GUSTAVUS ADOLPHUS COLLEGE

WOMEN IN TRANSITION: RE-CONTEXTUALIZING THEOLOGICAL

APPROACHES FOR BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

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"On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, nor tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid in completing this work."

THE WOMEN OF TSHABO

Every Wednesday afternoon in Tshabo, a small rural village in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, women who are members of the local Baptist church walk up to two miles to attend a women's communal worship service. As a woman staying in Tshabo with a Baptist family, I was invited to participate in the service one hot, sticky day. I walked with Mama, my host during my stay, for nearly an hour before reaching the worship site, a small, circular hut where one of the Baptist women lived. As we approached the hut, Mama pulled lightly on the sleeve of the black jacket I had thrown over my shoulders on our walk, indicating that she wanted me to wear the jacket during the service. With respect for the conservative culture of the village, I obediently put the shirt over my shoulders as Mama had requested.

About a dozen women who had already arrived sat in manufactured blue plastic chairs, an odd replacement for the simple bed and small dining table that had likely occupied the quaint hut hours earlier. Each of the women spoke only a few words of English, but their inviting smiles told me that I was welcome in this place. I followed Mama around the circular edges of the hut as we stopped at each synthetic blue chair, greeting the women in their Xhosa language: "Molo, Mama." Each responded, "Molo, Sisi." While we waited for everyone to arrive, the women chatted easily with one another.

A woman who I recognized as the Baptist pastor's wife began the service with a few words and a lively song. Throughout the service, the women's confidence amazed me; with commanding authority, they took turns leading hymns and presenting personal

testimonies to the group. Never before—and not since—had I seen these women exude such charisma and demand such presence.

THE MEN OF TSHABO

No event in Tshabo was better attended, I learned, than funerals. During my short stay, I participated in three of these "social" events, as they might appropriately be considered. As I arrived at the first funeral, Mama led me to what I identified quickly as the women's side of the congregation. The women sang with enthusiasm—dancing and raising their arms. Despite their enthusiasm, however, the women remained speechless.

Near the middle of the service, the reverend leading the service paused to introduce my friends and me to the congregation: "Brandon, would you like to say a few words to introduce yourself?" While we were in Tshabo, the people in the village consistently asked Brandon, one of my close friends who was also staying in Tshabo, to speak on behalf of my friend and I who were both female. Arriving at the burial site, the reverend opened the casket for the first time and said a short prayer. A small group of men looked at the body before closing the casket for the last time and began shoveling dirt to fill the empty hole.

Following the burial, a group of women in the church served lunch for all of the people who had attended the funeral. Ensuring that they served all of the men before the women received their meals, it seemed, was imperative. Sometimes this process could last nearly an hour, as the women serving lunch waited for the men's recycled plates and cups.

Curious to learn more about these funeral customs and rituals, I turned to Mr. Yaka, a man in the village who spoke English quite well. Mr. Yaka told me that when a man dies, the women in the family wear black clothes covering their bodies to honor him, whereas the men only wear a small, black button to commemorate a woman who has died. "Because of the hierarchy," Mr. Yaka explained matter-of-factly.

INTRODUCTION

Women in South Africa, I have learned, are strong. Their compassion for others, along with their determination to fight for change, makes them a resilient force commanding attention. During apartheid, the era of white minority rule in South Africa that began officially in 1948 and lasted until the country's first democratic elections in 1994, people were separated physically, culturally, economically, and socially based on racial categories determined by the government. The lasting effects of this separation are monumental; hierarchies once focused on race continue to manifest themselves in hierarchies of class, religion, and gender. The democratic government and passionate individuals have taken great strides to undo institutional racism and promote racial integration, yet much inequality remains. Years of privileging whites in South Africa have left those marginalized by the hierarchical apartheid system struggling to regain their silenced voices. Women represent a disproportionate number of these voices.

Women of all races and regions of South Africa experienced apartheid. Some experienced apartheid in the passbooks they were forced to carry that indicated their race

and where they lived.[1] Others experienced apartheid in removals from their homes and

relocation to new, government-constructed townships.[2] Still others experienced the

privileges of apartheid, a result of being born into the "superior" racial group. Regardless

of the nature of these experiences, they differed undoubtedly. These differences were

reflected in women's leisure activities, their jobs, and their education. They influenced,

and were influenced by, women's political views, their economic statuses, and their

religious beliefs.[3] South African women, however, have struggled to find the intricacies

of their experiences reflected sufficiently in Christian theological thinking.

As worldwide awareness of and resistance to apartheid grew during the late 1980s

through the 1990s, literature regarding South Africa and its transition to democracy

emerged just as rapidly. Literature has addressed the experiences of South Africans from

political, religious, economic, and cultural perspectives. Each of these perspectives is

important for understanding the current condition of South African society and

formulating appropriate directions for the country in the future. This thesis seeks to

contribute to that discussion and encourage its active continuation. In particular, I will

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[1] Brigalia Bam. "Priorities for Women in South Africa," in *Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change*, ed. Diana L. Eck and Devaki Jain (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987), 44.

[2] Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of Christianity in South Africa* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 302. Approximately 3.5 million people were forcibly removed from their homes and relocated during the years 1962 to 1985.

[3] Richard Elphick, "Introduction: Christianity in South African History," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1. The prevalence of Christianity has risen dramatically throughout the last century; whereas fewer than half of South Africans were Christian in 1911, today over seventy percent report that they are Christian.

highlight the experiences of black South African Christian women[4] to capture a small piece of what distinguishes them from other South African women and men during and after apartheid. It is these distinctions that frame my discussion of appropriate theological methods for black South African Christian women. My goal is to evaluate priorities in Christian theological thinking and methods based on the need to understand people locally before attempting to resolve challenges nationally or globally. I argue that theological methods for black South African Christian women need to reflect their contexts with a focus on, and more comprehensive understanding of, the local concerns of these women.

First, in Part I of this thesis, I will contextualize the post-apartheid experiences of black South African Christian women in terms of the hierarchical strategies and principles that dominated their lives during apartheid. Next, in Part 2, I will examine the ways in which women have remained marginalized by a gender hierarchy even since the end of the apartheid racial hierarchy. I will look specifically at black South African Christian women's experiences in African traditional religion and Christianity and their changing roles in South African society. Finally, in Part 3, I will consider the opportunities and limitations of possible theological approaches or methods for black South African Christian women based on the complexity of their experiences.

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[4] As I seek to develop a contextual understanding of the experiences of black South African Christian women, I understand that even this categorization may be too broad. When I speak of black South African Christian women, I refer to the Protestant branch of Christianity. I will clarify when I am referring to experiences of people outside of this community, such as white, non-Protestant, or non-South African people.

PART ONE: SOUTH AFRICA IN TRANSITION

Contextualizing the experiences of black South African Christian women requires understanding these women's encounters with the apartheid system. Specifically relevant here is the degree to which women's experiences in South Africa were severely at odds with the apartheid structure. Apartheid was a hierarchical system of separate development and social engineering based on a political and social atmosphere of institutional racism. The Afrikaners became the white ruling class when they won the 1899-1902 Anglo-Boer War against the British Empire. Later the Nationalist Party, represented by Afrikaners, created the apartheid system when they won the 1948 election.[5]

Although apartheid was not officially constructed until after the Nationalist Party won the 1948 election, many of its principles had been rooted deeply in South African society for years. For instance, the 1913 Land Act, instated by the British colonial government, established reserves for all South Africans who were considered "African" (a term used to refer to black South Africans), limiting them to only 14 percent of the country's land.[6] The government required that all South Africans carry passbooks indicating in which of the four racial categories they fit: "white," "Indian," "coloured," or "black." These quoted terms represent racial classifications that the Nationalist Party developed during apartheid to benefit whites and discriminate against all other races.

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[5] Gay Seidman, "Is South Africa Different? Sociological Comparisons and Theoretical Contributions from the Land of Apartheid," *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999), 421.

[6] Anton D. Lowenberg and William H. Kaempfer, *The Origins and Demise of South African Apartheid* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 34.

Racial labels have shaped and continue to shape relationships in South Africa. For the remainder of my writing, I will use these terms as they are recognized within the culture. Simultaneously, however, I identify with Elizabeth Isichei, a prominent scholar of African Christianity, who writes, "One cannot write intelligibly about South Africa without using the language of race, 'Coloured', 'Afrikaner', 'Black', but to use these labels, as if they had a self-evident meaning, is itself a victory for racism."[7] Like Isichei, I do not wish to perpetuate apartheid racial categories, but rather to identify lasting implications of their use. While these categories no longer exist officially, their distinctions continue to be felt in South African culture and society, often informally dictating neighborhoods where people live, the schools they attend, and the religious places at which they worship.

Central to the apartheid system was the idea of separate development. National Party leader C. P. Mulder's essay, "The Rationale of Separate Development," is helpful for understanding the National Party's reasons for creating and maintaining separation. His essay is published in *South African Dialogue*, a text compiled in 1972 as a forum for opponents and proponents of apartheid to voice their arguments for and against this system. Mulder argues against the notion that apartheid—structured as a system of separate development—is "by its very nature racialistic and oppressive and designed to favour the White population at the expense of the other ethnic groups."[8] To this claim, he responds,

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[7] Isichei, 299.

[8] C. P. Mulder, "The Rationale of Separate Development" in *South African Dialogue*, ed. Nic Rhoodie (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972), 49.

> Why should a policy be abandoned if its ultimate aim is to safeguard the national identity of separate nations in free and sovereign states with full independence and self-determination in every sphere of life? Why should a policy be totally rejected if it encourages each individual, in his own country, to develop to the maximum of his abilities, and opens new avenues of progress to him?[9]

Mulder's response to criticisms of apartheid reflects the Nationalist Party platform that races thrive when they are separated from one another.

Such seemingly rational justifications for separate development, as well as many whites' abilities to ignore the harsh realities of apartheid for their non-white neighbors, aided considerably in the success of this system. South African Episcopal bishop Desmond Tutu notes, "The [apartheid] system…was exceedingly sophisticated. The black townships were usually out of sight of whites, and it was an easy step from being out of sight to being out of mind."[10] Apartheid racial policies may have remained concealed for some, but for others they were quite blatant. Isichei identifies the work of Livingstone, who experienced firsthand in his work with the black southern Tswana culture "a violent and exploitative racism among the Afrikaner frontiersmen" that developed in mid-nineteenth century South Africa.[11] Livingstone writes, "In [Afrikaners'] own estimation, they are the chosen people of God, and all the coloured race are 'black property' or 'creatures'—heathen given to them for an inheritance."[12]

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[9] Ibid., 50.

[10] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (London: Rider Books, 1999), 171.

[11] Isichei, 111.

[12] D. Livingstone, *A Popular Account of Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (J. Murry: London, 1875), 24, cited in Isichei, 111.

What Mulder's rationale for separate development fails to admit, therefore, is that in practice, separate development did not uphold its claim to "[encourage] each individual…to develop to the maximum of his abilities."[13] The system claimed to recognize the needs and experiences of each race individually but actually attended only to whites, who were at the top of this racial hierarchy. South Africans were much more diverse than the four racial categories allowed; separate development ignored other classifications that distinguish the individual, including gender, class, and religion.

The creators of apartheid based its policies and construction largely on Christian ideals in Afrikaner theology. Afrikaner theology and political agendas developed almost simultaneously, each advancing separation initiatives. Eugene Klaaren, Associate Professor of Religion at Wesleyan University in the United States, explains, "A broad theology of culture, stitched together from neo-Calvinist rigour and evangelical piety, ensured the dominance of Afrikanerdom and apartheid."[14] It was the combination of all of these elements and spheres of Afrikaner society "stitched" neatly together that allowed apartheid to thrive. As they did not experience tension between principles promoted by the churches, political organizations, and schools of thought to which they subscribed, Afrikaners did not need to evaluate this hierarchical structure critically. Johann Kinghorn, a Professor of Religion at the University of Stellenbosch in South Africa (a traditionally Afrikaner university), describes this relationship: "The Afrikaner churches joined other

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[13] Mulder, 49.

[14] Eugene M. Klaaren, "Creation and Apartheid: South African Theology Since 1948" in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 374.

institutions at the centre of the Afrikaner dynamic, profoundly shaped by it and shaping it in turn."[15] There developed an ongoing exchange between the Afrikaner churches and political or social constructions of Afrikaner identity.

The neo-Calvinist emphasis on law and order, on which Afrikaner theology was largely based, further reinforced Afrikaners' assertion of their own authority. They upheld a view of creation that recognized a number of separate and distinct social spheres (such as church, state, family, school, etc.) that all reported to the control of the one biblical Creator. Hendrik Stoker, a neo-Calvinist philosopher and key constructor of twentieth-century Afrikaner theology, promoted establishing racially separate universities, a standard that was later extended to the entire South African educational system.[16] This initiative reflected the Afrikaners' value of group identity and ultimate rejection of liberal values of freedom and autonomy.

This focus on separation is further reflected in the myth of the Great Trek, which is still identified as a significant cornerstone in Afrikaner identity and theology. As the Afrikaners saw themselves as the chosen people of God, the Trek represents the Afrikaners'[17] search for their "Promised Land"[18] from the Cape Colony to two new

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[15] Johann Kinghorn, "Modernization and Apartheid: The Afrikaner Churches," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 135.

[16] Klaaren, 373.

[17] Isichei, 111. The Afrikaners are also referred to as "Voortrekkers," referring to their participation in the Great Trek.

[18] Janet Hodgson, "A Battle for Sacred Power: Christian Beginnings among the Xhosa," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 79.

republics in South Africa in 1837-38.[19] As a symbol, the Great Trek serves to attribute

ownership of South Africa to Afrikaners, justifying their superiority and hierarchy of

racial supremacy. Philippus J.S. de Klerk, a minister for the predominantly Afrikaner

Dutch Reformed Church, articulated Afrikaners' belief in their inherent ownership of the

land: "'Equalization leads to the deterioration of both nations…The Voortrekkers

constantly guarded against such admixture and through their act of faith our nation was

saved as a pure Christian race in this our land.'"[20] According to this statement,

maintaining separation is considered an act of faith that preserves "our nation," an

inherently white South Africa.

White women, placed at the top of the South African racial hierarchy during

apartheid, enjoyed privileges associated with their race; unfortunately, the same was not

necessarily true of their gender. It should be noted here that Afrikaner and English-

speaking women, while they were both white and thus enjoyed the privileges of this

racial status under the apartheid system, each held vastly different histories; thus, their

experiences within South Africa and within their religious institutions differed

considerably. Although many of the themes I will discuss are likely to overlap with the

experiences of white South African women, my intention is to remain focused on the

contexts and experiences of black South African Christian women; therefore, I will not

address white women's experiences at great length.

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[19] Klaaren, 371.

[20] Kinghorn, 141.

Since its first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa no longer has policies of institutional racism. However, decades of promoting this separatist system have undoubtedly had lingering effects on the underlying social structure of the country. Brigalia Bam, who lived in exile from South Africa during apartheid but who eventually served as the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches,[21] notes that apartheid placed black South African Christian women at the bottom of a multilayered hierarchical structure. She states, "The black women of South Africa are the most exploited group in the whole setup of the apartheid system. They are devalued both as blacks, and, within their religious traditions, as women."[22] These women were blacks in a hierarchy governed by whites, and women in a hierarchy governed by men. When the formal racial hierarchy of apartheid waned in 1994, the gender hierarchy remained and continued to marginalize women. In the following section, I will begin to explore these experiences of black South African Christian women to better contextualize approaches to their theology.

PART TWO: BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN IN TRANSITION

Grappling with racial hierarchies in the South African context is only a beginning step in understanding the contexts of black South African Christian women. Adding to this complexity is the overlapping presence of religious experiences and customs in their

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[21] Anthea Garman, "The Changing Status of Women in South Africa and the Churches' Response," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2, no. 2 (1999): 57.

[22] Bam, 43.

lives. The significance of both African traditional religion[23] and Christianity in contemporary black African Christianity is important to recognize, as the religions of many of these women are likely based, to a certain extent, on African traditional religion. Furthermore, these women's changing roles in South African society during apartheid contributed to their demands for simultaneously changing roles within the church. Therefore, race cannot be understood as the only hierarchy in South Africa. This section explores the intricacies of understanding and applying the contexts of black South African women.

African traditional religion and Christianity

Before examining the roles and experiences of women in the black South African Christian context, it will be helpful to define some of the key terms that will frame this argument. As these terms are often politically motivated and differ depending on the context in which they are used, I will attempt use and construct definitions most appropriate for the contexts of black South African Christian women. First, "male domination" and variations of this phrase will refer to hierarchical structures which place males in leadership positions and thus deny women's access to these positions. This definition is derived from the use of "male domination" in the texts that I will discuss later.

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[23] African traditional religion refers to the traditional religions of African cultures that existed prior to Christian missionary arrival in Africa. Many black South Africans still practice African traditional religion or combinations of African traditional religion and Christianity. I will discuss African traditional religion in further detail later.

Next, my definition of "patriarchy," for the purposes of this essay, is adopted

from the introductory notes of *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*,

which was submitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in May 1996.[24] I

selected this definition because it was written specifically for the South African context

to address the era during and directly after apartheid, which coincides well with the

context of my study.[25] Its authors, two female professors in South Africa, submitted this

document to provide "a starting point to aid the Commission in understanding how

gender forms part of the truth and reconciliation process."[26] This document was

especially important because it addressed the insufficient inclusion of gender

considerations in the reconciliation process prior to their submission. The authors provide

this helpful definition and explanation of patriarchy in South Africa:

> Patriarchy refers to the social, political and economic system which
> provides men with unequal power and authority in relation to women in
> society. Patriarchy existed in pre-colonial societies, and interacted with
> colonialism to create specific forms of gender subordination in South
> Africa. Interlaced with the racial and class development of our country,
> patriarchy has wound its bonds around South African women. As with
> other forms of social and political control, dominance of women has often
> been enforced by violence. While apartheid defined blacks as secondary
> political and civil subjects, women were given an even further diminished

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[24] South African Episcopal Bishop Desmond Tutu led the Truth and
Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in the years following the fall of apartheid. Based on
the theological notion of forgiveness, the TRC sought to allow both oppressed and
oppressors to voice their stories of the misdoings of apartheid. In exchange for telling
their stories, participants had the opportunity to grant and receive forgiveness, as well as
receive political amnesty from the South African government.

[25] Material included in the *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*
is based on varied sources, including interviews and consultation of relevant literature.

[26] Beth Goldblatt and Shiela Meintjes, *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation
Commission*, May 1996. <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc/submit/gender.htm#DI1> (29
October 2007).

> social and legal status through both the customary and the common law and other social mechanisms. It is this social imbalance which has enabled men to devalue women and which can be linked to the prevalence of abusive and oppressive treatment of women and girls in our society.[27]

This definition and explanation of "patriarchy" detects the deep ties between patriarchy and other hierarchical structures in South African society. Patriarchy, a "political and economic system," is "interlaced"[28] with the apartheid system, which was a political and social system of racial separation and development, as noted in Part 1. One might consider the patriarchal system an extension or further manifestation of the hierarchical structure of apartheid. In the South African context, as in other contexts, race cannot be considered the only source of hierarchy; black South African Christian women fell under domination of whites in the racially based apartheid system and under men in the gender based patriarchal system.

Patriarchy and male domination arguably have their roots in both African traditional religion and Christianity. Identifying the development of a gender hierarchy in South Africa and women's roles in South African Christianity is therefore a deeply complex process. Customs and practices of African traditional religion continue to materialize in the lives of many black South African Christian women. These overlapping religious traditions may be considered a sort of "religious pluralism" in which African traditional religion is "woven so tightly into the culture that none can claim to have moved completely out of the spirituality of Africa's own religion as distinguished from

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[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

the 'new religions' that have arrived in Africa, be that religion Christianity or Islam."[29] Thus, to contextualize the experiences of black South African Christian women appropriately, one must have a brief understanding of women's roles in both African traditional religion and Christianity.

I do not seek to identity all of the ways in which African traditional religion or Christianity manifest themselves in these women's lives, nor do I attempt to determine an appropriate weight of importance individuals ought to grant to each of these religions. I am cognizant of theologian Manas Buthelezi who warns of "the tendency to romanticise the ethnographically reconstructed historical past at the expense of the anthropological dynamics of the present situation."[30] Rather than focus on the past, I seek to illuminate the contexts that distinguish black Christian women in South Africa today. This requires discussion of their religious experiences, including both African traditional religion and Christianity.

The term "African traditional religion" may seem at first a gross generalization of the people, traditions, and cultures of Africa. Theologian Diane Stinton, who is a senior lecturer in Nairobi, recognizes this concern but notes, "African theologians generally agree that there is enough commonality in African worldviews and experience to justify using the term, and they guard against overgeneralizations by specifying the particular

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[29] Rosemary Edet and Bette Ekeya, "Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 5.

[30] Manas Buthelezi, "An African Theology or a Black Theology?" in *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, ed. Basil Moore (London: C. Hurst & Company, 1973), 32.

context or people group to which they refer."[31] Using this standard, I will discuss

women's roles in African traditional religion, but ultimately with the goal of

understanding important considerations in the contexts of black South African Christian

women.

    African traditional religion is experienced through prayer, ceremonies, healing,

and ritual. Its traditions are chiefly ritualistic and verbal, compared to a "highly literate"

and text-oriented traditional Christianity.[32] Symbolism in African traditional religion is

often deductive, using one symbol to explain another, and so on.[33] African thought tends

to emphasize communal and holistic ways of living. Holistic ways of living are those that

"[avoid] dichotomies between the physical and the spiritual,"[34] and encourage the

individual's participation in community life. African traditional religion has encouraged

women to participate actively in worship, allowing them to hold a number of healing and

salvific ministry roles that parallel the roles of Christian ministers and priests.[35] Women's

worship groups in these religions tend to focus on prayer and preaching with "an activist,

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[31] Diane Stinton, "Africa, East and West," in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parratt, 107. I am interested in African traditional religion for the ways in which women that have participated in both spiritual experiences have carried over its practices, traditions, and values into Christianity. My specific purposes, however, do not intend to disregard the worth or prevalence of African traditional religion in any way; it is rather the lingering significance of this religion in the lives of the women I am studying that makes its recognition important.

[32] Aylward Shorter. *African Christian Theology—Adaptation or Incarnation?* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1975), 6-7.

[33] Ibid., 7.

[34] Stinton, 120.

[35] Edet and Ekeya, 6.

evangelistic fervor."[36] Because of its strong emphasis on participation and ritual,

traditional religion is perhaps understood best through experience and observation.[37]

Traditional religion also involves ancestor worship and the belief that human

beings can possess divinity, in turn reflecting a hierarchical life structure.[38] African

theologian Diane Stinton explains the hierarchical structure of African thought: "Life…is

mediated through descending ranks of beings in the invisible and the visible world: from

God through deceased clan and family members, through royalty, chiefs and elders, to

heads of households and family members, to animate and inanimate elements of

nature."[39] Later, I will discuss black South African Christian women's criticisms of this

hierarchical structure in terms of gender. Important to recognize now are the ways in

which the communal emphasis of African thought contrasted sharply with apartheid

policies based on separate development. The hierarchy of apartheid, focused on tending

to the needs and experiences of white Afrikaners, did not acknowledge or reflect the

communal focus of African traditional religion. Black South African Christian women

also argue that hierarchical structures in African thought contributed to the framework of

gender hierarchies in the Christian church. In this way, black South African Christian

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[36] Deborah Gaitskell, "Power in Prayer and Service: Women's Christian Organizations," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 254.

[37] Shorter, 8.

[38] Isabel Apawo Phiri, "Southern Africa," in *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, ed. John Parratt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 141.

[39] Stinton, 120.

men were marginalized under the apartheid racial hierarchy but benefited from the gender

hierarchy; black South African Christian women were marginalized under both.

In religious groups and within South African society more generally, the roles and

treatment of women have been debated heavily. As increasing numbers of black South

African women join the Christian church, many have questioned whether African

traditional religion or Christianity is to blame for what many of these women identify as

patriarchal structures. Rosemary Edet and Bette Ekeya address this complexity in their

article, "Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community."[40] They write,

> Africa's traditional society was by and large not as fair to women as we
> would like to think. Sometimes women were regarded as secondhand
> citizens; often they were used and handled like the personal property of
> men, exploited, oppressed, and degraded. Under colonial rule women
> fared no better, for all the disabilities of Western Christian culture were
> added to the already burdensome African situation.[41]

While identifying the sources of black South African Christian women's perceptions of

gender-based hierarchies is significant for understanding the implications of these

hierarchies for their theologies, a single or direct source may be difficult to isolate. Based

on Edet and Ekeya's description, the origins of these gender-based hierarchies may not

belong to Christianity, but those hierarchies present in Christianity magnify gender

distinctions. Brigalia Bam provides a specific, and slightly more cynical, example:

> Many of the undesirable remnants of traditional male-female relations
> have survived precisely because Christianity has, in some ways, reinforced
> them. For example, in my own tradition of the Xhosa people, women

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[40] As both Edet and Ekeya are experts in African traditional theology and religion,
their article contributes well to this discussion; Edet is a Nigerian Roman Catholic Sister
with a Ph. D. in religion and culture, and Ekeya is a Kenyan Catholic with a Ph. D. in
African traditional religion.

[41] Edet and Ekeya, 5.

could not be "ordained" to participate in ceremonies which bring the ancestors back to earth until after menopause, when they attained a certain amount of purity. But then, of course, in the Anglican tradition women could not be ordained at all, before or after menopause![42]

Bam illustrates that many of the specific practices of African traditional religion[43] and Christianity may differ, but the practices of each contribute to a problematic gender hierarchy. The layered influence of African traditional religion and Christianity complicates gender relations for black South African Christian women, as Christianity amplified rather than liberated them from this hierarchy. The roles and frustrations of black South African women within Christianity must be understood as a product, at least in part, of their multifaceted developing religious traditions and cultures.[44]

Women in South African society

In addition to their experiences of African traditional religious beliefs and practices integrated with Christianity, black South African women's changing roles in society and in their homes have also shaped their contexts and identities. Beginning in the

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[42] Bam, 44.

[43] Bam uses an example of the Xhosa people, which is the same culture of the Tshabo women and men in the beginning narratives.

[44] Dorothy Ramodibe, "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa," in *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, ed. Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988), 15. While current gender relations and theological methodologies for South African women have undoubtedly shifted since Ramodibe's essay was published, she represents the views of women who argue that the fixed nature of practices and customs within African traditional religions perpetuate patriarchy. Ramodibe claims, "static culture is oppressive culture, and the patriarchal system legitimizes the domination of women by men." Ramodibe's central criticism of African culture is based on its failure to adapt as societal demands changed.

1950s, many men (and some women) were jailed or imprisoned for political reasons; others were forced into migrant labor. [45] While men were away, women assumed decision-making roles within their households. These roles provoked in women for the first time a sense of their own capacity for leadership. Later, "[Women] began to question why, if they were playing this significant role within the home, they should not also play a larger role in public life."[46] Prior to this time, black South African women had been bound by their race and gender. Still bound by race in the 1950s but able to step outside some of their gender constraints, women took advantage of opportunities to adopt positions that had previously been held only by men. Women's observations of their abilities to act as powerful leaders in their homes served as empowering catalysts for their desired involvement in political and religious roles.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's leadership role in the anti-apartheid movement exemplifies women's abilities to adopt roles that men had dominated in the past. Winnie was an anti-apartheid leader during the 27-year imprisonment of her former husband Nelson Mandela, highly celebrated as a leader in the struggle against apartheid and later as the first elected President in the democratic South Africa. Many regard to Winnie as the "mother of the nation"[47] with respect to her efforts to fight white minority rule. She was exiled for a number of years but continued to promote racial equality.[48] While she

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[45] Garman, 54.

[46] Ibid.

[47] James Barber, *South Africa in the Twentieth Century* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 245.

[48] Nancy Harrison, *Winnie Mandela* (New York: George Braziller, 1985), 11.

was later accused of fraud and brutality,[49] biographer Nancy Harrison writes in 1985,

"Winnie Mandela typifies the black women of South Africa who are the unsung heroines

of a largely untold struggle."[50] As a white South African, Harrison was deeply impressed

with Winnie's ability to interact and build relationships with people of diverse

backgrounds. Worldwide awareness of apartheid has increased since Harrison published

her book, yet awareness of Winnie's and other women's roles remain largely hidden.

Much apartheid literature recognizes Winnie's fraud more prominently than her

contributions. Upon Nelson's return from prison, Winnie no longer maintained her role as

the national anti-apartheid hero. This shift represents the struggles of many black South

African women to establish and maintain their leadership roles during structural

transitions; when men returned, much of South African society no longer recognized

women's roles as fundamental or beneficial.

Conditions associated with apartheid allowed many women, such as Winnie

Madikizela-Mandela, to participate actively in South African society, but their roles post-

apartheid were not so clearly defined as they were during the struggle.[51] Isabel Apawo

Phiri, Professor of African Theology at the University of Natal and Continental

Coordinator of the Circle of African Women Theologians, cites the following excerpt

from Desmond Tutu's writings to demonstrate the context of emerging black theologies:

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[49] Barber, 245. One of the strongest accusations against Winnie Madikizela-Mandela is regarding her alleged authorization of the Mandela United Football Club (MUFC) to murder and assault at least 18 people during apartheid.

[50] Ibid., 182.

[51] The resistance movement to apartheid is commonly referred to as "the struggle."

> We had a common position, our stand against apartheid…Now that apartheid is being dismantled (1993) we are finding that it is not quite so simple to define what we are for…We no longer meet regularly as church leaders because the tyranny is over.[52]

Tutu's writing reflects challenges within the church to remain cohesive during highly formative years of South Africa's transition to democracy. As early as 1993, a year before the country's first democratic elections, Tutu explains that church leadership was already becoming disjointed because "the tyranny is over."[53] During apartheid, black South Africans identified a common enemy in the apartheid government and worked together to collapse this system of racial hierarchy. No longer united by an enemy, the church struggled to maintain a sense of its purpose. Similarly, when men returned to the home and reentered positions of leadership in society, as demonstrated in the case of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, women were no longer guaranteed the same roles they had held in the absence of men. While they had been successful in dissolving the racial hierarchy, women remained repressed by the gender hierarchy.

Understanding the official end of apartheid as the point at which hierarchy and separation within South Africa ended is problematic and requires brief examination of Tutu's *kairos* theology. *Kairos* is defined in the South African context as "a moment of judgment facing the church."[54] In 1985, the Institute for Contextual Theology[55]

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[52] Desmond Tutu, "Identity Crisis," in *The Christian Churches and Democratization of Africa*, ed. P. Gifford (Leiden, 1995), cited in Phiri, 146.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Denise Ackermann, Jonathan A. Draper, and Emma Mashinini, introduction to *Women Hold up Half the Sky* (Pietermartizburg: Cluster Publications, 1991), *xiv.*

[55] John W. DeGruchy, "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-speaking Churches under Imperialism and Apartheid," in *Christianity in South Africa: A*

published the Kairos Document, in which the Institute declared its resistance to the South

African government's racial policies.[56] However, the Document has been criticized for its

ineffectiveness in reaching migrant workers and the working class,[57] as well as its

inability to address fully issues of race, class, and gender.[58] By only addressing race

specifically, the Kairos Document in effect indicated (for some) that a time of *kairos* did

not necessarily exist for these other inequalities or hierarchies in the church. If *kairos* is

understood in terms of race, as in the Kairos Document, one might perceive the

immediacy and critical time of change within the church to exist in the past since

apartheid is officially over.[59] However, to consider this "judgment" time as historical is

to ignore the existing inequalities that remain largely unaddressed by the church.

While *kairos* was originally used in South Africa as a response to racial injustices,

South African women later used to the term to refer to gender in the church. In 1991, a

number of women theologians in Southern Africa compiled and published their essays in

Women Hold up Half the Sky. The women's motivations to assemble this text derived

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Political, Social, and Cultural History, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport
(Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 374. The Institute for Contextual Theology
included both black and white male theologians, but men from black townships were the
primary authors of the Kairos Document.

[56] Ibid.

[57] Peter Walshe, "Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic
Voice within Divided Churches," in *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and
Cultural History*, ed. Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport (Berkeley: University of
California Press, 1997), 393.

[58] Phiri, 145.

[59] This claim is based on official policy changes in South Africa; it is not meant to
imply that South Africa today faces no challenges regarding racial relations and
inequalities.

from their frustrations that the Anglican Church denied ordination to women in 1988.

More broadly, the women hoped to "[draw] attention to the usually unrecorded role

which women have played and continue to play in the history and struggle for justice in

Southern Africa."[60] They acknowledge that women have held important roles in shaping

this history, but that these roles have gone largely unrecognized, leaving women's voices

and experiences absent throughout much of historical and theological writing in Southern

Africa. The editors write, "The beginning of the dismantling of apartheid represents a

kairos for women in the church in Southern Africa. The opportunity for contributing to

laying foundations will not soon return."[61] The sense of urgency the editors attach to

reframing women's roles in the church emulates Tutu's struggle to unite Christianity in a

time of *kairos*. However, women's roles are not linked so evidently to a nationwide

movement, as in the struggle against the racial hierarchy of apartheid, further challenging

women's centralization.

During this same era, the exigency of women's situations carried simultaneously a

considerable degree of hope. At the same time women criticized their inferior roles in the

church, they desired the church's full recognition of their humanity. Edet and Ekeya

maintained in the late 1980s that the church would benefit greatly by allowing women's

involvement:

> We are convinced that the church can be more relevant and more effective
> in Africa and that, given the chance to act as full humans, women can
> equal men in their service to the church, as they are doing in other walks

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[60] Ackermann, Draper, and Mashinini, introduction to *Women Hold up Half the Sky*, xiii.

[61]Ibid., xv.

of life where the barriers to women's intensive participation are crumbling.[62]

While this statement criticizes the church's approaches to gender relations during the later years of apartheid, its promise rests on deteriorating hierarchies outside of the church. Involvement of black South African Christian women as decision makers in their homes and as political activists indicates promise that they will someday be allowed to participate fully in the church as well. Furthermore, the breaking down of racial hierarchies during this period in South Africa lends itself to the possibility that other hierarchies, such as gender hierarchies, might fade as well.

The remaining challenge is to reformulate approaches to Christian theology that honor the experiences of a variety of people in South Africa, honoring their differences in race, gender, and class. Bam captures the frustrations of many Christian women academics who struggle to identify beginning steps in this task. She asks, "How do we in South Africa—as women, and as black people—liberate ourselves from our own poverty, and also liberate the whites from their wealth? Because even the elite are trapped."[63] As realities of daily life, these conditions act as serious barriers to black South African women's participation in large-scale change. This challenge to reformulate theological approaches for black South African Christian women requires local understanding prior to national change.

It is clear that a number of national and academic leaders are aware of the need to address issues of gender in the church; however, their efforts are in many ways

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[62] Edet and Ekeya, 10.

[63] Bam, 48.

disconnected from the local concerns of the black South African Christian women of whom they write. For instance,

> At the top level of leadership of the World Council of Churches the commitment is clear: "The struggle for change is one struggle. Racism, sexism and classism and all other forms of domination, rejection and marginalisation are linked together in a demonic symphony of oppression."[64]

Similarly, praising the country's efforts to address issues of gender in its government and policy reform in the early 1990s, Anthea Garman (professor in the Department of Journalism at Rhodes University in South Africa who specializes in Gender Studies) writes, "South Africa is legally and constitutionally truly modern and right up to date on women's issues."[65] These observations raise questions, then, about the disengagement that seems to exist between national and local levels of leadership within the church. Leaders at national and academic levels recognize the need to better address and acknowledge forms of hierarchy, and local leaders recognize the need to do the same. The question remains how South Africa can respond actively to gender and other hierarchies experienced in the church in a way that reflects more cohesive participation of varied levels of leadership.

This challenge is present for women who wish to contribute to women's literature in South Africa, specifically in *Claiming our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity, and Spirituality*. Similar to *Women Hold up Half the Sky*, *Claiming our Footprints* is an anthology of essays written by women in the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians in the interest of voicing concerns for South African

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[64] Garman, 57.

[65] Ibid.

women. In the introductory reflections of *Claiming our Footprints*, editor Denise

Ackermann notes the following shortcoming of compiling these essays:

> Some black Circle members feel that they are not ready to write.
> Overcoming feelings of inadequacy caused by the ravages of an apartheid
> education takes time. Two members who are single mothers struggling to
> make ends meet and to fulfil the multiples roles in their lives, could simply
> not find time to write and rewrite as required by our time-consuming
> communal process.[66]

Ackermann refers to the education system during apartheid that constructed educational

institutions separated by race; unequal distribution of resources and quality of education

reflected the apartheid racial hierarchy.[67] The circumstances associated with the lingering

effects of these educational and class inequalities have left women, such as the ones who

wished to contribute to *Claiming our Footprints*, unable to do. The concerns of black

South African Christian women living in these conditions are deeply local; their

theologies must reflect this contextual and local focus.

PART THREE: THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES IN TRANSITION

  The process of addressing the disconnection between national and local leadership

in terms of the desire to undo gender hierarchies in the church requires reformulating

theological approaches. Seen as a struggle to overcome challenging gender relations in

the church, the time of *kairos* might also be understood as an opportunity—an

opportunity for change, an opportunity for black South African Christian women to

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[66] Denise Ackermann, introduction to *Claiming our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity, and Spirituality* (Stellenbosch: Milano Printing, 2000), 9.

[67] Linda Chisholm, "The State of South Africa's Schools," in *State of the Nation 2004-2005*, ed. Daniel, Southall, and Lutchman (HSRC Press: 2005), 205.

engage directly in their theologies, and an opportunity to reevaluate appropriate theological approaches for women in these contexts. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African feminist theologian, defines theology as "an expression of faith in response to experience."[68] Using this emphasis on the importance of experiences in theological thinking, I will address in this final section possible points of theological entry as they apply directly to the experiences of black South African Christian women.

If theology is understood as a process of knowing or coming to understand the Christian God through experience, then each of the theological approaches I identify highlights a different method of reaching this understanding. I will discuss feminist theology, African theology, and African women's theology in terms of the application of each to the contexts of black South African Christian women. The strengths as well as inadequacies of these approaches in addressing these women's experiences demonstrate the need for theological approaches of black South African Christian women to maintain a local focus.

Feminist theology

I have recognized black South African Christian women's criticisms of African traditional religion and Christianity for their apparent failures to recognize these women's experiences fully. Based on their frustrations, along with their changing roles in their homes, South African society, and the church, many women began to respond using feminist theology. Since feminist theology originated in Western contexts, definitions of

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[68] Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Introducing Women's Theology* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001), 22.

"feminism" and "feminist theology" from Western scholars are appropriate and useful for understanding the theories and ideals that were later transmitted to the South African context. Rosemary Radford Ruether, considered one of the first major feminist theologians in the United States,[69] defines feminism as "a critical stance that challenges the patriarchal gender paradigm that associates males with human characteristics defined as superior and dominant (rationality, power) and females with those defined as inferior and auxiliary (intuition, passivity)."[70] Ruether quite readily associates males' dominance and rationality, as well as females' inferiority and intuition, with gender differences. While this description may uphold in a Western context, at least in a patriarchal Western context,[71] it does not account for cultural differences that may alter characterizations of males and females. Ruether also extends this definition to feminist theology: "Feminist theology takes feminist critique and reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm. They question patterns of theology that justify male dominance and female subordination."[72] Ruether's criticisms of approaches to gender in theology are essentially an extension of her criticisms of patriarchal structures in Western society.

Within feminist theory, criticisms of the church or religious institutions are often criticized as reflections or extensions of undesired gender relations already present in

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[69] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, ed. Susan Frank Parsons (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 9.

[70] Ibid., 3.

[71] A patriarchal Western context may be characterized by higher pay for men in work similar to women, men predominantly placed in leadership positions, and reduced expectations of women's abilities based on their gender.

[72] Ibid.

society. In her introduction to *Feminist Theology: A Reader*, a text published during a

significant transmission of feminist ideals and theologies to South Africa, Western

scholar Ann Loades discusses the basic assertions and arguments of the feminist

theologian:

> The feminist argues that [in] our culture, and Christian theology as one
> manifestation of that culture…the male has been thought to represent the
> *whole* of humanity, the half has been mistaken for the whole, so that what
> has been described has been distorted in such a way that we cannot see it
> correctly.[73]

Loades's anthology includes essays written by British and United Statesian scholars. The

reader may assume, then, that these are the cultures to which "our culture" and "that

culture" refer. As long as their readers and those who implement their ideals recognize

these contexts, the Western basis for her writing may not be problematic.

In terms of the South African context, however, it is precisely these Western

feminist perspectives that women seeking new roles and remodeled gender structures in

the church erroneously adopted during the later years of apartheid and early years of

democracy. Theologian Anthea Garman discusses the insertion of feminist theologies

into the South African context and mistakenly suggests that women's apartheid

experiences can be categorized into three types: white, educated women who have been

exposed to Western ways of thinking; predominantly non-white women who served as

activists in the struggle in South Africa; and women who were exiles from South Africa

during the struggle.[74] White women, both those who stayed in South Africa and those

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[73] Ann Loades, introduction to *Feminist Theology: A Reader* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 1.

[74] Garman, 54.

who lived in exile, encountered Western forms of feminism and feminist theology during apartheid that they later carried into their post-apartheid South African contexts.

Western feminisms that influenced a number of white South African women, who had access to education and a variety of literature during apartheid, were characterized by an emphasis on equal opportunities in educational institutions and the workplace and carried "a strong sense of entitlement about their rights as women."[75] No longer preoccupied by race or class inequalities, they focused on reshaping what they viewed as restricting gender structures. These interests reflect what Loades refers to as "liberal" feminist ideals, which are "concerned with equality of civil rights for women as for men, with access to educational and professional opportunities, reproductive self-determination, and equal pay for comparable work."[76] Women who lived in exile from South Africa during the struggle also gained access to similar types of Western feminism while they were out of the country (stationed in places such as North America, the UK, Europe, the Soviet Union, and other countries in Africa). Their exposure to women worldwide who were demanding shifts in gender relations and policies, combined with their activist natures, contributed to their abilities and motivation to band together upon returning to South Africa. While their intentions may have been noble, these women cast theologies shaped by Western contexts hastily into a deeply complex South African post-apartheid society.

The women who embraced Western ideals adopted simultaneously demands for work opportunities, increased pay, and equal civil rights that were in many ways specific

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Loades, 1.

to their needs and thus to their contexts. Garman's categories of women's experiences note correctly that women in South Africa during and after apartheid experienced different realities and were exposed to and influenced by various types of feminism and feminist theology; however, her categories are oversimplified. First, women's experiences in South Africa during apartheid cannot be reduced to three neat categories; this assumption ignores the incredible diversity of experiences that existed among South African women. Condensing this diversity to three categories ignores, for instance, the experiences of white South African women who were not exposed to these Western feminisms and those of non-white women who did not participate actively in the struggle. Literature needs to reflect the complexity and diversity of experiences in South Africa if these experiences are to shape accurately and appropriately future research, political directions, and theological thinking.

Second, one should not assume that all "Indian," "coloured," and "black" women shared a common experience in their struggle. While this claim may be valid on some level, on others it ignores the very structure of apartheid; although each of these racial categories of people were below "whites," each race was still separated from the others in terms of privileges, neighborhoods, and education. For instance, "Indians" were privileged over "blacks," but both were placed under "whites." While their participation in the struggle certainly shaped these women's experiences, their race, class, and gender also influenced them. Applying Western feminisms to this already complex makeup of South Africa, in addition to its changing political structure, is highly problematic. While one might view this exposure to Western feminisms as a positive development for South African women, as it has arguably granted them a sense of entitlement, its Western basis

in many ways contradicts the South African experience. Those exposed to these Western feminisms were predominantly white, educated women in South Africa and educated political exiles, yet these women account for only a small percentage of South African women. These observations are not meant to devalue Western feminist theology, but rather to reveal the need to reevaluate its application to the lives and theologies of black South African Christian women.

Western feminist theology, along with many forms of Western theology, is particularly limiting in addressing the needs of rural communities in South Africa. To illustrate this assertion, consider the women from Tshabo discussed in the beginning narrative. The women of Tshabo had few possessions—a bed, a small dining room table, and perhaps an additional end table. These women were secluded—traveling an hour by foot simply to attend church, they did not participate in a "common struggle" experience during apartheid (if one exists at all). This is not to say that they did not struggle, for they continue to do so, but their isolated experiences cannot be equated or universalized with those of "coloured" or "Indian" women, both of whom have vastly different cultures and ranked higher on the apartheid racial hierarchy. Using the women of Tshabo as a frame of reference, over-generalizing the experiences of South African women during apartheid poses incredible difficulties. The diversity of South Africa (and, of course, this applies to other contexts as well) is far too great to apply theological approaches from vastly different contexts to any number of communities in this country.

Based on the evidence presented in Parts 1 and 2, theological approaches of black South African Christian women need to reflect their experiences. Their race, gender, class, and culture shape these experiences. In particular, many black South African

Christian women identify strongly with the traditions and customs of African traditional religion and culture. Even those Christian women who no longer maintain African traditional religious or spiritual beliefs often uphold aspects of the culture. Their experiences with traditional religion and culture affect these women's viewpoints within Christianity and thus their theological thinking. This combination of beliefs, in addition to other factors, makes Western feminisms insufficient for addressing the experiences and needs of black South African women. As Ruether suggests, feminist theology extends feminists' desires for a "reconstruction of gender paradigms into the theological realm."[77] Using this framework, applying Western theologies to non-Western contexts is problematic because each context exists within a different gender paradigm. The gender paradigms for many black South African Christian women, for instance, involve a blend of the gender paradigms present in South African society, African traditional religion, and Christianity. Any combination of these is unlikely to parallel the gender paradigms of women in a Western context. Dorothy Ramodibe writes,

> It is…imperative that in this process toward building a new church in Africa, women should face more seriously the task of their liberation. It is here that feminist theology comes in. *By feminist theology I understand the act of reflecting on the significance and influence of our faith on the experiences of women with a view to making women fully human.*[78]

This conscious reflection of the faiths of South African women specifically, rather than an imagined "universal" Christian faith, is necessary for approaching theologies for black South African Christian women.

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[77] Ruether, 3.

[78] Ibid., 18.

African theology

The South African context, and the context of black South African Christian women in particular, demands an inclusive and diversified Christian theological approach. Feminist theology is a possible starting point for addressing Christian women's experiences in South Africa, but this method is insufficient for addressing the experiences of all South African women. Finding its origins primarily in Western theologies designed for educated, predominantly white women, black South African Christian women need a theological approach that applies to their own contexts. In her article, "Africa, East and West," Diane Stinton provides a helpful definition of African theology, according to Tanzanian theologian Charles Nyamiti. Nyamiti writes, "African Christian theology is the systematic and scientific presentation or elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs and mentality of the African peoples."[79] The African theological method maintains Christian principles but with an acute awareness of the experiences and contexts of the African people who employ the faith.

African Christians, particularly those who have participated or currently participate in African traditional religion, have for quite some time identified the importance of considering and focusing on their specific contexts in the process of theological inquiry. Following trends of contextual theologies elsewhere, African theology uses a plural reading of "theologies," emphasizing the diverse contexts to which these theologies apply.[80] While contextual theology finds its roots in liberation theology,

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[79] Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies: Assessment and Practical Suggestions" in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Gibellini, cited in Stinton, 107.

[80] Stinton, 109.

it is distinguished from "liberation theologies" of Latin America by the need for contextual theologies "to take account not only of race and class exploitation as in Latin America, but of the more complex range of Christian denominations, Islam, and the rich heritage of African religion in South Africa."[81] The religious diversity of South Africa makes determining a theological approach an all the more intricate process. African traditional religion is especially significant for its interlacing presence in the lives of many Christian women today, but South Africans increasingly encounter people of other races as they work to restructure the country's racial hierarchy. No longer governed by apartheid, they must also seek a structure free from religious hierarchies, adding to the multiple diversities that have already been considered.

Whereas feminist theology was particularly limiting in the South African context, the contextual focus of African theologies is helpful in recognizing a number of different theological interpretations and approaches. Though not ideal, as it is based in a Western context, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is helpful for outlining possible sources for coming to these conclusions. Albert Outler used the term Wesleyan Quadrilateral to describe the work of John Wesley; Wesley identifies Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as sources for Christian theological thinking.[82] Using this framework, one might understand the importance of using a theological approach specific to the South African context. African traditional religion, as noted in Part 2, is a much more verbal and experience-based tradition than Christianity. African thought is also very symbolic. Since African

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[81] Walshe, 392.

[82] Michael R. Cosby, "Using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to Teach Biblical Studies in Christian Liberal Arts Colleges," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4, no. 2 (2001): 72.

traditional religious thought continues to influence the Christian faiths of many black South African Christian women, their theologies might be based more on tradition and experience. Western Christianity, on the other hand, is text-oriented and might tend more toward Scripture and reason. The difficulties of making even these generalizations emphasize even further the danger of applying Western theological methods to the South African context. In this case, African theologies are a much more appropriate method.

African theologies fall short, however, in terms of gender differences as relevant and significant to the theological experiences of black South African Christian women. In addition to being distinguished from the experiences of Western or white South African South African women, black South African Christian women's experiences must be recognized as distinct from black South African Christian men's experiences. While women's theological experiences in many ways parallel those of men's experiences, this is not necessarily the case. The Baptist women of Tshabo, for instance, were treated quite differently than the men in their same church. These women only spoke in the worship service designated exclusively for women; in combined services, male clergy and laypeople were asked to speak. Men and women sat on separate sides of the congregation. Women served food to the men after funeral services and only ate after all of the men received their food. These observations indicate that men and women in the church were treated differently and held different roles, whether these distinctions were a result of structures within the Christian church or their African traditional religious customs. Most of the time, these distinctions favored men. African theology, while it may recognize the contexts of the rural village, may fail to recognize the ways in which the

theological thinking of the women in Tshabo would differ from the men in the same community.

African theology is certainly useful in its efforts to address and honor African culture and African traditional religion. Recognizing the racial hierarchy of apartheid that privileged whites, thus silencing their own experiences, black South Africans used African theology as a way to address their specific contexts. In doing so, however, African men's voices tended to silence those of African women. As an expression of experiences, theological approaches of black South African Christian women must also address their gender.

African women's theology

African women's theology has served as an opportunity to recognize gender distinctions within an African theological framework. African women's theology "covers the writings of women who do not accept that African men's theology should suffice for the entire faith community."[83] This is the perspective of Mercy Amba Oduyoye, who produced her findings of a study on the theological work of African Christian women in her work, *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Oduyoye studies a great deal of writing produced by the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, a group of women formed in 1989 to gather and publish women's writing regarding religious and cultural concerns.[84] Although Oduyoye is Ghanaian, her claims are limited to, but inclusive of, the African countries represented by the women involved in her study

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[83] Oduyoye,10.

[84] Ibid.

(including South Africa).[85] Oduyoye's assertion that African theology should extend

beyond African men's perspectives is significant for directions of future theological

approaches. It is not necessarily that African men's theology reflects incorrectly the

experiences *of African men*; rather, African men's theology does not address entirely the

theological needs of "the entire faith community." As she addresses women in African

contexts, and includes South Africa specifically, Oduyoye's work is particularly

applicable to my research.

Modeling her emphasis on recognizing the experiences of women based on their

specific contexts, Oduyoye provides a simple but helpful explanation of the need to

distinguish African women from an all-inclusive view of feminism. She writes, "African

women…acknowledge and share the concerns of several genres of women's theology but

they do not necessarily work on identical themes, as the contexts are similar but not the

same."[86] Oduyoye honors the validity of various types of "women's theology" as a place

from which to begin developing methods for black South African women's theology, but

she maintains simultaneously the authenticity and distinguishing characteristics of each

of these women's experiences. This theological approach meets the intentions and goals

of this research by recognizing the complex experiences of black South African Christian

women on a local and contextual level.

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[85] Ibid., 9. The African women theologians that Oduyoye studies represent the following countries: Angola, Republic of Benin, Botswana, Burundi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire), Cameroon, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malagasy Republic, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Republic of South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

[86] Ibid., 15.

However, limitations to African women's theology also exist. Denise Ackermann, in her introduction to *Claiming our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity and Spirituality*, notes these challenges. Ackermann views difficulties associated with doing African women's theology as both challenges and opportunities:

> The conversation between context and theology is often awkward and uncomfortable. As our knowledge of ourselves as subjects deepens, shifts take place in our understandings of our faiths. Fuelled by imagination and the tension between the reality of our experience and our faith longings, new theologies begin to emerge. With these theologies we seek to claim our footprints.[87]

This discussion of the challenges of changing circumstances and aspirations of women within the Christian faith structure allows room for new theologies. Given this room, many black South African Christian women might envision opportunities to participate in a changing church structure or emerging theologies.

Future theological approaches

Black Christian women and other South Africans have taken great measures to reshape Christian theological approaches in South Africa to better reflect their experiences. Without the burden of the apartheid racial hierarchy, black South African Christians have had opportunities to voice their experiences in Christian theological thinking. The voices of black South African Christian women, however, have remained limited. If the crisis of *kairos* lends itself to opportunity, the opportunity for black South African Christian women to formulate locally and contextually focused theologies is present now. Any points of theological entry must remain cognizant of the specific

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[87] Ackermann, introduction to *Claiming Our Footprints*, 12.

context to which they apply. Sufficient reflection on the contexts and experiences of

black South African Christian women is preferred as a way of developing a theological

method that applies to their contexts.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the experiences of the women discussed here, theological

methods cannot be discussed fully without mention of and attention to the particular lives

and contexts of the people involved in or affected by that theology. The history of South

Africa, so recently dominated by the apartheid system, was based on a racial hierarchy. In

this structure, those who were not white struggled. Women struggled. Women who were

not white certainly struggled. Women of all races shared a desire for a shift in gender

roles during and after apartheid; this is not meant to indicate that *all women* of all races

desired this shift, but rather that the desire was not confined to any specific race.

However, women's specific experiences within Christianity and within South Africa

affected the ways in which they desired these gender roles to shift. Understanding these

experiences and appropriate theological approaches on a local level will provide room for

constructive conversations regarding ways to break down the multilayered hierarchies

that have long governed South Africa. It is these situational differences that are notable

for studying appropriate theological approaches of black South African Christian women

today.

The South African context, as with others, is continually in transition. Based on

these evolving differences in women's experiences of Christianity and of apartheid, their

theologies subsequently differ. Simply recognizing the need to restructure gender

hierarchies in the church, therefore, is not sufficient. Just as fixating on the church's

racial hierarchy did not eliminate gender hierarchies in that same church, neither will

restructuring gender hierarchies eliminate hierarchies related to class or religion.

Reducing racial hierarchies after apartheid allowed people of all races to participate more

actively in Christian theological thinking, as demonstrated in African theology. Similarly,

efforts to reduce other hierarchies in the church and understand local experiences will

allow black South African Christian women and others marginalized by these hierarchies

to voice their experiences. To break down these existing hierarchies is to recapture a

sense of humanity within the church.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackermann, Denise. Introduction to *Claiming our Footprints: South African Women Reflect on Context, Identity, and Spirituality*. Stellenbosch: Milano Printing, 2000. In her introduction to this anthology of essays written by members of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians, Ackermann highlights the challenges a number of women and other African academics face in overcoming inequalities of the past and moving toward new theological perspectives. These challenges influence women's theological perspectives and thus signify the need to approach theology on a local level.

Ackermann, Denise, Jonathan A. Draper, and Emma Mashinini. Introduction to *Women Hold up Half the Sky*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 1991. Similar to *Claiming our Footprints*, *Women Hold up Half the Sky* is an anthology of works organized through the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. This work seeks to contest the Anglican Church's decision not to ordain women. The text also serves as a useful example of women in the years of transition from apartheid to democracy the efforts of women to reshape theological approaches in South Africa.

Bam, Brigalia. "Priorities for Women in South Africa." In *Speaking of Faith: Global Perspectives on Women, Religion and Social Change*, edited by Diana L. Eck and Devaki Jain, 42-29. Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1987. Bam captures the frustrations of many South African women academics who seek transition in the church. Her role as a national and political leader contributes to my understanding of the disconnection between national and local levels of church leadership. She has lived in South Africa and Switzerland and has led a very politically active lifestyle. She acted as the General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches and founded the Women's Development Foundation.

Barber, James. *South Africa in the Twentieth Century*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1999. I use this text only briefly as an example of post-apartheid literature regarding Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. Barber discusses fraud charges associated with Winnie that have left a lasting impression on the country. I argue that Winnie exemplifies the experiences of black South African women who acted as leaders during apartheid but struggled to continue these leadership roles after men returned from prison and other places.

Buthelezi, Manas. "An African Theology or a Black Theology?" In *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, edited by Basil Moore, 29-35. London: C. Hurst & Company, 1973. Buthelezi, an anthropologist, identifies ethnographic and anthropological methods as possible approaches for theological study in South Africa. He warns that ethnographic approaches have the tendency to focus too much on the past and in effect ignore the present. I take Buthelezi's concern into account in my discussion of the overlapping presence of African traditional religions and Christianity in the lives of black South African Christian women.

Chisholm, Linda. "The State of South Africa's Schools," in *State of the Nation 2004-2005*, edited by Daniel, Southall, and Lutchman. HSRC Press: 2005. Chisholm addresses the ongoing schools in South Africa in terms of existing and past inequalities. I use her essay as additional support for Ackermann's discussion of challenges the contributors to *Claiming our Footprints* faced in overcoming equalities in their own schooling.

Cosby, Michael R. "Using the Wesleyan Quadrilateral to Teach Biblical Studies in Christian Liberal Arts Colleges." *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4, no. 2 (2001): 71-80. Cosby outlines ways in which the Wesleyan Quadrilateral might serve as a theological approach for liberal arts students. While his argument does not apply directly to my own, his emphasis on the accessibility of the Quadrilateral is beneficial for my research, as it demonstrates ways to

DeGruchy, John W. "Grappling with a Colonial Heritage: The English-Speaking Churches Under Imperialism and Apartheid." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, 155-72. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997, 374. DeGruchy provides a helpful explanation of the participants in the Institute for Contextual Theology and their involvement in creating the Kairos Document.

Edet, Rosemary and Bette Ekeya. "Church Women of Africa: A Theological Community." In *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, edited by Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 3-13. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988. Rosemary Edet, a woman from Nigeria, and Bette Ekeya, a woman from Kenya, outline the roles of religious women in light of African culture and context. Edet and Ekeya call women to participate actively in theological thinking and argue that women's roles have been confined too often to traditionally feminine roles. They recognize the importance of understanding women's experiences transitioning from African traditional culture and religion to Christianity. Written to persuade women to participate actively in the church, this piece should be understood as persuasive rather than deeply factual, but it highlights women leaders' efforts to promote change in the church.

Elphick, Richard. "Introduction: Christianity in South African History." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, 1-15. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. In his introduction, Elphick outlines the pertinent people, contexts, and time periods involved in the study of Christianity in South Africa. Both Elphick and his co-editor are scholars from the United States, and fewer than half of their contributors are from South Africa; this does not necessarily demerit their work, but their direct involvement in South African culture and society should be understood as limited.

Gaitskell, Deborah. "Power in Prayer and Service: Women's Christian Organizations." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, 253-267. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Deborah Gaitskell assesses and compares the roles of black African and white Christian women's organizations throughout South African history. This article is helpful for understanding basic distinctions in Christian women's involvement in the church and worship styles based on their race.

Garman, Anthea. "The Changing Status of Women in South Africa and the Churches' Response." *Journal of African Christian Thought* 2, no. 2 (1999): 54-60. Garman is a Professor in the Department of Journalism with an emphasis on Gender Studies at Rhodes University in South Africa. She mistakenly identifies three different types of women's experiences in a newly democratized South Africa that are decidedly limited in scope. Garman argues that women have gained significant political advancement in South Africa, but that the Christian church has yet to respond adequately to issues of gender. Garman's article is useful in recognizing distinctions in women's experiences during and after apartheid, but the diversity of women she involves in her study is far from comprehensive.

Goldblatt, Beth and Shiela Meintjes. *Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. May 1996. <http://www.doj/gov.za/trc/submit/gender.hrm#DI1> (29 October 2007). I have drawn my definition of "patriarchy" from this document, which Goldblatt and Meintjes submitted to the Truth and Reconciliation to request the commission's awareness of gender in its process of promoting reconciliation post-apartheid. As women educated in the South African context, this work provides relevant and credible assessment of the considerations surrounding gender, reconciliation, and culture.

Harrison, Nancy. *Winnie Mandela*. New York: George Braziller, 1985. Nancy Harrison is a white South African woman who wrote this biography when Winnie was a political exile from South Africa. Impressed with Winnie's ability to build rapport with others across racial boundaries, Harrison celebrated Winnie in this work. I use Harrison's discussion of Winnie as a leader in South Africa during apartheid.

Hodgson, Janet. "A Battle for Sacred Power: Christian Beginnings among the Xhosa." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Hodgson works with the Church of England in Durham, U.K. as a Diocesan Advisor in Local Mission. I only use this source for a small detail about Afrikaners' Great Trek and their belief that they were the chosen people searching for a Promised Land.

Isichei, Elizabeth. *A History of Christianity in South Africa*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995. For an overview of the historical considerations of studying Christianity in South Africa, I have turned to Isichei's

text. A prominent scholar in African Christianity, Isichei's work contributes particularly to my understanding of Afrikaner theology and history.

Kinghorn, Johann. "Modernization and Apartheid: The Afrikaner Churches." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, 135-154. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Kinghorn addresses the challenges Afrikaner churches faced as they transitioned into a more modernized society. In the evolving context of South Africa, these Afrikaner churches struggled to maintain consistency between generations. Kinghorn's outline of the Afrikaner church's experiences through this transition contributed to my explanation and comprehension of Afrikaner theology and culture. Kinghorn is a Professor of Religion at the University of Stellenbosch, a traditionally Afrikaner University in South Africa.

Klaaren, Eugene M. "Creation and Apartheid: South African Theology Since 1948." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, 370-382. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Klaaren, an Associate Professor of Religion at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, assesses the use of interpretations of the biblical creation story in historical and contemporary South African theology. He argues that African theology recognizes African heritage, in contrast to an Afrikaner theological emphasis on law and order. His article provides a background for my understanding of the ways in which creation myths and ideologies have shaped theological thinking in South Africa.

Loades, Ann. Introduction to *Feminist Theology: A Reader*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990. Loades's introduction to *Feminist Theology* outlines a definition and basic outline of feminist theology. While Loades does not make this distinction, her discussion of feminist theology applies primarily, if not entirely, to the Western context. Therefore, I use her introduction to identify the problematic nature of applying this structure to the South African context.

Lowenberg, Anton D. and William H. Kaempfer. *The Origins and Demise of South African Apartheid.* Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001. In their contextualization of the conditions and policies that shaped and destroyed apartheid, Lowenberg and Kaempfer point out that the South African government, years before the beginning of apartheid, distributed blacks to land reserves, separating them from the rest of society. While I only use their text for minor figures, this text provides a helpful discussion of the factors that constructed as well as removed apartheid.

Mulder, C. P. "The Rationale of Separate Development." In *South African Dialogue*, edited by Nic Rhoodie, 49-63. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1972. *South African Dialogue* was compiled in 1972 as a written venue for discussion of apartheid policies and South African society at the time; its contributors were both proponents and opponents of the apartheid system. In "The Rationale of Separate

Development," C. P. Mulder, one of the top National Party leaders, explains the logic behind separate development, the basis of apartheid. He explains the value of racial separation from a number of perspectives, including economic, cultural, and geographic. His discussion of separate development forms my basis of understanding how this ideology grounded the structure of apartheid, and how the structure conflicted with black South African Christian women's experiences. Since Mulder was a National Party leader, his words create a credible understanding of apartheid policies in its creators' own words.

Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. *Introducing Women's Theology*. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001. Based on her belief that women's own writings and voices should tell their stories and govern their theologies, Oduyoye wrote *Introducing Women's Theology* as a study of women's theological writings in Africa. She consults a number of writings from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians. Oduyoye's work provides a positive method of moving forward in African women's theological work.

Phiri, Isabel Apawo. "Southern Africa." In *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, edited by John Parratt, 137-162. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. In her article, Isabel Apawo Phiri is a Professor of African Theology at the University of Natal and Continental Coordinator of the Circle of African Women Theologians. Phiri provides a helpful outline of the historical emergence of black theology and African women's theologies in Southern Africa. Phiri emphasizes the validity of a number of valid theologies based on different contexts in Southern Africa. Phiri argues that the focus of contemporary theological inquiry should be on all types of oppression, including and especially related to gender.

Ramodibe, Dorothy. "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa." In *With Passion and Compassion: Third World Women Doing Theology*, edited by Virginia Fabella and Mercy Amba Oduyoye, 14-21. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988. "Women and Men Building Together the Church in Africa" is Dorothy Ramodibe's critical response to perceptions that women can contribute to and participate in the Christian church in its existing patriarchal structure. Ramodibe is a theologian from Soweto, a black township in Johannesburg, South Africa. She argues that women desire change in the church but are being asked simply to partake in a church already designed by men. Like other essays included in *Passion and Compassion*, her words should be understood as persuasive but reflect the goals of women theologians well.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "The Emergence of Christian Feminist Theology." In *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Theology*, edited by Susan Frank Parsons, 3-22. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Offering a valid and useful history and interpretation of the history and emergence of Christian feminist theology in the United States, from where Ruether writes, her work should be considered applicable and compelling for this specific context. While her interpretations of feminist theology should not be applied unwisely to the South

African context, Ruether is a highly respected feminist theologian in the United States.

Seidman, Gay. "Is South Africa Different? Sociological Comparisons and Theoretical Contributions from the Land of Apartheid." *Annual Review of Sociology* 25 (1999): 419-440. Seidman, a Professor of Sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, investigates changing identities in South Africa, specifically regarding race relations in the country. She begins to explore the constructions of race in South African society, keeping in mind that much of the rest of the world was attempting to do just the opposite. I use her writing primarily to outline a historical understanding of race and theology in South Africa during and briefly following apartheid.

Shorter, Aylward. *African Christian Theology—Adaptation or Incarnation?* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1977. Shorter provides a useful explanation of African traditional religion and its transition to African Christianity. He outlines different approaches to studying African traditional religion and argues that African Christian Theology must be conducted in active and reflective dialogue between Christian and African traditional religious traditions.

Stinton, Diane. "Africa, East and West." In *An Introduction to Third World Theologies*, edited by John Parratt, 105-136. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004. Stinton outlines the ways in which African traditional religion and Christianity might emerge as one in African theology. Based on emphases in African theologies of community and holistic approaches to life, Stinton suggests that African theologies may become important theological models for worldwide Christianity. Stinton is from Canada but is a professor from Kenya. Her explanation of the opportunities in African theology is useful for exploring possible directions for African women's theology and the importance of emphasizing cooperation and context when doing theology.

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. London: Rider Books, 1999. I only use Tutu's reflection on the sophisticated nature of the apartheid system, allowing whites to ignore its implications. However, this source is useful for understanding Tutu's political and religious emphasis on the importance of forgiveness in the process of reconciliation.

Walshe, Peter. "Christianity and the Anti-Apartheid Struggle: The Prophetic Voice within Divided Churches." In *Christianity in South Africa: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, edited by Richard Elphick and Rodney Davenport, 383-399. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. Peter Walshe, a Professor of Government and International Studies at the University of Notre Dame, focuses on the theological and religious struggle against apartheid. I use his assertion that the Kairos Document was only partially effective because it reached a limited variety of people.