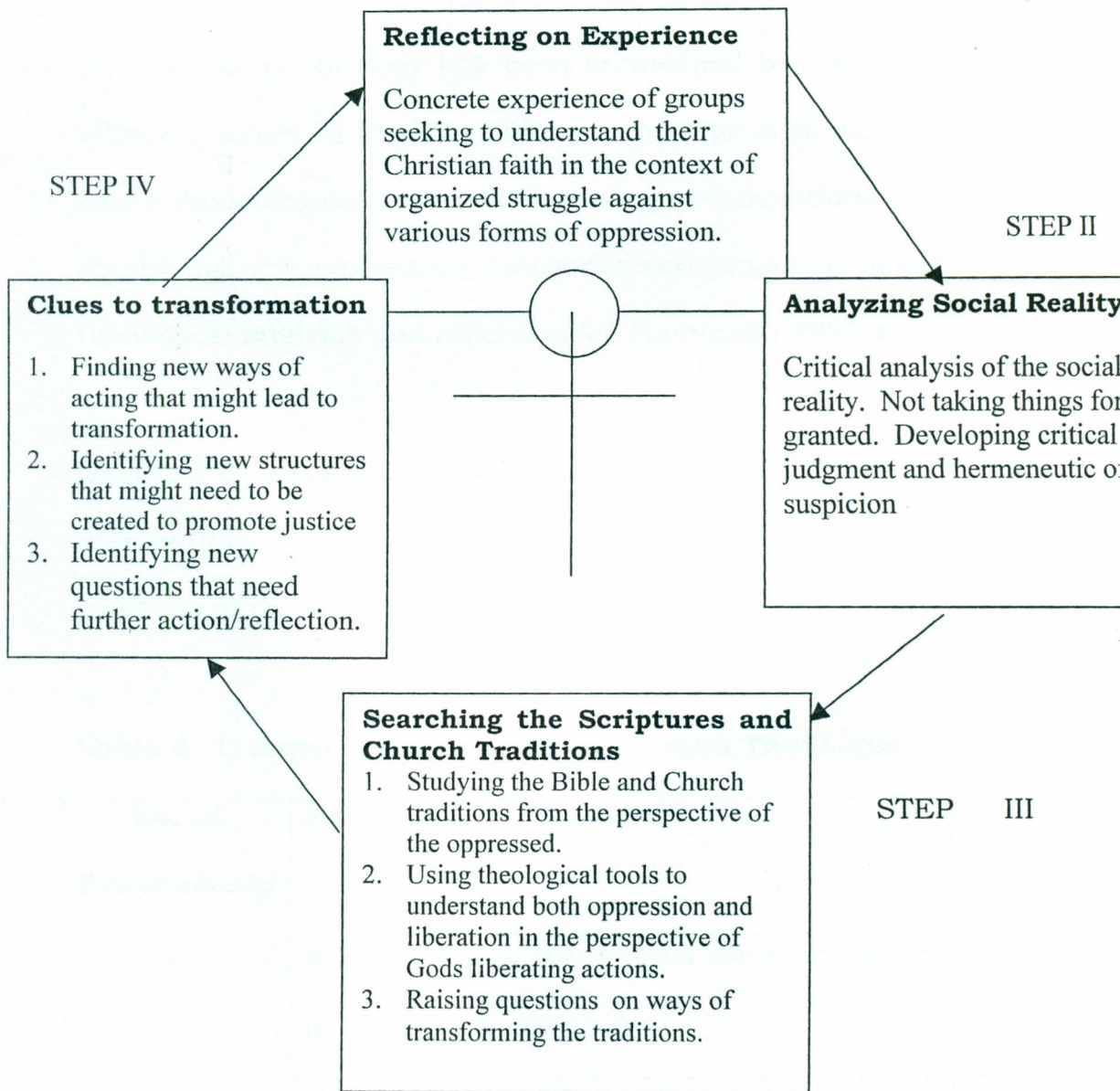
The chapter is divided as follows:- the procedure in Women Theologies in Kenya, theoretical orientations in Women Theologies, popular methods of theologizing and pedagogical methods in Women Theologies in Kenya.

#### **4.1 The Procedure in Women Theologies in Kenya**

In this section, we present a four-step procedure in Women Theologies. These steps include, reflecting on experience, analyzing social reality, searching the scriptures and Church traditions and identifying ways of effecting transformation. It is an adaptation of the method in "Feminist Liberation Theology" developed by the National Assembly of Women Religious in USA in 1984. The four steps are graphically presented below.

### 4.1.1 Four Steps in Women Theologies in Kenya

#### STEP I



**Figure 4. 1: Original from National Assembly of Women Religious, USA 1984**

In this diagram, it is noted that women's experiences of faith in the context of struggle against oppression form the starting point in women theologizing. The use of day-to-day life experiences in the practice of theology has been occasioned by the inclusion of women's voices in theology. Women theological practices call for new methodological approaches, posing new questions of inquiry, identifying new explanatory categories and proposing new data for theological analysis and reflection (cf. Haminski 1995:x).

During the fieldwork, we asked our informants to identify what differentiated women's theologizing from that of men. The analyses of the responses were as follows.

**Table 4. 1: Aspects Characterizing Women Theologizing**

<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Responses</b>	<b>%</b>
55	Mentioned the use of real life experiences in women's theologizing.	85
4	Gave no response.	6
4	Observed that women tend to be down to earth.	6
1	Indicated that the question was not clear.	2

This shows that most of the informants were aware of the fact that there is a difference between men and women's ways of doing theology. Further, they observed that this difference lay in the women's ability to utilize concrete life experiences in their theologizing. Below is a selection of their responses:

- 1) Women seem to be more down to earth. They address real life situations and needs in a practical way (Mwangi O.I March 2000).
- 2) Women tend to dwell on real life situations, especially grassroot experiences (Nandi O.I August 2000).
- 3) The starting point in women's theologizing is everyday life experiences. Therefore, in teaching Women Theologies, it would be proper to utilize the lived experiences of Christian women (Kinoti O.I March 2000).

The informants had different explanations as to what doing theology based on real life experiences of Christian women meant, as presented below. In this regard, it was observed that, it means using a life centered approach in doing theology. This comprised theological reflections that started with real life experiences of the women in their faith communities. Thus, their contexts or the

specific social location from which one did theology was important.

It was however, noted that the context in which Christian women study theology in Kenya was not a homogenous one. There were many Christian denominations, cultural, social, economic and political contexts. Such differences had prompted African women theologians to address the differences between them. This is in view of their awareness that such differences have been used to divide, silence, oppress, marginalize and even kill, sometimes in the name of faith and scriptures (cf. Njoroge 1997:80).

Women realize that they have been marginalized because of their gender. They however, noted that their lived experiences as women unites them. For this reason, African Women's Theology seeks to honour the diversity of perspectives and ways of addressing particular issues of concern in the various Christian denominations, religions and cultures. The influence of African culture and religion is particularly significant. This is because, African Women's Theology is done in the context of a living and dynamic culture that is imbued with traditional religious symbols, beliefs, rituals and a worldview that deeply influences peoples' lives. Africa Women's Theology in Kenya has critically

assessed the influence of African culture on the lives of women. The impact of African culture on women's lives is further discussed in chapter five.

Context, also refers to the Church itself. In Kenya, the Church is multifaceted and with many denominations, including African instituted churches (AICs). Each Christian community has its own peculiar ethos by which it is distinguished, although they all can be viewed as one body in Christ. In studying theology, women theologians refer to their experiences in particular denominations or AICs. Such experiences have not always been positive as these churches are patriarchal in organization and orientation. Very often, this has meant that women theologians challenge life-threatening religious beliefs and practices. This calls for detailed research and analysis on the part of the women. Besides, it displays why men should also be trained to understand and accept women as equal but different actors (cf. Kanyoro 1997). Thus, the churches have to create spaces for women where there have been none before (cf. Njoroge 1996).

It was also noted that, women's experiences are the basic source of theological content. According to Ruether:

The use of women's experience explodes as a critical force exposing classical theology

including its codified traditions as based on male experience rather than on human experience (1983:12).

Such experiences are reflected in the stories of women, the songs they sing, their prayers and in their dramatizing. The second step in women's theologising involves analysing social reality. Our research noted that women's experiences of faith in the Church led to questions on the sources of oppression and how the situation was explained. Such questions were directed at various structures of society. For Christian women theologians, the response of the Church towards their oppression was mandatory as indicated in step two of the diagram.

During a worship service organized and presented by women in one church, we noted that the presenters identified contradictions between the teaching of the church and the application of such teachings with regard to women. Consequently, they questioned the church's response to problems affecting women members. The presenters noted that the church had failed to attend to the special needs of women within the congregation. It overlooks or ignores its responsibility towards widows, divorcees, single parents, students and single professional women among others. The needs of singles that are hardly met by the church include:

acceptance, networking, faith, guidance and friendship. (cf. Appendix 11).

It was noted that sometimes singles engaged in pre-marital sex and were stigmatised. Often they realize their mistakes but the church judges them very harshly, hence they may be excommunicated or even rejected as bad examples. Unfortunately, such treatment coincides with rejection by the family, friends and even the so called lovers. What these singles need is love and acceptance as opposed to rejection. This is in accordance with Jesus' teaching that the greatest commandment that Christians ought to keep is love (Mtt 22:37-40). The church can, therefore, be the family that singles need to restore their honour, spiritual heritage and a right relationship with God.

By use of flashcards, which indicated the above needs of singles, the church was asked to reconsider its relationship with singles. They were reminded that it is through responsive behaviour of members that God provided for the needs of singles. Thus, instead of judging them, the church could encourage singles to make friends with Jesus for in him there is hope and love (cf. Appendix III).

The third step in the procedure for Women Theologies involves searching the scriptures and Church traditions from the perspective of women. The role of scripture and Church tradition in the oppression and liberation of women was ambivalent. Thus, reading scriptures for transformation and renewal of women's lives requires that women search for what is life-affirming while resisting the temptation to conform to social constructs that downplay women's dignity.

At grassroot level, women theologians, guide women to search for the liberating word of God in scriptures. This is in view of the fact that the Bible is a patriarchal book. In many instances, it downplays women's dignity and worth. It is, therefore, important to refer to texts that take seriously women's experiences. The gospel story is particularly important as it identifies Jesus liberating women from difficult situations. This is why Njoroge avered that: "scripture taught from a people-centred perspective has the power to transform society" (2000:155).

The fourth step in women's theologising involves ways of effecting transformation. We noted that women theologians in Kenya like their counterparts globally are searching for ways of transforming their oppressive contexts. Questions on how women could change

their situation for the better both in the Church and the society abound. This is why women theologians in Kenya were involved in researches that address the promotion of justice in the political, economic, social, cultural and religious spheres of life (cf. Getui & Theuri (eds) 2002; Kanyoro & Njoroge (eds) 1996).

In view of the preceding discussion, we submit that the procedure in women's theologizing presented is viable. It is flexible, in the sense that it can be utilized by both those who employ feminist and gender conceptual frameworks respectively. More importantly, the application of this procedure is gender responsive as it considers the perspectives of all Gods' people—both women and men as members of their communities and churches. In the next section we discuss theoretical orientations in Women Theologies in Kenya.

#### **4.2 Theoretical Orientation in Women Theologies in Kenya**

In the previous section, we presented the procedure followed in women's theologizing in Kenya. We underlined the importance of women's experiences of faith and struggle in diverse socio-cultural locations. The real life experiences of Christian women provide a basis for women theologies. In this section, we identify and discuss some of the theoretical frameworks that inform

Women Theologies in Kenya. When broadly categorized, we noted that some methodologies were informed by either feminist or gender-based theories.

As noted earlier, African Women's Theology is a nascent theology in Kenya as it formally dates back to the late 1980s. At this stage of its development, a number of issues have emerged. These include the use of Western feminist theories and the search for a uniquely African women theological methodology (Maluluke 1989, 2001). For this reason, it has been argued in some forums that women theologians in Africa, in general and Kenya in particular are merely imitating those in the West as we indicated in chapter three.

In response to this observation, Oduyoye notes that women theologians in Africa apply a methodology of theologizing that is different from those frequently used in academia. In her view, many women employ a 'narrative' theology. This implies,

Utilizing their life experiences and sharing their reflections in the forms of stories, thus extending the study of theology beyond the academic realm (2000:219).

What this means is that the methodology employed by the women is not similar to those that have been employed in the study of

theology before. This is in view of the fact that in the past, theology was defined as an activity for academics in seminaries, colleges and universities. The study of theology also utilized specific methodologies and theories that were taught in these institutions. These views are confirmed by Phiri and Nadar (2006:7) who point out that "Circle women have often chartered innovative methodologies that fall outside the ambit of traditional Western methodologies".

African male theologians who for a long time have been the exclusive beneficiaries of the theology taught in the seminaries employ such methodologies. In other words, theological education for purposes of Church ministry was reserved for men. This differs from liberation theologies in general and Women Theologies in particular which give a methodological focus which shifts from perceiving truth to doing the truth.

The methodologies learned in seminaries alienated theology and the theologians and placed them in a class of their own, most often a class above the common people. This approach has been challenged by The Circle's theologizing which stresses that every Christian is a theologian (cf. Oduyoye 1989:360). This is because, all Christians seek to understand their experience of the

Christian faith amidst organized struggle against various forms of oppression. Such realization enables women theologians to assess individual experience and response to God as 'doing' theology. Indeed, this puts into focus the fact that the differing experiences of women and men are important in guiding our theological methodology. We shall demonstrate this by referring to The Circle's theological methodology.

African women theologians in The Circle try to promote a theology by the people. It is noted that individual Christians, both informally and formally trained in theology can communicate something about their experience of God and God's activity in the world. This implies that the methodologies of the academia may or may not be utilized in Women Theologies that are based on life as experienced. These methodologies may not even be uniform. This is in view of the fact that, these women bring into theology different training, or no formal training, concerns, persuasions and religious affiliations among other differences. They however, explicate a theology which has a practical orientation, a theology that addresses questions and issues of life as experienced in specific social locations. Our findings are in line with Oduyoye's observation that, "It is not helpful to idolize the received patterns

of theologizing . . . as these (patterns) are not related to how Africans experience God" (1989:362).

In view of the above, women theologians in Kenya should not be expected to emulate and utilize the methodological patterns of the seminaries as these are foreign to their experiences as women. Besides, such imported patterns tend to socialize individuals in specific denominational and religious affiliations. The resultant theology may thus be fragmentary, impressing the differences of the theologians. This is why one of our informants Kerubo indicated: "There are differences in the way Evangelical, Catholic, Seventh-Day Adventist etc, women address issues of concern in theology" (O.I. January, 2001).

Thus, instead of mentioning that Women Theologies are characterized by a lack of methodology, critics of the theology would be better off trying to find out and underlining the unique methods utilized in this theology. These differ from those of seminary trained theologians who embrace the various types of biblical criticism, exegesis and specific patterns of worship and methodologies that are rooted in the mother-churches abroad (cf. Oduyoye 1989).

The need for women's voices to be heard in the academy has meant that African women theologians develop innovative theories of analysis. Examples include Musimbi Kanyoro's "cultural hermeneutics" and Musa Dube's "post-colonial readings" cf. Kanyoro (1995), Dube (2000).

It is noteworthy that one of the strengths of Women Theologies in Kenya is that these address issues of life as experienced. They articulate theology from the basis of the social context. They affirm that women speak about their inner feelings and experiences in songs, stories, deep silences that tell a lot, and in their drama (cf. Njoroge & Dube 2001; Kanyoro & Njoroge C. 1996; Hoehler-Fatton 1996). These are methods of communication that Africans from the various ethnic communities are well-versed with. There is need to uphold these as they are uniquely utilized in women's theologizing.

To address the question of methodology, we asked our informants the following question:

What are the appropriate methodologies for doing Women Theologies in Kenya?

This is because we came across individuals who assumed that feminism stands for one specific methodology. It is, therefore, appropriate to begin our discussion by underling that feminism is a political stance or perspective that may be utilized to inform other theories. As we noted in chapter two, feminism may be categorized as radical, liberal, cultural and socialist. This categorization implies the use of differing theories in the study of women's secondary status in society. Such analyses have often yielded different explanations as well as varying recommendations as to what should be done to correct the unequal status of women in relation to men in society (cf. Clifford 2001).

With regard to Women Theologies, applying a feminist stance refers to the work and reflecting on God undertaken by individuals who are committed to stand consciously with women. Such individuals – men and women value women's humanity and are working to overturn systems that unjustly treat women as subordinate, inferior and derivative of men.

Women theologizing emerges from diverse presuppositions and analyses of women's experiences. They also work within widely divergent political and theological frameworks. Thus, within Feminist Theology, individuals may utilize liberal, radical, literary

sociological or post-colonial theories and arrive at various conclusions. For example, post-colonial feminist theological theories critically address imperialism's general and continuing ideological roles in peoples and cultures of the Two-third World Countries. They have constructive strategy of establishing separate cultural, social and religious discursive traditions to give voice to the religious marginalized women made other by middle-class Euro-American feminists. Thus, Dube employs post-colonial feminist theories in her reflections on a variety of theological issues (cf. Dube 2000:83, 2001(a):40ff; 2001(b):145ff; 2006:131ff). They may also utilize gender analysis in examining the reality of women in society.

It is, therefore, noted that Women Theologies are varied in personalities, experiences as well as the theoretical orientations utilized for explication. These may, however be classified into two broad categories namely; feminist and gender-based theories. These are discussed in the two sub-sections that follow.

#### **4.2.1 Feminist Theories**

Feminist theories utilize specific lines of thought that may be identified regardless of the specific categorization. These theories arise out of intellectual movements found partly within the

academia and partly within women's social and political efforts to end their oppression. These theories are interdisciplinary and employ various methods of inquiry and analysis. Often, they engage a dominant academic field for their primary investigative approach such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, anthropology among others; all of which are utilized in theological work. Through these various approaches, feminist theories interrogate structures of male domination and female subordination and the resultant gender relationships (Broch 1996: 117).

Two-thirds World Women Theologies adopts a two-fold point of departure: Womens' experience of resistance, survival and struggle against patriarchal systems of domination and dehumanization and womens' shared experiences of hope, of life giving spirituality and of a common effort to eliminate all forms of social and domestic violence (Aquino 2000:88). In addition, African scholarship has encouraged attention to the everyday, the ordinary and the seemingly insignificant. These daily socially inflected exchanges and mediations are viewed as "the sight of localized struggles and transformations" (Lewis 2004:28). These are discernable in the narratives that women theologians share, reflect on and interpret.

Although there are many articulations of feminism today, feminists in the world over agree that contemporary feminism is not only a political movement akin to other emancipatory movements: it is also an intellectual process of theorizing the situation of women in the patriarchal/kyriarchal societies and religions (Fiorenza 1996: XVII). Thus for the academy, there is need to employ such theories in order to demonstrate and coherently explicate the position of women in relation to men in society and religions. Humm (1992:1) points out that:

. . . the emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the understanding in all societies which divide the sexes . . . women are less valued than men.

Feminism also stands on the premise that women can consciously and collectively change their social place. Thus "from social reform and suffrage campaigns through to academic theory", feminism underlines the need for, and the possibility of change in the situation of women in relation to men in society (Ibid:2).

There are diverse theoretical articulations of feminism that are employed in the study of Feminist Liberation Theology. A critical feminist theory and theology of liberation, however has the following characteristics:

First, they critique male supremacy, and hold that gender is socially constructed rather than innate or ordained by God. Such male supremacy may be articulated as patriarchy (male domination and power over women) or Kyriarchy (elite male domination over women and men who are less powerful) (cf. Fiorenza 1996). Thus, women's oppression is as a result of patriarchy/Kyriarchy as well as the multiplicative, intersecting of racism, classism, sexism, colonialism, neo-colonialism as well as all other structures of domination existing in society (cf. Dube 2001, Humm 1992).

Second, the theory does not limit itself to the understanding and discussion of such domination and its theological legitimations. It also strives to change and transform such oppressive structures. This implies that while a feminist critical theory of liberation begins with the feminist experience of women struggling against oppressive structures, it further explores how the dignity and worth of women, and all oppressed people may be restored. Thus, the death-dealing oppressive structures and systems are named. Besides, there is exploration of life-giving visions and structures.

Finally, the aim of such critical theorizing is to give dignity and value to the life of the non-persons, the down-trodden women and

men. Therefore, it does not restrict salvation to the soul but seeks to promote the wellbeing of the whole person and insists on radical equality for all. To this end, it seeks to inspire Christians to engage in the struggle for transforming patriarchal/kyriarchal structures of domination. In the next section, we examine gender theories.

#### **4.2.2 Gender Theories**

The French feminist Simone de Beauvoir (1953) is generally seen to be the precursor of gender theories. She formulated a critique on biological determination introducing the famous adage that “woman is not born but made”. She, therefore, pointed out the difference between natural and cultural sex, which later became the basis for sex/gender theories.

Gender theories have been utilized in conceptualizing the subordinate status of women in relation to men in the society and religion. Women theologians, for example, have examined traditional teaching pertaining to the horizons of women and the precise nature of male-female relationship in leadership, language, worship and symbols of the Church and they have found them wanting for the inclusion of all God’s people. This is because such structures are sexist. They reflect the perspectives

of male gender only. This is because "he is the subject, the absolute; while she is the other (de Beauvoir 1992:46). Hence, she is defined with reference to man and not with reference to her.

The use of gender as a category of analysis is a theoretical possibility that responds to the question of the circulation of power. It is, therefore, capable of articulating both the confluence of relationships among the sexes, ethnicities and class that cut across the various sectors of humanity. Gender theories proceed from the premise that the system of roles and relationships between men and women are determined not by biology but by the social, political and economic, and religious structures of society. Thus, the relationship between men and women and the way this is socially constructed is of interest to gender theorists (cf. Mwaura 2001:168). Because gender is a social construct, the roles of men and women are not universal. They originate in a given social setting and are maintained and reinforced through the processes of socialization and training in a particular society.

Society's perception and attitude towards gender roles, responsibilities and their worth are often based on value judgment and stereotyping. Religion, among other structures, plays a significant part in maintaining and legitimizing roles,

attitudes and perceptions towards the genders through beliefs, teachings, ritual, language as well as other forms of communication (cf. Fiorenza; 1996:xxi; Kanyoro 1997:178; Mwaura 2001:169).

The use of gender theories in theology helps women and men redefine their relationship in a mutually beneficial way. For instance, in the Church, such redefinition enables women to move into traditionally male domains and men to traditionally feminine roles. This way, the communities will be able to benefit from the potential of all its members (cf. Kanyoro 1997).

Accordingly, gender theories situate the problem in the relationship between women and men in the distribution of power. This distribution is asymmetrical; that is, the problem between female-male relationship is that the male gender exercise systematic power and authority over women. On the other hand, women are expected to occupy a secondary position in relation to men in all sectors of achievement.

Power is inherently dynamic and embodied. It has, however, been interpreted as domination by men and some women in some contexts. This has led to violence being meted on women as proof

of the power associated with the male gender among other injustices. Thus, in utilizing gender as a category of analysis, it has been possible for women theologians to expose the unequal regard for men and women. They, therefore, call for equal regard for all persons regardless of gender. This is justice, and to seek justice is a command from the scriptures. Thus, in seeking for God-given dignity for women, the Church will also seek for justice for all others who are treated unjustly (cf. Mwaura 2001:169ff; Kanyoro 2001:249).

Gender analysis calls for mainstreaming of gender in all aspects of the religious assembly; in mission, diakonia and proclamation; including development programmes, personnel and employment policies. This involves the use of gender lenses in order to account for the presence, role and status of women and men in all aspects of life in the religious community (cf. Kanyoro 1997).

In conclusion, we submit that both feminist and gender based theories are being utilized to varying degrees by women theologians in Kenya. In some cases, aspects of both theories are identifiable in individual feminist theological works. The choice, in our view is governed by individual training and exposure. Besides, Women Theologies emerge from diverse presuppositions

and analyses of women's experiences even as they work within widely divergent political and theoretical frameworks. We also acknowledge that the fear of the term feminist deters some people from employing feminist theories. As a result, they may use gender-based theories in contexts where a feminist analysis might have been better. This is in view of the fact that feminist critical theory has a sharp cutting edge as it names the perpetrators of injustices towards women in society.

The choice and application of theories in Women Theologies are also influenced by the level of education, training in theology or lack of it, place of training as well as level of awareness among other factors. Women theologians trained in the West stood out as they freely utilized feminist and gender-based theories in theologising. Understandably, these theologies are varied in personalities, experiences as well as the methodologies utilized in analyzing women's situation. Thus, what determines the theory in Women Theologies may be the situation being addressed, audience and the political ends sought. These determine a methodology which can profitably analyze the experiences of women in a certain social location and point out avenues to liberation for that context. For example, women in Kenya are influenced by various indigenous cultures, Church traditions,

social, political and economic and geographical contexts. The variety implied here, calls for multiple approaches. The work of Teresia M. Hinga and Anne N. Wasike underlines some of the different approaches available in doing Women Theologies in Kenya.

#### **4.2.3 Methodologies in Women Theologies: The Cases of Teresia M. Hinga and Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike**

In chapter three, we noted that women theologians in Kenya have utilized Western methodologies in their discourses. This is largely due to their earlier formation in institutions in Euro-American institutions. Besides, much of the literature on Women Theologies is written or edited by persons in the developed countries of the West.

It is, however, noteworthy that these women have employed the knowledge gained through such studies to respond to specific issues in their socio-cultural contexts. Their reflections address concerns that are local as opposed to foreign ones. Such reflections display unique aspects which, therefore, differentiate women methodologies of theologizing in Kenya from those in the Euro-American West. Besides, women methodologies in Kenya