Building a Human Rights Culture
South African and Swedish Perspectives
Karin Sporre & H Russel Botman [eds.]
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Human rights can be approached from different perspectives, for instance as a legal or philosophical issue, from the point of view of governments or of organizations keeping a watch on and drawing attention to human rights violations. Our approach here is yet another one, namely, the question “How to build a human rights culture?”. We invited academic colleagues in South Africa and Sweden to share their reflections on this topic. They are active in the fields of history, political science, the history of economics, sociology, gender studies, social anthropology, philosophy, social ethics and theology. We met at a colloquium in Stellenbosch, South Africa, in November 2002. We discussed the papers we had prepared individually and shared our thoughts in discussion and reflection. The sixteen texts we publish in this book emanate from this process. Each author addresses in her or his own way the question of how to build a human rights culture. Before introducing these texts, we will briefly sketch the background to the colloquium.

An exchange project...

In October 1999 we, H. Russel Botman and Karin Sporre, met in Stockholm to discuss a possible co-operation project between our academic institutions, Högskolan Dalarna (HDa) and the University of the Western Cape (UWC). We knew one another through the network of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches and had also met when Russel Botman had visited Sweden to lecture during the 1990’s. I, Karin, had been intrigued then by the understanding of justice – justice as restoration – which Russel Botman and other South African theologians were developing as a way of handling the atrocities of apartheid, a way of conceptualizing justice in such a way that attention may be centred on the future and not the past.

To Remember and To Heal. Theological and Psychological Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation, is the title of one of the books conveying some of this thinking, edited by H. Russel Botman and Robin Petersen, (Botman & Petersen,
For me Karin, such an understanding of justice illuminated justice issues as they appeared in my study: Först när vi får ansikten – ett flerkulturellt samtal om feminism, etik och teologi (Eng.: First when we have faces – a cross-cultural conversation on feminism, ethics and theology), (Sporre, 1999).

In 1999, Högskolan Dalarna urged its staff to extend their international academic contacts so as to create opportunities for international co-operation, which was the reason why we met with Russel Botman. We then agreed to work for an academic exchange and decided that Russel Botman would make another visit to Sweden and then come to Högskolan Dalarna.

This visit materialized a little more than a year later, in November 2000. By then, two important things had happened for the further development of our project. Firstly, the Linnaeus-Palme program had been launched. This is a Swedish program for academic exchange with countries outside the northern hemisphere. In May 2000, we applied for funding for the planning phase of our project. We received such funding for the years 2000–2001. Secondly, at the beginning of the year 2000, H Russel Botman moved together with a colleague and a group of students from the University of the Western Cape to the University of Stellenbosch – a move intended to assist in the development of creating a more racially diverse South Africa. However Russel Botman continued to teach, now as guest professor at the University of the Western Cape. For our project, this meant that we were now three academic institutions involved in the exchange: the University of the Western Cape, the University of Stellenbosch and Högskolan Dalarna.

... with an educational idea

During the planning phase, we developed the basic ideas of our project. At the centre is an educational idea that builds on an assumption, hard to prove but still very reasonable, namely, that if you take South African students with their backgrounds in their society and Swedish students with their backgrounds in their society and allow these students to study human rights together, preferably as interdisciplinary studies, you will get different learning processes than you would have got had they studied each in their own countries. In putting this idea into practice the Linnaeus-Palme program became a major sponsor for us. In the planning phase, it was also important to spread the idea in our institutional contexts, among administrators, staff and students, in order for us to be able to carry it out. There were also questions concerning “when” and “how”
in terms of semesters and curricula and a number of other practical matters. Through exchange visits to HDa, US and UWC and also after getting more staff and colleagues involved, the project slowly got under way.

Now, in 2002–2003, we have carried out the first year of exchange. It started in the second semester of 2002, when four Swedish students studied in South Africa at UWC and US. Two Swedish faculty members were also in South Africa, roughly a month each. In the first semester of 2003, it was time for three South African faculty members to visit Högskolan Dalarna, 4–5 weeks each, and four students have studied a full semester here. We thought it would be wise if students, both South African and Swedish, were to start their studies abroad in the winter and then experience spring and warmer weather as their stay and studies proceeded. One of our obvious goals for the studies is the exchange of perspectives and in a small report, hopefully soon to be published, some of the first fruits in this respect of the study process at HDa will be available.

**Humanity in a Global Era**

In our early discussions, Russel Botman, stated that the question: “How to build a human rights culture?” was a crucial one from a South African point of view, this to assist the development that would create new realities in support of the new constitution adopted after the downfall of apartheid. The South African constitution firmly states and so establishes the value of each and every citizen in stating their human dignity, dignity to be respected and upheld. For me, Karin, being at HDa where teacher training is one of the important academic activities, I saw that there is an important pedagogical potential in framing the question thus: “How to build a human rights culture?” I also saw that a human rights culture was crucial in Sweden, where for instance the problems of the integration of immigrants and Neo-Nazi tendencies have currently to be dealt with. So as partners in co-operation, we agreed that this question, which may be approached in different academic ways, would be a vital one in our exchange. We understood that it could encourage both a study of the principles of human rights and their history, as well as the societal conditions for trying to realize them, and not least, it could get critical and constructive discussions going of how to make them “work” in practice.

Along the road, we have been asked in what sense we use the term ‘culture’, in our question. One could say that we could just as easily have used the term, society – “How to build a human rights society?” might just as well have been
a possible question. However, in choosing to use ‘culture’, we want to underline a more qualitative aspect of the issues. One may have a society where, from a legal point of view, human rights are guaranteed but, unless a culture exists, created by people for people, where the citizens recognize their own rights and deeply respect those of others, without such a ‘culture’ the legal framework is merely superficial, therefore the term, a human rights culture.

We also agreed to call our project, the exchange and other activities, “Humanity in a Global Era”. By this we wanted to emphasize that any study of human rights today must necessarily take into consideration global processes – cultural, economic and political. We chose to use the concept, ‘humanity’, to emphasize as ours a humanistic approach to the questions of human rights, putting us as fellow human beings in a state of global solidarity with one another.

The colloquium

Early in our planning we dreamt of holding a conference gathering teachers and researchers, academic colleagues who might be potential future resources in the exchange. We had the hunch that in bringing together a group of colleagues, we might even be able to get an idea of what possible academic encounters might grow out of the long-term learning-processes that the exchange would initiate. The report from such a conference could also be of use in the exchange itself, for students and professors to study, comment upon, question, so that the intellectual development of our project would continue. From a colloquium also, further ideas for future research co-operation could be identified and developed.

The dream of bringing colleagues together became reality when the colloquium took place in November 2002, from which this is the report. For its realization, we have received funding from SIDA, Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority, the Department for Democracy and Social Development, Education Division.

The texts

Any classification of a given number of texts can be made in different ways. I have chosen to present the sixteen texts here under the following headlines:

a/ Economy and human rights, b/ Democracy and citizenship, c/ Social conditions and human rights, d/ Religion and human rights, e/ Gender iss-
ues and human rights, f/ A human rights culture. The themes of the articles sometimes, interestingly, coincide very well and sometimes, also interestingly, depart from one another. Thematic connections can be discovered between articles in different sections. A particular article might just as well have been placed in one section as in another. In making the classification, I have tried to catch the bottom line of the articles. It should also be said that each of the sixteen contributions is a story in its own right; it has an academic disciplinary context to which it relates, an academic tradition to which it belongs both methodologically as well as in terms of discourse and choice of perspectives and themes. Also the concerns of the author become evident and consequently all the authors are responsible each for their own text. The fact that we shared discussions in a colloquium does not mean that the opinions stated here are shared by each and every one. For the opinions expressed in the articles, each author is individually responsible.

Our academic contexts express both similarities and differences. This will become evident to a reader of our texts. However in writing, we have tried not to be too insulated in our own contexts – societal and disciplinary, but rather to be alert to the need for explaining the backgrounds to our academic and societal conditions so as to facilitate the reader’s task.

The case of theology and religious studies may need an extra comment in this respect. In Sweden, most academic work in theology and religious studies over the last 40–50 years has been developed in a style that presupposes an approach tending to be value neutral, and distanced from faith, meaning that theology, as it has traditionally been understood within the Christian tradition, has been left to the churches to develop within their confessional contexts. In South Africa, this development is not the case: academic theology may be developed as “within” a faith context, but still certainly allow for an academic theologian to keep a critical distance to the teaching of a church or churches, while undertaking her or his work in an academic style and fashion. In this way, distance to churches can be developed but with faith as a given presupposition. As a background to this, it should be stated that religious institutions play a more significant societal role in South Africa than in Sweden, the latter being a more secularized country.
Economy and human rights

The first two texts discuss relationships between human rights and the economy. In doing this, they also give, as a background, a good introduction to the present-day situation of the South African and Swedish societies respectively. The texts are written by a lecturer in the history of economics and a social ethicist.

The social ethicist is H. Russel Botman and, in his article, the complexities of the South African situation are treated. Botman takes as his starting point the new South African constitution with its basis in the dignity of all human beings. He then discusses the contradictions and complexities when dealing with human dignity against the background of the atrocities committed during the era of the apartheid system. He clearly draws into the discussion the need for reparations and justice as restoration and does so in the context of second and first generations of human rights. He also relates the discussion to global economic issues.

Ulf Magnusson, who specializes in the history of economics, discusses the relationships between human rights and economic development. His thesis is that economic equality is a precondition for citizens to exert their human rights as citizens. The setting for Magnusson’s discussion is a dialogue with the work of Robert Putnam and other scholars. When Magnusson substantiates his argument with economic facts, he gives an overview of the development of Swedish society, particularly in the last twenty to thirty years. So both Botman and Magnusson, consequently, discuss economic matters and their importance for human rights.

Democracy and citizenship

Three out of the sixteen texts fall under the category of democracy and citizenship. They are all written by Swedes, two by historians, Lars Petterson and Jan Gröndahl, and the third one by political scientist, Erik Amnå. Lars Petterson’s text takes us mainly back to the 19th century when he discusses the historical background to the so-called Swedish Welfare Model, a concept much used in describing Swedish society from the 1960’s and onwards. What Petterson does is to discuss the historical background to this societal development. He then elaborates on the development of popular movements (in Swedish: folkrörelser) and their growth as a response to changes in Swedish society during the 19th century. He draws on the findings of his research and that of other researchers.
in this field and discusses critically the interpretation of this particular epoch made by other historians.

Gröndahl has studied a crucial moment in Swedish history around the year 1921, when women and also all men irrespective of income were allowed to vote for the first time. He has done so in a “microscopic” study of the city of Gävle, the fifth largest city in Sweden at that time. Gröndahl’s focus is on whether the expansion of the electorate to include women in reality meant a change in the way politics operated. What did the inclusion of women, definitely a considerable number of new voters, actually mean? What kind of power struggles developed? Did gender matter and, if so, for what?

The third text on democracy focuses on most recent research. Erik Amnå summarizes and discusses the findings of the Swedish Parliamentary Commission on Democracy, who published their main report in 2000 and whose principal secretary he was. Amnå discusses Swedish society from the point of view of different current attitudes towards democracy among the citizens, as well as four different ways of characterizing the Swedish democracy. He concludes by formulating three crucial civic virtues: involvement, participation and influence.

These three texts, taken together, sketch the development of Swedish democracy, by pointing to movements, actors and attitudes among citizens. Through these texts, different aspects of citizenship are brought forward from different epochs in the Swedish development of democracy.

Social conditions and human rights

The next section consists of three texts, which all treat different social conditions and relate them to basic human rights. Education, health care and questions of identity within an immigrant group are the themes.

Schools as arenas for the young and growing generation form one crucial topic within any discussion of human rights and democracy. Here Åsa Bartholdsson, a social anthropologist, writes about her own fieldwork, in which she shared a number of days with Swedish school-children. She focuses on the space for Swedish pupils to express themselves authentically in the classroom. And the question that lingers on after reading is, can democracy be learnt or not through such praxis in school life as Bartholdsson describes?

The second text discusses a societal problem, most real and whose dimensions are hard to overview, the questions of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. Ethicist and
theologian Miranda Pillay focuses in her text on how women and also children are affected and how silence concerning issues of sexuality makes women, often powerless in their relationships, even more powerless in this particular situation. In feminist theology and its re-reading of the early history of the Christian church, which could be empowering to women, and in not idealizing the issues of bodies as brought to attention through the work of recent theologians, Pillay finds a direction for work within churches so that the issues of HIV/AIDS can be dealt with responsibly and with hope.

The third study in this section took its starting point in schools among Turkish immigrant children in Sweden. In a recent follow-up study, some fifteen years later, Judith Narrowe, a social anthropologist, interviewed the former youngsters, who are now grown-ups. In her article, Narrowe describes and analyses how these young people use an “othering from within”, a strategy to form an identity which integrates both Turkish and Swedish elements, so as to uphold ethnic boundaries and cope with the situation as immigrants, or rather, as the children of immigrants in Sweden.

Religion and human rights

Two of the articles by South African authors deal more specifically with issues of religion and human rights. Denise Ackerman, a feminist theologian in the Christian tradition, poses the question of the rights of women to religion within their own religious tradition given that a patriarchal tradition, time and time again, tends to exclude women. In her article, Ackerman formulates a principled argument for the right to a religion that respects the individual, when the individual is a woman. She does so against the background of the South African constitution.

In the second article in this section, Nico Koopman, systematic theologian and ethicist, given a recent re-interpretation of the trinity within the Christian tradition, takes on the task of finding a foundation for an understanding of human beings as interdependent, vulnerable and caring. Together with an emphasis on ubuntu, community, he thus finds what could form a foundation for building a human rights culture.
Gender issues and human rights

A gender perspective is present in several of the contributions. I group three of them together under this headline. The first of them is written by Stina Jeffner, a sociologist, who presents her own research among Swedish teenagers concerning their attitudes to rape. She has interviewed a number of young women and men about what constitutes rape but also about their understanding of what good sexual relationships are. Jeffner analyses what spaces understandings of love and rape create for young women and men respectively. She argues that men’s violence against women in intimate relationships is not compatible with basic human rights and that a critical attitude towards what is regarded as “normal” in the relationships of women and men is absolutely necessary.

Lindsay Clowes draws our attention to the question of men as fathers, but also as husbands and family members. In her research, she has analysed shifting masculinities, expressed in the descriptions of men in the South African Drum magazine, a magazine published from 1951–1965, largely written “by black men for an urban black male audience.” She describes a shift from the start of the period studied, when men were given a place within the diverse relationships of family and kin, only to become autonomous and independent breadwinners with invisible wives, children and other family members towards the end of the period. Clowes relates this to theories of gender constructions as well as to the changing societal realities of apartheid.

The third essay here is written by Kathy Nadasen, an anthropologist. Her article describes the phenomenon of female genital mutilation (FGM), different practices and their consequences. Out of the international discussion, she lifts up the judgement that female genital mutilation is to be seen as a form of torture. However, as this general international view does not stop the practice of FGM, the phenomenon needs to be described and analysed so that knowledge about it is improved and can contribute to the long-term well-being of women.

A future human rights culture

The articles above have approached different societal aspects: historical, economic, cultural or other related to a human rights culture. Here, in the last section, I have brought together three articles in which the authors ponder more directly on the question of how to build it. The first is written by a philosopher, the second, by an ethicist and the third one, by a systematic theologian.
JP Abrahams, a philosopher, argues in his article for the importance of feelings, sentiments, when building a human rights culture. Along with Richard Rorty, he argues against a universalist understanding of human nature as a foundation for human rights. He also questions a sense of moral superiority that might accompany the existence of human rights in a given country. Given the background in the South African society of rights not having been equal for all human beings, Abrahams focuses on how differences between human beings can be bridged and so shows how the resources and limits of philosophy can be used critically in dealing with this matter, his main argument being that differences can be overcome through emotional encounters between human beings.

In the second article, Karin Sporre, an ethicist, discusses the confusing Swedish reality with apparent political equality between women and men co-existing with economic discrimination and violence against women and sexual abuse. She searches for an understanding of this confusing reality through a re-reading of works of Harald Ofstad, a Scandinavian moral philosopher. She then phrases the question of whether contempt for women as a parallel to the admiration of men and male power can be significant in a patriarchal understanding of women. In her discussion, she tentatively develops criteria for a human rights culture and suggests further research in the field.

In the last article, Ernst Conradie, systematic theologian and ethicist, touches on the extensive discussions on the foundation of human rights. Further, he exemplifies different initiatives to discuss global ethical issues. He argues for the need of including ecological concerns in the discussions of how to build a human rights culture and sees the common need for a preservation of the environment as a possible meeting point for people beyond the differences between them. He also argues for religious communities to be important actors in the moral formation he deems necessary, as legal frameworks are not enough to make rights become a living reality for human beings.

Mirroring societies – a few concluding thoughts

A collection of texts such as this one poses, of course, a number of questions and challenges to its readers as well as to its editor. The situations in the two societies mirrored in these texts are different and still in other respects they also have similarities. The Swedish society has long democratic popular traditions; in South Africa this is a more recent development. The new South African constitution explicitly states the human dignity of each and every citizen in
powerful language at the same time as the implementation of the citizen’s rights puts enormous strains on society, when economic scarcity is a reality at the same time. Citizens in the Swedish society might lose a clear view of how a deeper human rights culture is realized, for instance in terms of gender issues, children and immigrants, and might have a delusive sense that it has all been achieved – an impression which needs to be questioned.

Some readers might have wished this book to mirror “exactly” the same areas of society so as to make comparisons “even” – implying that articles should have parity with one another, one on schools in South Africa and one on schools in Sweden, for instance. However, this is obviously not the case. But this does not rule out comparisons. Comparisons are possible – when the reader compares with what she or he knows of her/his own society, or compares the South African and Swedish societies according to what he/she knows about the two societies. In such a way, questions on a human rights culture may be directed towards the society of the reader, be it South Africa, Sweden or some other country.

In a follow up to this first study, more comparative studies could be made, for instance: in areas such as gender and culture, democracy and citizenship, children and human rights, education, economic development and human rights and gender and religion – to mention just a few areas touched upon here.

**Acknowledgements**

Several sponsors made this book possible. SIDA, the Department for Democracy and Social Development, Education Division is the first to be mentioned. Without their support, the colloquium would not have taken place and consequently this book would never have been written. However, had it not been for the Linneaus-Palme program, the exchange would not have come about – the exchange project which the colloquium builds on. Thanks to both these Swedish organizations.

To the total picture of sponsors, our universities also belong: the University of Stellenbosch, the University of the Western Cape and Högskolan Dalarna, where our exchange project as well as the colloquium have received support in different ways, such as the assistance of administrative staff, the provision of other resources, without which this project would not have been realized. For this support from colleagues and superiors, and for the funding from SIDA and the Linneaus-Palme program I am very grateful.
This editorial introduction starts with a strong ”we”, meaning H Russel Botman and Karin Sporre. It ends with an “I” meaning Karin Sporre. In July 2002 Russel Botman was appointed Vice Rector (Teaching) at US. This change of tasks from professor to Vice Rector meant that the two of us could not carry out this project jointly right to the very end. However, throughout this process, actually starting in 1999, I, Karin, have enjoyed the friendship and collegiality of Russel Botman. We have shared a joint vision and many ideas, out of which some important ones were realized in the exchange project and this very colloquium. Thank you Russel for our cooperation!

However my thanks need to be extended to all my colleagues who wrote these texts. Academic life is about taking important questions seriously, grappling and struggling with them, so as, in the long perspective, to assist us all, humanity and our habitat, in making life for us all, hopefully, a bit easier.
ECONOMY AND HUMAN RIGHTS
In the year 2004 South Africans will celebrate the tenth anniversary of democracy. Many black people such as myself will look back in order to imagine the future of the poor and most vulnerable people of this country. I will also remember the years of severe repression. Black people were forcefully removed from their land and taken to barren parts of the country. I will also remember the days we marched the street of South Africa calling for the people’s liberation. South Africa will remember the day its people could, for the first time in their lives, participate in democratic elections on 27th April 1994. As a theologian, the word remembrance takes on special meaning as it embodies both an exercise of the mind (thinking) and an exercise of inclusion (bringing back into membership).

Celebration is always a time for reflections. One can look back at the past ten years to think about the dramatic revolution, to review the remaking of the political landscape and imagine the remaining challenges awaiting this country’s new-found democracy. In the constitution, South Africans marked the notion of dignity as its core challenge. The constitution is based on a set of values determining the nature of the country’s democracy. The first and foremost value on which South Africa’s democracy is found is identified as “human dignity,” and benchmarked by the words “the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms”. ¹

However, South Africans had won their democracy at a time of rapid globalization. In the context of globalization authors from different fields started to perceive a certain conflict between the restoration of human dignity and the agency of economic globalization.² The most recent developments in the

² The broad argument that undergirds the main point of departure of this article is strongly represented by authors in the following publication: Berma Klein Golgewijk, Adalid Contreras Baspineiro, Paulo César Carboni (eds) 2002, Dignity and Human Rights: The implementation of economic, social and cultural rights, Antwerp: Intersentia
human rights discourse, namely respect for economic, social and cultural rights, are at odds with the most recent developments of the world's financial markets, namely respect for the bottom-line, respect for the value of money and trade as well as the primacy of economic growth over social imperatives. The point of departure is that the restoration of human dignity after the advent of oppression requires of governments the responsibility to fulfill and protect the social rights of people, especially the most vulnerable. These responsibilities of governments would of necessity require intervention in markets and even regulation of such markets to protect the poor and marginalized. The restoration of human dignity must be seen to be more than a mere social goal. It ought to be more specifically an institutionalized practice. Governments and not markets signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). Governments and not markets accepted the responsibility to fulfill and protect the economic, social and cultural rights of people.

The question addressed here is whether the achievements in the human rights discourses are at stake in the current context of economic globalization. The answer to this question hinges on the place and role ascribed to governments and states in the global economic context. The outcome of this query is in the social realm where the restoration of human dignity is tested. However, the context of this investigation is both political and economic. Since South Africa has set for itself the political and economic objective to restore the dignity of its humiliated black communities, it remains a pivotal test to the achievement of social gains in a world characterized by economic gains. The word value is important in this debate. The term originated in the world of money and is applied to human dignity by the Constitution of South Africa. In a certain sense this paper tells the story of the world’s economic globalization as it impacts on a country’s, South Africa’s, social objectives. The quest for reconciliation in South Africa is crucial to the restoration of dignity. Reconciliation requires also reparations to humiliated human beings. Reparations, however, call for intervention by governments. It therefore brings one back to the first question regarding the attainability of social goals that impacts human dignity at a time when the world experience the hey-days of the financial market in the context of economic globalization. One can now rightly ask whether a government, such as South Africa’s, fulfill its constitutional obligations regarding the restoration of human dignity and fulfill its global contractual obligations to economic globalization.
The context of economic globalization

Zygmunt Bauman, the political sociologist and Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the Universities of Leeds and Warsaw, has done extensive research about the human consequences of economic globalization.³ His political argument sees a deconstruction of politics in the realities of economic globalization. His argument regarding the state of the human being is that economic globalization is geared towards the tourists’ dreams and desires rather than that of the poorest locals. Parallel to the latter, he also argues that the rich, the great and the famous people of a society no longer aspire to pastoral power, i.e. they no longer see themselves as shepherds of their flocks or their people. These three arguments impact on the way in which governments are positioned to act in the context of globalization in achieving their social responsibilities.

His political argument⁴ is that in the classical phase of modernity, legislation was the principle tool for setting the social agenda of a nation. Legislation provided a restriction to unbridled choice by allowing legislators to exercise the first and primary choice on behalf of the collective and in relation to the responsibilities established in the constitution. Only after legislation, individuals could exercise their choices. The law-makers could then, in the interest of the human being and the social needs, reduce the range of choices open to individuals by making laws that would provide incentives for the restoration of human dignity or disincentives for actions that could hamper such development. The legislators also had a second principle tool to set the code of choosing. The principle tool for setting the code for choosing was education. Education provided codes of conduct and also established values that would guide the exercise of choosing. Education was meant to teach us the distinction between the right reasons for according preference over against the wrong ones. Further, education would form in human beings the ethical inclination to follow good impulses and resist the wrong reasons for choosing.

However, says Bauman, political institutions everywhere are currently in a process of abandoning or trimming down their role in agenda- and code-setting. This means that these two principle functions of political institutions


are now being ceded to structures and forces other than political. Within the framework of globalization, the insistence on curbing the states’ regulatory functions gives expression to this phenomenon. Those associated with financial and commodity markets then find themselves operative in a context of deregulation regarding the agenda-setting and the code-setting on social and thus human dignity related issues. This leaves political institutions stripped from any effective social agency to legitimate, promote, fulfill and service other sets of values. Values related to the restoration of human dignity are not exempt from this impact of the deconstruction of politics.

Given this background, Bauman then develops the idea that the events in the political arena, especially their effect on the human being, are compounded by the way in which economic globalization impacts human life. Economic globalization, he claims, produces two human forms, the tourist and the vagabond. The tourists are those human beings with the means and ability to chose to travel because they want to do so. The vagabonds are involuntary tourist forced to travel because they have no other bearable choice. The real lifeblood of a voluntary tourist is the possibility of choice. Globalization is, therefore, he claims geared at the dreams and desires of the tourist, not that of the vagabond. The vagabonds are those who, in terms of the argument of this article, require the restoration of their dignity. They are the poor and side-lined members of the human community. They represent the people living in the squatter camps of South Africa and ghettos of the world. However, says Bauman, the reduction of the options, marginalizes the vagabond from the central activity of economic globalization, namely the unfettered right to choose. The vagabond is seen as a flawed consumer, and as such useless to the global economy. They are also unwanted. So they participate in crime as a negative expression of their desperate wish to become like the tourist. Eventually, the vagabond learns that the tourist are actually dreaming of a world without vagabonds. They, therefore, choose secluded tourist destinations rather than spaces where the vagabonds wander the streets of the world.

The vagabond is now dependent on the philanthropists of the world. The pastoral role of the philanthropist has, however, also changed significantly. Where they would earlier stand as pastors or shepherds of the flock of vagabonds, they now simply display their life-styles as the examples to be followed.

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The South African dilemma

In such a world, South Africa has decided to make the restoration of dignity especially of the poorest and most marginalized sectors of society a crucial area for political performance. This has happened after 1994 when the country had its first democratic election. Already in 2000, warnings were sounded that the political agenda regarding the collective social responsibility had fallen behind. On 18 May 2000 Judge Arthur Chaskalson, then president of the Constitutional Court in South Africa, presented the third Bram Fischer Lecture in Johannesburg. He warned the country that it is in danger of not realizing the future vision contained in the constitution. “We seem temporarily to have lost our way”, he said, “Millions of people are still without houses, education and jobs and there can be little dignity in living under such conditions. Dignity, equality and freedom will be achieved only when the socioeconomic conditions are transformed to make this possible”.6 Nowhere, he says, was the importance of dignity more apparent than in the application of social and economic rights and the justice they entail.

Another way to state this kind of view is by saying: South Africa has been very successful with broad transformation. The country can be proud of the instruments of its constitutional democracy, of the advances in the educational system, of the broadening of access to health care in the country, of the restructuring in civil society, of partnerships with business, of the advances in environmental awareness, and the blossoming in arts and culture. However, broad transformation in itself is not a panacea. At some point the realization emerge that it must be followed by deep transformation. The country must also seek a deepening of the transformation so that dignity is restored to those who struggle to make a living in the remotest village of our country. It points to the need for a deepening of equality so that the daughter of the farm worker would have the same opportunity to success as the son of the farmer.

This concern regarding the social agenda, was also expressed by President Mandela after his own presidency. In his letter to the participants in the Rhodes Centenary Reunion in January 2003, former President Nelson R. Mandela makes a very important statement when he says: “While you are here (in South Africa) you will doubtless realize that although our great moral struggle – to

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cast off apartheid – is over, the challenge of bringing equality and dignity to our people remains.  

The year 2004 will usher in the tenth anniversary of South Africa’s democracy. The two statements these two well placed intellectuals and opinion formers of South Africa outline quite starkly the reality of South Africa’s people in the context of economic globalization. Judge Chaskalson’s concluding remark is a painful reminder of how far we are as a nation from the duties we would like to see fulfilled: “Generations of children born and yet to be born will suffer the consequences of poverty, of malnutrition, of homelessness, of illiteracy and disempowerment generated and sustained by the institutions of apartheid and its manifest effects on life and living for so many. The country has neither the resources nor the skills to reverse fully these massive wrongs.”

Apart from resources and skill, the argument of Bauman must also be brought to bear on this judgement. South Africa does not have a global economic context that is conducive of the restoration of dignity as the political deconstruction and the human consequences of economic globalization contradict the human goals set by the constitution.

**The human rights discourse**

Human dignity is a notion that belongs to the human rights discourse. The arguments posed above bring us in the context of the place and role of human rights in economic globalization. Internationally, the debate on globalization and human rights takes its point of departure in an intellectual position that assumes the existence of rights. Africans are entering the reality of and developments in human rights. The rights debate in South Africa is a debate of entitlement given its dignity-enriched meaning. However, the achievement of this contextual challenge is seriously hampered by economic globalization. It takes on the form of policy options in a global context in which the political deconstruction is in progress. The question is not so much whether globaliza-

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tion will strip Africans of human rights. The question is whether it will allow the country to restore human rights.

South Africa’s constitution, hailed by many scholars, as the most democratic constitution currently in the world, is predicated on specific moral viewpoints and does nothing more but “operationalize” this morality. Its main objectives are to i) heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights; ii) lay the foundations for a democratic and open society protected by law; iii) improve the quality of life of all citizens and free the potential of each person.

At heart the Constitution endeavors to restore the collective dignity of the South African society and state, on the one hand, and its people, on the other. This is confirmed in Section 1(a) of the Constitution:

...human dignity, the achievement of equality and advancement of human rights and freedoms.

The Bill of Rights picks up on the theme of human dignity and applies it specifically to the dialectic of freedom and equality. The commitment to this understanding of dignity is imposed as a positive duty upon the state as it is required to “respect, protect, promote and fulfill the rights” in the Bill of Rights.

The state is not merely required to “respect and protect” the dignity based rights, but is also obligated to “promote” and “fulfill” them. There will be purist libertarians who may suggest that the duty to “promote” these rights could lead to unacceptable state interference in the private sector and the economy at large. However, the Bill of Rights has chosen a strategy for equality and freedom that explicitly includes socio-economic (second generation) rights as point of departure. The objective of alleviating the poverty and suffering caused by 300 years of inhumane politics and economic requires modest state intervention. The right to “have access to” adequate housing, health care, food, water and social security must not only be respected and protected, but also fulfilled by the state. These rights of specifically marginalized and disadvantaged people

10 Lourens M. du Plessis calls these the “dignity enriched” concepts of freedom and equality. Human dignity thus becomes the interpretive framework for the Bill of Rights. “South Africa’s Bill of Rights, Reconciliation and a Just Society” in Race and Reconciliation in South Africa, 2000, p 142.

11 All references here to the Constitution or the Bill of Rights refer to The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Act 108 of 1996.

12 Section 27.
are enshrined in the Bill of Rights as proper entitlements, which the state must be seen to “promote” and “fulfill”.

Rooting the second-generation rights in the principle of human dignity sends equality and freedom “in the direction of concrete, human existentiality lest it absconds into the labyrinths of abstract rationality”.

Lourens M du Plessis argues that the overarching notion of equality that derives from such a base in human dignity should rightly be called “empowering equality”.

Empowering equality is accomplished through the judicious and thus congruous realization of the various manifestations of equality for which the constitution explicitly provides. The best that a constitution can do is to make sufficient provision for all the various manifestations of equality [(i)-(iv) supra] — which the South African Constitution does.

The various manifestations of equality, explained Du Plessis, sub-articles (i)-(iv) are the following: (i) **Numerical equality**, i.e. the equality of things such as the equilibrium of injury and indemnification when damage is recompensed; (ii) **Geometrical equality** which provides for differential treatment postulated on personal merit, e.g. the right to vote qualified by the age of eighteen years (section 46(1)(c)); (iii) **Substantive equality** which requires that people are treated exactly the same irrespective of individual difference or merit. Substantive equality embodies the “blindfoldedness” of the goddess of justice; (iv) Corrective or curative equality seeking to address the deficiencies of other forms of equality. **Corrective equality** address historically entrenched distortions of equality by specific procedures such as affirmative action.

Empowering equality is the overarching mechanism of equality that integrates the four forms. Section 9(2) of South Africa’s Constitution can therefore legitimate measures “designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination”. This legitimacy is predicted on the assumption that “equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms”. Corrective or curative equality, claims Du Plessis, is thus established as a “normal” form of equality and not an exception to the rule.

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13 Lourens M. du Plessis, 2000, p 150.
14 Lourens M. du Plessis, 2000, p 150.
15 Lourens M. du Plessis, 2000, p 147-149.
Taking as espoused by Lourens Du Plessis, the achievement of a dignity-enriched human rights situation, must be seen in terms of the fourfold actions for equality. These actions require from governments the ability to set the social agenda and to set the codes whereby they will be achieved. However, taken, the arguments of Bauman, the process of the deconstruction of politics in the context of economic globalization, reduces the capacity of governments to fulfill the rights claimed in the national constitution. The process of deregulation restricts rather than promotes the restoration of human dignity.

**The ethical dilemma**

Since my main interest is that of social ethics, I should now return to the philosophical heart of the matter.

The abovementioned arguments leave us with a deep sense of need to inquire again about the ethical centers of our societies in the context of economic globalization.

Dignity enriched human rights discourse takes as its base the set of moral principles that takes its point of departure in the necessary relationship existing among all individuals as members of the human community. The interests of a common humanity override the interests of investors, states, systems and the financial market.

Zygmunt Bauman, in comparing the status of investors in the global economy with absentee landlords, correctly argued that the high level of mobility required from both capital and investor in the global context means an unprecedented and unconditional disconnection of power from obligation such as duties towards employees, towards the young and frail, towards unborn generations and towards the common good. Indeed, economic globalisation creates a new form of freedom, which is a freedom from the duty to contribute to the better life of all and the perpetuation of humanity and the earth:

> now unanchored power, able to move at short notice or without warning, is free to exploit and abandon to the consequences of that exploitation. Shedding the responsibility for the consequences is the most coveted and cherished gain which new mobility brings to free-floating, locally unbound capital.16

This is a very important observation in the human rights debate since the main drive of the current discourse is seeking ways to move beyond the mere claiming

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of rights over against others, but rather to work towards rights as expressions of responsibility. One is not only free from, but indeed, free for responsibility.

Human dignity has always been vulnerable to encroachment. In different areas of human life and in the context of transformation the level of vulnerability may be higher than in others or at other times. The vulnerability arises when two distinct fundamental human orientations collide and the result is wrongly constructed at the cost of dignity.

In the context of globalization the “ethic of dignity”, the orientation favored by a strong social ethics, and the “ethic of interests”, the orientation favored by the current global economic reality, come into conflict and such conflict requires a fundamental moral choice from individuals, communities and society at large.

The discussion of human dignity must avoid the Kantian grounding in rationality, which has been thoroughly criticized for its anthropocentric worldview on the one hand and an understanding of human dignity that is imprisoned by a notion of human rights that excludes future generation and the earth. Calling violence an assault on human dignity, Wolfgang Huber argues that we are now called to a “planetary ethic”.17

There is significant consensus that globalization brings with it major risks to human beings, communities and societies. Our very humanity may be at stake in the current global context.

Martin Khor’s point is well taken:

The creation and establishment of a new economy and world order, based on environmentally sound principles, to fulfill human rights and human needs is not such an easy task, as we know too well. It may even be an impossible task, a challenge that cynics and even good-hearted folks in their quiet moments may feel will end in defeat. Nevertheless, it is the greatest challenge in the world today, for it is tackling the issue of the survival of the human species and of the Earth itself.18

The only credible way for South Africans to productively deal with a dignity enriched Human Rights discourse is in the area of reconciliation. The human rights discourse in itself will for the foreseeable future continue to suffer from the human and political consequences of economic globalization.

Having examined the many disadvantages of economic globalization, South African society has opted for the idea of reconciliation as a dignity enriched notion that could assist with the development of the poor and the marginalized in the face of globalization. The act of reconciliation is the most creative response of the South African society to the expressed need for the restoration of dignity after the situation of oppression and dehumanisation in the time of Apartheid.

One of the most burning questions in reconciliation processes is the nature and place of justice. Difficult debates ensue about the primacy of justice for the true resolution of past conflicts. However, the central question in reconciliation is not whether justice must be done, but how it is to be done. This crucial question leads to four main proposals: Justice as revenge, justice as retribution, justice as redistribution and justice as restoration.

First is the idea of justice as revenge. Individuals or organizations may feel that the legal and political system of a society has been eroded or are not adequately representative to deliver justice to the victims or those who were dependent on them. Then people take the course of justice into their own hands. Street courts and other ways of dealing with justice in society arise. Examples of such actions were reported in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia. The revenge option can condemn a society to a deadly spiral of retaliation.

Second, there is the option to handle justice in the form of the predominantly Western legal system. Where the criminal justice system is regarded, historically and socially, as the most adequate instrument to deliver justice to society, the option of retribution is enacted. The Western criminal justice systems are regarded as fairly advanced forms of dealing with justice in democratic societies. It is seen as an instrument that strengthens human rights in society and promotes the rule of law. Germany’s Nuremberg option is an example of this form of justice. Perpetrators are charged for offences before a court of law in which psychologists, religious leaders and other social service professionals have a meager role to play in the decision-making process. This option depends on the existing criminal justice system in country.

The criminal justice system focuses on guilt and blame and seeks criminal motive, incriminating evidence, an objective measure of truth, witnesses of broadly defined integrity and, preferably, a confession by the perpetrator. South Africans who argued strongly for retributive justice include the family of Steve Biko, the activist and leader killed by Apartheid agents while in police custody.

in the seventies. Willa Boesak argues for justice as retribution in his book God’s Wrathful Children (1995). He finds religious justification in the idea that the Christian scriptures claim that “Vengeance belong to God” (Rom 12:19) and that God appoints civil authorities as rightful administrator of punishment to the evildoer (Rom 13:14). The focus on crime in retributive justice tends to become an industry and depends on the very issue that sometimes leads to torture, namely, interrogations that extracts a confession. It further separates justice from social healing in a way that tends to marginalize victims and their continued suffering. The offender and the crime take central stage, while the victim and the pain dissolves in the notion that the state takes the case as its own against the offender.

The third option, distributive justice, calls on government to take a primary legislative position not only in the criminal justice system, but also in the civil justice system. In the civil justice system victims or their representatives become part of the process after retribution has been achieved and compensation can be sought. Distributive justice seeks legislation to redistribute the wealth of a nation to include the victims of its ethno-religious conflict that goes beyond the ordinary social security responsibility of the state. The focus is placed on the material loss of the victims or their immediate descendants. Instead of the term “victims” people then prefer the designation “survivor”. The latter moves the debate beyond the need for aid to the claim for redistribution. The benefits that resulted from the conflict should be redistributed justly to include recognition of the resultant disadvantage suffered by the survivor. Two theologians, Tinyiko Maluleke and Molefe Tsele, argued strongly for distributive justice. Molefe Tsele points to a direct connection between reconciliation and the biblical notion of the jubilee (Leviticus 25:9 –10). The process should not end with reconciliation, but should also return survivors to a better social and economic status and thus restore their human dignity. Maluleke criticizes the reparations proposals of the TRC. The proposal calls largely for symbolic and community-based reparations. The symbols want to remember victims and

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the other reparations focus on rebuilding local communities after the atrocities. Maluleke accuses the TRC of “Dealing lightly with the wounds of My People”. The focal point of reconciliation is the survivor and not the nation or community structures.

Restorative justice is the most critical form of justice in the structuring of reconciliation processes. Restorative justice returns the voice of the victim, whether alive or dead, from the periphery to the centre. When the victim is alive the person’s own voice is heard. Where the victim is deceased, the voice is represented by family. The crime was not directed at the state, as legal procedure often argue. The crime was personal, familial and relational. It connects the perpetrator and the victim eternally. Lawyers do not replace the perpetrator or the survivor although they may have such representatives as advisors. The survivor receives every right to question the perpetrator, over and against normal legal procedures. The perpetrator, similarly, can confess to the truth without fearing the aggressive legalese of lawyers representing the survivor. Restorative justice is a meeting of human beings both hurt, degraded and angry but willing to reach out to an element of mercy and grace in the human spirit. Dialogue, memory and embrace form the rituals of restorative justice. It takes its point of departure in the assumption that healing of memory, restoration of human dignity and the reconstruction of devastated communities are achievable in post-conflict situations. It assumes that embrace is more beneficial to society than any form of exclusion of people based on grounds of racial, gender, ethnic, religious, class or cultural entities. Whilst other forms of justice base themselves on evaluations of the past, restorative justice is orientated to the future. The question is not “how combatants have lived” but “how the next generation is going to live”. This future orientation calls on predecessors of future generations to accept the humiliation of dealing with the past in order to leave a conciliatory heritage to their children. Restorative justice is based on the dual meaning of the word remember. On the one hand, it means to remember cognitively, to call to mind or to recall events of the past. It is thus directly related to memory and to the symbolism of memorials. On the other hand, it means incorporating, re-membering, returning to membership and restoring community. Both these

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23 Interesting studies have been conducted about these questions by people such as Howard Zehr, “Restoring Justice”, in Lisa Barnes Lampman (ed.), 1999, God and the Victim: Theological reflections on evil, victimization, justice and forgiveness. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, pp 131–159.
meanings are captured and expressed in restorative justice. Restorative justice is thus community seeking.

Although the notion of restorative justice is not captured in Western legal systems, its has undisputed origins in the cultures of Africans, the Maori and the first peoples of North America where notions of community have always been more important than mere individualism.²³

Restorative justice relates directly to the biblical understanding of reconciliation. Christianity has always been concerned about memory, confession, guilt and forgiveness in the interest of reconciliation. These themes have been constituted through the Christian tradition as public events and rituals.²⁴ In the same way national processes of reconciliation expresses the public nature and political meaning of these Christian themes. Restorative justice focuses on the two meanings of freedom, namely freedom from and freedom for. It invites people into a certain memory of the past that also frees them from it. Simultaneously, it frees people for the future, for each other and for God. Restorative justice is, therefore, embedded in the Christian narrative, memory and identity. Restorative justice includes the need for confession but removes it, as in Christianity, from the realm of retributive justice placing it in the context of a common search for reconciliation.

Restorative justice does not call for cheap reconciliation. It does not fly in the face of a victim’s pain and continued suffering ignoring the dehumanization caused by conflicts. In Christianity a distinction is drawn between cheap and costly grace. Therefore, concrete reparation and restitution are not excluded. The perpetrator has a responsibility in this regard and so does the state.

Restorative justice belongs to the ambit of negotiated settlements. It, therefore, takes on a political rather than a mere religious meaning. Parties in conflict may get to a point where their research and common sense show that the continuing destruction of infrastructure and life outweighs the opportunities and benefits of continuing the struggles. They then may decide on the adoption of “a sunset clause” whereby the parties accept the principle that none of them will leave the conflict as the only winner. In the “sunset clause” they simply agree to let the sun set on the conflict and engage each other in negotiation for a settlement. Reconciliation becomes thus a public political reality.

References


By all international standards, Sweden is still a welfare state. It is also a very egalitarian society. But in the last few decades inequality has slowly increased in a number of ways.

This trend, I will argue, has already had some adverse effects on the ability to exercise some human rights, especially those related to Articles 20 and 21 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. These articles deal with the freedom of assembly and association and with the right to take part in the government of the country, directly or through chosen representatives. It is also possible to argue that some other human rights have been affected in a more direct way. Articles 22, 23, 24 and 25 all include rights related to employment, work conditions, payment, rest and leisure, standard of living, social protection and similar issues. In times of increased inequality, it is more or less unavoidable that these rights are affected in a negative way.

I will, furthermore, assert that there is a causal connection between these two types of human rights in so far that the last set of rights is a precondition for the first. Or to put it more bluntly: if you lack material assets, if you are hindered by sickness, disability, lack of rest and leisure, you are less likely to participate in social activities and to act as a responsible citizen participating in the democratic process. This is more accentuated the less equal you feel to your fellow citizens.

As I partly base my arguments on the works of Robert Putnam and the debate he has triggered, this will also be the point of departure for this article.

The Point of Departure: Robert Putnam’s Thesis

In his book: Making Democracy Work, already considered to be a modern classic, Putnam examines regional differences in Italy concerning a number of variables, in one way or another related to the overall issue of democracy. (Putnam, 1993) The major part of the research is related to the introduction of the new regional governments in 1970. The result indicates a very clear
distinction between the northern and southern parts of Italy in virtually all the aspects investigated: the effectiveness of the new governments, the economic performances of the regions, the political participation of the citizens, the cooperation between political parties and satisfaction with life. It eventually all boils down to a difference in civic traditions that can be traced far back in history. In Putnam’s own words:

Although all these regional governments seemed identical on paper, their levels of effectiveness varied dramatically. Systematic inquiry showed that the quality of governance was determined by longstanding traditions of civic engagement (or its absence). Voter turnout, newspaper readership, membership in choral societies and football clubs – these were the hallmarks of a successful region. In fact, historical analysis suggested that these networks of organized reciprocity and civic solidarity, far from being an epiphenomenon of socio-economic modernization, were a precondition for it. (Putnam, 1995, p. 66)

The more people meet, the more social trust and networks facilitating communication and coordination, build up to create a foundation forming the social capital upon which the vigour of economic activities depends. Thus, social capital is as vital to economic performance as physical and human capital, Putnam argues. Since social capital ”allows dilemmas of collective action to be resolved” (Putnam, 1996, p. 67), the transaction costs normally involved in employments and other types of agreements related to economic activities, are lower than in a society characterized by distrust and vertical social relations.

In *Bowling Alone* (following his Italian study), Putnam takes on to investigate the vigour of American civic life in the last three decades of the 20th century. As the title suggest, his findings are not very edifying. Instead of bowling in teams like they used to do, and at the same time drinking beer, eating pizza and socializing, Americans nowadays bowl alone. From being a nation engaged in all kinds of civic associations and activities, like churches, sports clubs, unions, socializing with neighbours and friends, etc., Americans tend to refrain from social activities, even within the realm of family. This has also affected political participation in terms of voter turnout, attendance at political meetings, interest in discussing political issues and the frequency of newspaper reading, despite the fact that education – the factor normally considered to have the largest effect on political participation – has increased.

But why has civic engagement decreased? Putnam’s answer develops along four lines:
1. *Lack of time and money*, especially in families where both parties work;
2. "Suburbanization", Americans spend more and more time commuting, and therefore have less time to engage in local activities;
3. *Electronic entertainment*, especially TV; and
4. *Generational effects*, which Putnam considers to be the most important factor: the younger generations are much less engaged in civic activities. (Putnam, 2000, section III)

Putnam has caused a lively debate, resulting in a virtual flood of articles and books, not only in the USA, but also in the rest of the world, including Sweden. (SOU 2000:1)

In the preface to the Swedish edition of *Bowling Alone*, two prominent professors of political science, Olof Petersson and Bo Rothstein, acknowledge the great importance of Putnam’s work (which in Sweden has had a great influence upon the extensive official report on democracy in 2000 (SOU 2000:1)), but they also point to the criticism he has met among other scholars. One problem is Putnam’s definition of *social capital*, which is too broad to be of much analytic use. Also, declining civic activity is more or less an American phenomenon, some of the critics claim. Petersson and Rothstein agree that Sweden also faces dwindling memberships in political parties and other, mainly traditional, types of associations, but that this has not affected the strength of social networks or mutual trust. Lastly they point to the difficulty in determining what types of civic associations can be said to promote mutual trust and democracy. (Petterson & Rothstein, 2001, p. 7–11)

**Bowling in Sweden**

Bowling has never been as popular in Sweden as in the USA. But we do bowl, and at least the bowling hall in my own town is a very social place, where kids celebrate their birthday parties together with parents and friends, where workmates meet after work to have a good time together. So, what is there to be said about Sweden in relation to the findings of Putnam?

Sweden still rates very high on most of the parameters of civic virtues: voter turnout, newspaper readership, union membership and membership in other

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1 In their preface to the Swedish edition, Pettersson and Rothstein also criticise Putnam for blaming big government for the decline of civic disengagement. In fact Putnam is of the opposite opinion. He even points to the countries of Scandinavia as the best example of a high positive correlation between social capital and high welfare expenditures.
types of civic associations are all among the highest in the world. Still, I am not as convinced as Petersson and Rothstein that Sweden differs that much from the USA concerning the major *trends*.

What differs is the time and the level from which the decline began.

**Political Participation**

We will start by examining civic engagement in terms of political participation. The parameters used by Putnam to measure this are *voter turnout, attendance at political meetings, interest in discussing political issues and newspaper readership*.

We find that the first parameter, voter turnout, shows a tendency similar to the American case. As illustrated in the diagram below, there is an obvious break in the trend at the beginning of the 80’s. In the USA, the decline in the presidential elections, which started as far back as the early 60’s, is now down below 50 per cent, which is lower than it has ever been in Sweden. But still, the trend is similar.

![Voter turnout in Sweden 1921–2002](image)

The same goes for *membership in political parties*, as shown in the next figure.

The number of those who have *access to a daily newspaper* in Sweden has decreased by 9.5 per cent in the period 1975–1995. In addition to the general trend, the curve slopes more steeply for the most deprived groups, for instance the low paid and poor. (SCB, *rapport 91*, 1997, diagram 12.7 p. 205 and översiktstabell, p. 213)
The exception to the trend of decreasing civic activity, measured as political activity, is the interest in discussing political issues. Those who often participate in political discussions have in fact increased in number over time. A closer look at the figures shows no obvious differences between men and women over time, but rather between generations. Those aged 45 or above have become more eager to discuss politics. This could indicate that there is a generational factor to be considered also in Sweden.

Source: SCB, Undersökningarna av levnadsförhållanden (ULF)
The inconsistency compared to the other parameters measuring political activity could reflect a growing sense of powerlessness, where increased discussion of political issues is elicited by the political changes.

On the other hand, investigations show that Swedes to a larger extent than before believe they can influence political decisions in many ways even if there are fewer that actually take any initiatives in that direction today. What is interesting is the way they think they can exercise influence. It is quite clear that there is a shift away from the traditional collective methods: by voting, by working in political parties and through trade unions. Instead, Swedes rely to a larger extent on personal contacts or other non-traditional ways of exercising influence, like gaining attention via the mass media. On the other hand, the traditional ways are by no means considered useless, and still rate higher than non-parliamentary means. (Petersson et al, 1998, p. 51–53)

We now turn away from the indicators of political activity and concentrate on the core of the Putnam thesis: the civic associations.

**Civic Associations**

At a very first glance the tendency concerning membership in civic associations is not as alarming as in the USA. Swedes still seem to be well organized (except for in political parties). The proportion of the population that are members in at least one organization has declined somewhat, from 94 % in 1987, to 92.2 % in 1992 and to 90.2 % in 2000. On the other hand, the differences in levels of activity over time have decreased more. In addition, both parameters (membership and activity levels) are strongly correlated to socio-economic variables. In none of the different types of civic associations is membership and especially active membership dominated by the working-class. Only the unions are fairly "equal" in that sense. Involvement in organized activities is undoubtedly to a certain degree a matter of class – or maybe one should say it is a matter for the wealthy and the well educated. (Petersson et al, 1998, p. 89)

Compared to the figures of 1987, present membership numbers in most types of associations have declined considerably: A quick comparison shows that membership has declined in 18 out of 26 comparable associations from 1987 to 2000 (see figure below).

Those who have increased in number are pensioners’ organisations (+14 %), associations for the disabled and patients (+21 %), church related organisations (+28 %) and local action groups (+ 25 %). The ageing population combined
with the prolonged life expectancy and the improved health status among the elderly might partly explain this. They are also better off financially than their forebears, and they belong to the categories that have maintained their purchasing power during the economically troublesome 90’s.

The rest of the organizations are losers in terms of membership. Out of the 26 organizations, 12 have lost more than 40 %. At the bottom we find women’s associations (–53 %), immigrants associations (–56 %), temperance movements (–79 %) and peace movements (–62 %). Among those that have suffered a heavy loss of members we also find other types of associations based on ideological or altruistic issues, such as environmental associations, religious organizations (outside the Church of Sweden), parents’ organizations and organizations for international issues, all of which have lost more than 40 % of their members.

### Relative changes in membership in different types of associations between 1987 and 2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Association Type</th>
<th>Change Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Group or association within the Church of Sweden</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local pressure group etc.</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association for the disabled or patients</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensioners’ association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade-union</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian relief organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-air association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer co-operative</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenants’, tenant-owners’ or house-owner’s association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraternity Association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group for international issues</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, music, dance or theatre association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other co-operation, other joint collective</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other hobby association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconformist society</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Motor organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environmental organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious society</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary defence organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant’s organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareholders’ organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperance society</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group for international issues</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture, music, dance or theatre association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other co-operation, other joint collective</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other hobby association</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nonconformist society</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motor organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Environmental organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other religious society</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary defence organization</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent’s association</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Women’s organization</td>
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<td>Immigrant’s organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shareholders’ organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace organization</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperance society</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other association</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCB: Häll, 2001, tab. 1 and; Petersson et al, 1998, tab. 3.3, p. 64
The relative size of the different associations is shown in the figure below. This does not alter the picture. There is an obvious overall decline in membership and the four types of organizations exhibiting a small increase in membership are quite small compared to the other ones.

Even more discouraging is the fact that also the activity level within each organization has decreased. From 1992 to 2000, the total number of members in any organizations has decreased by 11 percent and those active in any organization have become 21 percent fewer, meaning that the activity level has decreased even more rapidly than the membership level.
Based on these figures, it seems quite clear that civic traditions in Sweden are rapidly declining. This is also confirmed by a number of political scientists in a report published in 1998. They point to several alarming trends, threatening the basic democratic institutions, both official and unofficial. Membership and the level of activity in civic organizations are among those trends. (Petersson et al, 1998) It should be added that these trends are even more obvious today, four years after their report.

In an earlier project, in which two of the authors of the above-mentioned report participated, and which investigated power relations in Sweden in the 80’s, the heading of the concluding chapter is “The Ambiguous Citizenship”. (Petersson O., A. Westholm & G. Blomberg, 1989, chapter 11) This pinpoints the state of affairs in the 80’s and can be seen as an expression of the tendencies in that decade, pointing in different directions at the same time. As we shall see, the 80’s can now be considered the starting point of increasing inequality and decreasing civic activity.

**Explaining civic traditions – a tentative hypothesis**

So far I have only compared the Swedish development with that in America, as described by Putnam. I would now like to propose another, complementary hypothesis to the ones put forward by Putnam.

As Putnam himself argues, an extensive welfare state not only seems to be no obstacle to the formation of social capital. On the contrary, it favours it. This is also in accordance with the findings of many others (for instance Petersson and Rothstein above). But is it the welfare expenditure *per se* that is favorable or is it something else? I would argue that it is a certain outcome of the expenditure – namely the *relative economic equality* (if the expenditures are made in a way that creates equality), which is favorable to the formation of social capital and thereby also to economic performance.

The Swedish economist, Torsten Persson, and his Italian colleague, Guido Tabellini, investigated the correlation between the *rate of economic growth* and *equality of income distribution* over a long period of time (1930–1985). The investigation included nine countries. Their result shows a statistically significant correlation of such magnitude that a typical deviation from the standard degree of equality implies a difference in annual growth of a little bit more than 0.5 per cent over a period of 25 years, which would result in a difference in GNI per head of approximately 13 per cent, which is a considerable figure.
Of course this applies when several other factors that also have an influence on economic growth have been accounted for. (Persson, 1996)2

In Sweden, a substantial part of the state revenue is spent as transfers between different categories in society. Families with children receive an extra income benefit per child, until the age of 15 (or more under certain circumstances). Medical care is practically free, as is education. Sickness benefits are financed to a great extent by public means. Unemployment benefits are financed in equal parts by the union’s unemployment benefit funds and the state.

These are just some examples of transfers which all have the same effect: a considerable levelling of incomes. When you are young, old or sick, when you have children, when you study and when you are unemployed – the rest of the working population supports you. This system is also strongly supported by a majority of citizens, including a substantial proportion of the middle classes, as shown in a number of surveys. Also, the broader the bases of those who benefit from the system, the greater are the chances of winning an election on a program advocating a strong general welfare state. What might seem a paradox is that the more extensive the social and security system is the more will be left over for the poor. (SCB Rapport nr 91, 1997, p. 650) The explanation of why this system gains such strong support among people is that all citizens are entitled to it, regardless of income.

But there has been a trend away from the general welfare system for some decades now. Fees have been introduced; the level of benefits has decreased; qualifying periods have been introduced, etc.

These and other changes, mainly in labour market relations dating from the beginning of the 80’s, have resulted in growing income gaps and a more unequal society (but still Sweden, together with the other Nordic countries, is one of the most equal societies in the European Union and probably in the world (SCB, Rapport nr 91, 1997, p. 159–62)).

Given the scope of this article, it is not possible to pin down the exact causes of the shift towards growing inequality, but it has at least partly to do with the conscious change in economic policies that gradually took place in the 80’s, strongly advocated by the Swedish employers’ associations, the Conservative and Liberal parties, but also by a large part of the Social Democratic elite, especially those affiliated with the Ministry of Finance. Monetarism à la Milton

2 A more complete presentation of the project is made in American Economic Review, vol 84, no 3, p. 600–621.
Friedman and Friedrich Hayek is now the prevailing economic doctrine (also) in Sweden, given the emphasis on price stability instead of full employment and the independent role of the Central Bank instead of an active state-managed economic policy. Also a systematic and conscious cutback and dismantling of the public sphere took place (and is still taking place). A number of sectors formerly owned or regulated by central and local governments were privatised and/or deregulated, such as the postal services, telecommunications, electricity distribution, public transportation, the school system, health care, housing, forestry, agriculture etc. The centrally coordinated and detailed wage negotiations at national level have been abandoned and replaced by negotiations at a local and individual level.

This, I argue, has had adverse effects on income distribution, as well as on working conditions, not the least in the public sector, for women (to a large extent employed in the public sector), indirectly for children, the sick and disabled, the unemployed and immigrants (except for immigrants from Northern and Western Europe).

This is how the situation is described in the official report on welfare and inequality 1975–1995:

Disposable income has increased by ca 18 per cent since the mid-70’s, reckoned per consumption unit after taxes and transfers. The most significant improvement occurred during 1985–90. Most of the increase since the 70’s can be attributed to a sharp rise in employment among women, not to growth in real incomes. Real earned incomes for full-time employees have increased only slightly since 1975 (plus three per cent in constant money value). Without the increases in female employment, there would have been no increase in incomes. One implication is that the recorded rise in incomes was concentrated largely to joint households, particularly among the middle cohorts (30–64 years) and childless households. Inequality in the distribution of income declined steadily until the start of the 80’s, but has again begun to increase since then [author’s italics]. Inequality is measured with so-called Gini coefficients, where lower values indicate lower inequality (cf. Graph 1). The shift in trend during the 80’s was due primarily to rapid growth of the highest incomes (Graph 2). During the 90’s, the lowest incomes declined, and the proportion living in poverty increased.

(SCB, Rapport nr 91, 1997, p. 630)

Ironically the Swedish agricultural sector was extensively deregulated just before Sweden became a member of the European Union, and thereby the sector became more regulated then ever before, but on different grounds. Other sectors have been forcefully deregulated as a result of the EU-membership, like the formerly restrictive alcohol policy. Laws and regulations aimed at protecting children from TV-commercials, from dangerous toys, to prevent diseases from spreading etc. have also had to be abolished or weakened, a lot of them since they have been claimed to be an obstacle to the free market.
The Gini-coefficient indicates the ratio between the real distribution of income and a situation in which the distribution is completely equal. The Gini-coefficient can assume values from 0 to 1. The closer to 1, the coefficient is, the more unequal the distribution of income is.

A decile group is a tenth of the population. Decile group 1 is the 10 per cent of the population with the lowest incomes and decile group 10 the 10 percent with the highest incomes.
The report also shows us that young people and single parents have experienced the lowest increases in disposable incomes. What is interesting is that women’s entrance on the labour market explains the improvement in incomes in the 80’s to such an extent. It would be as interesting to know what caused women to seek employment. Could one part of the explanation be an attempt to maintain the living standard of the family? And what effect has it had in terms of the burden of work, paid and unpaid, especially for women? Is this maybe one of the reasons why the amount of sick leave has increased so much lately (see below)?

There has also been a clear increase in poverty in the first half of the 90’s. Poverty has affected young people, single persons without full-time employment, cohabiting couples of whom at least one is unemployed, blue-collar workers, disability pensioners and families with children – especially families with single parents, families with numerous children, and young parents with small children.

One of the most worrying tendencies is the rapidly deteriorating conditions for immigrants. In the table below, this is illustrated in terms of unemployment for different categories. Non-European immigrants are much worse off compared to the other groups, especially in the 90’s. Nordic immigrants, on the other hand, are hardly affected at all, compared to native Swedes. This might of course coincide with the fact that the Nordic immigrants (mainly from Finland) arrived earlier, not as political refugees but as labour immigrants at a time (in the 50’s and 60’s) when there was a severe labour shortage in Sweden. In the 90’s, the situation was the opposite, and unemployment figures peaked at levels not experienced since the depression of the 30’s. In the final decades of the 20th century, the labour market has also undergone a transformation, away from manual routine work in industry to other types of work, often in the public sector and requiring other types of education and skills. On the other hand, education does not seem to matter. As a matter of fact, the best-educated groups among immigrants are the ones currently suffering most from unemployment. Of course, there are many complicating elements such as language requirements, type of education, time of arrival etc., which are not possible to consider in this paper.

Whatever the reasons for the increasing difficulties for immigrants are, we can notice that the changes probably took place in the late 80’s or the early 90’s. Of course, the high unemployment rates among immigrants have also had a negative bearing on poverty, segregation in housing and, thereby, also in
## Unemployment for various different ethnic and educational categories 1975–2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1975-78</th>
<th>1984-87</th>
<th>1992-95</th>
<th>1993-00</th>
<th>1995</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Native Swedes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All those</td>
<td>76.1</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>63.2</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>born abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Nordic</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>81.8</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>67</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>countries (exc. Sw.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in other</td>
<td>77.9</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European countries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rest of the world</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated before</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the age of 7</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>64.3</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrated at</td>
<td>79.1</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adult age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in Sweden</td>
<td>70.3</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maximum 9 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived in Sweden</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>80.8</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>minimum 10 years</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum one</td>
<td>77.3</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>70.1</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parent born abroad</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both parents</td>
<td>78.4</td>
<td>81.6</td>
<td>77.5</td>
<td>..</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>born in Sweden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SCB Rapport 91, Översiktstabell: Sysselsättningsförhållanden, 1997

ULF MAGNUSSON
schools, etc., especially in combination with the above mentioned deregulations, privatisations of and cut downs in the public sector.

That income distribution also has an influence on political activity is hard to deny. There is a positive statistical correlation between electoral participation and income level, as well as between electoral participation and employment rate. The higher your income is, the more likely it is that you will cast your vote on Election Day. A tentative comparison between electoral behaviour and average income levels on the primary municipal level shows a correlation of 0.5 (rang). (National election of 1998 and income levels of 2000. SCB) On the contrary – if your income is low or if you are unemployed, you are less likely exert your right to vote.

Finally, some words about women and equality that qualify the question of income as a measure of equality. Strictly economically speaking, the wage gap between men and women has not increased that much during the period. On the other hand, income differences on an aggregated level are a somewhat blunt instrument. Women's incomes are dependent to a high degree on which sector they are employed in. An overall tendency is that wages in the public sector have declined compared to the private sector, especially for those employed by the local governments. This is also where most women are employed, mainly in education and nursing.

What is important to consider in a comparison between the sexes is the total burden of work and the dramatic increase in long-term sick leave, presently a very urgent issue in Swedish politics.

In the first figure below, it is obvious that the gap in periods of sick leave between men and women appeared and widened in the 80’s but that the total number of sick leave days has grown during the whole period. Both the increase and the sudden drop in the 90’s can probably be explained to some extent by changes in the regulations surrounding health insurance and maybe also directly and indirectly by the sudden increase in unemployment, but it certainly does not explain the differences between men and women. In the second figure, we can see how the gap between men and women on sick leave longer than 30 days is also widening. In this case also the gap appears in the 80’s.
Conclusions and suggestions for further study

To summarize, there are several indicators (growing gaps in income distribution, poverty, unemployment and health) indicating growing economic and social inequalities in Swedish society from the beginning or middle of the 80’s and onwards. These growing inequalities seem to coincide in time with declining civic activity, at least those indicators used by Robert Putnam. This implies that there might also be a causal connection between equality and civic activity, as I formulated it in the introduction. If this is the case, it would also
be possible to state that some of the HR are more basic than others, or that material conditions and the distribution of them are crucial to the exercise of democratic rights in a wider sense of the concept. To prove this would of course take a much more thorough investigation.

I suggest that further study should also include the historical aspects. By investigating the economic development in Sweden from the 19th century and onwards, including the preconditions for both the agrarian and the industrial revolutions as well as the further development of the 20th century, I believe it would be possible to further qualify the argument put forward in this article. There are obvious connections between the relative economic equality among the rural and early industrial population of 19th-century Sweden and the rapid industrialization of the country. Directly related to this development and by many scholars considered to be an important and functional part of it, are the popular civic movements of the late 19th century. These movements continuously pushed for democratic and social reforms, and eventually merged into a symbiosis with the state and capital, resulting in the profit and welfare-maximizing machine it was considered to be, especially in the 1950’s and 1960’s.
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SCB, National election of 1998 and income levels of 2000.
SCB, Undersökningarna av levnadsförhållanden (ULF)
SOU 1993:7, Löneskillnader och lönediskriminering: Om kvinnor och män på arbetsmarknaden. Betänkande av Löneskillnadsutredningen
DEMOCRACY AND CITIZENSHIP
central part of the UN Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 asserts the citizen’s basic civil rights of freedom of speech, the right to vote and to organize for different purposes, political and other. It is, therefore, important from a human rights’ perspective to study the relationships between citizens and the state in order to see how democracy develops. In this article I will mainly focus on the development of the conditions for a more participatory citizenship in the 19th century, but do so from the point of view of the so-called Swedish welfare state, from the 1960’s and onwards, so as to trace its roots more than a century back. Throughout the article, different aspects of citizenship will be addressed.

In Sweden, the concept and meaning of citizenship constitute one of the most intensely debated subjects of the political and social discourse. There is a great deal of disagreement as to what should be included in a modern definition of citizenship. Nevertheless, it appears possible to denote a few aspects commonly found throughout the plethora of definitions. Citizenship is delineated primarily as the possibility, as well as the responsibility, of active participation in the democratic structures of the society with the intention of influencing policy outcome.

The extremely high rate of participation of the Swedish electorate, where for a long time, about 90 per cent of the eligible population voted during national elections, has been interpreted popularly as a sign of genuine partnership in policy formation. It is argued that Swedes engage themselves more actively in

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1 An earlier version of this paper, with a somewhat different focus, has been published earlier (Petterson 1998). The text summarizes some of the results of two research projects: “The Functions of the Class Society: The Popular Movements”, started in 1965 at the Department of History of the University of Uppsala. The second one, a joint Scandinavian project called ”From Associations to Mass Organizations – Social Change and the Origin of the Modern Association Movement Studied in a Comparative Nordic Perspective”, which started in 1982. The following studies could be mentioned from these projects: Åberg 1975, Jansson 1982, Jansson 1985, Lundkvist 1977, Petterson 1992 and Stenius 1987.
their political structures than citizens of other democratic nations. However, it is seldom mentioned that the real participation of the Swede in politics is indirect, i.e. through political organizations, special-interest alliances and lobby groups. Citizens are asked openly for their views only sporadically. Their opinions and aspirations are promoted only as members of a defined aggregate. Consequently, debate in Sweden on the nature of citizenship has concentrated more on collectives than on individual citizens. The collectivist approach to the Swedish analysis of citizenship may be attributed to the historical fact that political, economic and social associations have traditionally been the vanguard of democracy on both the national and local levels. From this circumstance developed the widely held impression of a democratic Sweden synonymous with its social movements – i.e. the organized Sweden. It is generally believed (both in Sweden and elsewhere) that Sweden has had and continues to have unusually active and vigorous social and political movements. However, nowadays such views are being challenged. Furthermore, the conception exists that this attribute has been common throughout the other Nordic countries, though it seems that the role of collectivist organizations in policy formation and application was more pronounced in Sweden than elsewhere in Scandinavia.

The active participation of citizens from all walks of life in organizations and free associations has been suggested as the decisive factor in the evolution of both democracy and the economy in Swedish society. In the case of Sweden, linkage between participatory activity and democracy even in the economic domain can be demonstrated clearly. For instance, few countries anywhere have had a similar policy of centrally establishing wages, encompassing virtually the entire country and resolved almost exclusively through collective bargaining. This phenomenon is explained as the aftermath of the fact that Swedish workers historically, in addition to joining labour unions, were actively interested in shared labour issues. Collective bargaining and a complex systemic obligation to negotiate in order to achieve consensus (together with a legislated right to strike if negotiations failed) has been seen as the crucial components of the economic development of Sweden and its welfare system. It is in this context that collective action has acquired its popular significance as the central element of citizenship.
The Swedish Model

Since the 1960’s, what has been called the Swedish model has often been described as “the middle way”, something lying between socialism and capitalism yet neither the one nor the other, an efficacious combination of a capitalistic production system and a socialistic welfare system. However, this model, as well as the discourse that we readily associate with it, is of very recent origin. It was only in the early years of the 1960’s that Sweden became one of the foremost nations in Europe in the delivery of universal welfare services. In fact, not until the end of that decade did Sweden become a leader in the public provision of social insurance, health and education. These transformations coincided with the first era that saw more than half of the female population employed on the salaried labour market (still not on equal terms with men).

One defining aspect of the Swedish model is the existence of a securely instituted, centralized political apparatus with a high degree of popular legitimacy and the organizational capacity to effect a redistribution of economic and democratic resources. Needless to say, the functional capacity of such a state is predicated on the availability of surplus resources for redistribution.

The Start of the Welfare Project

However, an intriguing point remains regarding the dating of the origins of the Swedish welfare project. It seems to me correct that we should begin the chronology of the welfare project in the mid-1800’s. If, as many argue, the origin of the welfare state should be dated to the 1930’s (that is, as an aftermath of the collapse of stock markets and the spread of global recession), then the explicit role played by the popular and social mass movements the 19th century is negligently ignored. I believe that the commencement of the effort to create a national social system in Sweden coincided with the publication of a small pamphlet authored by a German historian, Ernst Moritz Arndt: Några ord om Skandinavien och dess förhållanden (trans: A Few Words on Scandinavia and Its Conditions) (Arndt 1844). Arndt described Sweden as a land that could successfully compete with other European nations only if it secured the necessary numbers of stone workers, charcoal producers, wood choppers, etc., sufficient to support an expanding population.

In less than a hundred years, the conversion of Sweden from an agrarian to an industrial society was induced. Arguably, it was during the 1840’s that the foundation of the Swedish welfare model was established. Stone, minerals and
forests that had once been impediments to the production of food were now exploitable resources in a slowly industrializing Sweden. The introduction of a national judicial system, with equal rights in town and country in 1845, and the promulgation of a new poor law in 1847, were vital steps in the transformation of the Swedish working population. The year 1846 saw legislation standardizing commercial regulations – the Manufacturers and Tradesman’s Ordinance (Fabriks- och hantverksförordning), another decisive advance.

Between 1840 and 1870, many of the institutions that had persisted from Sweden’s earlier age of superpower prominence were dismantled. The pillars on which the modern Swedish state was to rest, such as industrial production, a market economy and a parliament-controlled bureaucracy, were successively created during the 1840–70 period. During this time, Sweden also absorbed the tenets of political liberalism that swept Europe. The abolition of the guild system, the clearest evidence of the advance of liberalism, paved the way for nascent industrialization. Furthermore, by the mid-1840’s, there still existed far too few industries to absorb the workers made redundant by progressive economic liberalization and innovations in agricultural production. Comparable to the experience of Great Britain a century earlier, a new rural proletariat had come into existence in Sweden, and a discernible market for capital and consumer goods was evolving. Although the comprehensive abolition of trade and economic restrictions, and the subsequent enactment of liberal legislation, were not consummated until after the decade, we can state with certainty that the genesis of the Swedish welfare project can be discerned in the momentous years of the 1840’s.

Changes in Women’s Conditions

The decades between 1840 and 1890 were also crucial for the emancipation of Swedish women. The rigidly patriarchal control of women and their resources began a slow but steady dissolution during this period, especially between 1842–84, although the most encompassing legislation was not to be enacted for nearly a century. In 1845, women belonging to the nobility and land-owning farmer classes were given equal rights of inheritance. A result of political, economic and social class adjustments in the aftermath of the French Revolution, this reform was exceedingly important, directly affecting nearly 90% of the Swedish population. Since they were now permitted for the first time to inherit on an equal basis with their male siblings, women were now also required
to be able to actively manage property, which in turn necessitated additional liberalization in the economic and political status of women. The progression in women’s emancipation that began with the granting of limited property rights and concluded with universal suffrage was inaugurated in the pioneering efforts initiated between the 1840’s and 1870’s. In 1862, widows and unmarried women were enfranchized for local elections, provided that they, like men, satisfied income and property requirements. Limited voting rights for married women were extended in 1908, while laws granting universal suffrage and electoral eligibility for national and local elections were enacted in the 1920’s.

In 1846, the Manufacturer’s and Tradesman’s Ordinance gave women the right to gainful employment as entrepreneurs in commerce and the crafts. The independent participation of women in a considerable portion of the urban economy had begun in earnest. In 1858, unmarried women were granted legal economic autonomy, after application to and approval by the legal system. The application requirement was eliminated in 1863. In 1874, married women were declared legally competent to control the disposition of their personal income, and to administer their property, if so stipulated in the marriage contract.

In the early 1850’s, the teaching profession was formally opened to women, though only at the primary-school level. The universities were opened to women in 1873, with the exception of the faculties of theology and law. Matriculation gave no right to professional employment however, although it was only a matter of time and continued agitation before women would be granted that privilege. An additional obstacle was legislation defining and regulating pauperism; these laws prohibited the free movement of persons without property and thereby severely restricted labour mobility. The 1847 restrictions on indigents remained unchanged for many years, but the denial of the right to move freely from one administrative district (parish) to another was effectively abolished.

Other Factors
In addition to political/legislative reform, there were other factors that facilitated the growth of industrialization and the transformation of Sweden from an unenlightened agricultural backwater into a leading industrial nation. For

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2 The (limited) right to abortion granted in 1938, the prohibition of dismissal from employment on the grounds of marriage and childbirth (1939), and the right to equal pay for equal work, were further major advances in the struggle for fuller emancipation.
instance, there existed an untapped, expansive potential in those Swedish companies already practising timber and coal extraction, and iron manufacture. Another agent of considerable importance was that the Swedish banking system began issuing long-term business credits; a favourable market for timber exports during the Crimean war (1854–1856) was a catalyst for the reorganization of the banking system.

Yet another vital factor in the transformation of Sweden was the quality of the Swedish labour force. The early insistence of the Swedish Lutheran Church that all members be fluent in its canon (i.e. be able to read and recite the catechism and Bible passages, subject to review by parish officials) had transformed Sweden by the 1840’s into one of the most literate countries in the world. Moreover, the harsh demands of self-subsistence survival in rural Sweden, requiring utilitarian skills in woodworking, metalworking, iron and other metal production for local use, etc., supplied a large cohort of practical, competent, able-bodied workers suited for immediate integration into modern industry and manufacturing.

**The Swedish Model – three aspects**

The term ”Swedish model” has various connotations. In a narrow sense, it refers to relations between labour and industry, specifically the regulation of conflict between labour and capital. Additionally, the term refers to the tradition of mutual understanding between employee and employer. Collective bargaining agreements and labour courts have regulated the Swedish labour market since 1928, and have been refined by trade unions as coercive instruments of persuasion with regard to wages and working conditions. For industry, the consensual concord ensured by collective bargaining is the most important part of the relationship. Once an agreement has been reached, the labour unions are bound by law not to resort to strike action until the next round of negotiations has reached an impasse. The ”Swedish model” also refers to the concrete measures to be taken, when necessary, by the state and/or by the trade unions either to restructure a deficient sector or to stimulate a sluggish economy. Most

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3 The term model can have varying meanings. For instance, it can be used to describe an ordering, a manner of organization intended to address certain social issues. Yet another model is an archetype, i.e. a general response that requires case-by-case adjustment before application. A third meaning of model is a kind of prototype that requires additional development before full-scale application. In modern history Sweden has been a “model” in all three meanings: as a specific social system, as an archetypal pattern, and as a full-scale experiment.
famously, perhaps, the expression “Swedish model” also refers to the welfare system financed and administered by central and local public authorities.

The Swedish debate about the determinants of democracy and social welfare emphasizes the elements of collective mobilization and popular participation. As it is conceived, democracy is not limited to the mere existence of liberal political freedoms such as universal suffrage, but extends also to the establishment of the social and cultural conditions indispensable to active popular participation in political life, for example, by providing comprehensive education or by the disposition of work. Political parties in Sweden cannot be fixed merely in their ideological membership, for that would not suffice to mobilize voters during an election. Active support and participation between elections from both party members and sympathizers is also necessary for the pragmatic details essential to a functioning democracy.

**Popular Movements**

A characteristic feature of Swedish society today is the existence of an extensive variety of voluntary associations. Scandinavian social historians and sociologists have adopted the category, *popular movement* as a common label for this complex of organizations, many with their roots in the reforms of the 19th century. To give an example of their rapid expansion the following brief descriptions regarding the three main ones: the labour movement, the free churches and the temperance movement, can be mentioned. The labour movement, organized as far back as the 1880’s reached a membership in excess of 200,000 members by 1908 and emerged as one of an abundant number of popular associations inaugurated in the latter part of the 19th century. In addition to the labour movement, the most important ones were the evangelical or the free-church movement, which had been legalized and passed the 200,000 membership mark by 1910, and the temperance movement, rejuvenated in the 1880’s and numbering 300,000 members by 1910. Both the latter movements split up into multiple distinct organizations. Diverse political theories and models have emphasized the importance of these affiliations, making clear that the social mobilization brought about by the growth of popular movements was an important precondition for the triumph of universal suffrage and the democratization of political institutions. From a comparative historical perspective, Sweden seems to constitute an exceptional case in this respect. Although voluntarily organized popular movements certainly exist elsewhere in Europe, especi-
ally in the Nordic countries, the influence of these organizations on collective self-awareness is arguably greater in Sweden than anywhere else, greater even than is commonly acknowledged.

Before considering the functions of the popular movements and their relevance to the definition of citizenship in the Swedish debate, it is necessary to make certain qualifications. The term “popular movement” usually encompasses the three primary mass movements that emerged in 19th century Sweden: the religious revivalist movement and/or the free-church movement, the temperance movement, and the labour movement (trade unions, commercial co-operatives, and the Social Democratic Labour Party). They all embraced a number of common features that continue to imbue Swedish politics. All have endeavoured to mobilize, organize and educate, and to transform people and society. “Movement” in this sense denotes a dynamic, collective and tightly woven organization. The term also implies exertion: action, participation, commitment, and activity are key concepts characterizing such a coalition. Another attribute, their popular character, indicates that they are expressions of protest from below, i.e. from groups or classes that are in some manner repressed, exploited and/or disrespected. In sociological theory, the movement has a mediating function between the individual and aggregate society. The organization ultimately binds the individual to the societal entirety by socializing and transmitting predominant values, while in return, collective action more strongly asserts the special interests of adherents vis-à-vis competing organizations and/or political/economic systems.

The significance of these movements is obvious. Even today a great majority of Swedish citizens are members of several organizations. But it is generally agreed among scholars who have studied the popular movements that these mass organizations played a more crucial role in the past. Then the principles of popular organization did not merely stimulate a democratic process in Sweden, but they also defined – if not generated – the still preponderant notion of a “civil society”, and induced the nation to form a new image of itself. Swedish collective identity has been moulded by the association system, a system that from its beginnings was purposeful in its creation of a shared feeling of belonging – a ”We”. It was no coincidence that former Prime Minister and Social Democratic leader Olof Palme once cited the “study circle” as the model and ideal of Swedish democracy. Participant oriented and organized, collective educational activities in the form of study circles have been a unifying com-
ponent for the independent church movements, the temperance movement, and the labour movement. During their inceptive period, while forming and organizing, popular movements were not only tangible meeting places where specific issues and interests were discussed, they were also forums for examining a broad spectrum of political, cultural, and social questions.

Today the popular movements are aged. With the possible exception of the Social Democratic Labour Party, all of today’s popular movements have their historical roots in old affiliations. These mass organizations were and are the successors of the so-called voluntary associations – mostly middle class philanthropic societies of various kinds – that emerged early in the 19th century. Even the youngest of the principal organizations, the Social Democrats, celebrated its centenary in 1989, with a series of solemn, gargantuan commemorations in which practically the whole of the Swedish establishment took part.

It appears that the once vibrant popular movements have languished, atrophied by time and changing circumstances into routine and conservatism. Some have become integral parts of the status quo, agents of the political and economic systems that they once disputed. Many of their original cultural and educational functions have disappeared. The bureaucratization of the organizations is flagrant. The bold egalitarian and humanitarian ideals of the primordial years have given way to the embrace of mundane consumerism. Nevertheless, although maturity has depleted the once resplendent aura of the popular movement, in Sweden the concept is still considered to be quite glorious.

**Popular movements and social change**

Only by situating the development in its most general meaningful context, that of social change, can the emergence of popular movements in the 19th century be understood. The question must be asked: what were the prevailing conditions in Swedish society that precipitated the development of the popular movement? This is not at all the same thing as proposing a broad history of Swedish democracy. This is not a mere merging of the intentions and goals of the various organizations into a larger adjunct of political participation, nor is it a mere suggestion of a functionalist institutional adjustment to the “new demands of society”. Rather, it is by comprehending the specific movement as a solution to a specific problem existing in 19th-century Sweden that we can understand the true significance of mass organizations and their correlation to the institutionalized democracy in present-day Sweden.
A historical aspect of this transformation of Sweden was the redefinition of the fundamental units of society. The social prominence of some intermediate corporative bodies – the Estates, the guilds, and the village communities – declined, while two other social entities – the individual and civil society – gained increasing substance. The importance of these new, mutually reinforcing constructions was strengthened by the gradual degradation of the aggregates mediating between them. Swedish philosophers in the early 19th century frequently referred to “civil society”, attempting to contrast it and the state. The individual and the civil society, often referred to as the nation, were interposing entities. Social theories arose that legitimated them in terms of each other: national success was supposed to depend on competent, committed and dynamic individuals; individual welfare was said to depend on a watchful, active and impersonal state apparatus as the manager of the nation.

Interpretations of History
Since the 1940’s, popular movements and their social and political importance have been a recurrent theme in Swedish historiography. Originally descriptive studies, the historiographical examinations of popular movements in Sweden were characterized by a “Whig interpretation of history”. Such deterministic social history described the advance of the popular movements as an unbroken line of victories and worthy reforms, one in which history was peopled by well-meaning reformers whose admirable efforts led obviously and directly towards the political system of our own era, described variously as “modern”, “democratic”, etc.

In recent decades, the exegetic influence of the Marxist and Weberian models has led to more explicitly explanatory ambitions. A functionalist perspective of modernization has given a character of humanity, rationality, and implacability to these developments. However, the manifest limitation of most studies of the popular movements remains their non-problematized notion of linear development.

Social changes and movements in the 19th century
The disintegration of the traditional corporative groupings that took place between 1809 and 1865 created a social vacuum, and the loss of familiar forms of solidarity and social identity made the evolving “individual” desperate for new, succouring collectivities. Contemporaries described the dissolution of the
old society’s organs for political mobilization and control as an “atomization” of communal entities, which had to be replaced by fresh ones.

Nationalism, as developed in Europe since the French Revolution, was a specifically original form of collective identity. During the overthrow of the traditional orders of a feudal society, the individual was slowly yet forcibly emancipated within a framework of a civil society. During the early phases of this process, immature nationalism could not yet fully satisfy the need for new identifications. For the middle classes, the strengthening of the position of the individual produced civic means of filling the vacuum – the voluntary association, in which like-minded people came together autonomously to pursue matters of mutual interest, whether religious, political, or social. The voluntary associations believed that they represented viable, alternative means of performing vital functions within society, functions that the state could or would not perform any longer. Concurrently, the state recognized in voluntary associations a suitable tool for addressing social problems, especially in situations where the state, according to the political doctrine of the time, should not intervene.

In the 1860’s, the integration of the associations and the state attenuated. In the construction of civil society and its conceptualization voluntary associations and the state apparatus developed a mutual dependency. The state needed the voluntary associations’ legitimacy and effort, and the associations needed the state to finance significant portions of their activities from public funds. During a mere half century, social formations vacillated from intrinsic coherence to emancipation from the state, only to move again towards integration. The oscillation may be observed in all areas of societal life, as the state was relieved of obligations for which it had been responsible until then.

During the 18th century, these enterprises were undertaken, to a somewhat limited degree, by the upper social classes. From about the beginning of the 19th century, initially in response to a perception of religious decline, the scope of voluntary associations expanded to include other categories of the social hierarchy. Among their most conspicuous accomplishments was the inauguration of a comprehensive educational system in a society experiencing radical demographic change (many more children, especially from the poorer classes, were surviving infancy), and concerted efforts to mitigate the effects of alcohol consumption (again, especially directed at the poorer classes – it was necessary to keep workers sober). Voluntary associations were established to promote
Bible study, schooling, poverty relief, the care of abandoned and orphaned children, and so forth.

Leading circles in Sweden regarded England as a model. In numerous cases, the reformers found their inspiration, and their program’s derivation, in Great Britain. During the first decades of the 19th century, England and Scotland had developed into archetypal industrialized countries, and for many of the middle-class social reformers it was clear that Sweden should follow the British model, sometimes even in minute detail without consideration of the social and cultural differences. However, it should not be surprising that representatives of this isolated constitutional monarchy on the Scandinavian peninsula looked towards the British Isles to find solutions to their social and political problems: the solutions undertaken in England were intimately associated with the growth of civil society and the discourse on pauperism.

The development of popular movements – associations and societies

In Sweden, awareness of British voluntary religious movements came primarily from contact with immigrant Scots during the first years of the 19th century. A free distribution of Bibles was started in close co-operation with the British and Foreign Bible Society, and Wesleyan treatises were dispersed through contact with the British Religious Tract Society. The first associations of this nature founded in Sweden were the Evangelical Society (1808) and the Swedish Bible Society (1815). The decisive impulse towards free religious work following British methods was the effort of a Methodist preacher, George Scott, who formed a Methodist congregation in Stockholm in the 1830’s and 1840’s. He imported, translated and distributed books, pamphlets, tracts and hymnals and, when expelled from Sweden, he placed his library at the disposal of his Swedish associates. Moreover, he made arrangements for continued contact with the London Missionary Society and the British Sunday School Union.

The first religious societies can be seen as the structures generating the free-church cliques established later in the 19th century. Although there were not any formal organizational ties between them, they were the ideological forebears of those later mass organizations (e.g. the Baptist groups formed in the 1850’s), providing the core of the successful free-church movements of the latter part of the century. The temperance societies were formed later. On the initiative of the teetotal Crown Prince Oscar, the Swedish Temperance Society was founded in 1837. Very soon it was able to report that about 100,000
Swedes (of the country’s 3.5 million) had considerably reduced their alcohol consumption. It must be emphasised that those 100,000 were not “members” in the modern sense – or in the same sense as can be found in the later, more popular, mass temperance movements such as the Swedish branch of the International Order of Good Templars.

With reference to the question of citizenship and the role played by popular movements, it must be noted that the Swedish Temperance Society did not contribute to the national development of self-organization, empowerment or consciousness – at least did not contribute directly. The Swedish Temperance Society was not comprised of many more than 100 dues-paying members when it reached its 100,000 subscriptions. The Board of Directors leading the society consisted of even fewer and more privileged persons than the general membership. It recruited its chairman and other officials from the nobility and from court- and church officials. In the outer circle, physicians and the prosperous elite of the commercial and industrial bourgeoisie from in and around Stockholm were represented. While the exclusive inner cadre was responsible almost entirely for decision-making and for the necessary “connections”, it was the less exalted that managed accounts and were the source of substantial contributions.

With reference to the question of democratic practice, it must be clear that the aforementioned “subscribers” were not active members of the type encountered universally in the popular movements that appeared later. In the ensuing mass associations it was unimaginable, in Torkel Jansson’s words, to “make a pot of coffee or drive in a nail” without having first elected a committee to implement a decision. (Jansson 1985) These elections, by common and equal franchise among male and female members, were of considerable importance. They were organized among obstructed elements of society otherwise excluded from civic undertakings, for instance in municipal affairs, where at that time they were welcome only as taxpayers, not as participants. But the incipient associations had no active membership in that sense. For example, although its actual dues-paying membership was approximately a mere 100 persons, the Swedish Temperance Society could claim 100,000 signed sobriety pledges, mostly from lower class individuals not directly involved in the association. The subscribers were not members in any precise modern sense; they were at most people who – under duress, perhaps – promised to remain sober. They did not attend meetings and were not eligible to participate in the election of the Board of Directors.
Philanthropic and educational associations

The emergence of philanthropic associations in the 1840’s made it possible also for women from the highest bourgeois circles to organize their private charities in a more efficacious manner. The reformulation of personal, benevolent enterprise into voluntary associations must be understood as a deliberately depoliticized tactic for expedient provision of public services at a strategic point midway between private initiative and the state.

Education was a prominent issue for all the early voluntary movements, but some of the emergent semi-official associations, which drew inspiration from British archetypes and were utilitarian in their outlook, made popular education the foremost purpose of their activity. They campaigned for the dissemination of “useful knowledge” to all sectors of society. One example, the Swedish Society for Diffusion of Useful Knowledge, founded in Stockholm in 1833, was patterned after Lord Brougham’s famous British organization of the same name. Its paramount activity was the publishing of a quarterly periodical entitled Reading-matter for the People, which, according to the precepts of the Society, should “elevate the mind, enhance and enliven the taste for work” among the proletariat. The society sent a flood of these periodicals throughout Sweden, editorializing that the new-sprung factory system was in the process of conferring abundant benefits upon all, and that the interests of capitalists and labourers were, whatever misguided agitators might argue to the contrary, fundamentally the same.

A cardinal example of the efforts of the voluntary associations was the enactment of universal schooling. This new system of education, i.e. formal schooling in publicly financed institutions, was promoted by middle-class voluntary associations from the beginning of the 19th century. The school legislation of the 1840’s merely validated this development, as it delegated responsibility for local administration to the parishes and charged the Society for the Promotion of Monitorial Education with the obligation of educating the lower social classes. This early development of school for all children has been followed by a strong and almost all-encompassing public school system in which, today, nine years of schooling is compulsory. No fees exist in schools or universities.
A collapse of the old social order

A notable backdrop to the rise of the voluntary sector was, in Weber’s terms, the ongoing *disenchantment of the World (Enzauberung der Welt)*, exemplified by heightened disturbance of contractual social relations, functionally segmented administration, and so forth. The rationalization and bureaucratization of the state stimulated (and was in turn stimulated by) the rise of the voluntary sector; associations became symbiotic means of integrating the individual into civil society. However, some associations, not least the religious revivalist movements with their fascination with mysticism, denoted an undisguised revolt against a rational calculation of benefits and losses. They represented a desperate attempt to regenerate society through the restoration of qualitative values that were held to be have been undermined by account books and bureaucracy. The ambiguity of the popular movements manifested itself in two very contradictory fractions: one was conservative or even reactionary, while the other was liberal and utopian.

It is not unreasonable to explain the voluntary associations as an expression of a definitive degradation of utopian vision and a triumph for social pragmatism. However, I maintain that the aspirations of the two perceptions coincided, and that an exceptional juxtaposition was forced into being, the result of the collapse of the old order rather than the fulfilment of a novel disposition. It was this institutional breakdown that permitted accord between utopians and pragmatists, which in turn was a prerequisite for the realization, later in the century, of the concept of popular movement.

This peculiar fusion, pragmatic utopianism, found validation in opposite directions on the conceptual spectrum, and has its footing in two circumstances characteristic of the time. One was the disintegration of the collectivist and patriarchal feudal society: the demise of traditional feudal partnerships, the fractured village community, the dissolved state-constitutive Estates, etc.; the second was the discomfiting social mobility that these changes gave rise to, with chaotic, disordered and atomized social groups and ill-defined individual identity. Escalated social transformation, exacerbated by rapid population growth, proletarianization, and pauperism, was common throughout large parts of Europe.
A new social order

The Utopian element sought social expression for the opportunities opened by the development of new productive forces. People were freed from the static, stable – and what were conceived as unshakeable – bonds they had known for generations, and were transformed into “loose folk” on a road the direction of which had not been definitively staked out. The resulting social chaos seemed to demand guidance and ordering; all variants of opinion in the contemporary social debate appear to be possessed by the concept of “order”. Order, which was alleged to have distinguished the previous social corporation, had to be re-established in some new form of community. Fear and indictment of the mobile and the promiscuous, valid for all casual connections and held responsible for the decay of qualitative bands, characterized conservative reaction. The wandering journeyman, the itinerant peddler, the travelling preacher and the purveyor of sectarian pamphlets personified the fearsome individual, independent of all organic bonds.

That perspective united with an entirely different one: the assertion that a harmonious commonwealth must be based on rational people capable of privately choosing a way of life balanced between selfish aggrandisement and the needs of society at large. There remained but one problem. The lower classes had not yet begun to understand their own “best interests”; they did not perceive that sometimes immediate, personal gratification must be renounced for the profit and progress of the whole. These classes, therefore, whose deeds and motives were incomprehensible and obscure, required edification. They needed to be culturally homogenized and regulated, easy to muster and controllable. The poor should be socialized as individuals and literally integrated into civil society – as the concept had now come to be understood. Private fostering removed from the public eye was regarded as reprehensible and counterproductive. The poor and their conduct had to be illuminated and observable, and consequently their education had to be exposed. Their tutelage had to stand under public, if not state, control, and be oriented towards the procurement of those stolid virtues celebrated by the bourgeoisie.

Under these circumstances, amalgamation was the only viable possibility, an admixture of the different classes into a coalition capable of guaranteeing social stability. Utopians and pragmatists, liberals and conservatives, all shared an apprehensive distrust of the “masses”. The implicit objective of some voluntary
associations was the maintenance of a haughty pre-eminence of the sort that marked this phase in the development of bourgeois society. It was not a specifically coercive authority that was sought. Rather it was a paternalist authority resting upon the inherent acceptance and conformity of the participants in the social contract. It was believed that without this paradoxical subordination no social orderliness could survive.

By diffusing and cultivating a spirit of moral and religious devotion to the fundamentals of the existing order this paternalist authority attempted to control the individual’s proclivities. But total dominance was never achieved. The masses developed their own perceptions and their own definitions of respectability, and through general education, ironically promoted by the voluntary associations and the experiences of formal equality within them, they learned to organize autonomously. This enlightening experience was decisive for the subsequent pattern of organization in mass associations. The quasi-feudal social hierarchy, where everyone knew his or her proper place, contradicted the modernistic rationality of collective alliance independent of the state.

Popular movements, chronology and social change

Some historians in the 1970’s saw the emergence of popular movements as a result of modernization (in a functionalist understanding of the word). The basic, and unquestioned, theoretical model adopted by these historians was that the three most extensive social movements – the free churches, the temperance movement, and the labour movement – all had their origins in, and received their specific features from, the social tensions resulting from urbanization and industrialization. In short, they arose from the ascent of their notion of “modern society”. Industrialization and urbanization were singled out as the decisive factors behind the upsurge of popular movements.

But it seems to me that these theorists have ignored an evident dilemma of chronology. In fact, the interwoven processes of urbanization and industrialization in Sweden did not start until the end of the 19th century, not in the middle of the century as presupposed. A causality explanation in which the effect precedes the cause by three or four decades is obviously faulty. There has been a widespread and unfortunate historiographical tendency to assign too great and too early an influence to urbanization and industrialization, thereby neglecting the persistent dominance of the agrarian sector lasting until the end of the century.
The free-church and the temperance movements arose in some cases prior to, and in others shortly after, the mid-19th century. As an organized social force the labour movement first achieved prominence in the 1880’s. Urbanization and industrialization were quite confined until the end of the century. As late as 1850, only ten percent of the Swedish population lived in cities and towns; Stockholm had less than 100,000 residents, and more than 75% of the economically active population was still directly engaged in agriculture and related activities. It was not until the 1930’s that the rural population accounted for less than half of the population of the nation as a whole. Sweden’s very late and, by European standards, protracted urbanization affected the development of popular movements in a very specific way: Swedish popular movements were first and foremost a rural phenomenon, markedly weaker in the urban areas.

Compared to the foremost European countries, the industrialization of Sweden was late but rapid. The Swedish industrial revolution can be said to have taken place between 1870 and 1920. This process of industrialization can roughly be divided into two primary phases: the first, an industrial germination period from 1870–1890, and the second, a maturation period from 1890 to the end of the First World War. Beginning during the first phase, characterized by a short but intensive growth in trade, workers started organizing into trade unions. During the 1880’s, they began to centralize into nation-wide organizations and to incorporate socialist doctrines into their programs, coalescing politically in the formation of the Social Democratic Party (SAP) in 1889.

The successful establishment of the socialist labour movement in Sweden must be viewed against the background of earlier types of labour organization. The trade unions were in many respects the successors of older, self-help organizations and unemployment benefit societies formed among journeymen and apprentices, which in turn were the successors of guilds (the guild system did not officially exist after 1846). As early as the 1840’s, at a time when no self-aware working class of the ensuing type existed, liberal manufacturers founded workingmen’s associations to guide and educate their journeymen and apprentices. Those associations were the final attempt to put forward a liberal alternative to the socialist labour movement.
A class perspective

The history of mass organization in Sweden must be analysed in terms of class. The political conflicts of the decades preceding the emergence of popular movements and the triumph of liberal democracy were circumscribed by the polarizing influence of three social classes: the peasantry, the nobility and the bourgeoisie. The resultant social conflict created new tensions not only between central authority and local communities, but between the public and the private spheres as well. Of course, class conditions in 19th-century Sweden were not static. Changes in the means and methods of production reallocated authority in the workplace and patterned social hierarchies in society at large. Boundaries between and within classes were subject to constant change, and social organization was complicated by those changes. Older forms of social organization could no longer function when the prerequisites of social praxis had changed. People had to be re-educated to adjust to the new premises of industrial, democratic society.

Conclusion

What was it in Swedish society that the popular movements provided a natural solution to? The answer is probably to be found in the transition of society itself. The earliest phase of the development of mass organizations, an “age of associations”, may be described as a transitional phase between two distinct social formations, i.e., the progression from a feudal mode of production – based on the collection of revenues – to a capitalist one – based on individual appropriation and wage labour. It was in this social context that the first voluntary associations emerged. Furthermore, this period corresponds to a philosophic shift from a patriarchal to a bourgeois ideology, from an overwhelmingly religious rationale to one, technical and utilitarian. In the social arena, the bourgeoisie arises as the ideologically and culturally dominant group, successor to the aristocracy. A collectivistic and particularistic Gemeinschaft is metamorphosed socially and nationally into an individualistic Gesellschaft. Individualism is the most dominant trait in its conceptual profile. This conversion influenced the society in every sense, and helped to construct the concept of the individual (in male clothing).

The mass organizations presented fresh social perspectives. The principles of association and of mass organization introduced completely novel modes of social interaction in sharp contrast to the hierarchical order that had prevailed in
the corporative society. They permitted mutual and systematic communication, open to every adult, regardless of position in society or social rank. Women played important roles in the mass organizations, and more women than men entered the temperance and the revivalist alliances: for example, membership in Swedish free-church congregations was in general two-thirds, female and one-third, male.

I must stress that the changing perspectives were negations of earlier forms of social organization, and that the new principles could be used for very dissimilar political purposes. It is evident that the popular movements did not represent a unified political philosophy. Yet the success of the concept of mass participation can be seen as a refutation of the individualistic manner of regulating the workers’ status on the labour market. Trade unions and strike actions were expressions of a willingness to act as an aggregate and to collectively demand improved conditions, including better wages. By utilizing class-conscious forms of organization the labour movement compelled society – the political regimes, the authorities, the employers and even the workers themselves – to accept the right of the working class to establish organizations of their own, and on their own terms.

**Continuity and Change**

The primordial associations from the first half of the 19th century have not yet received appropriate attention from historians – little or no notice is to be found in general handbooks of Swedish history. The opposite can be said of the ensuing mass organizations – sometimes referred to as the “real popular movements”. Whereas there have been few studies assessing the older voluntary associations, there are numerous studies attempting to demonstrate the political importance of the mass organizations, and they are generally described as major factors influencing the democratization of Sweden around the turn of the century. Since the 1940’s, as already stated, each generation of Scandinavian historians, especially each generation of Swedish historians, has redefined its own relationship to the major movements and to the functions of the great popular movements – the mass organizations. It has been emphasized in their works that the popular movements also have a history, and that the general specifications for them were set at an early date in accordance with the values of the bourgeoisie. The movements were simultaneously the dynamic force
behind, and the result of, the processes that eventually led to a democratic society in Sweden.

The principal canon of constitutionalism – predictable government, i.e. that laws should bind the state apparatus by means of a defined set of statutes – was augmented in Sweden by the pre-eminent early voluntary associations with legal conditions that bound the average citizens to act predictably. The utilitarian intent was a social education aimed at shaping character in harmony with certain ethical goals which, in turn, were an expression of the predisposition of the human being.

The process by which the bourgeoisie became the dominant political class, in Sweden as elsewhere, was characterized by the establishment of an explicit, codified and formally egalitarian framework of jurisprudence, made possible by the commencement of a representative parliamentary regime. However, the evolution and dissemination of the disciplinary mechanisms necessary for its survival was the counterpart of these processes, one might say “the dark side”. It is a striking paradox that the predecessors of the extolled popular movements contributed more to the development of a coercive milieu than any other social bodies. For the early voluntary associations, which supplemented the ideal of limited state power with a concept of constrained state power, i.e., laws confining the actions of the state, it was predictability that was important. The behaviour of civil society must be constant, and not only in the sense that it was to be law rather than a fickle ruler that steered society. To guarantee that there would be no rule of the masses, no capricious “mob rule”, voluntary associations coveted moderation, sobriety, and predictable action. This inculcation was to take place in the public eye; it could not, as earlier, occur in the “darkness” of the household or in corporative privacy. Although sovereign authority had been concentrated in the state, disciplinary jurisdiction should be omnipresent. In bourgeois society, social control was applied through continuous supervision of individuals of the lower classes (the bourgeoisie by definition required no such supervision), and the normalization of behaviour.

The importance for democratization of the later mass organizations is manifest. In them, the members learned to seek the will of the majority institutionally, to adapt to a resolution, and to conduct the practical affairs of a democratic association. Yet the great significance of the primordial voluntary associations for the creation of the”Swedish model” must not be neglected or underestimated. I would argue that the rise of the voluntary association repre-
sents not only a vital transitional stage between laissez-faire and the intervention of the Welfare State, but a novel form of interweaving the private and the public spheres in 19th-century history.

The typical features of Swedish popular movements, i.e., slight militancy but with competent organization and a willingness to negotiate to achieve compromise, are a perpetuation of an even older tradition: the autonomous village communities and parish councils. I have emphasized to some extent in this article the momentousness of the organizational training of a cadre of “respectable citizens” thoroughly prepared to take their responsibility when the need and opportunity arose. It is interesting to note that the self-same classes that were condemned as rough and undisciplined adopted the norms – identifying them as the antithesis of law and order – propagated by the educational associations. What is most remarkable about these norms is not that they survived but that the popular movements embraced them, not least the labour movement. The ideals espoused by the conscientious and respectable workers of the temperance lodges and worker’s communes of the early 20th century were in many ways a direct extension of the mores championed by the educational associations of the first part of the 19th century. It is curious to consider how the same puritan virtues mobilized by the upper and middle classes to isolate themselves from the base, sensual, wicked and uncontrollable masses below were the very virtues the “contemptible” masses adopted as their own.

The development of popular movements is a primary feature of the notion of the “Swedish model”. The meaning and the effect of this evolvement remain, for the most part, still to be investigated. Suggested here are some historical perspectives—a genesis of the phenomenon—and hypotheses on the importance of this development. Whether the Swedish mass organizations of the past represent a potential model for political participation and democratic development today is, largely, a different theme.
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Among other things, democracy is often defined as equal rights for all adult citizens to vote and to be eligible as candidates in general elections. But, for groups of people that have previously been denied them, achieving these rights is one thing, and having a real opportunity to exercise political power, another. Sometimes such groups manage to transform constitutional rights into successful political influence; sometimes they remain almost as powerless as before. When the latter is the case, two of the most important human rights are neglected in practice, i.e. Article 21 (1) and Article 2 in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives” and “Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status. [...]”. Usually this neglect is also followed by a general neglect of the needs and rights of the group in question in various other fields.

This is a paper on Swedish experiences of the expectations and apprehensions before the first democratic elections and what then followed. It describes how a local, male political establishment tried to persuade the women to vote, and to vote for them, and how they later neglected the female part of the electorate, when they had found that there was nothing to be upset about or scared of. Though my study deals with the events in one single town, this pattern occurred all over the country. In order to understand how and why things developed the way they did, it is often necessary to make a detailed study of what actually happened. In many cases, this can be done only by studying a small and well-defined location.
Background

The local elections in March 1919 were the first in Sweden with universal suffrage for both men and women. It was more than two years later that the first democratic parliamentary elections took place. In accordance with the Constitution, universal suffrage to Parliament could not come into effect until there had been a new election and the bill on universal suffrage had then been confirmed once again by the new parliament. On the other hand, the rules concerning local elections could be changed immediately. The local government elections in 1919, came, therefore, to be the first democratic elections in the history of Sweden.

Before 1919, the right to vote in local elections depended on income and financial circumstances. Furthermore, the number of votes the voter had at his disposal varied between one and forty, depending on how wealthy he was. Now the principle was equal rights for all adult citizens and one person, one vote.

The 1919 electorate was three times as large as in the previous elections. A vast majority of those who were now entitled to vote for the first time were women. In many towns, women constituted about 60 per cent of the total electorate.

As far back as 1909, general suffrage for men in parliamentary elections had been initiated, though only to the directly elected Second Chamber of the Swedish two-chamber Parliament. The result of the following elections to the Second Chamber in 1911 was a clear majority for the Liberals and the Social Democrats, the two parties who worked for universal suffrage to all political assemblies in the country. The indirectly elected Conservative First Chamber, on the other hand, strongly opposed such a change. In the spring of 1918, the Liberal and Social Democratic coalition government proposed universal suffrage. In the autumn of the same year, after revolutions in Germany and Russia, civil war between the “reds” and the “whites” in Finland and political disturbances within Sweden itself, the Conservatives gave up their resistance.

The elections, both those to Parliament in 1921 and the local ones in 1919, following the constitutional reforms meant a double breakthrough. The labour movement would now be able to exercise political power corresponding to the number of followers it had. At the same time, women achieved full civil rights. But the effects of these two big changes were very different.
After a few years the Social Democratic party had emerged as the leading political power in Sweden and, from early 1932 until 1976, it almost continuously formed the government of the country. On the other hand, women held a very small percentage of the seats in the different political assemblies. Roughly, though women in the 1920’s and 1930’s constituted a majority of those entitled to vote and about 45 percent of the actual voters, they won only 1.5 per cent of the seats. Moreover, the number of female political representatives did not increase, but on the contrary decreased, during the first decade after universal suffrage was introduced, and reached its lowest point in the years around 1930. Men occupied close to one hundred percent of the leading and most influential positions on all levels, in the political assemblies, as well as in the political parties. On different boards and committees dealing with matters such as poor relief, child care and primary school issues etc. some female members had seats, while they were non-existent in the bodies that handled finances and technical matters.

This, of course, caused a lot of disappointment among politically active women as well as discussions between both men and women in all political parties. What were the reasons? Roughly speaking, there was a male and a female point of view, though many women also took the male standpoint, or at least thought that it also had some relevance.

The male standpoint was roughly that the low representation of women in politics was due to their lack of interest, capability and knowledge. The female standpoint was that men usually did not want them in politics and systematically opposed them, both in the daily work and in the nomination procedures.

My study

My own research in this field, on which this paper is based, describes and analyzes what happened in the politics of the Swedish town of Gävle, when the first local elections with universal suffrage took place, and also what happened in the following years leading up to the next local elections. It is a historical study based on the minutes of meetings of political parties, women’s political organizations and the City Council. Another group of sources are the four daily newspapers in Gävle. I have also used electoral registers, records of the counting of votes and official statistics. The study is based on literature to a
limited extent only. When this is the case, there are references in the text. The quotations have been translated into English by me. At the end of this paper, all sources that have been used are listed.¹

Gävle

In 1919, Gävle, with a population of a little more than 36 000, had the fifth largest population of Swedish towns. Gävle is situated on the coast of the Baltic Sea about 180 kilometres north of Stockholm. Since the Middle Ages, the town has been an important port. It was one of the first industrialized towns in Sweden and also an early center for the popular movements of the 19th century, such as the temperance and labour movements (Åberg, 1975, p36 ff). The Conservative party governed the town but even before universal suffrage there were quite a few Liberal and Social Democrat members of the City Council. The Liberal party traditionally had a stronghold in Gävle. The dominating workers’ party in both the whole of Sweden and in Gävle were the Social Democrats. In 1917, the left wing broke away from the party and organised the Social Democratic Leftist party. In the elections in 1919 and the early 1920’s, these two parties co-operated for tactical reasons under the same name, i.e. the Labour party.

More women than men lived in Gävle. Many of them had quite recently moved to the town in order to find work for a living. More than fifty per cent of Gävle’s adult women were either unmarried or widows. Most of them were poor people. Some worked in industries, such as the textile and tobacco industries, but most of them made a living in different kinds of service occupations, e.g. as housemaids, housekeepers, laundresses, waitresses, cleaners and seamstresses. Until then, very few men had probably paid any attention to their opinion on political matters. Now women constituted 58.5 per cent of the electorate in Gävle.

In fact, there were a few female members on the City Council even before these elections. Women who were both liable for personal income tax and had a high enough income or fortune had the right to vote in local elections. This was a very small group. Since 1910, such women also could be elected to the

¹ My research in this field mainly took place, and was presented in papers, and discussed at seminars, at the History Department of the University of Uppsala, in Sweden as far back as 1982 and 1983. In 1989, a more popular version was published in print. My works are listed in the bibliography. Since then, some new research in this field has been published, which, in some respects, shows results quite similar to mine, but those studies have very rarely been used as sources or references in this paper.
City Council. In Gävle, three women were elected in 1910, and just before the elections in 1919, there were two, Anna Sundbom, who was a Conservative and Elsa Bengtsson, who represented the Liberals. Both were elementary-school teachers.

The situation of women in general
The fact that female suffrage was introduced did not mean that women were considered equal to men. Until 1920, the husband acted as his wife’s legal guardian, and that concept then remained for a long time in the minds of many people. Women were still excluded from most public offices (Carlsson, 1980, p 494). Their wages were often about half of those of men in similar occupations. If they married or became pregnant, they often lost their employment.

The utopian ideas on women’s emancipation in the early Social Democratic movement, to be achieved through equality at work and collective solutions to the problems of child minding and housework, had by this time been replaced by a dream of the future, where working-class women could also be merely housewives. The income of the husband should be sufficient to provide for a family (Hirdman, 1983, p 33 ff). A consequence of this ideology was that the great differences in wages between men and women, and the idea that men should have prior claims on jobs in case of unemployment, were ideologically legitimized. The great numbers of women who were responsible not only for their own livelihood, but also for that of their children or other relatives were ignored.

Political women organizations and movements in Gävle
In the early 1920’s, the women’s organizations connected to the Liberal and Conservative parties were stronger and more independent of their parties than their Social Democratic equivalent (Quist, 1978, p 208 ff). Not until 1920 did the party approve the formation of a national Social Democratic women’s organization. In Gävle there was a Conservative women’s organization that could muster more than a hundred members at its meetings. The local Conservative party organization also had female members on their board, executive and other committees. The Liberals had a local women’s organization as well and women who sympathized with the Liberal party dominated the rather big local committee for women’s suffrage. As early as 1903, a Social Democratic
women’s club had started in Gävle, but its activity had ceased during the late 1910’s and early 1920’s and it did not reappear until 1923.

During the spring of 1918, there was a food shortage in the whole of Sweden (Carlsson, 1980, p 480 ff). At the beginning of March, women organized meetings and demonstrations against the authorities’ way of dealing with the situation. A lot of letters to the press, signed by women, were also published on the matter. The local committee for the supply of provisions, which organized the rations, admitted mistakes and promised to improve its work. In the election campaign one year later, this “Women’s Fair Distribution of Provisions Movement” and how it was treated emerged in the agitation. These events are the only independent activities of a political nature conducted by working-class women that I have found in the sources from Gävle prior to the 1919 elections.

There are reports from meetings on one more matter, where the active participants all seem to have been female, in this case Liberal women: the movement for peace and for support of the American president Woodrow Wilson’s peace program. Of course, there also had been meetings earlier for the cause of women’s suffrage, but these had ceased after the parliamentary decisions on the matter. The various temperance movements also engaged a lot of women, but in these almost all the leaders still seem to have been men. In the two local political issues that gave rise to most meetings and press debate, namely the housing shortage and the lack of public transports between the town center and its two largest suburbs, no women are mentioned in the sources, with the exception of one letter to the editor of the labour-movement paper, Arbetarbladet.

The newspapers in Gävle

During the election campaign of 1919 in Gävle, the parties had mainly four different ways of getting in touch with the electorate: leaflets, meetings, man-to-man agitation by the active party members and propaganda in the press. My opinion is that the papers were the most important of the instruments available in the different campaigns. Four daily newspapers were published in the town, the Social Democratic Arbetarbladet, the Liberal Gefle Dagblad, and the two Conservative papers: Gefle-Posten and Norrlands-Posten. Thus, all parties apart from the left-wing Socialists had at least one newspaper each (In Hadenius, 1982, p 195 ff the newspapers in Gävle are discussed). With the exception of Norrlands-Posten the papers also seem to have been completely at the disposal of each of the parties for their election campaigns.
The elections in Gävle 1919
Anxiety and expectations prior to the local elections in 1919

The dominating subject of discussion during the election campaign in Gävle in 1919 was women’s suffrage and its consequences. There were a lot of meetings and also articles in the papers on how voting was arranged and about the legal rules for elections. The different parties also arranged quite a few meetings, discussing different issues that women were supposed to be interested in, and trying to mobilize them. The parties seemed very uncertain of how women were likely to vote and whether they would vote at all. Would the parties that had forced universal suffrage through Parliament be rewarded? Or would the women, as the Conservatives hoped, be negative to party disputes and the politicization of practical local affairs and, as Gefle Posten recommended, say “No” to trouble and strife in politics, as they were used to doing in their homes and, therefore, vote to maintain the status quo, i.e. for the Conservatives? Would the Social Democrats, as they feared, have difficulties in mobilizing working-class women to the same extent that the non-socialist parties would mobilize “their” women? The uncertainty was considerable and the result was that the parties focused to a great extent on the tasks both of making women their supporters and making them also actually go to the polls.

Many men from the working classes were now for the first time also able to vote in the local elections. This was not just the first women’s suffrage election; it was also the first election where the workers, merely by using the power of their greater numbers, might possibly gain a majority of the seats on the city councils and other local political assemblies all over the country. This of course caused a lot of expectations as well as apprehensions and, together with the uncertainty about the consequences of women’s suffrage, left its mark on the election campaigns.

The Liberal and Social Democratic parties at this time governed Sweden together. This had consequences also for local electioneering in Gävle, where these parties very rarely attacked each other. The Social Democrats mainly agitated against the Conservatives, not so much I think, because of any expectations of winning Conservative sympathizers, but in order to make the working class join in full numbers, and by doing so, overthrow the Conservatives’ power. The Liberals also mainly attacked the Conservatives. These two parties competed to a large degree for the same voters, i.e. the middle-class inhabitants of the town.
Voting by proxy

Women’s suffrage did not mean that all women could be sure of having the opportunity to decide for themselves on how to vote. In 1919, voting by proxy was still accepted to a great extent and with little control. People could cede their right to vote to another person in blank. Each person entitled to vote was allowed to cast one such vote as well as his/her own vote. Furthermore, married people could vote on behalf of their husbands or wives. Thus, it was possible to have access to a maximum of three votes. At the next elections, this type of voting by proxy had been prohibited.

In practice, voting by proxy deprived many women of their franchise. Husbands often considered voting on behalf of the family members to be their business. Even worse was perhaps a phenomenon that directly translated was called “fishing for proxies”. The parties sent out proxy collectors and they were not always scrupulous in their methods.

*Arbetarbladet* accused the Conservatives: “people who were in dependent positions, such as shop assistants, housemaids, odd-job men, caretakers etc. were often forced by their superiors to give them a proxy to vote” (*Arbetarbladet* 26/3 1918). *Arbetarbladet*’s opinion was that especially women were exposed to such pressure and that this would be a disadvantage for the Social Democrats in the elections. Unlike the other parties, the Social Democrats also urged the women in various appeals to vote in person.

We do not know if and how voting by proxy influenced the election in Gävle. We do not even know how many proxies there were in the town. But we can be quite sure that the result was affected, as there are figures from other towns showing that around 70 per cent of the women’s votes were cast by proxies, compared to less than 25 per cent of the men’s.

Nominations

All four parties realized that they must have at least one woman nominated high enough on the ballot paper for it to be certain that she would be elected. But in this new situation, it was not easy to know which positions would be safe seats in that respect. It seems to have been a matter of course that, in the future also, politics should primarily be an occupation for men. What should interest the women was which men it would be. But a few women should be elected too, in order to be representatives for their sex and also to be useful on suitable political committees, especially those dealing with educational and social issues.
The Conservatives had the least difficulties with the nomination of women. Anna Sundbom had been member of the City Council for almost a decade. She was placed in such a position on the ballot papers that she could be sure of being reelected. The party expected that its number of votes would probably decline. Many very qualified councilors most likely would lose their seats. Still the party put one more woman in a position where she would be elected if the party achieved at least a reasonably good result.

In the local Liberal party organization, on the contrary, the nomination process resulted in an open conflict. Elsa Bengtsson was placed in a position that would secure her re-election, but a couple of the leading members of the local organization for women’s suffrage, were placed so far down on the Liberal’s ballot paper that they would not be elected unless the party was very successful. In consequence, some of the Liberal women introduced a rival ballot paper, with only women on it.

The Social Democrats had great difficulties in finding any woman candidate at all for the City Council. At this time, there was no activity in the women’s club but, in order to find candidates, the party summoned a women’s meeting, in which about twenty female members of the party participated. The men in the party were severely criticized by Signe Johansson, chairwoman of the meeting. In spite of what was stated in the party’s program, the men had shown no interest in having women participate in politics. On the contrary, they had always preferred women to stay in their homes, “but now when they need us they suddenly demand that we choose candidates amongst us” (Socialdemokratiska föreningen, minutes, 5/2 1919).

In the local party organization, there was an opinion that it would be hazardous not to nominate at least two women in such positions that they would have a fair chance of being elected, but it now turned out that all the female candidates suggested refused to be nominated. And Knut Bergsten, the leading Social Democratic politician in Gävle, did not have very flattering opinions about women in politics. He claimed that, where women’s suffrage had been introduced earlier, it had proved that: “they had not been as much benefit as expected” (Socialdemokratiska arbetarkommunen, minutes30/1 1919.)

After several meetings, at last two women agreed to be nominated. One of them, Ester Östlund, cashier in the local co-op store, was placed in a position on the ballot paper that would probably guarantee her election.
*Arbetarbladet* wrote: “Our female party members thereby get a candidate who is well qualified to meet our expectations” (*Arbetarbladet* 6/3 1919). This meant that the largest group in town, of working-class women, was supposed to be satisfied with one representative from their own ranks of the total of 45 on the City Council.

The Social Democratic Leftist party was the most radical one also in nominating women, as it put Mrs. Augusta Jonsson at the top of their ballot paper. She was the only woman nominated by the party that had a chance of being elected.

**Arbetarbladet in the electioneering campaign in 1919**

*Arbetarbladet’s* argumentation directed towards the women mainly followed three different lines. The first focused on fairness. The Conservatives had fought against women’s suffrage. Now the women should punish them for that. *Arbetarbladet* published several statements made by the Conservatives opposing women’s suffrage. The Conservative party was derided for now wanting the female votes.

The second line focused on class. Working-class women should not fail to vote because the better off women would not do that. This argument was also intended for working-class men. They should be aware of the importance of persuading “their” women to go to the polls.

The third line had its background in the idea that all women had a certain character by nature, and that they therefore were interested in and suitable for certain issues and tasks in politics. Thus *Arbetarbladet*, and the other newspapers as well, were studded with articles on issues such as provisions, housing, education, medical care and social welfare. In these articles, numbers of demands that would probably appeal to women were brought up.

Two men, who were the leading persons in the local Social Democratic party organization, managed *Arbetarbladet*. The above-mentioned Knut Bergsten, general manager of the newspaper, was also leader of the party’s group in the City Council and a member of Gävle’s finance department. He also had a seat on the party’s national committee. Nils Sigfrid Norling, editor in chief, was also chairman of the local party organization.
A Social Democratic platform for local politics

The articles mentioned above had an agitating tone and did not link up with local conditions, but in no less than ten long articles discussed local politics. The first seven of these all had the same headline: “How have the Conservatives governed the town?” and contained a detailed critical examination of the politics conducted during the preceding decades. The Conservatives were accused of favoring private economic interests at the expense of the majority of the population. Things like housing, public transports and schools for the children had been neglected during the pre-war years. And now, after the great inflation that started in 1914, the cost of necessary measures would be much higher. The present situation was in some respects described as a catastrophe.

In articles eight and nine, *Arbetarbladet* then submitted a municipal Social Democratic policy for Gävle. The first of the articles concentrated on how to deal with the housing shortage. The next presented a long list of reforms primarily in the fields of health care, support of provisions, education, poor relief, pensions and local communications. It is quite clear that the common theme consisted of proposals that would probably interest and attract women. This was hardly a coincidence and neither was the vague specification of when all this would be implemented.

The tenth and last article in *Arbetarbladet*, discussed how all the above could be financed. Different kinds of new or increased taxes on different activities, mainly such that better off people were probably interested in, dominated the Social Democratic list of proposals in order to increase the municipal revenues.

The paper did not hesitate to proclaim, in a big advertisement-like appeal: “Now is the time, when everything that the Social Democrats have fought for for decades can be achieved, if all working-class men and women go to the polls in the local and regional elections” (*Arbetarbladet* 19/3 1919). But on the very next day, there was a less conspicuous article, which pointed out about how restricted the powers of the local authorities were, and how narrow the economic limits.

The Conservatives

The Conservative paper *Gefle-Posten* replied to the charge. *Arbetarbladet* was accused of being wise with the benefit of hindsight. Nobody could have foreseen the war and the inflation. The list of demands was described as impractical and expensive experiments rather than realistic policies. The paper joked about
the great joy of being a taxpayer in the town if all the demands were put into practice. Only Parliament could change the laws on municipal taxes and the other proposals on how to finance the reform program would have very small effects. “Arbetarbladet’s magic wand for transforming the town was just birdlime meant to catch unsuspicious voters” (Gefle-Posten 22/3 1919).

Gefle-Posten argued that municipal decisions should not be politicized and that the experienced and capable (Conservative) men, who until then had led the town, should be entrusted once again. It was important that the Conservatives get at least 1/3 of the seats on the City Council. If so, they would be able to stop new kinds of expenses and also all expenses calling for financial loans. Furthermore, all kinds of decisions could be postponed. Then the town could be protected from “the superior numbers of the ignorant and non-taxpaying” (Gefle-Posten 1/3 1919). At the same time as the introduction of universal suffrage, some restrictions intended to protect minority interests had been introduced in municipal legislation.

The Conservatives did not bring up any specific municipal policy, or make any promises of reforms or other changes. But it is clear that they had similar ideas to those of the Social Democrats on what kind of political issues were suitable for women to be interested in. On many occasions, Gefle-Posten urged women to be the champions of unity and reconciliation also in politics, just as they were supposed to be in family life.

The arguments in Gefle-Posten varied a lot. On the one hand, the paper warned women that class egoism would lead to “a government where public matters would be handled by incompetent people who would only be interested in their own personal welfare” (Gefle-Posten 19/3 1919). And there were some notices like “remember the misery in Russia” (Gefle-Posten 17/3 1919) and “first there will be a Kerenskij and then comes Lenin” (Gefle-Posten 17/3 1919). On the other hand, there was self-criticism from Conservative women on how the party had handled the issue of women’s suffrage, and the fact that the Conservatives, also, were anxious to relieve social misery was pointed out. Several times the paper pointed out that the party had more women well placed on the ballot paper than any of the other parties.
The Liberals

In the liberal paper *Gefle Dagblad* the agitation was more subdued. The polemics were mainly directed against the Conservatives and the arguments were to a large degree the same as those used by *Arbetarbladet*. The paper seems to have considered it natural that the workers would come to vote for the Social Democrats. The Liberals competed with the Conservatives for the same part of the electorate and they saw themselves as the representatives of the enlightened and progressive middle class, while the Conservatives were considered to be spokesmen of a dying, unjust society based on privilege. In *Gefle Dagblad* the new women’s suffrage was the dominating issue in the election campaign.

The Social Democratic Leftist Party

This party had no local paper. Instead, it tried to make itself visible in the press through advertisements and letters to the press. For example, they turned directly to the working-class women of the suburb of Bomhus in an advertisement and declared that the women “had been met with scorn from right-wing politicians, both non-socialist and the Social Democrats” (*Arbetarbladet* 26/3 1919). They also claimed that their candidate, Augusta Jonsson was the only working-class woman who had a realistic chance of being elected.

*Arbetarbladet* answered that it was a lie that the women arranging meetings about the shortage of provisions in 1918 had been treated badly. On the contrary, the Social Democratic party organization had made great efforts in order to help them in their struggle.

The local election in Gävle in 1919 – results and participation

The “Labour party” received 51.9% of the votes, and of those the Social Democrats had 45.5% and the Leftist party 6.4%. The Conservatives got 25.3% of the votes, and the Liberals got 22.7%. This meant that the Social Democrats won 24 of the 45 seats on the City Council. The Leftist party had two seats, the Conservatives, ten and the Liberals, nine. Participation in the election in Gävle was 63.4% of the men entitled to vote and 57.7% of the women. It is worth noting that the highest female participation was achieved in two of the most markedly working-class districts, where it was 64.7% and 62.3%. In these two districts, the women’s participation was higher than that of the men.

These results made Gävle one of the 15 towns where the elections had resulted in a Socialist majority. The Conservatives had lost more than 50 per cent
of their seats, all of them to the Socialist parties, while the Liberals got exactly the same number of seats on the Council as they had before. This, of course, was a great disappointment for a party that saw itself as the true champion of the universal suffrage reforms. Three women took their places on the Council, Anna Sundbom and Elsa Bengtsson, who both already had seats and Ester Östlund, the Social Democratic candidate. Augusta Jonsson, although she was the first name on the Leftist party ballot paper, was not elected. Too many voters had canceled her name. The Liberal ballot paper with only women on it was unsuccessful, and did not win any seats.

Local politics in Gävle 1919–1920
Social Democratic policies in a majority position

The task for the new Social Democratic majority was not an easy one. Just a few days after the elections, they also made clear that they were aware of this fact. A long article in Arbetarbladet put a damper on the joy of victory and the expectations of rapid reforms. Work had to be concentrated on efforts to improve the town’s finances. The party’s guiding principle for the future was caution and a strict economy. Those who had feared or hoped that the new majority would carry through experiments or show lust for power would soon realize that nothing of the sort was to be expected.

Gefle-Posten and Gefle Dagblad gave these new directions a very positive reception. At the very first meeting of the new City Council, it was obvious that they were seriously meant. At this meeting, the Conservative President of the Council, Oscar Flensburg, was re-elected and the Social Democrats also refrained from putting themselves in a majority position on the executive committee that led the work of the Council. Arbetarbladet argued that it was a good thing that, as a result of these decisions, the Conservatives would have to continue in a position of responsibility for the town’s finances. The paper also gave credit to the leading Conservative local politicians, something that the paper did not say before the elections.

The discussions can be followed in the internal records of meetings of the Social Democratic City Council group. There were two opposite lines. The first emphasized that the party had a responsibility towards its electors to use its power to take over the presidency and the executive committee and that it would be dangerous not to do so. The line described above was the second, and this one, supported by both Bergsten and Norling, achieved a large majority.
There were several reasons for choosing this policy. The financial situation was one but the party also thought that the administration still needed the competence of the Conservative politicians and feared a Conservative opposition that could become obstructive. Another reason was to moderate anxiety among the better off groups in the town. The fact that important changes in policies had to be supported by 2/3 of the councilors probably also influenced the decision, though this is not expressed in the records. Actually the Social Democrats were not quite certain about where to start and felt that they needed some time to get used to the situation and to develop a concrete strategy. Extensive internal work of investigation, as well as planning, was immediately launched.

Nine months later, in November 1919, the party was ready to strengthen its positions. When the elections to various, different boards and committees took place, the party wanted one of their own, Knut Bergsten, as chairman in the borough finance department. This made the President of the City Council, Oscar Flensburg, decide to resign and so a Social Democrat was elected to that office, also. Still, a few months later, when Flensburg was interviewed in a Conservative paper published in Stockholm, *Nya Dagligt Allehanda*, he stated that no important change in town politics had taken place, and that the new majority had considered the economic problems more seriously than he had dared to hope before the elections.

It is also quite clear that on all the committees except for the finance department, there was still a majority of Conservatives and Liberals even after the elections in November. The Social Democrats concentrated on getting control of the finances in order to be able to lower the municipal taxes, while the old political establishment continued to run the rest of the administration. The leading men of the new majority concentrated their efforts on strengthening the competitive capacity of the town and its port in order to entice industries and other enterprises as well as ships to come. Some planning and preparation of how some of the promises made in the election campaign could also be realized were made, too, but very little happened in these fields during the period leading up to the next local elections. The most developed plans were about improving housing, but so far they had only resulted in a very small number of new dwellings. In general, the living conditions of the population had not changed except for the lowered municipal taxes.

This cautious policy of economic compromise was also reflected in the way the newspapers dealt with local public issues and the City Council meetings.
Arbetarbladet, especially, regularly wrote about how to improve housing and local communications, but in spite of that, the general picture is that the press wrote less and less about local politics. For example, in the first few months after the election, the papers reported in detail on the City Council meetings and sometimes also on various committee meetings. Gradually, the reports then became briefer and at the same time the paper’s own discussions on the different issues also vanished. Nobody discussed the aims and means of local politics in the same way as before the election in 1919. In 1920, the papers appear to have lost practically all their former interest in local politics. Municipal issues seem to have been made non-political and conflicts seem to have been removed from the agenda. The Conservative vision prior to the elections appears to have come true.

The role of women after the election

The great interest in the women’s debut in politics also vanished rapidly after the election. The elected women all seem to have been put in rather insignificant positions, both within their parties and in the local government. There are no signs of interest in what these representatives of the majority of the population did to be found in the newspapers. I think it can be explained as if a mental “all clear signal” was sounded. The women obviously had not voted to any significant degree in a different way from how the men had. They had not promoted women and canceled male candidates. No party had become more favored or threatened by their entrance on the scene, and they seem to have accepted the fact that they had only a few representatives from their own ranks, and also that these were kept out of real power.

An important, though so far in political practice very carefully used, shift in power had taken place, the achievement of a majority for the working-class parties. This shift took place almost totally within the framework of the male local political establishment, whereas the greatest change in the electorate, the majority of women, was well nigh invisible in the policies that followed the election.

When, for once, a female politician attracted attention, it was by using words that would have been impossible to write about a man. Arbetarbladet wrote under the headline “An attack of hysteria in the City Council” that “little Miss Sundbom was seized with what she perhaps thought was legitimate anger” and that “this pretty representative of the female weakness of mind” (Arbetarbladet 31/12 1919) had accused a Social Democratic councilor of having lied in the City Council.
Yet Anna Sundbom was probably the most influential of the three elected women. She had been a member of the poor relief board for many years, and she also had a seat on the local board of her party. The female Social Democratic councilor, Ester Östlund, seems to have been extremely passive. In the records of meetings of the Social Democratic group of councilors there is not one single remark made by her and at many such meetings she was not even present. I suppose it was not easy to be a young inexperienced woman among 23 men, led by Bergsten, who was skeptical of female political representation. The female Liberal representative, Elsa Bengtsson, left the council as early as the beginning of 1920 because of illness. On the other hand, the second woman on the Social Democratic ballot list, Anna Hallin, took a vacant seat on the City Council. She did not achieve any influential position either.

**The elections in 1920**

The election campaign in 1920

In December 1920, local elections took place once again in Sweden. This time only half the City Council was elected. Voting by proxy, in the extensive and badly controlled way that was allowed in 1919, was now forbidden. As these elections were spread over a couple of weeks, i.e. on different days in different towns, in places where the elections were still to come, people could discuss the results of the elections in other places, and their consequences. Participation in the election seemed to decrease everywhere and the Conservatives were successful. These two conditions left their mark on the election campaign in the newspapers in Gävle. Time after time, *Arbetarbladet* returned to the question of why the workers fought for suffrage for decades, and then when they got it, did not use it. As time went by, the tone of these articles became more and more whining and grumpy. “Some people in the working classes become tired and give up at the first setback. The Social Democrats were in government for a few months and couldn’t conjure up a Socialist society, and then some people lost their inclination to make any efforts at all for the labour movement.” (*Arbetarbladet* 9/12 1920).

Very few articles in *Arbetarbladet* in the campaign of 1920 were directed at women, and those that were had quite a different tone from the year before. Women should understand that they could influence the elections and that now was the proper time for them to pull themselves together, and show that they wanted to take part in exercising power. Voting in general, as well as voting
for the right party, was almost described as an obligation. I am not sure if the editors really believed that this kind of sour-tempered campaign really would mobilize working-class women. They probably thought that they had no better arguments. Unlike in 1919, there were no articles about the tasks of women in politics and no proud declarations about all the aims that could be achieved if the working classes went to the polls. And there were no great promises to accomplish a local welfare and reform policy this time.

What little debate there was, focused on what the Social Democrats had actually achieved since March 1919. Gefle-Posten was of the opinion that they had not been able to realize one single aim taken up in the election campaign of 1919. The tone in Gefle-Posten was quite good-natured and indulgent. Actually the paper was rather satisfied with the fact that the Social Democrats had been so reasonable.

Arbetarbladet answered that the party had been in power for only a year and a half, that taxes had been reduced and that the economic situation was very difficult. During the decades to come, the town would continue to suffer from the consequences of the former Conservative rule. The paper also wrote, that many steps had been taken in order to carry out various different reforms in the future, but it did not specify any examples of these.

The concrete issue that seems to have dominated the election campaign was public transport. The inhabitants of the suburbs, at meetings and in the press, expressed great dissatisfaction with how this was handled. The town had recently bought an icebreaker to serve the needs of the port and the Social Democratic Leftist party claimed that that money should have been spent on building tramways to the suburbs, instead. The Social Democrats answered that keeping the port open was a question of life or death for the town.

In an appeal in Gefle-Posten, the Conservatives brought attention to the fact that two Conservative women had chances of being elected, if the party was as successful in Gävle as in other places. They especially attacked the Liberals for having no woman at all with a fair chance of being elected. Gefle-Posten had great expectations of the election. The kind of articles that flourished in 1919, about ignorant and non-taxpaying voters, had disappeared in 1920 and so had the articles about the moderating influence of women on politics. Just as in Arbetarbladet the tone used against the opponents was more temperate than in 1919, except for in one single article. Gefle Dagblad also wrote that the Social Democrats had achieved very little during the time they governed the town.
Nobody seems to have organized the type of meetings intended to mobilize women that were so frequent in 1919, or if they did, the papers did not report them. The space used for articles, appeals and advertising the elections, as a whole, was much less in all the newspapers this time. Of course, there is a connection between the lukewarm electioneering and the “making the municipal issues non-political” described above. The Social Democrats could hardly once again attack the lack of local welfare policy and the Conservatives and Liberals could hardly try to pursue a policy of dissatisfaction with the lack of such changes. The only real opposition, though without having any newspaper at their disposal, came from the Leftist party.

Nominations in 1920
The Conservatives once again nominated Anna Sundbom, and one other woman, Anna Åkerberg. The Liberals and the Social Democratic Leftist party nominated no women with a fair chance of being elected. The Social Democrats, this time also, had great difficulties in finding anyone who agreed to be a candidate. Neither of the two women who had represented the party on the City Council wanted to be re-elected. Though at last, Anna Hallin, after an appeal to her loyalty to the party (she was daughter of the most famous working-class leader in Gävle’s history), was persuaded to accept nomination.

The election in 1920 – results and participation
Participation decreased substantially. Only 39.3% of the men and 21.8% of the women went to the polls. The last figure, especially, was very low compared to other Swedish towns. The Socialist parties lost their majority. Actually the Social Democrats lost, and the Conservatives gained seats, while the other parties remained on about the same levels as before. The Social Democrats had 40.4%, the Leftist party, 5.9%, the Conservatives, 30.5% and the Liberals, 23.2%. As only half of the Council was elected this time, the Social Democrats were able to maintain a slight majority. Only two women were elected, Anna Sundbom and Anna Hallin. Too many voters had deleted Anna Åkerberg’s name from the ballot lists.

Arbetarbladet wrote: The electorate of the party has shown “an unforgivable dullness... not less than 4/7 of our voters remained invisible.” (Arbetarbladet 15/12 1920).
The background to the low female participation was primarily an extremely low participation level among certain categories of women. Among the many unmarried female industrial workers, the percentage was below ten percent and it was also very low among the wives of workers in other occupations than industry, (with its well-organized trade unions). Also very few daughters and other unmarried women members of families, who were not gainfully employed, participated.

**Analysis**

What were the reasons for this decrease? There were probably several factors involved. Of course the disappearance of the proxy vote lies close to hand as an explanation. If so, the participation of women in 1919 would be considered artificial and the percentage of 1920, normal. In order to put this standpoint to the test, let us take a look at female participation in the three following elections or other opportunities to vote: the parliamentary elections in 1921, the referendum on the prohibition of the use of alcohol in 1922 and the local elections in 1922. In the first two of these events, female participation was on about the same level as in 1919. In 1922, it once again fell to a very low level: 43.9% for men and 26.8% for women (this time the whole of the City Council was elected). Thus, it is quite clear that many more than 20 percent of the women entitled to vote would, in fact, also go to the polls if they found the elections or referendums interesting enough. In 1920, only 7.7% of the unmarried female industrial workers in the working-class district of Brynäs in Gävle participated, but one year later in the parliamentary elections, the same category participated to a degree of no less than 80.8%, which was substantially higher than the male vote in the same district and for men in the town as a whole.

It seems that the electorate in Gävle, especially the women and, to an even higher degree, the working-class women, lost their commitment to local politics. This is quite understandable considering what happened in 1919. Many people must have expected reforms and improvements after that election. The ensuing development must have created some disappointment and loss of faith in what could be achieved by local political commitment. Also in the records of meetings of the Social Democratic local organization, the disappointment is clearly visible. In the internal elections, prior to the nominations in 1920, all the leading men got few votes.
In 1919, three women were elected to the City Council in Gävle. After the elections in 1920, there were only two and, in 1922, only one was left, and she had already become a councilor in 1911. During the years 1911–1934, altogether nine women were city councilors. Four of them were Social Democrats; two were Liberals and three, Conservatives. Of these nine, seven served only one term of office (in a few cases a little shorter or longer). One Liberal councilor served two terms. Only one, Anna Sundbom, was re-elected several times.

It is quite clear that most of these women felt uncomfortable in the male establishment of local politicians. Otherwise, most of them would not have left it as soon as they could. Men, on the other hand, seem to have been re-elected, or at least nominated for re-election, practically for the rest of their lives, once they had become councilors. It was not until the close of the 1930’s that the situation improved a little. In the 1940’s, a women, her name was Hildur Nygren, held a leading position for the first time in the politics of Gävle as she was elected to the City Council’s executive committee. About a decade later, she actually also became one of the very first female members of the Swedish government.

Parliamentary elections and the referendum

There was an important connection between the struggle for women’s suffrage and the temperance movement in Sweden. At this time, women seldom used alcohol and men’s drinking habits were often seen as a curse that sometimes changed life from hard to unbearable (Lundkvist, 1977 p 184 ff). That fact that the question of the prohibition of the use of alcohol was considered to be a “women’s issue” is confirmed on many occasions by Arbetarbladet. In an article about women and the coming referendum, it wrote that women were those who were capable of making an unconfused judgment on this question. In the light of these facts and of how local politics had developed during the recent years, it is not surprising that the political expectations of the women of Gävle were transferred to the Parliamentary elections and the referendum. The elections in 1921 were a great victory for the Socialist parties in Gävle. The Labour party (i.e. the Social Democrats and the Leftist party in co-operation) received 62.2% of the votes, i.e. over ten percent more than in the victory of 1919. The Conservatives got only 17% and the Liberals, 20.8%. It was quite clear that the high personal participation of women in the elections favored the Socialist parties (Many scholars think that female participation in elections at
this time should have favored Conservative parties, instead, e.g. Eduards, 1972, p 24f and 47 ff, Palme, 1969, p 44 ff, Quist, 1978, p 132 ff, Tingsten, 1937, p 229 ff). One of the reasons for this was probably that the Conservative party opposed the idea of the prohibition of alcohol most strongly. It also seems clear that the extensive practice of voting by proxy in 1919 had been to the advantage of the Conservatives, just as Arbetarbladet had suggested. Actually Gefle-Posten, judging by its comments on the results of 1921, seems to share this opinion. The paper claimed that, as there was no voting by proxy in this election, the Conservatives should be quite content with the result.

In the referendum in 1922, the champions of prohibition lost on the national scene but, among the women voters in Gävle,  voted in favor of prohibition, as did more than 90% of the female voters in the working-class suburbs.

Concluding remarks

In the Parliamentary elections of 1921 to the Second Chamber, four women were elected and to the First Chamber, just one. In the referendum, those who wanted prohibition lost. Thus, also on the national level there were good reasons for women to feel disappointed at the beginning of the 1920’s. Female political representation all over Sweden, and on all levels, then declined during the following decade.

The backlash was probably related to important changes in Swedish society that took place in the 1920’s and 1930’s. The housewife had become the female ideal in all classes and the number of marriages increased rapidly. There was less demand for women on the labour market than previously and they were often considered to be competing with the men for the jobs available. This was, of course, due to the high unemployment rates in these decades. Many men were of the opinion that they needed the jobs better than the women, as they were supposed to be the family breadwinners. Thus women, both for ideological and economic reasons, were pushed back into the kitchens. And surely there is a connection between women’s participation in the work force leading to economic independence as well as presence in all fields of society, on the one hand, and their chances of demanding and exercising political influence, on the other.

Furthermore, a number of issues that had engaged many women in the early 1920’s disappeared or became less important. The shortage of provisions came to an end when the First World War was over. The temperance movement lost the referendum on the prohibition of alcohol. The struggle for universal
suffrage had also come to an end. And the peace movement faded away, when the peace treaties after the war were concluded, and President Wilson’s visions had been rejected by the American Congress.

Women were nominated to political assemblies, but only a few, and quite seldom those who had been struggling in the suffrage movements. Among those women who had believed in a new and better world after women’s suffrage had been introduced the disappointment was great (Palme, 1969, p 109, Quist, 1978, p131, Torbacke, 1969, p145, Wahlström, 1939, p 62 ff). Wahlström was a leading member of the Swedish women’s movement for suffrage, but also a professional historian and she was the first to write the history of the movement. Men decided who the women they wanted to allow in would be. The result was that many of the female politicians in the 1920’s and 1930’s tended rather to be loyal party members than feminists. Their assigned task was to mobilize women for their respective party in the elections. Solidarity among women had no place in a political environment, where class was defined as the superior factor, and sex an insignificant one, except when it came to deciding who should exercise power. Then sex was of paramount importance. The consequence of all this was that, for decades, women’s suffrage in practice had so little effect, that it was almost as if it did not exist.
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MORE REPRESENTATION OR MORE PARTICIPATION?
CHALLENGES IN SWEDISH DEMOCRACY

BY ERIK AMNÅ

Six citizen types

There are very many different ways of being a Swedish citizen. The research carried out by the Swedish Parliamentary Commission on Democracy shows a multitude of citizen identities, which create rather different and conflicting roles, at least superficially. These different types of citizens can also assume different guises, take on different roles, depending on both outer circumstances and inner motives. Actual citizens make up a fascinating and shifting mosaic of different types of citizens.

The Elector

Most people vote. The Swedish general election in 1998 attracted 81.4% of those entitled to vote to do so. Swedes are used to thinking of the number of votes cast as fairly constant. It is part of the role of the Nordic citizen to vote. In a society like ours, there are certain duties such as the duty to pay tax, the duty to do national service and the duty to give way. It seems that, even without legal constraint, Nordic citizens consider voting a kind of imperative, social duty. You just vote unless you have obvious and dramatic reasons not to do so. You go to the polling station with a certain amount of pride and self-respect. That is important. You are celebrating the epitome of democracy by admitting to your opinion. It would be almost shameful not to take part.

However, scholars have shown how this democratic ritual is losing its grip on the citizens. In the last election, it was, in particular, the young, the workers, the town dwellers, the single and the divorced who did not show up to

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1 The Swedish Parliamentary Commission on Democracy was set up by the government in 1997 by appointment of representatives from Swedish political parties. It was served by a secretariat led by Erik Amnå as principal secretary. The Commission initiated research activities involving more than 100 scholars from 12 academic disciplines. Their work was published under Erik Amnå’s editorship in a series of 13 research volumes and 32 reports, which constitute the general context of this article. The Commission presented its political conclusions in a comprehensive report in February 2000 (SOU 2000:1).
vote. The turnout in the general election dropped by 5 percent units in 1998. Among first-time male voters, the turnout dropped by 14 percent units from 83.3% to 69.3% (Bennulf and Hedberg 1999). Less than half of them voted in the EU election in 1999 (38.8%).

On the surface, it seems that the citizens do not care any longer. The “arm-chair voter” is the stigmatised name given to these “stay-at-home voters”. However, nothing could be more misleading, superficial and deceptive. The norm of going to vote appears to be on the way out. But, the main reason for that is neither laziness nor lack of interest. Both these explanations can be disregarded (Teorell and Westholm 1999). Instead, there are other explanations that weigh much heavier.

To start with, in current democracy research there is an obvious increasing lack of identification with the seven established political parties. The voters feel less affinity with the various political alternatives. Commitment to a party is on the decrease and one result is that the citizens take a step back when it comes to elections.

Secondly, voting norms are crumbling. At least, the norm, when it comes to non-conditional voting figures, is not as strong as it was. Thus, the political choice has secularised the elections. You vote only if there is a point to it. You vote as long as the voting seems to be meaningful (Teorell and Westholm 1999).

But, further on, the election analysts make it possible for us to define the citizens’ reasons for not voting. This is particularly obvious when the voting behaviour of youngsters is analysed. However, social interest and political commitment among young people have not decreased during the past few decades, rather the opposite. And the Swedish young people’s support for Swedish democracy is in fact greater than that of their parents (Oscarsson 1998). So, on what do they base their decision not to vote?

The young people interviewed in the research project carried out by the Parliamentary Commission on Democracy said that the media and the parties acted, in symbiosis, in such a way that the effect was a “turn-off”. They talked about their distance from politics. They do not consider that elections or participation in an election have any meaning. The parties’ messages and their plans of action are not clear enough. The efficiency of the election process is unsure. And the way in which the media and the parties treat the young gives them a pacified, stereotyped role with no connection with the person in question or what he or she considers to be important. The attempts of the parties to fake
opposition or to popularise and play down the election movement have rather the opposite effect. Instead, young people talk with disgust about the similarity with the European Song Contest in which the exterior, the performance and the mould are more important than the message and the content. Quite simply, they are ambivalent. Individualisation and secularisation work together to play down the decision to vote and the decision not to vote (Bruhn 1999).

Fewer and fewer citizens feel they have a duty to vote. More and more act exactly as democratic theory thought they would: with curiosity, criticism and disloyalty. The success of democracy entails somewhat paradoxical and increasing difficulties in motivating people to vote. Modern voters look for meaningful political participation. The political parties should never take the ritual elector for granted, either.

The Loyal Servant

Another, but perhaps even more threatened species of citizens are those who dutifully, selflessly, continuously and with commitment maintain their membership of a political party or a popular movement idea-wise, socially and practically. They do not primarily ask what they can, themselves, get out of their commitment. Together, they see themselves as meeting the tasks and performing the practical jobs that someone must do. Why not them? Flouting the post-modern individualistic expressionism, she rather asks herself the opposite: what right have I not to do anything? She is more than that, something other than just a person with a post giro account, the unglamorous hero of mid-term democracy. She feels needed. Her public commitment is not negotiable. Without her, democracy would grind to a halt; at least it would slow down. She is the “brother” and “sister” of many people including the local political leaders.

Analyses of the players in local party life present quite a precise picture of what it is like to be that kind of member today. Perhaps one of the most challenging conclusions is that the parties no longer need their members, neither for membership fees nor for the sake of political ideas. Our contemporary parties have distanced themselves from their members. Instead, the state and the public sector have become more important both as financiers and as the producers of ideas. The parties appear to have other things to think about than cultivating political communities and providing arenas for political debate (Gidlund and Möller 1999).

The party meeting now lies in the shadow of the enormous public sector,
where, more often than not, the leading party representatives spend their working days (Gidlund and Möller 1999), where respectable professional bodies produce both problems and solutions. The meeting of members is marginalized into becoming a sage anchor with the task of giving local government political legitimacy. To use Easton’s metaphor, there is a kind of “sucking in”, a reversed process where the parties become the recipients of local government initiative and ideas.

Are the parties in the process of being transformed from being vital parts of civilised society to excrescences on the resourceful public sector? In that case, that would be a very good reason why the citizens find is harder to identify with the political parties. One might ask if it could also be one of the reasons why more and more new, local political parties are coming into being. Today in Sweden, there are 147 different party seats on the local decision-making bodies in the municipalities.

In local and regional politics, the “old” left-right orientated parties are facing greater difficulties in reflecting the leading, relevant and important lines of conflict among the citizens. Other developments also emphasise the importance of such a dramatic shift in identity, from ideology to pragmatism. The new governance-stamped network politics makes it more difficult, for example, for citizens to differentiate between ideological dividing lines and alternative measures, like demanding that someone should take responsibility for what has been done. Informal negotiating networks play down the role of formal, accountable and transparent decision-making hierarchies (Amnå and Montin 2000).

On the basis of these developments, no one interested in Swedish democracy development has reason to overestimate the staying power of the loyal servant, either. Nor may she be taken for granted. She, too, has quite reasonable demands when it comes to participating. If she is not given an outlet for her political interest, she will not participate. If the meeting of members does not look as if it has a credible chance to mean anything, to make any difference, she will probably choose – even if it hurts – to stay at home.

The Free Passenger
A citizen type who has already decided to stay at home is the consumer. He – yes, he is most often a well-educated, well-paid man – does not do so because he is doubtful about democracy (Petersson and Demokratirådet 1998). Not
at all. He does not support any radical, alternative social system. But for his part, he has decided to stay away from mid-term activities. He has no desire to spend his precious time attending what he considers typical low-speed evening classes with doubtful results.

On the other hand, he acts like a knowledgeable, political consumer. He is well aware of his rights and the services he can get from the public sector’s enormous range of services – in exchange for his, in his opinion, very high taxes. Neither is he apathetic or, even less, apolitical. Not at all. If some child-care matter, which he really feels for, runs into problems, he certainly knows which person in the social services to contact. If permission to build a carport is taking an unreasonably long time to obtain, his reflex action is to get on the phone to hurry things along. If he had to, in order to obtain his rights, he would go to court.

This exaggerated political consumer keeps his distance from the political system. Unlike the loyal servant, he does not complain about the new developments. Quite the contrary: he values the professionalisation and the assumption of power of various professional groups that it entails. Like very many citizens, he thinks that it is a good thing that the experts are gaining more influence at the expense of the political representatives (Oscarsson 1999). Democracy needs to become more efficient. The ability to provide must be improved if he is to continue to have faith in the political system. But he, himself, is not prepared to sacrifice very much just for the sake of it.

Faced with his truancy, there is not much one can do. A working democracy must always give its citizens the right to remain passive.

But, on another aggregation level, this individual behaviour means that the division between the public and private sectors will grow considerably. Privately employed people are recruited less often to political commissions of trust. The public sector looks after itself. Civil servants run politics while privately employed people deal with other things. For many, being an elected representative is a life-long career. Politics becomes even more professionalised but also more distanced from the private sector. The understanding of both of the sectors’ distinctive characters and their complementary relationship has become weaker. The public debate is carried out in a less enterprising but in a more prejudiced manner.
The Stranger

Unlike the consumer, the stranger has made his exit from mid-term commitment involuntarily. He has also made his exit from election-day commitment. However, the stranger does not have anything against democracy as a principle either. He feels like a stranger when he sees the distance between the ideal and the reality. Then he feels like abstaining. Distrust of the “politicians” then grows (Bennulf and Hedberg 1999; Teorell and Westholm 1999). The result could be a destructive, passive or active political action.

In one of the studies for the Parliamentary Commission of Democracy, an area on the outskirts of Gothenburg was analysed. Polling there was less than 50%. More specifically, the core of the analysis rested on a group of young Swedish men with immigrant backgrounds. Their families originated in three different continents and they grew up believing in three different world religions. Their opinions of Swedish social development are very critical and alienated. The title of the report is “Alienation is our Nation”. They look on the Swedish social state from a cold but not humourless distance, a state which they experience as close to being a police state with its neighbourhood police, narcotics police, criminal police, traffic police and security police all of whom, for some reason or other they have come up against (Sernhede 1999).

But their cynicism is not totally pacifying. They have found each other in the “Rap” culture. They play music and sing together in quite a successful group. The lyrics, representing their own kind of protest, are, on the one hand, about their hatred of the Swedish society in general and of the City of Gothenburg in particular, on the other. They sing of their love of the suburb in which they live but also about the solidarity they feel with the poor and oppressed in far-away countries such as South Africa. They cultivate this recognition in several ways such as through an exchange of music with Johannesburg. The common identity they have with the blacks is important:

– If only we had a Mandela, well..., says one of the young men.

One Tuesday afternoon, they are hanging about the suburban shopping centre at about half past four. They point out the various operational groups from the welfare state to the researcher/reporter who is a music sociologist. These groups are on their way home to various parts of Gothenburg at the end of their working day: social workers, regional social insurance officers, police on the day-time shift and teachers. Suddenly, one of the young men says, with a glint in his eye:
– Look, it’s the occupying power going off duty!

The idea of Sweden as an occupying power has little to do with the politically revered picture of the Swedish welfare state. This is also striking: their experience and their perspective of Swedish social development differ markedly from the dominating ones. They do not recognise themselves in the political leaders. When these top party people are talking on the television about how well things are going for Sweden, they wonder: Who makes up Sweden? When the integration minister talks about Swedes and immigrants, they wonder, and not particularly unreasonably, whether she considers them to be Swedes or not.

Even if some of the attitudinal, revolutionary romantic light was removed from these pictures, there remains a clear impression that there are social groups who did not, just relatively, lose out during the 1990’s through re-organisation of state finances, savings and cut-backs in the transfer system. They have difficulty identifying with any political leader. They believe that the Swedish democracy is OK for a white, middle-aged, heterosexual wage-earner with a Lutheran background and with roots in the Swedish farming community. But, Swedish democracy is not accessible or available to citizens of other cultural, religious or ethnic backgrounds (Dencik 1999).

Has something essential not come up to scratch in the Nordic democratic socialisation mechanism? In the past, there was a golden chain that helped those citizens with less to offer on the economic market to compensate by joining the political, union and religious movements. Now, however, it appears that those who are most dependent on collective politics have put least trust in it. Through its organisations, politics reinforces the feeling, first created by the labour market, of being an outsider (Svallfors 1999).

In this matter, it is incontrovertible that democracy has lost ground. Democratic government is weakening to such an extent that more and more citizens and groups of citizens feel that their ability to influence their own living conditions as well as those of others has weakened. The Parliamentary Commission on Democracy claims that this is the greatest defeat ever for modern Swedish democracy (Demokratiutredningen 2000).

Of course, it is an open question whether this development will lead to the formation of new parties with new demands, which will replace the classic, political ideologies by offering, instead, to represent gender, ethnicity, religion or territory.
The Activist

In many ways, the activist is also critical of Swedish democratic development. Apparently, it lacks sensitivity, responsiveness, dialogue, roots etc. But the activist’s protest is more collective, medialised and, perhaps, professionalised.

The activist can be found in the new social movements that put emphasis on different lines of conflict from those which dominate party politics. They also work differently. They are more easily dispersed, have less in common with association democracy and are of a more temporary nature (Thörn 2002).

It may be easy to associate with young citizens who save trees, demonstrate against the transportation of animals and attract attention to the rights of children. And, of course, there is nothing wrong with that. But it is far removed from getting to grips with the whole thing. This type of citizen also includes the “sewing circle ladies” who are also prepared to oppose Swedish law if necessary in order to ease their consciences. If, for example, the Swedish Aliens’ Appeals Board decide to deport a family of immigrants, they are prepared to hide them and make a stand against the realisation of the police decision.

This group also includes local development groups, some 400 of them, who work, in particular, in the countryside to prevent their old homesteads from dying out. Directed against the large-scale world in general and the large-scale community in particular, they mobilise the citizens to create a meaningful life in what looks like a condemned countryside. They react against lop-sided territorial representation. It is not unusual for them to turn their backs on party members (Herlitz 1999).

The activist will happily say that, even in a state governed by law, it is legitimate to break the law if higher ethics so demand. He or she sees himself/herself as a guardian, an assessor in the service of the state and democracy.

One example cited by the interviewees was about the Swedish animal protection law (which, by the way, was launched by the politicians as a kind of gift from the nation to the writer, Astrid Lindgren, on her 80th birthday). When they see how it is being implemented they say:

– If it was the intention of the Members of Parliament that the veterinary authorities should circumscribe the law, then it should be re-written. But, if the law mirrors the will of the people, the authorities should be given more precise implementation regulations (Jacobsson and Hebert 1999).

The activists use an assessment perspective based on morals to challenge representative democracy.
The Destroyer

Up till now, the five types of citizens presented here can, in one way or the other, be seen as well behaved, disciplined and the producers of reasonably successful political socialisation processes. But, Swedish democracy, yes representative democracy, also harbours citizens whose aim is to destroy democracy. The destroyer is the kind of citizen who exploits democracy’s generous array of freedoms and rights and fills them with gross violations of values central to democracy such as tolerance and equality. The election in 1998 gave the xenophobic Swedish Democrats a total of eight seats in municipal councils around the country. For reference, the 100 seats in the country’s municipal counties that were won by the nationalistic National Party in 1936 could be mentioned (Lodenius 1999).

Let me tell you about a fascinating and frustrating experience I had.

It was a lovely, sunny Sunday afternoon. ABF (the Workers’ Educational Association) in Haninge just south of Stockholm had invited people to an afternoon’s discussion on the subject of Democracy. I had just started my lecture when, all of a sudden, the door at the back of the hall opened. In marched six people with steps which were not asking for an excuse, quite the contrary. In a proud and upright fashion, these people walked to the front of the hall and sat down in the six seats which, as fate would have it, had been left vacant. And there was something about them which made it completely clear that they were not the usual kind of person to attend the ABF’s discussion afternoons. For example, their code of dress did not quite tally with that of the rest of the audience.

They had just sat down when one of them asked permission to speak:
“What’s your political background?” he asked.

Slightly disturbed by this “straight”, slightly un-Swedish question, I tried to muddle my way through to an adequate answer.

“Do you believe that we have a democracy in Sweden?” That was the next question.

After I had provided a thorough, well-argumented answer in terms of democratic freedoms and rights, I was about to once more take up the thread of my lecture when another member of the six waved his hand and wanted to say something.

But, at that moment, we heard the thunderous sound of chair legs being pushed across the floor. Right at the back of the hall, a man stood up. He was
about 1.96 metres tall and weighed something like 120 kilos. His appearance did not tally with my prejudiced idea of what ABF members should be wearing for an afternoon discussion on the subject of democracy: he was wearing shiny black motor-bike gear. By his side was his equally well-polished large, black helmet. And he said, in a loud and angry voice:

“If you down there at the front (he meant those six lads, not me) do not shut up, I will personally throw you out!” And he certainly had the physical resources to do so.

And that was just what the six xenophobic non-conformist participants – two were elected representatives on Haninge’s local council – had waited so long for. Their reply came like a triumphant arrow, aimed at me:

“Well then. You were just boasting about freedom of speech. But, as soon as someone wants to take advantage of it, someone else comes along and threatens them with physical violence. Do we have a democracy in Sweden?”

There are indeed different ways of being a citizen in today’s Swedish democracy. All ways are possible, most highly respectable but only one way is unacceptable. Analytically, they may be seen as a multitude but also as a contradiction. In the light of democratic theory, there is reason to now find out now which more or less alternative model of democracy they represent or promise.

**Four democratic models**

Obviously, Swedish democracy is suffering from considerable outer pressure, at the moment. It is not just a question of multi-level governance in general. It is not just a question of the considerable growth of administrative levels, from three to, in some cases, seven levels, with politically elected boards. Nor is it enough to describe it as the old amateurishly run political model, complemented by new types of partnerships, networks, alliances etc. A description of that kind could either hide the democratically theoretic challenge or disregard unequivocal anomalies or, in some kind of organic confidence, play down the inherent conflicts.

Instead, I would like to try to describe Swedish democracy in its present form as a mixture of at least four different models of democracy. As I will show later, it has clear implications concerning the kind of citizens that are created. My classification is based on David Held’s typology (Held 1987).
Competition-based elite democracy

In all essentials, Swedish democracy is most like a competition-based elite democracy. Within the framework of representative democracy, the “party democrats” are the ones in particular to come out as the winners of the battle, over the responsible democrats but mainly over the participating democrats. The focus on efficiency and leadership has become clearer and clearer. Unbridled citizen participation would also jeopardise stability (Holmberg 1999). The democratic institutions must show overall efficiency in that the system can supply the values it promises and claims to possess (Karlson 1998).

The democratic history of the 20th century is primarily that of the parties. “The representative democracy became a party democracy based on united parties with clean-cut programmes and party discipline” (Holmberg 1999, p 10). The voters entrust the representatives with the task of carrying out the party programme.

As a result of various arrangements, the parties have consolidated. Of the seven national parties, five have existed throughout the entire political history of the 20th century. Only three further national parties came on the scene, one of which had only one election success. Through party support on different levels of representative democracy, the state guarantees the parties’ primacy.

But, in the Swedish democracy, there are several worrying features when it comes to party legitimacy. Firstly, election turnout is on the decline, secondly there is less trust in the politicians. Since the first line of development can easily be confirmed, it is also the one that gives most reason for specific, jointly shared concern (Demokratiutredningen 2000). Thirdly, the national parties are threatened both from above – from their own European policies – and below – from the new local political parties. Fourthly, the multi-cultural shift in the Swedish electorate has led to increased stress and strain on the system. The theory assumes that it is the representation of opinion rather than that of groups that is decisive for the legitimacy of the system. That assumption now appears more daring. The voter is being put to the test.

Law-based democracy

Only to a rather limited extent, does the Swedish constitution show signs of a division of power. One of the main signs comes perhaps from the municipal government. But that is also strikingly elastic and can, at any time, be withdrawn by the government and parliament. Another sign comes from the Swedish civil
service, whose servants, in accordance with a central constitutional idea, should not take orders from any political leader, however high up, but only from the Swedish judicial authority.

In a comparative perspective, the Swedish way of democracy historically must be described as a way in which the party representatives have been given great responsibility for safeguarding the rights of individual citizens as well as of groups of citizens. Participation by elected representatives has been the main route to gain political control of both individual and human rights. The lack of a strong judicial review process clearly illustrates the great trust in politicians as a satisfactory guarantee against discrimination.

However, several contemporary developments strengthen the constitutional line of development very markedly. First of all the traditional Swedish institution of the ombudsman has been developed. To strengthen individual rights against discrimination of different kinds, several ombudsmen were set up during recent decades.

First and foremost the membership of the EU brought with it, both directly and indirectly, institutional changes in that direction. EC law has automatic priority over Swedish law. National rules must be put aside if they conflict with EC law (Wiklund 1999). Thus, the EU membership has, de facto, been given a greater element of power division than that which has, of tradition, characterised the Nordic model of democracy. The Swedish constitutional framework now show a larger streak of political decision-making by courts and lawyers instead of elected politicians (Holmström 1999). Somewhat critically, one could say that there are no longer any national legislation projects (Nygren 1999). In that way, the democratic reach of the EU-affiliated Nordic states has, without doubt, been restricted while the constitutional state has expanded (Holmström 1999).

The transformation of the Bank of Sweden is also going in the same direction. By granting it increased political independence, the politicians have, de facto, reduced the(ir) democratic, political government of monetary policy and given executive experts increased elbowroom. The deregulation of the telecommunications market and the electricity market seems to be moving in the same direction. Or, perhaps, it is rather a question of a “re-arrangement” with new, non-political, authoritative standard-setters and by means of, for example, professional standardisation. The guiding force of these standards lies somewhere between those of the norms and the directives (Brunsson 1998). However,
the state has not abdicated. Not least through internationally operating legal firms, global private or semi-public players obtain a global control monopoly with the consent of the national states (Sassen 1999).

However, and to a considerable degree, the transfer of these powers to both national and trans-national courts of law means that popular power is curbed (Hermansson 1999). The point of being politically active is lost. The consumers become more numerous. It is, however, an open question what the reforms will mean for the individual and for human rights.

New-pluralistic democratic theory

But Swedish democracy also has, to a considerable extent, well-organised pressure groups and a social order characterised by activities. Even the state civil servants are lobbyists and fight for their interests in specialised organisations, directed against the national politics they are there to serve (Demokratiutredningen 2000).

Corporatisation is characterised by the presence of state-authorised groups in decision-making assemblies. On public committees and on the boards of the civil service. That order has been abolished in several respects. But what seems to arise in the place of decorporatisation is that the same old corporate interests are appearing in the shape of lobbyists (Hermansson et al. 1999). There seems to be no division of power. There is still obvious inequality with regard to political participation. The former, or at least formal, openness – under the terms of the Freedom of the Press principle – has been replaced by a lobbyist culture, which is hard to fathom. Resourceful lobbyists operate quite freely and without hindrance within the whole spectrum offered by multi-level governance for effective decision-making, from local decisions about the location of a hyper-market to global decisions concerning the conditions governing the participation of African farmers’ associations in world trade. This development seems to harmonise with the medialisation of politics. The socio-economic imbalance of politics is reinforced. Strangers are created.

Important citizen groups have more and more faith in their own ability to act and select, more or less autonomously, from the public services. As a result of the independence and autonomy created by democracy, the citizen seems to want to throw off his representatives and go it alone. Marketisation has entered the arena, if only in an embryonic form for the time being. Undeniably, this has meant a limitation of democracy in the sense of the possibility of being able to achieve insight, influence and public debate (Lundquist 1999).
Deliberate participating democracy

While these enormous, dramatic but ephemeral transfers of power are being made, a spectrum of democratic experiments is being carried out in other parts of the multi-level governance, a spectrum probably never seen before (Montin 2002). On the local level, they often test, with the help of IT, hearings about traffic planning and advisory voting on the subject of tax. This creates a new arena for the citizens. Even cabinet ministers take part in the chat. The population of one particular district is given the opportunity to put direct questions to members at sessions of the district council. Researchers too carry out experiments to see what deliberation means in practice.

But perhaps the most interesting thing is what the citizens do with IT. Without being asked, without being forced, they come to grips with the instrument. Sometimes this is done to destroy democracy. But, on other occasions, it is done to fill the public space left empty by globalisation (Barber 1999). Discussions are started, facts presented, actions planned and opinions are formed. Whatever was supposed to be secret is now made public. It is difficult to describe this as anything other than an important achievement for a deliberate democracy. Activists, even previous loyal servants are tempted to “come out of the closet”.

User-influence is also arranged along new channels, such as parent and pupil influence in schools. Operations are transferred to various associations in civic society. General education organisations invite the public to talks, not seldom on the subject of democracy, sometimes in old, actual rooms, sometimes in new, virtual spaces. Adult education lives, comparatively, a very active life – like a relatively autonomic, undemanding form of cultural quest in both individual and collective education and development (Larsson 1999). This must, of course, be weighed against the backward move of the temperance and free church movements which were formerly strong democratic movements but which are now losing members and seem to be unable to recruit young members as they did before (Vogel et al. 2003). The informal way of taking human, loyal and joint responsibility for people outside your own family and relations does not, however, show any signs of weakening (Jeppsson Grassman and Svedberg 1999). But there is a threat from the state’s and the municipalities’ economic-administrative inability to leave things alone, which threatens the freedom of these associations. In this way, social values run the risk of being diminished by a number of individual and independent arenas for mutual conversation (Demokratiutredningen 2000).
Attention must also be given to the importance of the media. There is reason to be critical of how the work of many journalists, probably unconsciously, contributes to further distrust of our elected representatives. The tendency towards media monopolies and the concentration of ownership entails a threat to the multitude of angles to the perspective (Weibull and Gustafsson 1999). The forming of opinions and free debate, fundamental to democracy are threatened by “a lot of episodic chat but few enlightening and thoughtful conversations”, (Demokratiutredningen 2000, p 76). Stereotypes are reinforced instead of modulated pictures. Journalists can revel in the “well-being of political distrust” (Ekström 1999). A healthy scepticism concerning the political wielding of power could easily turn into cynical contempt. The media are now relatively isolated as media these days; popular movements and parties have, in many respects lost their historically strong positions as important forms of media.

When it all boils down, school is important for what it teaches and what it stands for. At the moment, in Sweden, work is being carried out on basic values questions with democracy at the centre. Socialisation processes, the critical training of citizens now appear even more important in globalised and medialised political communication. A school of this kind is, at the same time, the result of deliberate democratic theory and one of its prerequisites (Englund 1999).

Four analytical concepts of citizens

It should now be apparent that democratic development in Sweden is marked by a meeting of different kinds of democracy. It could also be described as a confrontation between different, incompatible concepts of citizens. I will, therefore, return to the four models mentioned above but now to pose the question: what concepts of citizenship do they represent?

Law-based democracy: Reactive citizenship

Law-based democracy implies unambiguously, reactive citizenship. People react to some injustice and take the matter to court. They act when necessary as long as the process is on-going. They do it out of self-interest to assert their rights. Their actions are based on authoritative documents such as regulations, conventions and standards. If they object to the court’s decision they still have a chance to protest. They can appeal to a higher court of law if they feel an injustice has been done. The procedure requirements are strict and familiar.
They are also blind: it should not matter who you are or who your opponent is.

**Competition-based elite democracy: Active citizenship**

The moment of voting is the moment of truth in a competition-based, elite democracy. Here too, people utilise their rights after a fixed period of time. Here too, the procedure is predictable. Election participation gives the political system and its leaders the legitimacy to act on my behalf until the next election. The alternatives available are more or less set, even though a citizen can try to add another one to the list. If he/she does not have faith in the parties or the system, the citizen will not vote at all. But the citizen acts anonymously. The secrecy of the ballot is protected.

**New-pluralistic democracy: Hyper-active citizenship**

Here the ever wakeful political consumer is introduced. He is forever checking the price and quality of what he gets, including various added values of a symbolic, ecological and global type of justice. That ensures the best possible efficiency. In the short term, what is offered is set here too, just as preferences are. Discretion is a virtue. The flow of funds is de-personified, even though, in principle, there is a chance to negotiate.

**Deliberative participating democracy: Pro-active citizenship**

The most important element in the citizenship of deliberate democracy is, perhaps, preparation, the intellectual preparation for the decision. People continuously take part in communication with other affected parties, on the basis of a feeling for the general good, a kind of dutiful responsibility. The aim is to reach a consensus. The common “responsibility” is based on a kind of conception of a deeper justice, a meeting face to face.

These different types of citizenship can be summarized in various dimensions: the place, the frequency of activity, the role, the motives, the final product and rationality and in terms of a fundamental, democratic direction to form what could be called civic virtues.

**Civic virtues**

Finally, I would like to draw some normative conclusions based, on the one hand, on a participatory democratic ideal and, on the other, on the findings of the research that was carried out by the Commission on Democracy in
Sweden, 1998–2000. I will address what could be seen as three civic virtues which ought to be reinterpreted in the light of the democratic development in Sweden during the last few decades.

Involvement

Involvement is the central hallmark of civic spirit. It constitutes the citizens’ interpretations of their experiences of participating in and wielding power. No one is left out in advance. Everyone’s knowledge, experience and opinions are required if the decisions are to be good ones. Everything should be done to demolish the reasons for not inviting someone to join in, for example, mental, physical and linguistic reasons.

But, individual obligations to be committed, involved, included and interested correspond to the institutionalised right to participate. In this way, a social organisation is kept together, value-wise, and the growing differentiation and fragmentation are neutralised.

There are good reasons to attach greater respect to the common character of citizenship. For the sake of both the collective and the individual, the civic imperatives to take responsibility and make a contribution must be stressed, cultivated and demanded. Democratic, participatory theory argues that it can prevent elitism, powerlessness and estrangement from growing in Swedish society (Barber 1984). A democracy of citizens who, in various ways and in different situations, take responsibility for more people than just themselves is both the goal and the only way of reaching that goal.

This perspective is not just, or perhaps not in the first place, based on an abstract public interest. In the long term, if not before, it will be in every citizen’s interests to try to solve the common problems and ensure that they are solved in a civilised way. Where no confidence-inspiring meeting places for collective problem solving exist, the seed will be sown for the undemocratic social development of cynicism, intolerance and violence.

To be involved in, and have access to, discussions and decisions which determine your fate is, however, a prerequisite for even wanting to participate. That calls for both physical and mental availability. It is important that political democracy, regardless of the extent of its mandate, should correspond to the citizens’ expectations of involvement. Everyone’s experience and knowledge are required if a democracy is to work.

In this specific respect, researchers have seen some signs of worrying deve-
lopments. Confidence in the political institutions is on the decline especially among those who are most dependent on them for their welfare. Many citizens waver in their trust in the political institutions because they cannot see the value of involvement in their routines and actions. It is understandable that the discord between civic virtues and the ethical practices of the institutions can lead to citizens losing their trust in the institutions of democracy. It is not certain that this would result in an activist desire for revolt. It could also result in a retreat due to powerlessness, a kind of estrangement.

The expectation of involvement inherent in the civic identity must be nurtured, respected and complied with. On occasion, these legitimate civic demands have been accorded too little importance. There is a pattern of political negligence with regard to the people’s general expectations of political authority. Reforms with major implications for democracy have been staged without sufficient analysis being made within the political parties of what they may entail for democracy. The resultant debates, such as the one following the referendum about Swedish membership of the EU and municipal decisions about cut-backs, have revealed a deeper rift between civic expectations and the ability of elected representatives. Decision-makers have failed to judge both the decision-making process and the content on the basis of what they indicate in terms of involvement and inclusion. They have sometimes taken important political decisions and passed them on to places other than the party and political arenas. Sometimes, they have not taken responsibility for the actual decisions they have made. As a result, political power is now obscure and the subject of distrust.

In other words, the fact that civic virtues are changing is not necessarily or particularly the fruit of outer, general, global shifts in values but may also be the result of inner changes of ideas, forms and actions. So, instead of blaming either the citizens or the politicians for democracy not working as intended, one might look for new forms in which openness and discussion can safeguard the prerequisites of the meaningful participation of political equals realised by the first century of popular government.

Participation

In the Swedish popular government tradition, the far-reaching and, at the same time, deep participation of the citizens is to solve common concerns centrally. Participating democracy has sometimes been translated as popular movement
democracy. Swedish democracy has been a layman’s democracy. In many small municipalities, amateurs have taken on positions of trust which, for a long time, meant that they also implemented the decisions. The extent to which the citizens are active in various kinds of associations has been an important gauge of Swedish popular government, and it still is. The communicative search for what is best for everyone increases the quality of decisions; it encourages participation and also increases political awareness.

The citizens should not just be offered the opportunity of participating when the often-complicated questions of common interest must be dealt with. It is taken for granted that they really do so – for several reasons. By participating, the citizens generate a large amount of human and social capital, which all spheres of society can enjoy and benefit from. Those who do not receive the equivalent training in creating trust by being tolerant towards people with different opinions, lose out on schooling and self-development. Those who practise co-operation, positive criticism and tolerance are an asset both to themselves and to society in general, for both the private and public spheres. Democracy is the life-style or disposition which both constitutes the prerequisite for and is the result of the consciously designed and living form of government. It cannot just be theoretically acquired. Only when it is applied and asserted in word and action, will it be credible.

If one wishes the citizens to participate when matters of common importance have to be solved, on different levels of the social administration and during different times of their lives, they must be offered a variety of opportunities. Otherwise, democracy will not be a part of their life experiences and a joint project of meaningful and effective ways of action. From a participative democratic point of view, the opportunity structure for involvement plays a crucial role for the quality of democracy. Here, schools, general education and other non-profit making organisations must generously allow or offer different forms of participation which the citizens will consider meaningful and effective. Sometimes, there is reason to try out other forms of democratic government.

Without, for one moment, abandoning the endeavour to democratise these institutions, there is sometimes reason for the state and the municipalities to pass it on to associations, companies and other, not just local association, forms to administer their own business in the spirit of democracy. From a more autonomy-seeking way of democracy there is reason to be rather critical
of the well-meaning but self-centred desire for expansion and the ambition to wield control which authorities and decision-making assemblies often prove to have since they are built on monopolistic and self-centred conceptions of how democracy can best be ensured and promoted. A strong state and strong municipalities do not necessarily indicate democratic strength.

However, it would be irresponsible to claim that it is democratically valuable to participate in all kinds of associations where problems are solved jointly. Not all collective activity is actually characterised by democratic ideals. Some of the (un)civic associations sometimes use violence and threats and must therefore be repudiated, for example some militant groups of animal rights activists. There are organisations, whose working forms are anti-democratic, for example totalitarian religious sects. And there are also associations of destroyers, for example, neo-Nazi movements, whose aims or means can never be tolerated from the point of view of democracy.

Democracy is also developed by the citizens, in decisive situations, acting with courage to stand up for their beliefs. But this courage must be built on empathy and solidarity. It must have its roots in respect for the equal value of all people in order for it to constitute an asset to democracy.

Is it just as democratically valuable to participate in solving major common concerns as in dealing with the minor ones? And is it also reasonable to consider all kinds of participation in solving common concerns as being of equal democratic value? Somewhat critically: is a road association as important for democracy as a municipal district committee or board? The answer is simple: it is the process and the discussions held between several involved parties that are valuable. That is where and that is when civic virtues are developed. Therefore, there is a need for many public spheres in which citizens can meet. This is nothing new in the Nordic tradition of democracy of strong educational aspirations. The American political scientist, Putman, almost confirms a collective experience (Putnam 2002).

So-called deliberate democratic theoreticians criticise a minimal democratic perception that focuses on the right to vote and the right to make decisions and interpret democracy as a way of effectively reaching a majority decision. And, of course, the many mid-term talks and discussions and attempts to solve common problems are really central democratically. Just to participate is not enough. In that way it can be ensured that, in different public spheres, several
opportunities for the common considerations of separate political solutions and their consequences are offered.

But it is not always possible or desirable to reach a consensus like the so-called communitarian school. Neither blood relationships nor common opinions or any metaphysical contracts form the foundation of citizenship. At a time of growing differentiation, it is even more necessary to emphasise and cultivate the pluralistic features of democracy. It is even more important, in all these situations, to discuss more or less private matters in public on the basis of various norms. It is in civil society – outside the market, state and family – that we, the people, can recognise and confirm, adjust or abandon our opinions and our approaches. But, to prevent civil society from becoming just islands for like-minded people discussing special issues, the state must also create arenas where people can meet and ask questions concerning common premises.

In my case, this argument leads to an attempt to partly detach the discussion on Swedish democracy from its dominant liaison with state, municipality and representative democracy in order to attach it more firmly to civil society. Every citizen should have equal opportunities to participate in the wielding of power. The ideal of democracy should characterise all social situations.

In the light of this change, which will also probably characterise the near future, the ideal of participating democracy has to be both defended and deepened. The claim that democracy is an institutional arrangement characterised by the fact that it gives its citizens the opportunity of electing their leaders should not be dismissed. But that is not sufficient, since some parts of the Swedish popular government have tendencies which harmonise with the fact that election behaviour is the only expression of citizenship. Voting is the only method of expression for the citizens. When a conception of this kind gains ground in the various political organisations, the natural reaction of the citizens is to consider the mid-term period as a period between two elections when responsibility is delegated to the elite of the elected parties. If there is the opportunity to participate democratically on matters common to everyone, both the quality of the decisions and the legitimacy of popular government will increase. But in that case, there is a need for a special kind of participation.
Influence

In the words of the Swedish Power Study, democracy can be seen as a “set of criteria concerning society’s distribution of power” (Maktutredningen 1990, p 11). Therefore, it is noteworthy, but also, symptomatic, that the word “power” does not appear in either of the two directives of the Parliamentary Commission on Democracy (other than in the digest of the Power Study). Furthermore, the term “influence” is used only once (about the influence of the citizens of the EU). A view of democracy is hiding here which only, or mostly, attaches importance to involvement and participation but ignores what popular government can contribute towards the social, cultural and economic result.

In other words, it is not just any kind of participation that a deliberate democratic opinion refers to but participation with real possibilities of opportunity to wield influence in the long term, processes able to provide influence over a decision. It is worth stressing that democratic processes can never promise any influence, just promise the participant that he/she will be listened to. A democracy is in often in desperate need of good losers. Indeed, a democracy is the only procedure that is able to create good losers, since it takes every person’s argument under equal consideration.

Of course, one may assert that political participation is valuable because it develops the personalities of the participants. In this way, a public spirit and feeling for the common good are created. The kind of democracy which gives participation itself a central role should be strongly defended because it means that indispensable civic virtues are bred. When individual citizens or companies come out of their private spheres in order to talk and co-operate with others, they create, bit by bit, the public culture necessary to solve common problems, properly and legitimately. But can this be considered to be sufficient inspiration for people to participate?

To disregard the fact that the point of involvement and participation is to solve common problems appears too risky and idealistic. It would be more reasonable to consider civic virtues and public spirit as “desirable side effects of an activity encouraged by another instrumental purpose” (Hermansson 1992, p 99). The unprecedented success of democratic movements, Swedish popular movements, for example, can probably, in many ways, be explained in the sense that their operational concepts and form of operations link theory to practice, thought to action, participation to result.
One large and growing problem concerning Swedish popular government is closely connected to the fact that participation in the traditional forms of politics does not entail any wielding of influence. The available forms are not good enough; they do not inspire confidence and are not considered meaningful either. Therefore, bit-by-bit they lose out on credibility and the power of attraction in the eyes of the citizen who wants to achieve something. When the traditional forms are no longer considered effective, other, more purposeful forms of influence are preferred. The voter and the loyal servant will, at best, become activists.

To the highest degree, the Swedish confidence crisis is based on the fact that citizenship does not entail any influence over social development. Just as a consumer would, people do not see the connection between participation and result. The fact that democracy seems to lack the ability and power to act, yes, the fact too that its agenda is far too restricted and unassuming have constituted a main point in the activists’ criticism expressed in the new social movements (Hadenius 1999; Thörn 2002) That criticism must be taken seriously without any further weakening of representative democracy.

In the same way, if the institutions are to be considered legitimate, the result must be morally acceptable and meaningful. Those who participate must feel that their participation is important and that the decisions made have fair consequences. In other words, the citizens have quite reasonable expectations that their participation or non-participation will make a difference. One of the popular government’s most important problems is civic criticism of the democratic institutions’ lack of popular government. A deliberate democracy assumes that elucidating political leadership exists that can personify and politicise, and that democracy is based on both volition and conflict.

Therefore, there are neither any passive nor any active citizens per se. One becomes active or passive on the basis of one’s virtues, one’s needs and one’s experience. Fortunately, citizenship is dynamic, instead. Not all citizens will become active. But that is no reason to lower the level of ambition. On the contrary, the institutions must be designed so that every citizen is offered the opportunity to participate meaningfully. The potentials of participation have not yet been fully utilised. When a society is undergoing increased diversification and where specific groups of people suffer from involvement and influence, the Swedish tradition argues for more participation in a strategic belief that collective action is preferable to more representation.
References


SOCIAL CONDITIONS
AND HUMAN RIGHTS
In this article, I will try to sketch the complex of ideas that forms the actual practices that enable children to participate in democratic processes concerning their everyday school life or disables them. “Participation” refers to both having “a voice” and being listened to. The Swedish National Curriculum (Utbildningsdepartementet 1994) states that the teacher should ensure that all pupils, irrespective of sex, social or cultural background, are given real influence over their own education. This influence should increase with advancing age and maturity (Ibid.:14). This corresponds with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12, where similar formulations are found:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

When reading these documents, I cannot find that they elaborate on the concept of maturity. Therefore, in an implicit way, they seem to refer to some general assumptions about maturity. How children’s opinions are to be treated seems, as I see it, to be left to doxic (Popkewitz 1998), and sometimes subjective ideas about what constitutes a mature human being. To be in position to define who is mature and who is not means possessing power over the object being defined. The French philosopher, Michel Foucault (1998), states this is the case with most power relations; they manifest themselves more on an interactional micro level than through national policy (see also Rose 1999). In most societies, power is distributed unevenly with age being one important structural principle.

As a social anthropologist, my starting point is that ideas about what constitutes childhood and the nature of the child are culturally defined and, the-

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1 By “participate” I refer to processes that active agents take part in, in order to come to some kind of understanding about something of concern or interest for those involved.

Therefore, social and cultural constructions (James & Prout, 1997; Poluha et al., 2000; Norman, 1996). Different ideas of childhood shapes actual childhood and children in different ways. This has consequences for how social practices take shape (James & Prout, 1997). Whether, and in what ways, children should have influence depends on how children are viewed within a given society, at a given time. Adult ideas about the autonomy of the child influences children’s own conceptions of what is possible to influence and how this should be done (Lovshal Nielsen, 1998). Ideas about children’s participation, therefore, exist in a complex of ideas concerning culturally specific ways of viewing children as well as ideas about what teacher professionalism is all about.

In order to illustrate the complexity surrounding ideas about children’s participation, I will deal in this paper with how the teacher’s task of turning children into nice persons is carried out in two Swedish schools. I will also give some examples of how children’s participation is practiced and, at the same time, undermined by expectations that children should display a positive attitude, should be reflexive and emphatic (rather than negative, critical and angry) and the strategies children employ in order to meet/resist the expectations on them to have “the right attitude”. Positioning research at this micro level, a clash between policies, practice, ends and perspectives is exposed.

In this ethnographic description, the examples presented come from field notes and interviews taken during my anthropological fieldwork with a pre-school class (16 children, 5–6 year olds, that I followed between August 1999–June 2002) a class in the fifth grade (27 children, 11–12 year olds) where I conducted intensive everyday participant observation from January to August 2001. During my fieldwork I have attempted to maintain a child-centred focus, but I have spent considerable time together with the teachers too. My two schools are situated in two different municipalities in central Sweden and could be described very simply, as socio-economically heterogeneous with a slight middle-class overrepresentation.

In Sweden, children attend compulsory school from the age of seven and for the next nine years. The pre-school class is open for children from the year they celebrate their sixth birthday. It is not compulsory but, since 1998, it has been integrated into the general school system. This is a well-attended activity and during the school year of 1998/99, 91.2% of the six year-olds were registered as attending (Skolverket, 2003).
**Bringing up a generation**

In recent discussions in the Swedish media and in schools themselves, today’s generation of young people are often said to lack empathy and respect for teachers. Parents are accused of being too weak in framing their children’s life with authority. According to teachers I meet, school has increasingly become an arena where “upbringing” competes with academic education. One of these teachers told me that, nowadays, they send homework in mathematics and spelling home for the parents to take care of while they spend a lot of time in school with children’s upbringing and teaching children how to behave. Something is wrong, she concluded.

At the same time as I hear teachers try to resist their role as “upbringers”, the task of moulding children into socially competent, respectful and empathic persons is closely linked to the teaching profession. Teachers put lots of energy into reproducing their own standards of behaving and thinking. In teachers’ stories, parents appear to represent in many respects the opposite of what the teachers stand for – controlled development of crucial skills and disciplining of the children together with routines that stand for stability in the children’s lives. These are important elements that help constitute the teacher’s professionalism – a professionalism to a large extent defined in opposition to what is described as weak parenting and lack of resources in schools (Bartholdsson 2003).

**Hunting the right attitude**

During fieldwork with these classes, strongly outspoken expectations for the children to be ”positive”, “alert” or ”cheerful” are regularly observed in everyday interactions between teachers and children. Children behaving in accordance with these expectations are considered “nice to deal with” by teachers. In addition to such words as “positive”, “cheerful” and “on the alert”, words such as “negative” and “sullen” are used as comments about and to children. Here I will present some of the forums where these expectations and problematic attitudes are dealt with.

“Progress review sessions”

Progress review sessions are held every term with each student and his or her parent/s. In these discussions, judgements on the child’s attitudes are made and the student is encouraged to look at him/herself and work on improving him- or herself both when it comes to skills in mathematics, doing homework
or behaving in the classroom. Almost every student is said to have at least one minor behavioural problem such as talking too much, too loud, too little, at the wrong time, bothering too much about others, not remaining in his or her chair, complaining too much or having a tiresome, negative attitude. No one can be entirely successful. Social skills are discussed and the teacher tells the parents about how friendship relations are progressing and, hopefully, about how nice and cheerful he or she is. The discussion aims at having the child identify problems, agree to work on correcting them and to seal this, a contract is written between the three partners present: child, parents and the school, represented by the teacher.

In one progress review session in the fifth grade I listened to Frida taking on all responsibility for her bad relationship with the teacher. This was a surprising turn for my ears because I had earlier listened to her complaints about how unjustly she is treated by the teacher. Other girls in the class reacted to this too and gave Frida support. But in this discussion, she was talking about herself as being insecure and often moody. The teacher was responding to this in a positive way. She told Frida that people who know and who can admit they are doing something wrong have a good potential for change and people that do not see their own deficiencies can never improve themselves.

To be reflexive is a quality that forgives almost any wrongdoing. It is an act that would, in the end, produce positive, empathic and socially competent children. It is, thus, besides being positive, important to be self-critical as a child. The teacher might stand as a role model in this by admitting her own minor shortcomings but the focus is on the child. And the reflexivity expectation inclines more heavily towards the child than the teacher.

When I interviewed Frida later, she told me that she did not consider there was any point in being oppositional and saying what she really thought about her relationship with the teacher at the progress review session. She said her parents would believe the teacher because she was an adult and that they want her to be successful and well liked by everyone.

“The week-book”

Different ways of achieving reflexivity with the children were practiced. In the fifth grade, they have sporadically been writing a personal “week-book” since the fourth grade. In order to understand their writing, we need to consider the circumstances the “week-books” are written under. This is something that the
teacher has initiated and she is the audience to whom the writings have been directed since long before I came into the picture. For a period, they were instructed to write down something that was good and something that was bad during the past week. Good things were often connected with being/playing with friends, being with a parent for the weekend or having a favourite school task. Bad things were often injuries, sickness, too much noise in the classroom and fights. At the time when I came into the class, the writing was to be carried out a bit differently. Now they were supposed to write expectations for the week ahead and evaluate the past week. For the first two months, these expectations were supposed to be relevant for the time spent in school. Before the first break in the spring term, they were instructed to write about expectations about both school and their free time. In the expectation/evaluation writings made by the children, one thing stands out as maybe more important than many other things. This was about being nice, being good to classmates and teachers followed by reflections on whether you succeeded or you failed. In the expectations part, they often wrote about hoping to be nice, positive and working hard. They also wrote about being treated well by others. The most frequent things that occurred are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expectations</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hope to be positive</td>
<td>Everything turned out as expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be nice to everyone</td>
<td>It was a good week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be treated nicely by others</td>
<td>It was fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To work hard in school</td>
<td>It did not turn out well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn a lot</td>
<td>because of injuries or sickness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everything should be fine</td>
<td>Schoolwork did not turn out well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have fun</td>
<td>because classmates talked to much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To finish school tasks</td>
<td>I have been positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To do the homework</td>
<td>I think I have been positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looking forward to school holidays</td>
<td>I have not been in any fights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be helpful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be friendly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have nice breaks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be nice to siblings at home</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To improve in athletics (swimming, football)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To think harder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a good time with friends</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 I always asked permission from each child to read the week-book.

4 More rare opinions are: to expect to be freed from playing in the class orchestra or writings about the possibility of “freezing” and “falling”. Practising being “just”, managing in school, but remaining fuzzy at home. There are also expectations for better achievements in school in order to do well in the “national tests” that are done in the 5th grade.
The teacher told me she does not read these books although she has instructed the children to hand them in regularly. She regards it more as being a question of having the children reflect on their ways of behaving and attitudes towards schoolwork. Since their writings do not reveal any of the dissatisfaction expressed in more informal situations, they can be read as a way of presenting themselves as having the right attitude, a positive attitude towards learning and towards people. Expectations have the character of “promises” and since the children do not know that the teacher does not read their books, their writings are in some way constraining/obligating. They become a way of controlling children by their own doings.

“Friends’ talks”

Another example of a way for the teachers to have the children reflect over themselves and over other children’s actions were so-called “friends’ talks” (kom­pissamtal), which occurred during the second term of the pre-school year. I have understood that these kinds of talks are practised in many schools all over Sweden. Children who thought that someone had been bad could turn to the teacher and she would immediately arrange a friends’ talk. These had to be carried out at once because, otherwise, according to the teachers, the children would not know for sure what it was all about. The whole class gathers and everyone that knows something about the actual incident can speak. A friends’ talk means a moment in the middle of everything for the child requesting it. For some time the children were requesting friends’ talks about almost any incident. The perpetrator was supposed to confess and regret any misdoings in public. The party that had been offended in some way was supposed to tell the group about how he/she feels. Greater focus is placed on confession and reflexivity than on understanding the conflict that gave rise to the whole thing in the first place, according to my observations. This is an action that directs focus away from the conflict and you are forgiven (by teachers) through your confession. With the friends’ talk, another teacher goal is achieved: talking about feelings. This is also considered an important step towards developing another “quality” – empathy – learning to understand how other people are feeling. Another aspect of this is to understand that teachers have feelings too and, in the fifth grade, one of their teachers repeatedly told the children, when they were not paying attention to her, that she felt they were insulting (Sw. kränkte) her.

On the other hand, the children also express their feelings of being insulted
by teachers. They discuss this with friends, but also with me, the participant observer in their class. When some children oppose demands that they be “positive” persons, this means taking real risks. Being oppositional with teachers may be considered tough in some groups of children. Daring to challenge teacher authority could be a way of showing strength. This, however, is risk-taking, and a delicate balancing act. You need to have a fairly good relation with the teacher between the conflicts and, in most cases, your relation with the teacher is not entirely bad or entirely good. In some cases, children and teachers are unable to like each other but, nevertheless, they have to make things work.

**Among friends?**

The balancing act becomes even more complicated if we consider that a “negative attitude” not only lowers your chances of being liked by the teachers, but could also jeopardise your peer-group status. The teacher’s “dislike” of some children is used as a guide to whom it is rewarding to report or refer to as an oppositional personality. In different situations, it is possible to use these “bad” classmates as a way of appearing nicer yourself. The children in both the pre-school class and the fifth grade also refer to other children who represent the wrong attitude or are explicitly considered by the teachers to be negative. For instance, during a progress review session with Marie in the fifth grade, the teacher brought up the subject of being positive. The teacher said she appreciated that Marie did not object to doing things. Marie said she was not like “Amanda” (a rather oppositional girl in the class, often considered “sullen” by the teacher) and the teacher agreed.

Friendship – being a friend and being among friends – is one of the most important aspects of school life, for most of the children both in the preschool class and the fifth grade. Friendship and peer-group status are parallel projects going on beside history class or multiplication while children are working on their internal relations. They mimic or whisper to each other, send notes, make plans, leave their places, even shout across the room. This is something that explodes into the open whenever the teacher leaves the classroom, even though this is not approved of. This disturbs classroom order and is something you should do during the breaks.

“Telling” on friends is also a way of reproducing rules and morals set by the teachers. Even if a child does not agree with these rules he or she may still be eager to have others obey them. This is a kind of justice and peers act as moral
policemen. In some cases, it is unacceptable to complain about classmates doing bad things if you are considered to be a negative personality yourself. Such complaints will not be taken seriously by teachers. At the same time, as Tommy in pre-school class can tell you, if you are too much into doing things right according to teachers’ standards, you can be called an “ögontjänare” – a toady – being “nice” in front of teachers and not so “nice” when they aren’t looking. Children do this all the time but they don’t usually overdo it, like Tommy. He was, however, very popular within the peer group.

Peers that can be used as bad references, mentioned as examples of how not to behave, are easily identified through their own behaviour in class and by the teacher’s harsh treatment of them. This is often justified by the teachers in order to restore classroom order or to “sätta någon på plats” (put someone in their place). The ways in which teachers act authoritatively and try to keep the class in order reveal that double standards exist, with a difference between the behaviour you prescribe and the one you yourself act out. I often heard children describing their teachers as angry, sullen, screaming and disrespectful. This is often considered by the children to be unpleasant and unfair. The very same kinds of behaviours are condemned by teachers when displayed by children. Acting in such ways, teachers are not considered to reflect on their own actions or being suitable as role models for their own discourse. Children who resist point to this circumstance again and again – often with the consequence that the teacher gets even angrier and children are accused of not being able to “take” a reprimand. Children that have “problems” with this can expect the issue to be on the agenda for their progress review session.

Expressing oneself

Protecting one’s integrity, claiming rights, pointing out unjust conditions or being tough in the eyes of friends are children’s own explanations for why conflicts with the teacher may occur. Children that are disobedient or oppositional often have a tough time as they stand out and stand up for their own opinions and what they consider to be their rights in class. Many children are reluctant to express criticism since this is connected with taking risks and not considered to be the proper way to do things right. Teachers often disregard children’s opinions. In interviews, I discussed this with the children. I asked if they thought that they could express their opinions about things. Here follows a transcript from an interview with Lucas in the fifth grade:
Lucas: No, they won’t listen.
Åsa (Interviewer): No?
Lucas: Like this: “I think you should stop this”... If you say something like that...
Åsa: Yeah?
Lucas: Then you’ll get a bad reputation.
Åsa: Among the teachers?
Lucas: Yeah, I think so.... anyway.
Åsa: Does it matter? Is that important?
L: Yeah. Otherwise they think they have to treat you harder.
Åsa: Yeah?
Lucas: So you get nicer... sort of.
Åsa: But... what would you like them to do things differently from how they are doing things now?
Lucas: I think they could learn more about what it is like being a young person.
Åsa: Mm. If you could change things around here, what would you do then?
Lucas: Get rid of all the old ladies and take in young men and women instead.

Another implication is expressed by Kajsa in the pre-school class as she complains to me about having to do the same things over and over again, singing the same song day after day and wishing they could do more work in their “school book”. She thinks preschool class is boring. I ask her why she does not tell the teacher about this. She answers:

Kajsa: No, I don’t want to tell the teachers.
Åsa: Why not?
Kajsa: I may make them feel sad.
Åsa: So you think they get sad?
Kajsa: I don’t know...
Åsa: Do they cry?
Kajsa: (Giggles) No, I don’t think so.
Åsa: No?
Kajsa: A little like this: “hrm, hrm” (looks severe)
Åsa: Angry or...
Kajsa: Yeah, I think so... They may scold you a little like this...
Åsa: So, you think that when they are scolding you they are actually a bit sad?
Kajsa: Mm.
Considerations about what the consequences might be prevent the children from expressing their opinions. The teacher’s feelings can, as with the “offended” teacher earlier in this text, be used as a means of upholding order and attitudes. Kajsa expects the teacher to be hurt and angry if she expresses her own feelings – something she does not want to do.

**Orchestrated Voices**

The difficulties of true participation are deepened further through existing forums where formal participation is exercised. These formal occasions for participation take place as part of a more explicit political socialization process, where school democracy is exercised. Teachers provide the correct time and place to participate in questions concerning school. One such forum is the class council held every two weeks in the fifth grade. A chairman, a secretary and someone to approve the minutes are elected for each meeting. Everyone in the class is supposed to act in each of these functions at least once. Here the children can raise questions. But these questions are conditional. You are not allowed to raise questions concerning “private” interests and here the teacher acts as gatekeeper. When Ayla, one of two girls in the class who do not eat pork, complains that she always has to eat vegetarian food although she isn’t a vegetarian, the teacher informs her that this is not a forum for such a question. Questions concerning individual matters should be raised by the parents. She stresses that the subject must be of interest for the class as a whole. Even though the teacher is not part of the class council she often disqualifies questions she considers to be unsuitable for the children to discuss. She often sidesteps the council’s chairman in discussions.

The next level of pupil’s participation is the pupils’ council. Here two children from each class act as representatives. The pupils’ council has a chairman and a secretary from the fifth grade and the meetings are supervised by one of the resource teachers who circulate in the school. This teacher does intervene in the discussions that are brought up. At one meeting, she informed the council that they had plenty of money in the council’s funds. She thought that they had better spend this money and she also put forward an idea about what they

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5 These elections have a double function for the children since it also manifests the status ascribed to different children in the class. The children considered most popular were always elected first. When I went through the minutes of meetings during a year the children first elected corresponded with my imaginary sociomethric map of groupings and status within the class.
could do with it. Her idea was to invest in a number of land hockey sticks and basketballs for each class. At this point, a girl from the third grade raised her hand and said that she did not think it was a very good idea to use up all the money in one go. She believed it would be better to save some of it. A boy in second grade also remarked that they already had sticks and balls and that they really did not need any more. The teacher told the council that money should be spent and not saved and without further discussion, everyone in the council voted in favour of the teacher’s proposal. The girl in the third class, that was sitting next to me mumbled: “I still don’t like this” as she raised her hand to vote. This is an example of how children, in spite of being at their own pupils’ council, nevertheless, are orchestrated in a direct manner by a teacher.

Children often discussed their teacher relations with me. They expressed criticism of the way teachers treated them and talked about school being boring. The problems with today’s young generation, as described by teachers and discussed in the media, call for a transmission of democratic values that are thought to prevent bullying, sexual harassment and racism among peers rather than being implemented in processes within school’s authority structure.

One example: learning to speak out is emphasised by the teacher in the fifth grade in order to prevent group pressure. When the teacher wanted to hear how my interviews went, she commented on my positive response, that she had been working in order to encourage the children to speak out, to stand up for their opinions irrespective of what peers thought. This statement is contradicted if, for instance, I consider the conduct policies (trivselregler) that are common in many Swedish schools. These rules often state that children should not object when being corrected by adults. While teachers considered peers to be potentially oppressive with each other, adult authority over children is not problematized.

I have also noted that there were no joint actions taken by the children. They acted individually whenever it came to expressing critical opinions even if the speaker knew he or she had support among peers (see Lundgren 2000). At the same time, a democratic decision, as the teachers in pre-school class would have it, is considered to have been made whenever a majority decision is taken. Opposing majority decisions is treated as being destructive for everyone else. This was particularly the case in pre-school class whenever someone resisted
or objected to doing something. Teachers often refer to things “we” (children and teachers together) have decided, when in fact no decision has taken place. This is often done when referring to regulations whenever someone infringed them in some way.

Managing multiple expectations

What is considered to be competent behaviour is, also within a culture, relational and situationally defined in different ways by different actors representing different discourses within one and the same setting and between settings that you pass during the day. Children move through many contexts everyday, where different aspects of who they are come to light. They even, for example, describe themselves during interviews as somehow different persons at home and at school.

But contexts also mingle. At school, you must handle multiple expectations about who you are and how you should behave. You have to cope with being a child within the authority structure in relation to adults, a student in relation to adult goals and aims for your being there. In the progress review session you have to be the student child and the family child at the same time. There are many systems, many standards, all working at the same time. You have to learn to manage multiple expectations in one and the same situation. Besides maintaining a good relation with your peers, another important competence in school is the ability to “read” the teacher. This is crucial for one’s well-being, as is performing as positive, reflexive and empathic persons – qualities that the teachers want the student to possess. Reflexivity is then seen as a means to many ends – proving to be a person willing to change your ways, trying to do your best, working harder, being nicer and more positive. Reflexivity is constant evaluation of the self in relation to expectations flourishing around you. Empathy is a way of constantly considering someone else’s feelings in response to your own actions, needs and expectations. The mastery of these qualities means taking on responsibility for problems and solving them as a personality problem instead of making opinions clear. Children are encouraged to turn their dissatisfaction over their educational situation into a personal question, turning inwards for solutions at the same time as the questions that can be raised within the democratic forums available are not supposed to be personal at all.
And?

This is, as Foucault (1998) would have had it, the level where power relations are carried out in everyday practice, beyond national policy. My findings are that, from a teacher's perspective, there is an inconsistency between different intentions and a threefold discrepancy between policy, practice and achieved ends. Following the National Curriculum, schools implement democratic forms and emphasise the transfer of democratic values to the next generation. At the same time, at a micro level, real participation is, in practice, undermined under the supervision of empowered teachers concerned with classroom order and the development of socially competent children at the bottom of the authority structure. Social competence, as defined by the teachers and as a goal for teacher professionalism, is a question of conformity and attitudes (about being nice, reflexive, empathic and positive). Social competence, as it comes as a response from children, is a complex performance. You have to come through as “right” according to both peer group standards and in line with the teacher’s culturally defined conceptions about what being a child is all about. Children have to work both systems, and the different ends they represent, at the same time. To adopt (internalize) the “right attitude” might look like submission. But this does not necessarily mean that children actually adapt to the expectations in any tangible way. An alternative interpretation is that we are witnessing performances from, not very old, but truly competent cultural and social actors positioning themselves and being positioned within an authority structure. Through the means of modelling children’s positive, reflexive and emphatic attitudes and making participation conditional, children learn another lesson: Being angry, sullen and oppositional are not qualities of the democratic citizen. In order to be successful in your relations with the teacher you have to “fjäskà” (suck up to her) as Frida told me.
References


WOMEN IN THE CHURCH
SOLIDARITY IN SUFFERING IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV/AIDS?

BY MIRANDA PILLAY

In South Africa the Christian churches are an important factor in society. The church therefore can act as a influential agent of change, which was true for a number of churches in South Africa during the struggle against apartheid.¹ I write as a woman theologian within a Christian tradition and my views are influenced by my experiences as a South African woman of colour for whom the idea of human rights means being pulled between excitement and anxiety. I am excited about the empowering challenges and opportunities made possible by the legal and structural changes since the demise of apartheid² but anxious that those who find themselves in leadership positions within these structures are missing the opportunity to challenge entrenched perceptions and practices that are contrary to a human rights culture based on the dignity of all human beings.

In this article I argue that the rediscovery of possible transformative and liberating principles of the early Christian tradition, within a framework of feminist theology, could contribute toward addressing the complex challenges facing South Africans in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. To develop this argument I will first give a brief background of some basic thoughts in feminist theology and then move on to a discussion of HIV/AIDS in a South African context with particular reference to challenges facing women in the church. First, a few words of introduction describing the experiences of many women in some South African churches.

Women across the world are becoming increasingly aware of discrimination in all forms and guises. In 1989 the Circle of Concerned African Women

¹ Some churches justified a theology of segregation and a doctrine of purity, believing that God has divided all people into collective units and permanently separated them from each other (Bosch 1991:5). On the other hand, in a book published on request by the Anglican Provincial Board of Missions, the author is adamant that, “We must declare that South Africa’s racial structures of society are incompatible with Christian values. But pronouncements are not enough; the social order must be changed”. (Prozesky 1990:89).

² This was marked by the first democratic election in South Africa on 27 April 1994.
Theologians was founded, an African women’s theological community offering a safe space in which African women can “dare to speak and write about many subjects considered to be taboo” (Kanyoro 2001:169).

Historically, struggles for national liberation have taken precedence over struggles against gender oppression. However, throughout the ages, many women in different parts of the world have challenged society and the church to move away from patterns of sexist thought, behaviour and structures (Masenya 1994:66).3

In the church environment that I was exposed to as a child and teenager, women were (and still are) silent and are not allowed access to the hierarchical structures of “office bearers”.4 I remember women speculating excitedly about whose husbands were to be promoted to a higher office, an annual event that is a highlight on the church’s calendar. If a brother’s work towards “the salvation of his soul” is satisfactory, he becomes an under-deacon in charge of a number of brothers and their families. Thereafter, success in climbing the “clerical ladder” results in becoming a priest, then an elder, and then an overseer. To hold the highest-ranking office of apostle is to have the ultimate authority in the church.

Women in this church are extensions of their husbands – priest-sister, elder-sister etc. that of course creates a hierarchy amongst women themselves. All office-bearing men preach in church, but never in the presence of a man who holds a higher office. Women are not allowed to preach, but they are encouraged to prophesy. The prophecies are interpreted by the highest office-bearing man present.

I regarded the subordination of women in the church as “the natural order of things” and to some extent also enjoyed my father’s success in the church. However, the distinct separation of “spiritual things” and “worldly things” affected me directly. I was not allowed to go on certain school outings because they were “worldly”. To me, it seemed unfair – not so much because the school was “in the world” and because being part of the school also meant being part of the world, but because my friends, who were also Christians, got to go. The explanation? I was a true Christian because I received an anointing from the hands of the holy apostle, the only one with authority from God “to seal” the elect with the Holy Spirit.

3 In the 1890s Elizabeth Cady Stanton, together with a committee of 29 women, wrote commentaries for interpreting passages in the Bible which referred to women (Zikmund 1985:23).

4 I was raised in the tradition of the Old Apostolic Church of Africa, where respect for authority (the church and the government) was paramount, if not reverent.
It is the dynamic tension between subordination and domination, between inferiority and superiority operative in hierarchical relationships and amongst those who experience subjugation and discrimination themselves, that has prompted me to raise and explore the following questions: What influence does the notion of an engendered God have on gender power-relations? What were the challenges of early Christianity as an alternative to the established culture of patriarchal structures? I also explore how feminist theology and particularly the focus on embodiment could contribute towards a re-discovering of our common humanity as we seek an appropriate response to the sexual, economic and cultural vulnerability of women in the context of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I start this journey by reflecting on how sexism sets the stage for dualism in which relationships of domination, control and oppression are sustained.

Sexism in the church: a brief overview

Sexism, according to South African feminist theologian Denise Ackermann (1988:22), is the exclusive ordering of life through gender power-relations. North American feminist theologian, Rosemary Ruether (1993:178) explains that sexism, understood to be both violence and violation to women’s bodily integrity, humanity, and capacity for full selfhood and as such, also is the distortion of male humanity. Traditional gender roles and power relations in churches have contributed to sexist social constructs within which the subordination of women flourishes in the family, the church and society.

The origins of sexism in the Christian tradition are related to the plato- nic-apocalyptic dualistic worldview, which identifies God with the positive (that which is perfect) and “the world” with the negative (that which is imperfect). In this scenario, human beings stand between God and the world, spirit and nature. Ackermann continues:

The stage is set for models of domination and superiority, for the oppression of women by identifying them with nature, earth and the body in its despised and rejected form (1988:22).

Within this dualistic worldview then, man is seen as representing the rational and spiritual part of the self, while woman is seen as having a “greater aptness for sin” and also being less spiritual (Ruether 1993:94). Thus, observes Ruether:

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5 The recognition of sexism as wrong and sinful brings about the total collapse of the myths of female evil, says Ruether (1993:173–183).
Within history, woman’s subjugation is both the reflection of her inferior nature and the punishment for her responsibility for sin (1993:95). Ruether, referring to the theologies of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Barth, further argues that the “pattern of patriarchal anthropology can be illustrated in the entire line of classical Christian theology from ancient to modern times” (1993:96).

In criticism against Nietzsche’s views on gender construction, Croatian theologian, Miroslav Volf (1996:189) quotes Nietzsche as saying, “[...] only he who is sufficiently man will redeem the woman in woman; for the woman, the world is perfect only when she obeys with all her love”. Nietzsche thus contends that man is creator, he is redeemer, and he is commander, while woman is the chaos that cries for the imposition of order. This argument reiterates the notion that woman is sinful and awaits redemption; that she is irrationality that must receive command. Volf (1996:190) argues that such a construction of gender goes in one direction – from the positive of man’s fullness towards the negativity of woman’s lack. Volf suggests that the doctrine of the trinity offers an alternative for Nietzsche-like misogyny.

Some theologians have made the point that the “gender of God” language questions gender equality. Fulkerson (1994:42) argues that male gender constructions dominate the Christian faith and where there are female gender constructions, they include many notions of female subordination. Johnson (1994:42–55) criticizes Ruether’s use of the word “God/ess” because it proves unpronounceable and thus not usable for worship. She (Johnson) agrees that speaking of God in the image of male and female has the advantage of making clear that women do enjoy the dignity of “being made in the image of God”.

Volf (1996:170) says that it is generally agreed that God is beyond sexual distinction. He further states that because God is “personal” we speak of God using masculine or/and feminine metaphors, since there is no other way to speak of persons except in a gendered way. He (Volf) continues his arguments saying that notions about God regarding masculinity or femininity are there because we, who are gendered, have placed them there. Volf maintains that “Gender distinctions are unrelated to the image of God”. Volf (1996:172) is convinced that whether we use masculine or feminine metaphors for God, God

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6 It is generally agreed, specifically amongst feminist theologians, that this particular image of God within the Christian tradition has contributed toward the subjugation of women.
models our common humanity, not our gender specificity. To be adamant about a gender specific deity in order to make male or female gods the horizons for development of specific gender identities is unacceptable if one is committed to the one God of the Christian tradition, continues Volf.

I agree with much of Volf’s argument, but then, how is one to ignore the fact that God incarnate, in Jesus of Nazareth, was male? Volf (1996:175–180), by presenting the trinity as a non-hierarchical relationship between separate persons, introduces the notion of mutual giving of the self, while not losing the self, as the pivotal point to be considered in gender power-relations. While this may be a powerful illustration and inspiration to transform domination within relationships, this image does not erase the reality of the maleness of the one God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit operative within the Trinitarian relationship. So while I agree with Volf that referring to God in gender specific language is a human construct, I question my own conviction in this regard because Jesus, who is God (to me and other Christians), is also male.

Referring to the trinity to illustrate gender equality may not be quite appropriate, but it is effective in illustrating mutuality and reciprocity, which are essential if relationships are to be life enhancing and not oppressive. I add my voice to those who believe that it is not important to find the maleness or feminality of God so that we (Christians), who are either female or male, can align ourselves with God and thereby affirm our superior nature, but that we find our common humanity, our equal human dignity in God incarnate through the birth, life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

At that time, God Immanuel had to be in a male because the world back then would only have paid attention if the prophet, rabbi, teacher or leader were a man. Jesus used this platform to challenge the oppression, subjugation and exclusion based on race, class, gender and age. He risked his comfort zone of rabbi, teacher and leader when challenging racism, sexism, classism, ageism and exclusivism. He restored the human dignity of women and children; of the poor, the unclean, the outcast and all those who were marginalized as the “other”. Jesus created the space for women to claim their credibility as witnesses and dignity as human beings.7

Unfortunately this space was invaded by men who were in control, and for them to retain positions of power women had to remain subordinate. This is

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7 Schüssler Fiorenza (1990:20) who argues that the reality of women’s commitment and leadership “precedes the patriarchal injunctions of the New Testament texts” affirms this.
evident in Paul’s letters where he continuously addresses questions regarding supposedly appropriate behaviour of women in the church. Slowly, but surely Paul’s well articulated advice and guidance for that time and place became ammunition for church fathers thereafter to undo what God had intended.\(^8\) Schüssler Fiorenza (1990:20) argues that, although only remnants of a non-patriarchal Christian ethos are preserved in the bible, “these remnants indicate that such a ‘patriarchalization’ process was not inherent in [the early] Christian community, but progressed slowly”. Thus, she claims that any new liberation praxis in the community of believers’ calls for concrete social action based upon “reflecting on the meaning of biblical texts”.

Given the fact that equality is the seedbed of human rights and that most democratic states have constitutionalized human rights, women, cannot by law, be discriminated against just because they are not men. Women’s basic human rights within political, cultural, economic, social, and family life have received international attention since the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations in December 1979 (CEDAW-website: 4 April 2003). As this Internet source reveals:

> Often called an international “Bill of Rights” for women, the Treaty for the Rights of Women is the culmination of more than 30 years of work by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women. [...] The creation of this Treaty [CEDAW] was the first critical step in developing a standard for basic human rights for women. These standards address abuses [physical, sexual, economic, and political] of women and promote women’s equality of rights and well-being.

Article 2 of the Treaty mandates countries\(^9\) who have ratified the Treaty to “condemn discrimination in all its forms and to ensure a legal framework, including all laws, policies, and practices that provide protection against discrimination and embody the principle of equality” (CEDAW-website: 4 April 2003).

Structures in civil society have changed to give women a voice in the public sphere. If this had been the case when (the Christian) God had decided to take on human form, God might have done so in a female gendered body.

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\(^8\) I am aware that no one can, with any accuracy, infer what God’s intention had been, but I am also aware that Christians, as a people of faith, believe that “in Christ” God relinquished power and domination so that humanity – men and women, slave and free, Jew and Gentile, young and old rich and poor, sick and healthy – may be empowered to live in life-enhancing relationships.

\(^9\) As of November 2002, 170 nations, including South Africa have adopted the Treaty for the Rights of Women (CEDAW-website: 4 April 2003).
It is essential not to ignore either the irreducible duality, rooted in our sexed bodies or the dynamic construction of gender identities, which is culturally constructed, while keeping in mind the fundamental equality of being human, whether male or female.\textsuperscript{10} Keeping in mind that equality does not mean sameness, we must continue to affirm gender equality and seek to change attitudes and practices which embody the subjugation and inferiority of women.

Although sexist oppression is usually seen as “gender privilege of males over females” (Ackermann 1993:22), it often involves oppression of women by women (Kretzschmar 1991:109). This phenomenon has recently become evident in instances where in some church denominations ordained women clergy are simply not “called” to serve in congregations. While it is true that many church leadership structures are still male dominated, I would argue that many women who are now part of churches’ leadership structures do not challenge the status quo because they accept the “natural order of things”. Thus it is imperative that women who seek to make sense of the life of faith and who envisage radical transformation, reflect critically and systematically on structures and practices within the church and society that continue to uphold patriarchal symbols and hierarchical relationships. This, according to Ackermann (1992b:66) is the notion out of which feminist liberation theology is born. It is not my intention to elaborate on the theoretical framework of liberation theology or how feminist theology operates within this framework. For an overview in this regard see Ackermann (1992a; 1993c). Suffice to quote Ackermann (1993:22):

[Feminist theology] has as its goal an emancipatory ecclesia; and theological praxis. Hence feminists today no longer demand only admission and marginal integration into the traditionally male-dominated hierarchical institutions of the churches and theology, they demand radical change of these institutions and structures.

Unfortunately the above quote reflects much of what has remained an academic curriculum. Thus we are continuously challenged to, in creative ways, seek to explore “emancipatory ecclesial and theological praxis” at grassroots level.

\textsuperscript{10} One has to keep in mind that general tendency to polarize gender identities as either male or female might lead to oversimplifying the complexities of sexual identity.
Early Christianity: Liberation movement at grassroots?

Jesus and His first followers, who were women and men, were Jews and therefore, Christian origins cannot be separated from its Jewish roots. Jesus and His movement should be understood as an inner Jewish renewal movement that presented an alternative option to the dominant patriarchal structures, and not as an oppositional formation rejecting the values and praxis of Judaism (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:106–107). The fact that women leaders such as Prisca and Junia in the early church were Jewish women, who challenged the subjugation of women in a patriarchal society, should not be ignored. Thus Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:108) contends that feminists should maintain a hermeneutic of suspicion when re-interpreting texts that speak about women because the historical experience of these women are only available through Jewish or Christian “male texts” where the focus is on male writers and their attitudes towards woman, while ignoring the reality of women’s experiences.

Schüssler Fiorenza points out that because of a serious lack of sources, especially for the pre-70s period, the historical-theological reconstruction of the Jesus movement as an emerging inner-Jewish renewal movement faces difficult hermeneutical problems. Since our general picture of pre-70 Judaism is blurred, and that of early Christianity is equally vague, it is even more difficult to construct a picture of the position and function in the emerging renewal movement at the beginning of the common era. It is however, important that women continue to re-read Biblical texts and also read between the lines, gaining new insights into the praxis of early Christianity and thus empower and inspire women to re-discover transformative and liberating principles.11

Because of the struggles between the emerging transformative view of the Christian movement and that of the dominant patriarchal ethos of the Greco-Roman world, the leadership roles assumed by women were ignored, submerged and pushed aside.

Women in the early Christianity

The people of Israel understood the Roman occupation to be the greatest offence to God’s rule and they believed that God would intervene. Thus, according to Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:111) the establishment of God’s Kingdom (basileia)
was central to all Jewish movements, including the Jesus movement. The various groups may have had different lifestyles which reflected their theology, but they were united in their concern for a political existence and holiness of the elected people of Israel. Jesus however, refused to define the holiness of God’s elect in cultic terms. Instead, he re-interpreted it as “the wholeness intended by creation” (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:112).

The basileia vision of Jesus as the praxis of inclusive wholeness
Jesus did not observe the ritual purity of the “holy table” like the Pharisees; instead he shared table fellowship with the marginalized. Jesus reveals a God of graciousness and goodness who accepts everyone; a God who brings about justice and well-being for everyone; a God who wills wholeness and dignity for all human beings and therefore enables the Jesus movement to be a discipleship of equals (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:135). He called Jews and Gentiles; women, men and children; sick and healthy; sinners and righteous to be part of God’s Kingdom. Jesus even suggested that the women of the poor and the unclean classes – Samaritan women, slave women, prostitutes – will come into the Kingdom of God ahead of Scribes and Pharisees (Ruether 1993:6).

Women were the first non-Jews to become members of the Jesus movement, continues Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:135). She states that women, who had experienced the gracious goodness of God through Jesus, were instrumental in spreading the Jesus movement in Galilee. The discipleship of equals was safeguarded by women who challenged the Jesus movement to extend its table fellowship and the power of the basileia to gentiles. Not only were Galilean women responsible for extending the Jesus movement to include “others” but they were also prominent in continuing the movement after Jesus’ arrest and execution. The women disciples did not flee after Jesus’ arrest and they were also eyewitnesses of his execution. Women were also the first to witness the powerful goodness of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, and it was a woman who took this good news to the men.

Ruether (1993:195) aptly describes the Jesus movement as an alternative to the established culture of dominant patriarchal structures:

This alternative Christianity could have suggested a very different construction of Christian theology; women as equal with men in the divine mandate of creation, restored to this equality in Christ; the gifts of the Spirit poured out on men and women alike; the church as the messianic society, not over against creation but over against the systems of domination.
Jesus movement: Liberation from patriarchal structures?

The Jesus movement gave women a voice in the public sphere and as such challenged the dominant patriarchal ethos through the praxis of equal discipleship. Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:141) asserts that patriarchal structures and poverty are two sides to the same coin and that the majority of poor and starving during the first century were women. This phenomenon has not changed much, since. It is important to note that poverty alone is not a sufficient descriptor of being marginalized in the first century but womanhood added a significant further dimension to the marginalization of women who were specifically also poor. Thus Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:141) argues against a direction of Christian theology which has allowed women to identify with general male categories and groups – the poor, brothers – because it does not allow women to identify themselves as women, in solidarity with other women.

While Jesus’ stance against the marginalization and subjugation of the poor and of women is noticeable, no strategy for structural change is articulated. The gradual patriarchalization of the early church was unavoidable, observes Schüssler Fiorenza (1983:84), because as the Christian movement became institutionalized, women were excluded from church office or their positions were reduced to subordinate marginal ones.

**Women in ministry today**

Female subordination and the general theology of male headship have been the basis of arguments for women’s exclusion from ministry. But women realized that they are uniquely capable of ministering. During the ordination service for Antoinette Brown, the first woman ordained to the Congregational ministry in 1853, the preacher affirmed that, “since the gifts of prophecy are given to women as well as men in the New Testament, there has never been any excuse for excluding women from the ordained ministry” (Ruether 1993:198–199).

Almost one hundred and fifty years hence and many church denominations still refuse to accept that women too are empowered by the Holy Spirit. While some church denominations have accepted the inclusion of women to offices of ministry, it is expected of them to continue within established patriarchal structures. Generally women are included in ministry through the concept of justice and equal opportunity.12 This perspective ignores the fact that the shape

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12 “Antoinette Brown’s ordination was part of the first wave of liberal feminism, which is manifest in the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848” (Ruether 1993:199).
and form of patriarchal ministry resulting in the subordination of women, is problematic and while women win inclusion in this same ministry they do not ask whether ministry itself needs to be redefined. As Ruether (1993:200) points out:

Women are allowed in token numbers to integrate themselves into this male-defined role. They adopt the same garb, the same titles [Reverend, if not Father], and the same clerical modes of functioning in a hierarchical structured church.

Ruether continues her argument referring to the Swedish Lutheran Church, “in which male priests and theologians dragged out all the old arguments linking maleness and priesthood, including pollution taboos, to argue for the illegitimacy of women’s ordination”13 and warns that winning the legal right to ordination is not secure. Women in ministry, continues Ruether (1993:201), like all women in public roles under male rules, “are allowed success only by being better than men at the games of masculinity [...] In such a system it is not possible for women to be equal, but only to survive in a token and marginal way at tremendous physical and psychological cost”.14 Where women do find themselves occupying the same space as men in leadership positions in the church they should not allow themselves to blend into the natural order of things, but challenge any perceptions, practices and structures that give rise to, or perpetuate relationships of dominion or subjugation. Responding to the realities of the HIV/AIDS pandemic could be an opportunity for South African women to, irrespective of race or church denomination, develop skills amongst themselves that will lead to transformation in local churches and society. My conviction is that South African women who hold leadership positions in churches should claim this space to, within the framework of feminist theology, identify, rediscover and develop body-affirming theologies. I will now turn to this subject.

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14 Katie Canonon, an African-American Feminist theologian reiterates this notion when she argues that, “when strong, positive, God-centred women confront their male counterparts, they are usually afforded a subtle, institutionalised option to conform to whatever those in power have defined as normative.”
**Sexuality, HIV/AIDS and the Church**

One cannot respond to the HIV/AIDS pandemic without addressing the realities of human sexuality. Weeks (1995:15) says, “To speak of sexuality and the body and not also speak of AIDS, would be, well, obscene”. Nelson (1979:14) reminds us that “the church is also very much a human community composed of sexual human beings”.

Nelson (1979:17) explains that while sexuality includes sex, which relates to biological organ systems, it goes beyond the biologically-based need which is oriented toward procreation and pleasure. Sexuality is a very basic dimension of our personhood and a way of being called to communication and communion. There has however, been a deafening silence within the church as its focus remains on things “spiritual”, resulting in body alienation. The church has ignored the reality that human beings are also sexual beings. Because sex and sexuality remind us of our bodiliness, it reminds us\(^\text{15}\) that we are not God. In the struggle to be powerful and in control, like God, we strive to be spiritual and deny our bodiliness. By doing this, we ignore the reality of Christianity, “And the word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth […]” (John 1:14).\(^\text{16}\) Thus, if we alienate our body-selves, we alienate ourselves from God and we continue to be blind to what it means to be fully human. The church carries with it the historical baggage of viewing and teaching about sexuality in a negative way, giving the impression that sexual sins, especially premarital sex, matter more than most other sins (Nicolson 1995:20).

Feminist theology identifies sexism – the distortion of gender into structures of unjust domination and subordination – and not sex, as sin (Ruether 1993:37). It is sexism, supported by structures of patriarchy that results in the cultural, sexual and economic vulnerability of women.

In my opinion, feminist theology, operating within a paradigm of Christianity as a theology of liberation, offer a framework for women in the church to respond to the realities of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The reality of AIDS has made us aware, not only of our vulnerability as human beings, but also our vulnerability as sexual beings.

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\(^\text{15}\) As a member of the Christian community of faith, I am part of the Christian story/history with all its facets and as such cannot express myself apart from it.

\(^\text{16}\) Referring to John (1:14) Nelson (1979:8) says that “Christian faith ought to take embodiment seriously”.
The reality of HIV/AIDS

[...] the global HIV/AIDS epidemic, through its devastating scale and impact, constitutes a global emergency and one of the most formidable challenges to human life and dignity, [...] it undermines social and economic development throughout the world and affects all levels of society – national, community, family and individual. [...] Africa, in particular sub-Saharan Africa, is currently the worst affected region (UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS June 2001).

This quotation aptly reflects the disaster facing all of humanity, and in particular Sub-Saharan Africa which is not only the most affected by HIV and AIDS, but also the least prepared and able to deal with the effects the disease has on the lives of individuals, families and communities.17 Dealing with the impact and challenges of HIV and AIDS on a medical and a social level proves to be a daunting, if not near impossible task particularly in South Africa’s rural areas.18 It is estimated that around 4.7 million South Africans are currently HIV positive and this number is growing by 1 800 new infections every day. Approximately 200 000 South Africans already have AIDS. While statistics lay bare in a rather dramatic way the urgency with which the disease needs to be curbed, I want to echo the words of Ndungane, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town in his call to:

[...] measure HIV/AIDS in human terms rather than only in statistics. [...] until and unless we begin to measure the pandemic in terms of broken hearts, orphans, fear, loneliness, pain and grief, we will not adequately respond to a disease which is impacting on all humanity.20

Women, AIDS and poverty

HIV/AIDS does impact on all of humanity. However, while HIV/AIDS may be described as an “equal opportunity” disease, the socio-cultural, economic and sexual vulnerability of many women are the main reasons for the increase

17 While some countries in this region have launched comprehensive and collaborative responses to the pandemic, the South African government directed its resources and energies in debating the proverbial “causes of the fire while Rome is burning”.

18 Added to the fact that many rural people are economically disempowered, limited or no access to resources such as medical treatment and care, transport, running water and sanitation worsens their plight.

19 I will not be dealing with characteristics of the HI-virus and the pathogenesis of AIDS in this paper. See Chapter 2 of WCC Study Document Facing AIDS: The Churches’ Response. See also Nicolson (1995:9–17) and Snidle (1997:9–16) for an overview in this regard.

in infections amongst women.\textsuperscript{21} While the social and economic impact of this disease are felt by thousands of South African living with AIDS, millions of South Africans who are infected, and all South Africans who may or may not acknowledge that they are affected,\textsuperscript{22} the pandemic is fuelled by the cultural, sexual and economic subordination of women.

As infections rise in women, so do infections in the infants born to them. Mother to child transmissions is the primary source of HIV infection in children under the age of fifteen (van Houton 2002:18). If a woman is poor, then long-term health risks may seem irrelevant to her own or her family’s survival. This may explain why prevention strategies that are limited to “knowing the facts” and “becoming aware of the risk” have not succeeded. The link between HIV/AIDS and poverty has often been highlighted and the link between HIV/AIDS and economic benefits has already been established.\textsuperscript{23} As HIV/AIDS begin to affect the day-to-day quality of life of HIV-positive individuals and their families, it leads to increased absenteeism from work, also on the side of spouses and other members of the family. In many instances economic and social circumstances force children to leave school in order to look after a sick parent/adult. This phenomenon perpetuates the poverty cycle, as there is a correlation between levels of education and standard of living. HIV/AIDS does not only threaten lives but also the sustainability of livelihoods of the poor and economically vulnerable.

While poverty does not cause HIV/AIDS, the poor and destitute, who in most instances are also women, are more prone to contracting the disease and in that sense poverty exacerbates the pandemic. Often the need to still one’s hunger pangs, or provide food for those who depend on one, is more urgent, real and sometimes life-threatening than the knowledge of possible dangers of a sexually transmitted disease. Poverty impacts on nutrition. The extremely poor often find it difficult to meet basic caloric requirements, let alone the particular mix of proteins and calories necessary to benefit optimally from Anti-Retroviral

\textsuperscript{21} Female anatomy also makes women 2–4 times more likely to be infected by an HIV-positive sexual partner, than the other way round (van Houten 2002:10).

\textsuperscript{22} As reported in the media during 2002, some (South African politicians) are of the opinion that the “attention” given to HIV/AIDS is causing unnecessary alarm and that it is in the interest of all if ignored. Conspiracy theories have also entered the debate, suggesting that the focus on Africa is a racist slur and that pharmaceutical companies are out to enrich themselves while “poisoning” people with toxic drugs. These views as expressed by (the late) Peter Mokaba, ANC MP (among others) have resulted in intense debates among politicians and the citizenry of South Africa.

Therapy that is if they have access to these drugs.\textsuperscript{24} As access to treatment is further restricted by availability of adequate health care infrastructure, rural and urban poor populations suffer disproportionately. Their lack of advantage makes their lives no less valuable and no less deserving of protection. Denial of treatment means suffering and death.

Seidel (1993:178) reflects:

\[ \text{[...]} \text{in situations of deepening economic crisis which disproportionately affect women as provider, no AIDS prevention programme can afford to ignore the socio-economic aspects of sexual behaviour or operate in isolation of the need for action on poverty and gender inequality.} \]

The above quote is also echoed by Tallis (2000:59) who asserts that gender inequality could be regarded as the main problem area hindering HIV/AIDS prevention. Tallis further argues that “traditional human rights approaches are based on male norms and women's rights are not always seen as human rights”. This is particularly so in the African context where the incidence of HIV-infections are more prevalent amongst younger women between the ages of 15 and 24, indicating the “strong patriarchal character of traditional African society in which young unmarried women have little defence against sexual advances from older, more powerful men” (Saayman 1992:51). In some areas, men seek out younger women because they believe that younger women are less likely to have AIDS. This is often how the HI-virus is passed on to young women by older men who may not even know that they are carrying the virus (van Houton 2002:10). Kanyoro comments:

\[ \text{In many ways, African women bear the brunt of AIDS. They are economically marginal. Those who develop AIDS are scapegoated and often thrown out of their family structures (2000:25).} \]

Elsewhere Kanyoro (2001:160) writes that one of the major tasks facing African women theologians is to “gain confidence to face the dilemmas and contradictions that are part of our history and present”. Her appeal continues:

\[ \text{24 Since 1996, People who are HIV positive have been treated with a combination of anti-retroviral drugs, known as Highly Active Anti-retroviral Therapy (HAART). This treatment stops HIV from multiplying and reduces the volume of HIV in the blood, slowing down the process that leads to AIDS. This, together with proper treatment for opportunistic infections such as oral thrush, shingles and TB, allow HIV-positive people to lead normal, productive lives for up to 10 years (AIDS Law Project 2001:25).} \]
When we advocate that women be included in the ordained ministries of the churches in Africa, we are hoping that these women pastors will be strong pillars for establishing relationships of trust and mutuality with women in the congregations. We are hoping that women pastors will be willing to talk about the reality of women’s experiences in their sermons, and therefore be able to make connections between church, home and society (2001:161).

In some cultures and communities issues such as legal rights, domestic violence, and women’s non-control over their bodies are perceived as part of the natural order which cannot be challenged unless women exchange knowledge with other women who know it is possible to change the perceived natural order of things. Women in the church, and particularly those who now occupy leadership positions, are thus encouraged and challenged to explore avenues that might have transformatory and redistributive effects, inspiring all women and men to challenge unequal gender power relations in the church and society.

**Community and Solidarity**

Churches are grounded in communities. Herein lies their strength and credibility to act effectively in response to the impact and challenges presented by the HIV and AIDS pandemic. It is within the space of the local church where people gather voluntarily that the spirit of community must be rediscovered, reclaimed and nurtured. It is within the community that life must be sustained and experienced to the full. I maintain that the challenges with which we are faced in our response to HIV and AIDS present us with an opportunity to be the community we ought to be. The HIV/AIDS pandemic presents the church with the challenge to create opportunities where people are inspired to “have life abundantly”; where people are encouraged to develop skills to make responsible, life-sustaining decisions that are congruent with their sense of Christian identity, and where collective responsibility is fostered, offering an embracing spirit of community.

The church is in a unique situation to use the Christian symbol of community as revealed in the Trinity to bring about a “newness of mind” regarding relationships among its members. The Trinity is first and foremost a community in relationship sustained by mutuality and reciprocity.25 We are aware however, that many relationships within the family, church and society are oppressive and abusive. In its response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic the church as a community

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should create the place and space where members become aware of mutual responsibility and commitment within relationships.

A community says Weeks (1995:79) offers a “vocabulary of values through which individuals construct their understanding of the social world, and of their sense of identity and belonging”. The concept of community also suggests an “embeddedness in a world which seems constantly on the verge of fragmentation”, continues Weeks. He further asserts that there is a close connection between “the spirit of community and the ideal of solidarity”.

With regards to solidarity, Weeks (1995: 77) writes:

The progress of human solidarity is the ability to see more and more traditional differences as unimportant when compared with similarities with regard to pain and humiliation.

Solidarity continues Weeks (1995:76–77), “is the public equivalent of compassion. It implies care and responsibility for others, a belief in the dignity of the other, an ability to learn about others, and the willingness to support those groups, movements and other collectives which are intent on reducing the level of violence and domination in private relationships as well as public institutions.” Weeks states that solidarity also implies a recognition of equality and interdependence and a commitment to solving disputes democratically, through discourse. Weeks reiterates:

Solidarity is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sort of people.

The Christian theologian, Ada Isasi-Diaz (1994:79) argues that solidarity goes beyond being a matter of agreeing with, of being supportive of, of liking, or of being inspired by the cause of a group of people. She says that:

Solidarity moves away from the false notion of disinterest, of doing things for others in an altruistic fashion. Instead it is grounded in common responsibilities and interests which necessarily arouse shared feelings and lead to joint action (1994:79).

Women, in the various Christian communities, who have been separated and kept apart during apartheid, now have a unique opportunity to explore the space for solidarity created by the AIDS pandemic.26

26 Ada Isasi-Diaz (1994:78) suggests that “solidarity must replace charity as the appropriate Christian ethical behaviour”. I would suggest that this shift be explored amongst the white women and women of colour in South Africa as we seek ways of responding adequately to the challenges of HIV/AIDS.
An integral part of addressing the HIV/AIDS pandemic is to address the fear of death that has resulted in a numbness and reluctance to acknowledge and celebrate the gift of life. Moreover a “theology of life and death” has to include an urgent review of the historical understanding of sin and death. The perception that sexual indiscretion, infidelity and promiscuity are wrong insofar as the sin is visible – now, as a manifestation of AIDS and previously as pregnancy out of wedlock – has to be challenged. The irony is, in the case of AIDS, “sin” results in death to the body while in the case of pregnancy it brings forth life. The issues involving sex, and sin, and life, and death become more and more complex as the term “born to die” takes on new meaning, with the threat of mother-to-child HIV infection. There is a need to move away from reducing morality merely to sexual conduct.

Stigmatization, alienation and discrimination have in various instances proved to be the biggest “killer” in human history. It now perpetuates the spread of HIV/AIDS as people are reluctant to know their serostatus, let alone reveal it for fear of being rejected and ostracised by partners, family members, fellow workers, and communities – including some churches. We are reminded by Yeoman (1997:34) that, theology is a science and because theologies are human constructs, they reflect the origins and biases and interests of those who formulate them. Like all sciences, theology must change and develop with changing knowledge and experience. The church is challenged to develop a theology that reflects the life enhancing principles evident in the essence of Christianity.

How do we respond in a situation where the elderly are burying young mothers? HIV/AIDS has enormous emotional, psychological, economic and social consequences, not only for the person who is HIV-positive or has AIDS, but for the whole family. Shock, bewilderment, anger, disbelief, social isolation and despair are normal ways of responding to any life-threatening disease, but it seems to have generated a different nuance with the way the HIV/AIDS pandemic has been responded to (Snidle 1997:86).

Over the centuries humans have prided themselves in having “power” to negotiate and find solutions to problems in their lives and the world. The quest to control economies, territories, individuals, groups and nations has proved successful for some with grave consequences of disempowerment, alienation and vulnerability for others. Now humanity is faced with the realities of HIV and AIDS for which there is no cure or effective vaccine, despite relentless efforts in biomedical research.
The need for ongoing medical research for a cure for AIDS and vaccine against the HI-virus; the need for medical treatment and care; the need to address the underlying reasons why people find it difficult and sometime impossible to access medical treatment and care; the need for continuous education on issues around the social and clinical dimensions of the epidemiology of HIV/AIDS; the need to challenge oppressive economic and social structures especially those that perpetuate poverty and gender inequality; the need to change popularly held perceptions of sex, sexuality and sexual relationships which lead to stigmatization as well as the spread of HIV/AIDS; the need to live life positively and celebrate it as a gift from God; the need to make responsible decisions about how we engage in sexual relationships; the need to see the lives of others as a gift from the same God who continues to love us as body-selves. These are all challenges that face all of humanity, on every level of society.

Clearly the church as a whole needs to be involved on every level, engaging with government, NGOs, other faith communities and other church denominations in a collaborative effort to respond to HIV/AIDS, employing appropriate moral discourses which challenges oppressive patriarchal structures. The need for a collaborative effort is aptly described by Nicolson when he quotes a correspondent answering a query about AIDS work in his (the correspondent’s) denomination:

My impression is that several ad hoc projects are running in South Africa and that an overall lack of co-ordination could be our biggest problem (1995:6).

Over the past five years there has been a burgeoning of donor-driven HIV/AIDS programmes and the competition for funding by NGOs including church-based organizations are continuing. This often results in the duplication and concentration of services and programmes in some areas, while other communities, especially those in rural areas are not reached.

The social and economic impact of HIV and AIDS on individuals, families and communities and the possible future threat that it holds for all of humanity are dramatic challenges which need a collaborative, co-ordinated response from all levels of society. The paradox presented by the threat that the HIV/AIDS pandemic holds to human life, as well as the opportunity it offers to reflect anew on “who we ought to be”, results in a creative tension within which the church in general, women in particular have to respond. Drawing on their experiences of suffering, women have the opportunity to make a valuable contribution by responding to the realities of the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
Concluding remarks

HIV/AIDS has been described as a behavioural disease and is perpetuated by social behavioural patterns, which are maintained by social, economic, cultural and spiritual factors (Saayman 1991:160). I would thus argue that the power to stop the spread of HIV/AIDS in its disastrous tracks hinges strongly on making responsible decisions and choices. Primarily, but not simply, every individual is challenged to make responsible choices about his or her sexual relationships.

Here I haste to add that in some cultures women are not at liberty to negotiate sexual practices, and for many women the notion of choice is a luxury not available to them.

However, it is my contention that women who hold leadership positions in churches can contribute towards an adequate response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic by challenging sexism which continues to impact negatively on the lives of women under the guise of “the natural order of things”. I agree with Saayman (1991:27) who insists that the emphasis should be on “helping people develop a sense of collective responsibility for dealing with AIDS, as well as inculcating the conviction that something can be done about this life-threatening disease”. It is my belief that Christians have both the “conviction of life” and a “spirit of community” to embody a vision and the will to respond in a way that will enable us to move from a situation of hopelessness and despair, to hope and joyful living.
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in recent decades, the phenomenon of ‘othering’ has become a topic of constant concern in social scientific discourse. Beginning perhaps with Edward Said’s now classic study, *Orientalism* (1978), where Said suggests that Western social scientists and others have in fact created or constructed various ‘others’ in the Middle East and the Orient, much attention has been paid to describing the process by which ‘others’ (always opposite to the necessary ‘us’) are constructed, identified and/or defined in a variety of social contexts. Some of the ‘others’ readily identified are those defined by gender, age, sexual preference, socio-economic and geographic location (“the third world”), indigenous groups in a variety of places, and, most specifically for the purposes of this paper, immigrants in today’s Europe. ‘Othering’ in the general discourse is portrayed as the sometimes conscious tactic of the power holders to keep or make the powerless powerless, and is often seen as undemocratic, imperialist and quite wrong.

**Othering from without and from within**

My interest in this paper differs from the general discourse on othering. I am concerned specifically with the position of ethnic groups in the larger societies in which they live and the particularities of what I perceive as the ethnic dynamic – the need to stay separate, on the one hand, and the need to share traditions and experiences with the general population, on the other. The shape of the dynamic is no doubt affected by at least two factors: first, the background and/or agenda of the ethnic group and the kinds of processes occurring within the group which work to maintain the ethnic self;¹ and, second, the details

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¹ Fredrik Barth first identified the concept of *ethnic boundary* in his now-classic work, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). I and those of us who view ethnic behavior as an aspect of interaction with identifiable others and try to identify the types of difference-maintaining boundaries raised in that context are indebted to him.
and perhaps ideology of national public policies with regard to the rights and obligations of ethnic groups.²

In this paper, I will explore this ethnic dynamic in one particular arena – that of immigrant children who attend a public school in urban Sweden. My particular focus is a language program which offers linguistic minority and immigrant children instruction in their mother tongue. This Swedish program is related to the fact that in 1962, the government of Sweden signed UNESCO’s Convention against Discrimination in Education. The convention clearly recognized the rights of ethnic minority children to maintain and strengthen their language and cultural identity within the context of the larger society in which they live. In other words, it both defines the rights of the children to a separate identity if they so desire, and at the same time includes their rights to participate in the larger society as fully legitimate members. Previous policies in Sweden focused on only on the rights of minority populations to join the majority. We thus see here the beginning of a new society in Sweden – one in which human rights extended to the right to be culturally and ethnically different while at the same time, retaining membership in the majority society.

In order to set the scene, I will briefly review the Swedish immigrant policy of 1974 and the research I conducted in the early 1980’s in one elementary school in greater Stockholm (Narrowe 1998). My concern was quite simply how the home language program was understood and implemented on the local level by a number of immigrant children and teachers from Turkey. I returned to the field fourteen years later and explored the views of some of the young adults who participated in the Home Language program as children. The study concluded with the young people’s comments on their lives as Turks in Sweden.

**Dealing with immigrants in Sweden: Policies and Programs**

The UNESCO convention became especially relevant in Sweden in the decades of the 1960s and 1970s when – for the first time – large numbers of non-Nordic immigrants were admitted to the country. The situation prompted the articulation of a new nation-wide immigrant policy and led to the subsequent implementation of many immigrant-oriented programs. Thus, in 1974, on the

² Charles Taylor (1994) has identified two types of public policies with regard to the recognition of difference. Either governments focus on the general rights of all citizens and ignore ethnic and other differences, or governments recognize ethnic and other differences and actively support and perhaps encourage groups to maintain ethnic difference. Since 1974, the Swedish government has followed the second type of policy.
basis of a series of fact-finding studies which it had commissioned in 1968, the Swedish Parliament, the Riksdag, enunciated a new policy with regard to the position and status of immigrants and linguistic minorities in Sweden (SOU 74:69). The policy was expressed in three main guidelines: jämlikhet, valfrihet, samverkan, equality, freedom of choice, and partnership. As individuals equal to Swedes, immigrants would be entitled to all the benefits of the welfare state and they would be expected to fulfill all its obligations. As members of groups which were said to be “culturally different” from Swedes, they would have the right to choose to maintain their culture. And all activities and programs in conjunction with effectuating the policy would be conducted in the spirit of cooperation and partnership.

In 1975, the Riksdag passed legislation to implement the policy. The legislation offered immigrants a broad series of programs to study their languages and their culture if they so wished. It also provided them with public monies to do so.

The home language program for immigrant students in Swedish schools was one of the most widespread programs instituted in conjunction with the new policy. The program offered immigrant children and children of linguistic minorities several hours per week of instruction in their mother tongues or, as it came to be called, “home language.” The instruction was included in the regular school curriculum. Children who belonged to the larger language groups – including the Turks described below – could receive most of their instruction

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4 Defining the concept of culture is not an easy task. I begin with Edward Tylor’s classic definition: “Culture or civilization, taken in its broad ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (1871). Since then, we have focused on ‘norms, values and ideas which some group of people share and about which they communicate.’ Hannerz has referred to culture as "meanings and meaningful forms which we shape and acquire in social life." (1996:8), and Levinson and Holland have spoken of culture as "a continual process of creating meaning in social and material contexts" (1996:13). The focus is process. Gone, fortunately, is the view of culture as a static body of knowledge which is merely transmitted from generation to generation.

5 Hannerz (1983:146) has called the new policy a “conspicuous turnabout”. The policy was in fact the first time that Swedish lawmakers focused on the specific rights of immigrants as cultural or ethnic groups (see note 2 above). With regard to the focus on ‘culture’, Ekman (1996) points out that local cultural traditions were often heralded in regional development programs in depressed areas in Sweden in the 1970s. The focus on local traditions made ‘us feel good about us’ and sold rather well to others.

6 For a thorough evaluation of the program in terms of its aims and accomplishments, see Municio (1987a, 1987b).
in their home language. The program was intended to accomplish the guidelines of the new policy in the context of school: the children would be equal to Swedish children in that they would be able to study in their mother tongue just as Swedish children could study in Swedish; they could avail themselves of the opportunity to choose their own culture if they so desired. And immigrants – parents, teachers and pupils – and Swedish school personnel would cooperate wherever and whenever possible.

**Turks in a Swedish School: the contours of a study**

At an early stage, my research concerns were similar to those being raised by educational anthropologists elsewhere. Based on a definition of education as cultural transmission (Singleton 1974) and ”learning [...] as cultural acquisition” (Roberts 1976:1), much research addressed processes of socialization and acculturation, most often in the context of cultural discontinuities between minority and majority populations in schools. The studies were rampant with examples of failure; in addition to blatant discrimination on the part of school personnel, too many minority children and children with working class and/or lower socio-economic groups were unable to participate in the middle-class culture, linguistic codes and values of mainstream schools. (Bernstein 1971, Jacobs and Jordan 1993, Ramirez and Castaneda 1974, Ogby 1974, 1978).

While not discounting the importance of cultural values and norms in school performance, I found little research which illustrated the experience of ethnic minority children from the inside, that is, from their point of view. My intention, therefore, was, first, to explore the school world of a small number of Turkish immigrant children as they experienced it, and second, to consider how the institutional and political context – immigrant policy and the rhetoric of home language – contributed to or influenced their experience. My focus was the performance of ethnicity and the dynamics of the ethnic encounter rather than miscommunication or school failure.

Some of my initial questions were the following: hypothesizing that language is much more than syntax and grammar, what, I wondered, was the content of the Turkish home language – not so much in terms of its grammar but in terms of its underlying social and cultural codes? How did the Turkish teachers define or develop this home language in the context of a Swedish public school? Most simply, how were these Turkish children defining and practicing being Turks in a Swedish school?
The main field-site of my study was a school located fourteen kilometres northwest of Stockholm in a newly-built high-rise housing project which housed many immigrants. The school was a good microcosm of the new Sweden—a majority of Swedes and a goodly number of immigrants. It was a world which reverberated with a very clear discourse of difference; there were constant discussions about immigrant cultures, about cultural differences, and about the causes of and the cures for what were often called *kulturkrockar*, culture clashes.

Turks, Turkish culture and the Turkish children were a major topic of these discussions due to the fact that fully one-third of the pupils in the school were children of immigrants from Turkey and most attended one of the five fulltime home language classes for Turkish children. Due to sheer numbers, the Turkish classes had the critical mass to resemble an actual Turkish school. Indeed, the Swedish principal often referred to the Turkish classes as a “school within a school,” and the Turkish children (and others as well) regularly called their school the *turk okulu*, the Turkish School. The principal's view of the Turkish School as being (somehow) inside the Swedish School seemed to afford me a good opportunity to identify processes of othering within, or ethnic socialization, on the one hand, and the dynamics of culture contact and culture production, on the other.

I spent three terms in the school attending a third and a fifth grade class. My primary assumption was that the immigrant policy, in the form of the home language program, had created a particular framework wherein the Turks could define themselves—or perhaps invent themselves—as Turks, or, more exactly, as Turks-in-Sweden. What was happening in the Turkish School, it seemed to me, was a process I identified as 'ethnification', the gradual re-socialization of some Turks from Turkey—that is, “people bearing pre-constituted national identities” (Verdery 1994:55) who came to Sweden from several regions in Turkey to work, study or find refuge—into an ethnic minority, Turks in Sweden.

Fourteen years later, I returned to the field and revisited eighteen of the

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7 I use the concept of ‘discourse’ here to mean the reigning themes of the discussion of the times—what was talked about, how and by whom. With regard to the changing discourse concerning immigrants in Sweden during the past thirty years, see Björk (1997) and Sjögren (1996).

8 Magnusson (1986) has also suggested this.

9 My term, ‘ethnification’ differs from ‘ethnization’. The Danish sociologist Carl-Ulrik Schierup used the latter term to describe ethnic groups who remain in their enclaves. His point is that ethnization (as opposed to assimilation) “blocks the conscious formulation of those common interests that transgress ethnic-cultural divisions. It hampers the generation of trans-ethnic forms of organization and of the immigrants’ develop-
’children’ whom I had known and worked with when they were in elementary school. My concern was the same: to probe the features of their now-adult Turkish home language and to understand how they were proceeding with the process and the practice of ethnification. No longer school children who were constrained to follow a set curriculum, the young people were now on their own, setting their own agenda and realizing their own plans within the structures of opportunities and constraints of Swedish (and local Turkish) society. What were their current views? And, in conjunction with my focus on ethnification, how did they now understand or define themselves – as Turks? Swedes? Both? Neither? I turn to these views below.

The purpose of home language: young adults retrospect

The ethnography which I refer to in this paper is a series of comments made by these young adults. All had attended fulltime Turkish home language classes when they were children, all had participated in the first study and all considered themselves seasoned informants for the study. The interviews were conducted on tape in Turkish and Swedish. I then translated the interviews into English and checked my translations with the young people. My questions and/or comments are included in the texts.

In the following comments, they explain why, in their opinion, they were offered home language. ”Why home language in the first place?”, I asked Sefa, now twenty-six.

Immigrants were a new thing in Sweden. They didn’t know what they wanted to do with us. They really didn’t know much about us, culturally, and they had to do something. Maybe they wanted to test our brains, our capacity, to see whether we really could learn both languages [Sefa acknowledges that bilingualism was one of the expressed purposes of the program]. And... well, the Turkish teachers probably needed jobs.
Fatma, now twenty-seven, viewed the issue somewhat similarly:

They [Swedish educators] didn’t know anything before we came. An immigrant group comes here...what would you do? I’d do the same thing, begin a home language class, then I’d see what would happen afterwards. But it was the first time – our class was the first. And it was good that they did it, I think. Listen, they didn’t know anything, they didn’t have any experts that said that this model is good for this group, and that model for another group. It just became like that...and it was the best thing they did, I think.

Both refer to the fact that the ‘Swedes’ were uncertain: immigrants generally were new to them, and so they experimented. Fatma continued to point out that the Turkish parents were also uncertain. The Swedish school personnel were new to them too:

The Turks probably wanted [the home language program]. In the beginning, Turkish parents wanted us to be cared for – not like the Swedish girls – and to learn our culture.

Zekeriya, now twenty-eight, mentioned a popular argument: immigration was temporary and the Turks would soon return to Turkey. Many parents were afraid that the children wouldn’t know their language any more, that they would forget their culture and the actual language. Everyone said that ‘in a few years, then I’m going to return to my country and then the children need their language and then, if they don’t know anything, they can’t adjust there’. Those kinds of thoughts.

Mehmet, also twenty-eight, mentioned the Turkish parents’ fear that they would lose their children, and then added one of the most widespread arguments for the home language classes – that learning Turkish would facilitate learning Swedish:

Our parents were afraid we’d melt into the Swedish world, and the home language teachers thought it was a good idea... And they thought we’d learn Swedish better.

Note that Mehmet emphasized the importance of learning the first language in order to learn the second. This approach to the importance of home language was based on research done by socio-linguist Kangas-Skutnab and colleagues, and was widely accepted in Swedish educational circles during the 1970s and 1980s.10 Mehmet continued:

10 The debates about when to teach the second language were long and vituperative, and I cannot do justice to them here. It was held that children who did not first learn their first language properly would become semi-lingual, thus the strong focus on mother tongue instruction. See Skutnabb-Kangas 1975, 1976, 1978.
My personal opinion is that because we had our background, for us it’s important to know our own home language in order to learn Swedish properly. If we have a weak foundation in our home language, we’ll never learn Swedish... If we had gone directly to a Swedish class, we wouldn’t have understood the content of what we were taught. It would have taken us twice as long, so it was very important that we learned Turkish first and well.

For thirty year-old Ibrahim, strengthened identity was the prime purpose of the home language program. He also pointed out that there is still too little knowledge about how the home language program is working:

I was one of those who began in 1982 or 1983 to question home language’s role, how we could improve it. Since the home language reform [when the municipalities were obligated to offer home language instruction to children who requested it, and ‘active bilingualism’ was the goal], they’ve tried different models—they have two hours, four hours, half and half; fulltime home language classes, whole classes, half classes and so forth. It’s always been an experiment. Always. They’ve never tried to deepen their knowledge about one model and how it worked. Two hours, OK, what can two hours give? Or four?

JN: So what do you think it should give?
It should most of all give an identity and security, nothing else.
JN: Turkish literature, history?
No. I mean, if I’m curious about literature or grammar, I can read about it, but home language is mainly a key to a secure identity and the development of the individual. If you create that identity, then I think you’ve given the children the keys to solve the codes of the home culture. But [...] not even the teachers knew what to give, they were so vague as a group, as a professional group. The whole time it’s been an experiment. There has never been a generally fixed model. You can’t throw the ball around like this.

Ibrahim also refers to the uncertainty – here on the part of the Turkish teachers – as to what the program was supposed to accomplish. Cengiz commented on the effect of the program on his social world. He remembered the Turkish and Swedish schools and as being quite separate: ”We never really saw [the Swedes].” Serap also pointed out that ”Our whole world was Turkish”. Thus, while the two schools were physically under one roof, the Turkish children were more often socially apart from the Swedish school than a part of it. Some of the young people expressed approval of this separation: ”It was good for us then”, ”We knew everything about Turkey”. Others regretted it: ”We should
have come into Swedish society and made some other friends”, ”We should have learned the Swedish language sooner”.

Note the young people’s constant use of contrasts and the comparisons: ”the Swedish world and our culture”, ”the codes of the home culture” and ”not to melt into the Swedish world”. No doubt this was one of the practical effects of the home language program; it generated a discourse which included a focus on both ’us’ and ’them’, and which located both entities in a common framework of comparison, the typical ethnic we and they.

Note also that the two-school model, ”the school within a school” which depicted the structural as well as the cultural dynamic of their childhood as Turks in a Swedish school, worked as well – though now symbolically – as a metaphor for their present lives. Many years later, the “school within a school” surfaced as a root metaphor for how the young people perceived their current social lives as Turks in Sweden – sometimes a part of the Swedish whole, sometimes apart from it.

“*We’re not split*”: explaining a position

Some of the young people discussed where they find themselves in the Turk-Swede continuum. Safiye said outright that she wants to be regarded as a Turk and a Swede, and not, she pointed out with some amount of passion, as an outsider nor as an “immigrant”:

_I don’t feel like an immigrant. I want to be understood as a Swede, but I have my [dark] hair colour and work and live in Rinkeby. I don’t want to be considered as a refugee and I don’t want to be regarded as an immigrant – my father is, I’m not. I want to be seen as a part of this society. With my family I’m a Turk but my child will speak Swedish outside._11 I cannot stand being split in two, I must be accepted in Swedish society. As I am.

Note how Safiye refers to two possible reasons why she might not be regarded as a Swede, her dark hair colour and the fact that she lives in a particular neighborhood. But she insists that she belongs to “this society”, that she is and can be a Turk at home and speak Swedish outside. She intends to maintain this

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11 J. L. Gordon (1831–1892), a Jewish poet writing in Hebrew in late nineteenth century Russia, wrote, in his poem, *Hakitza ammi*. Awake, my people! ”Be a Jew in your home and a man in the street”. This inside-outside framework seems to be endemic to the practice of ethnicity. The Swedish social anthropologist Ulla-Britt Engelbrektsson (1986) points out that Greeks in a small Swedish city refer to the ‘Greek part’ as belonging to the ‘private sphere’ and the ‘Swedish part’ as belonging to the ‘public sphere’ (Engelbrektsson 1986:166).
healthy “bothness”, and does not want to be regarded as sick or “split.”

Safiye’s comments and her desire not to be “split” echo some of the ideas of the Swedish immigrant policy as it was formulated in the mid-1970’s, and the whole discussion of difference and culture which it generated. Clearly, the policy not only created the “school within the school.” It also created a framework for thinking and talking about and practicing being an ethnic self in the Swedish context, being “both” or double rather than “split.”

Serap talked about her position in Swedish society in similar terms. Like Safiye, Serap also wants recognition of her bothness and the freedom to choose and maintain what for her are meaningful traditions, which, in her case, means continuing to practice some of the traditions of Islam. And like Safiye, Serap does not want to be regarded as a ‘Swede’ but rather as a Turk-in-Sweden.

When I say that we have to come into the Swedish society, I don’t mean that we have to become like a Swede; I mean you have to learn what counts and what doesn’t count. I think you need to know that in Sweden, this is the way to do things. That doesn’t mean that you have to be Swedish just because you know that. I mean, all during the years, I’ve kept my traditions, and when I was out with Swedes, I could still say, ‘I’m a Turk’, ‘don’t take me for a Swede’.

A lot of people say [that I’m Swedish]; they call me Sarah at work, I speak very good Swedish, and everyone says to me, ”You? you’re Swedish”. No, I’m not Swedish, I’m a Turk, but I live here in Sweden and you have to accept the customs of the land you live in, some of them at any rate. But at the same time, you should not forget who you are, and where you come from, where your roots really are...because if you do that, you’ve lost yourself. Then there’s no Serap, there isn’t even a Sarah.

I asked her what defines the Turkish part of Serap. Her answer refers to the particular boundary which is important for her.

Some of my traditions, some things I do and some things I don’t do. I mean, I don’t celebrate Christmas, but I think it’s really nice with Christmas, with candles and the tree and Donald Duck on TV, but I don’t have a special Christmas table with the food, but I think it’s cozy with snow and we light candles and drink glögg, [sweet spiced wine ] and ...

12 Serap changed her name to Sarah in high school because, she told me, one of her teachers found the name Serap too hard to pronounce.

13 Donald Duck and other Disney animated films are broadcast on Swedish television on the afternoon of Christmas Eve. The films have become part of the traditional way of celebrating Christmas in Sweden. For an expanded historical description of the celebration of Christmas in Sweden, see Löfgren (1991), and Bringeus (1976). Oddly, neither author mentions Donald Duck.
JN: And a tree?

Yes, all those things I can accept, but we don’t have a Christmas dinner, nothing that has to do with the religion. It’s just the cozy, nice things that interest me, and I can accept them. But at the same time I’m not Swedish just because I do that.

The part of Christmas which Serap as a Muslim will not accept is the ”Christmas table”, her euphemism for the ham and sausages served at the traditional Swedish dinner. She then points out how important it is to be ”open” to culture, which she views as ”other ways, another tradition”.

If you move [to another country], you can’t keep the blinders on and not notice the society around you. I would have suffered from this. But if you can keep your own ways and at the same time be open for other ways and not look the other way when you meet people with another tradition, you feel better. You don’t have to give up parts of yourself to associate with Swedes. You just expand...

Serap regards ”culture” as a continuous learning process, one which is additive rather than substitutive. But she also recognizes the importance and the possibility of defining boundaries and maintaining her ”own ways”. In other words, Serap and the others seem to want to remain other in some contexts. This internal othering has little to do with formal policy and formal programs, though it might be that the discourse of difference enunciated by the formal policy created a discursive space to think and practice difference – in short, to remain other in certain contexts.

Moving between ‘pressure’ and ‘freedom’: the young people’s world

In the same vein, I want to suggest that the ethnification process, the process of becoming one or another kind of Turk in Sweden has involved a continuous dialogue between the practice of specific Turkish ethnic obligations and the practice of Swedish general rights – between what the young people identify as Turkish baskı, pressure, and Swedish frihet, freedom. All of the young people place themselves somewhere on the continuum – some closer to the Swedish frihet, others closer to the Turkish baskı. I think we can plot the answers on a line moving from Swedish individualism and rights – the goal of equality of the immigrant policy – at one end, toward another point that I have called Turkish ethnic obligations – the goal of culture choice of the immigrant policy.

The Turkish end, the young people say, is defined by the ideal and reality of relatedness, togetherness, beraberlik, where family is primary. Here they are involved as specific persons in an interconnected social universe with other
specific persons. Some define these connections in the area of gender; they want to maintain palpable boundaries between men and women. Others define relationships on the basis of age and insist on the importance of respect for their elders. The Swedish end of the continuum, in the young people’s views, is defined by its freedom, openness, and by disconnected individuals.

When the young people contrast Turkish and Swedish, they refer to the fact that they are moving between these two ends of the continuum—Turkish relatedness (fusion) and Swedish individualism (fission), between the performance of what they choose (or have to choose) as their Turkish obligations, and by their expectations of what they perceive as their Swedish rights. Indeed, one of their Swedish rights is to practice these Turkish obligations. They do not see these obligations and rights as opposites, but as important aspects of their lives. They move between their adjacent social fields, between their two schools and link them with their ongoing discourse of comparison.

In a real sense, the young people’s two schools still endure in the sense that they still move from their Turkish world to the Swedish one and back. This is probably the most unremarkable and predictable aspect of membership in an ethnic group. But as adults, the young people are more directly defining the curriculum. By this I mean that they are practicing a Turkish home language, a particular “discourse of us” which works in, is responsive to, and is produced in the Swedish world in which they live. In the throes of this kind of commuting—moving between the particular Turkish and general Swedish spaces, between their inner school and outer school, they are producing and practicing a Swedish version of Turkish culture and a Turkish version of Swedish culture that can bear the label of an “ethnic culture.” This ethnic culture is fluid; it is by definition responsive to influences from both the Turkish and the Swedish positions. It is thereby a culture of conscious contemplation, a culture of commuting and a culture of becoming. Put differently, the young people comfortably other themselves at quite the same time that they indicate that they participate in and are part of the greater Swedish we.

Today they are all involved in the constant and steady practice of everyday life—caring for their families, conducting their businesses, finding jobs and working, taking courses, attending parent-teacher meetings, and utilizing the institutions of the Swedish welfare state. And at some points in time and in some social contexts, they are also occupied with being Turks-in-Sweden, focusing
on interests and concerns which relate to that aspect of their lives. For these young people, being both ‘a part of’ and ’apart from’ Sweden, has been one of the dominant facts of their lives.

**Both, not either: a conclusion**

What I want to suggest here is that in the course of the young people’s unavoidable and constant interaction with the Swedish structure – their continuous participation in the *school within a school* – they have produced certain durable dispositions which they now can spread over a variety of contexts.¹⁴ They are comfortable with the rules of the Turkish as well as the Swedish games and have garnered some expertise in playing both.

This double-field participation has produced a new competence, new knowledge of “how to play the game.” No longer quite immigrants in their own eyes, they have accomplished becoming Turks in Sweden: they are practicing some Turkish moral-laden practices, what I have termed ‘ethnic obligations’, within the context of their clearly definable Swedish rights. In other words, today they speak and practice the cultural codes of both their home language and Swedish. I think we can argue, then, that just as the home language program intended, they have become bilingual, or, perhaps more exactly, multi-cultural.

Othering-from-within is thus an important aspect of their lives as Turks in Sweden. Without staying other in some contexts, that is without practicing or identifying the obligations or particularities which they identify as Turkish, they acknowledge that they will give up an important part of their selves. Yet they also refer to the fact that the practice of these obligations is one aspect of their rights in the surrounding society – a society to which they feel they belong. Their mandate is to somehow find ways to remain *apart from* and practice Turkish obligations as well as to become *a part of* Swedish society and to adhere to their Swedish rights. From their comments here, they seem to be managing the dynamic quite well.

¹⁴ I refer of course to Pierre Bourdieu’s *habitus*, ”durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures...” (1977:72).
References


RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS
Posing the question

As a South African I am guaranteed “equality before the law”, “freedom of religion” and respect for my “human dignity” as rights. The Bill of Rights in our 1996 Constitution says so in chapter two (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996). This constitution followed on the interim Constitution of 1994 that laid the foundation for the new democratic order in South Africa. Section 9 (1) of the Constitution states unequivocally that everyone “is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law” and is entitled to the “full protection and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms”. Section 15 (1) affirms the fact that “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion”. Furthermore, Section 31 (1) emphasises the associational nature and protection of these rights:

Persons belonging to a cultural, religious or linguistic community may not be denied the right with other members of that community –
(a) to enjoy their culture, practice their religion and use their language; and
(b) to form, join and maintain cultural, religious and linguistic associations and other organs of civil society.

Lastly, Section 10 provides: “Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected”. Not only are dignity, equality and freedom individually protected in the Bill of Rights, but they also constitute the founding values of the democratic South African state as proclaimed in Section 1 of the Constitution. All provisions relating to equality are mutually interdependent provisions of the equality guarantee. Moreover, the Bill of Rights is not merely a defensive mechanism for protecting the individual against the state, but it constitutes an objective normative value system influencing the interpretation of all statute law and the development of the common law.

South Africa’s past and present emphasise the need to embrace the right of human dignity as essential to the healing of our wounds. Apartheid was in-
humane precisely because it denied human dignity to the majority of South Africans on grounds of race and of their related rights to equality and freedom. As Archbishop emeritus Desmond Tutu (see Ackermann 2002, p. 538) says:

Apartheid claimed that what imbued anyone with worth was actually a biological irrelevance – the colour of one’s skin....

The present blight of HIV/AIDS, greatly exacerbated by denial and stigma, calls for the vigorous affirmation of the dignity of all sufferers. Dire poverty is dehumanising as it strips people of their dignity, of the ability to determine the course of their lives and to respect and protect the inherent dignity of all. It does so precisely because dignity, equality and freedom are the rights that have suffered so much in our recent past and still continue to do so.

As a woman I ask: “What does equality, religious freedom and respect for human dignity mean for women who belong to religious institutions?” I am not a lawyer. I am a Christian feminist theologian who lives and works in South Africa. This paper will look at these three fundamental human rights, how they relate to one another, their limitations when applied to the Christian tradition and will conclude with a few suggestions for further debate. I am aware of the fact that some of my questions apply equally to women in the Muslim and Jewish traditions. I shall, however, confine myself to Christianity in the hope of contributing to the debate on rights and religious institutions.

At the outset let me acknowledge the question of difference. We women may be equal before the law, but in reality we are not equal or alike. Women everywhere differ in terms of class, race, economic status, sexual preference, nationality, ethnicity, culture and so on. Universal sisterhood is a myth. In the words of Caroline Ramazanoglu (1989, p. 44), women

...are not simply a mass of people, comparable to the Italian working class of Gramsci’s day, but millions upon millions of people living in very diverse circumstances and cultures, with no common language or concepts. Materially, women’s situations vary from extreme affluence to destitution and starvation. Some women have considerable power over the lives of others; some have no power even over their own lives.

Thus our contexts and understandings of our religious traditions differ. Many women are contented participatory members in their religious and cultural traditions and affiliations. I am not. Neither are a growing band of women in the world’s religions who are restive, critical and seeking change. Hence the question posed above. In order to get to grips with it, it is necessary to look first
at the human rights of women and their implications for women’s membership of specific cultures and religions.

By way of a final introductory comment, I would point out that the relationship between human rights and religion, although complex and contradictory, cannot be ignored. On the one hand, religions have often been the instruments of awakening concepts such as self-worth and dignity of people which form the corner-stone of human rights. On the other hand, religions have sanctioned wars, persecution, tyranny and oppression, as well as racial and gender discrimination, all of which conspire to destroy human worth and dignity.

This point is tellingly made in two ancient stories. The first is the story of Jephthah (Judges 11:26–40) the “valiant warrior” who sacrificed his daughter Mizpah as a burnt offering in terms of a vow made to God. The second story tells of Agamemnon’s sacrifice of his daughter Iphigenia to appease Artemis and enable him to sail to Troy to recapture Helen. In both cases, a human being dies as a religious offering for the good, or perceived good of a community. (It is significant that in both cases the innocent victims were women!). Obviously these stories are not meant to be case studies in human rights; in both human life is destroyed because of religious belief. The clash between human rights of individuals and religious beliefs of communities is clear. It would be easy to dismiss these tales as belonging to the myths of the past. This would not only deny the power of their mythical meaning, but would ignore modern parallels. And, of course, Christian history itself is clouded by the Inquisition, witch-hunts, the justification of slavery, racism and sexism.

Returning to the point made above, religions have contributed to the foundations of our understanding of human rights, while at the same time violating what we commonly understand by such rights. The relationship between religion and human rights is a complex one. Religion is neither “for” nor “against” human rights. It is both.

The human rights of women
Towards the end of the twentieth century, the human rights of women emerged as a major focus of international advocacy. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares in Article 1 that all human beings are equal in dignity and rights “without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” Further covenants sought to entrench this right. “Yet despite these legal
guarantees, women have long experienced gross inequalities in the enjoyment of fundamental rights” (Henkin et al 1999, p. 359). Women, particularly on our continent, continue to remain subordinate in the home, in the family and in the political processes that govern their lives, as well as in social-sexual relations, property rights, matters of employment and the market place. It was therefore thought necessary to adopt a special treaty to deal specifically with gender-based discrimination. In 1979 the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). This instrument hoped to offer women greater protection against the violation of their basic right to freedom from discrimination. Article 1 clearly states that CEDAW wishes to counter “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” Interestingly, despite the desire to ensure women’s enjoyment of rights in every sphere, CEDAW made no mention of violence against women or the relationship of women to their respective religions. The former was subsequently remedied in 1992 by the adoption of the General Recommendation no 19 entitled “Violence against Women”, (U.N. Doc. A/47/38 at 1, 1992).

To date CEDAW has been ratified by 166 countries (Tamale 2001, pp. 97–104). Its reservations are legion. Reservations limit the extent to which the Convention is applicable to the ratifying country. Rebecca Cook (1990, pp. 643–716) points out that the “Women’s Convention is amongst the most heavily reserved of the international human rights conventions”. A great many of these reservations emerge from the Islamic world. This fact can be explained by the close relationship between Islamic law and religion. An example is the government of Egypt which made the following reservation upon accession to CEDAW:

The Arab Republic of Egypt is willing to comply with the content of [Article 2], provided that such compliance does not run counter to the Islamic Sharia (see Henkin et al 1999, p. 295).

Clearly the issue of women’s rights is a culturally sensitive matter. What emerges from debates of feminist international human rights scholars is the fact that modern international law rests on and reproduces various dichotomies between the
public and private spheres (Charlesworth et al 1999, p. 384 and Oloka-Onyango and Tamale 1995, p. 17)). Traditionally international law is regarded as operating only in the public sphere, governing the relations between nation states. But when bills of rights are applied to the relations between citizens in particular states, do these relations belong exclusively to the public sphere?

Is the male-dominated Christian church a public or a private institution? Where is the line drawn between the public and the private and to what extent is freedom of religion regarded merely as a private right, similar to the joining of a social club? In the South African Constitution freedom of religion is protected not only on an individual basis but also by protecting the associational individual right to practise religion in community with others. How far does equality stretch into the non-state domain? It would seem that the heart of the legal problem under our Constitution is where one draws the line between the scope of influence of the Constitution’s equality provisions and the right to privacy and autonomy enjoyed both by individuals and institutions. While acknowledging this legal conundrum, it remains clear that male voices dominate the public sphere and that the public/private distinction has both normative as well as descriptive dimensions. Women’s ‘place’ in society and religious institutions is culturally and religiously defined – often in such a way that to speak of women’s human rights can be a contradiction in terms.

Women, equality, freedom of religion and the Christian church

A further issue which emerges from the issue of the human rights of women is the question of conflicting rights. Freedom from discrimination and the right to human dignity can collide with the right to religious freedom when restrictions on freedom of religion for the purpose of protecting the rights of others are conceded. It is a universally accepted principle that rights, even constitutionally protected ones, are not absolute (see Ackermann 2002, pp. 177–184). Some limitation on rights is inevitable. This is apparent when rights are conflicting. The South African Constitutional Court has commented on the difficulty that arises in the area of religious rights when interests may conflict.

The most complex problem is that the competing interests to be balanced belong to completely different conceptual and existential orders. Religious conviction and practice are generally based on faith. Countervailing public or private concerns are usually not and are evaluated mainly according to their reasonableness. To the extent
that the two orders can be separated, with the religious being sovereign in its domain and the State sovereign in its domain, the need to balance one interest against the other is avoided. However religion is not always merely a matter of private individual conscience or communal sectarian practice. ...Many major religions regard it as part of their spiritual vocation to be active in the broader society. ...Religion is not just a question of belief or doctrine. It is part of a way of life, or a people's temper and culture (Ackermann 2002, p. 183).

The history of the Christian church itself highlights the problem of conflicting rights and conflicting beliefs. Freedom of religion is considered inalienable. The right to equal consideration for positions of authority, to preach or teach is too often another matter. Despite the affirmation of humanity's equal status before God, the centuries old stamp of patriarchy on the Christian church, often justified theologically and concretised in discriminatory practices, is frequently the norm. Patriarchy was the social construct inherited by Christianity from ancient Greece, from Roman law and from the practices of Israel. As American feminist theologian Rosemary Radford Ruether (1974, p. 151) explains:

Christianity, born in Jewish apocalyptic and nurtured in the world of Hellenistic syncretism, drew together all the streams of religious consciousness from antiquity, Greek, Jewish and Oriental, but precisely in their alienated, anticosmic stage of development. This alienated experience of reality was expressed in a dualistic doctrine of being.

This fundamental dualism appears repeatedly in the Christian church. For women it has meant that the cultural male-female dualism which was assimilated into a soul-body dualism defined us in terms of our subordination to the male in the order of nature, and our ‘carnality’ as resulting from the disorder of sin. The subject-object relationship became both culturally and religiously expressed. In modern times, the battles for women’s suffrage, educational opportunities and ability to regulate women’s reproductive lives, presented a concerted challenge to patriarchal culture, particularly in the west. The Christian church is a late-comer to these issues and it is still struggling to emerge from this centuries old patriarchal mould. No wonder the idea of human equality is often countered, always hastily, by the remark: “Rights are fine but we Christians like to speak about responsibilities!”

Inequality in religious institutions is now being challenged on our continent. African women are confronting sexism in the Christian church and theology from their cultural and historical perspectives. African woman theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995, p. 173) writes:
Faced with the vastly complicated, hydra-headed challenges of living in today's world, Africa finds little sustenance in the continuing importation of uncritical forms of Christianity with answers that were neatly packaged in another part of the world. These churches, which most often take the form of patriarchal hierarchies, accept the material services of women but do not listen to their voices, seek their leadership, or welcome their initiatives.

She continues later to point out that

Whatever is keeping subordination of women alive in the church cannot be the spirit of God. The church is intended to be the ecclesia of all people, women and men, across all social barriers. In the church we expect to experience “reciprocity and mutual respect, support and protection of each person’s freedom in continuum with our freedom as the children of promise”... It seems that the sexist elements of Western culture have simply fuelled the cultural sexism of traditional African society (Oduyoye 1995, p. 182).

Patriarchal practices and traditions are long in dying. Sadly they are still part of the problem when women’s equality and freedom of religion are considered. From a Christian perspective, the phrase “freedom of religion” has meaning for the church’s relationship with the state but not for the rights of those within the church in terms of their relationships with and in the church. Religious freedom of a church and its members as well as their right not to be discriminated against by the State, should surely have its corollary within the church. The church’s failure to acknowledge this within its own body must be addressed in order to do full justice to the idea of religious freedom. I am not arguing for sectarian license, or an “anything goes” approach, but rather for consistency and inclusiveness. The Christian church supports freedom of religion and equality in civil society. But as Ruether (1987, p. 18) comments,

It is hard to take an institution seriously when it defends religious liberty, freedom of dissent, the equality of persons before the law, just wages and fair political processes, when it refuses to apply these principles within its own institutional walls.

I return to my initial question: “What do the rights to equality and human dignity mean in the Christian church? Can there be freedom and equality of religion without freedom and equality in religion?”
Freedom of religion as freedom to leave your church

The questions I have raised are not intended to imply that freedom of religion is not a necessary, valuable or important human right. On the contrary. The freedom to practice one’s religion without interference from the state is vital for religious pluralism and for the functioning of a democratic state. “History is cluttered with religious authoritarianism” (Villa-Vicencio 1992, p. 254). Religious people’s rights must be protected against the state.

Neither am I implying that women are hapless, helpless victims, captive to religious and cultural norms. Women certainly can make choices. We are often confronted with the following suggestion: “If your church discriminates against you, leave it!” However, the choice to opt out of a religious institution or cultural affinity is not a simple choice at all. In some respects it is no choice. In the first place, belonging to a religious institution is a sociological fact that brings with it the existence of a community with its own practices and traditions many of which are sustaining and which provide solidarity and opportunities for social engagement. Second, belonging to a particular church provides members with stated theological understandings and spiritual and moral insights – all of which are important in helping people to live the life of faith and to shape their identities. It is not easy to walk away from the place that has nurtured an encounter with the divine. Third, there is also a powerful strand of prophetic, liberating thought within the Christian tradition and particularly in Christianity’s source book, the bible, that has given courage and hope to believers throughout Christian history. This alternative voice in the scriptures has enabled many women not only to deal with discrimination and oppression but to use the bible to counter patriarchal traditions and practices effectively.

The situation is further compounded by the fact that many women, because of personal conviction, social and cultural mores or indoctrination, do not question religious theories or practices. It is well known that the internalization of oppressive images and practices is very pervasive and that ignorance and fear of isolation conspire to keep women quiet. The fact that reform is not foreign to the Christian church points to the fact that it can adapt to changes in society and that it is not wholly structured by immutable laws.

When some contend that the answer is simple: “If your religious community is oppressive leave it”, I say: “Just a minute. It is not so simple.” At the same time I concede that a number of women, particularly in the climate of liberal
individual freedoms in North America and Europe, have done exactly that and found their spiritual succour in alterative communities (see Ruether 1985). For the majority of Christian women the idea of simply quitting is unacceptable if not ingenuous. It is precisely in this very deeply entangled relationship of religion and culture that the majority of women find their identity as members of communities of meaning.

There are other ways. Challenging oppressive cultural and religious norms is one way of dealing with this dilemma. Once again Ruether (1987, p. 29), still a member of the Roman Catholic Church, hits the nail on its head when she asks

...whether a democratic polity would not be a more appropriate expression of the community of salvation, than one modelled after Roman imperialism, medieval feudalism and Renaissance absolutism.

I believe she is on the right track. All is not lost. Many women on the African continent are, through critical reflection combined with active participation in their churches, pursuing a similar course. Here I have in mind the challenging work of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians who has published a number of theological works over the last couple of decades exploring the relationship between women and their religious institutions.

I believe, however, that it is the right to human dignity that offers women in the church a powerful tool with which to challenge the church. My conviction rests on the fact that human dignity and the idea that all humanity is created in God’s image, go hand in hand.

**The right to human dignity and imago Dei**

The phrase “image of God” is traditionally used in Christian theological anthropology that seeks to understand what it means to be human. It signifies the dignity and responsibility of human beings who are created in the image and likeness of God. This understanding is largely derived from a passage in the book of Genesis (1:26–27): “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness;... So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them”. Traditionally Christians understand the *imago Dei* as a gift of creation, which is marred by sin, restored by the grace of Christ and will come to fulfilment in the glory of heaven (Johnson 1996, p. 149). The precise meaning of image and likeness has been debated since the beginning of Christianity. More recent interpretations have linked the image of God with human creativity, human
community or human bodiliness and sexual differentiation as male and female (Johnson 1996, p. 149).

Human dignity is thus linked to the fact that every human being images and reflects God in some or other mysterious way. This understanding challenges Christians to demonstrate what the dignity of the human being means in practice and how such an understanding can contribute to the realization of human rights. The Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church declared: “The dignity of man [sic] has its roots in the fact that every human being is an image and reflection of God. As a result of this all men are equal with one another in their essence” (Moltmann 1984, p. 11). More comprehensively, the Reformed Theological Basis of Human Rights in a seven point document puts it as follows:

1. The image of God is the human being who co-responds to God. ...
2. The human being should co-respond to God in his or her relationship to himself or herself. The human being is in this respect a person, and thus he or she has essential rights to freedom.
3. The human being should co-respond to God in his or her relationship to other human beings. Persons are in this respect human beings and thus have essential community rights...

(Moltmann 1984, p. 10).

These two approaches, one seeing the image of God as gift the other stressing a more responsive pattern, manifest different theological traditions, a comprehensive exploration of which is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that despite their different emphases these approaches do not exclude one another. While the Catholics come from a tradition that emphasises the relationship between nature and grace, and the Reformed tradition is based on the scheme of sin and grace, both traditions acknowledge that the “revelation of God in Christ through the gospel is the way to the knowledge of the dignity of all, and of every human being as the image of God” (Moltmann 1984, p. 11).

When Reformed German theologian Jürgen Moltmann (1984, p. 10) begins to tease out the meaning of human dignity, he states: “Human dignity lies in the fact that each particular human being and all human beings are, in common, human”. He then points out that if this statement is not to be a tautology, “... presupposes the difference between the existence and the essence of the human being. The human being is a human being, and ought to be a human being” (Moltmann 1984, p. 10). In short Moltmann’s understanding of human dignity is simple – human beings are human and should be human. “Their existence is both a gift and a task” (Moltmann 1984, p. 10). Our task is to actualize our-
selves, our very essence and so come into our truth – as human beings being fully human. Moltmann (1984, p. 17) continues as follows:

Human rights to life, freedom, community, and self-determination mirror God’s right to the human being because the human being is destined to be God’s image in all conditions and relationships of life.

Unfortunately Moltmann’s understanding of the image of God is blind to the gender implications of simply being human. Feminist theologians have in their reflection on the imago Dei tradition brought to light powerful ambiguities. According to American feminist theologian Elizabeth Johnson (1996, p. 149)

On the one hand, women’s full and equal inclusion in this religious bedrock of human dignity is deeply rooted in biblical and theological insight. On the other hand, traditional Christian theology accepted gender dualism in its strong Greek form, identifying men with the spiritual, rational principle of the world and women with the physical and sexual, irrational, and emotional principle. Consequently, women were projected as the lower part of human nature, and it became difficult to see how they could enjoy being fully human in the image of God, as God is understood in traditional theology.

Once fullness of humanity became identified with maleness it followed that women’s reflection of the image of God came to be regarded as somehow defective and that their claim to dignity was either less valid than men’s or subordinate to male claims.

Feminist theologians reject interpretations of women’s subordination and the dualisms from which it comes and are set on retrieving the full image of God for women, and indeed for all who feel deprived of their dignity and freedom. Quite simply, women claim the critical principle of ‘full humanity’ for themselves (Ruether 1983, p. 19) in an inclusive manner which cuts across the injustices of race and class. The aim is a respect for and a celebration of differences among women as all endowed with inviolable dignity, all created in the image of God.

What would this in effect mean for the Christian church? First, the full humanity and dignity of a human being is exercised in human community. When we human beings are in mutual and affirming relationship with others, we truly begin to reflect the image of God. Obviously this means that a church community that discriminates against women fulfilling their rightful roles cannot be a community that reflects the image of God. Women’s rights to dignity and equality can only be developed in a community that is just, and a community that is just can only be developed on the grounds of the rights
of the person. I agree with Moltmann (1984, p. 26) that “Human liberation is liberation of community and human community is community in freedom”. Quite simply – my dignity and freedom are related to yours. If you are burdened by poverty, sickness, marginalization or stigma, your burden becomes mine.

Second, the right to dignity and equality is inseparable from the right to freedom in religious communities. When these rights are separated I suspect that a private/public dichotomy is at work. What happens inside religious institutions is deemed private. The right to worship without interference from the state is deemed a public right. I would argue that it is ethically untenable to claim the right to freedom of religion while at the same time denying half the members of a church the right to have their dignity and equality affirmed in church teachings and practices.

Third, human dignity and equality determine the nature of our relationships. Relationships can be measured by the extent to which they are marked by “equality of power, mutuality of freedom and responsibility, love that is other-centred yet neither neglectful nor destructive of self, and fidelity” (Farley 1996, p. 239). Such relationships affirm the centrality of the theological claim that we are made in the image of God and therefore imbued with inviolable dignity.

Conclusion

Freedom of religion and the equality and dignity of women is a contentious subject in virtually all the world’s religions. The principle of freedom of religion is one to be jealously guarded and interference by the state in a people’s right to choose their religious affiliations is untenable. Equally so, the right to dignity lies at the bedrock not only of the South African

Constitution but also in the Christian understanding of what it means to be a human being. Sadly, we women find ourselves between a rock and hard place. We know that we cannot call on the state to interfere in religious institutions that discriminate against us in their teachings and practices, thus denying us our dignity and freedom, because these bodies have the freedom to make their own rules. At the same time we have to live with the contradiction that we have the constitutional right to claim equality, freedom and dignity outside religious institutions.

Rocks and hard places are obstacles but they are not immutable. Undergirded by the belief that women’s dignity and equality is as deeply vested in God’s
image as that of men, women are claiming their rightful place in their religious institutions with increasing determination. This arduous journey through often hostile and perplexing terrain, requires courage and the certainty that our cause is not only just but that it is an affirmation of what human community should be when it calls on God’s name. Human dignity, equality and freedom are, in fact, as much religious dispositions as they are legal rights. Herein lies women’s hope for their rightful place in their religious institutions.
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The thesis of this article can be formulated as follows: A relational trinitarian understanding of anthropology and the notion of ubuntu can pave the way for the creation of a human rights culture.

This thesis will be unfolded as follows. Firstly a brief outline of the development of trinitarian thinking in the 20th–21st century is given (1). Secondly the significance of relational trinitarian thinking for anthropology is sketched. The potential of such trinitarian thinking as well as the limitations thereof for anthropology are briefly outlined (2). Thirdly the relationship between trinitarian anthropology and ubuntu is described (3). In the fourth instance a brief description of the author’s understanding of a human rights culture is given (4). Lastly an attempt is made to spell out what the possible implications of a relational trinitarian approach to anthropology as well as the notion of ubuntu for the building of a human rights culture are (5).

**Trinitarian thinking in our days**

The epistemology that developed after the Enlightenment with its emphasis on the empirical support for truth claims, lead to the marginalisation of thinking about the Christian doctrine of the trinity. According to the North American theologian, Ralph Del Colle in his *The Triune God*, trinitarian thinking cannot be reconciled with the Enlightenment criterion that knowledge and truth be empirically, i.e. as it appears to us and as we experience it, verified. In this regard Immanuel Kant claims that we cannot know things in themselves but only as they appear to us (Del Colle, 2001, p134).

Del Colle however portrays that Karl Barth from Reformed and Karl Rahner from Roman Catholic perspectives revalued trinitarian thinking in the twentieth century. Barth viewed the Father as the Revealer, the Son as the Revelation and the Spirit as the Revealedness. Rahner’s trinitarian thinking culminates in this axiom: The economic trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity. Thereby he claims that God’s revelation to
us, i.e. economic Trinity, and his essence, i.e. immanent Trinity, do not differ (2001, pp135–137). The British theologian, Colin Gunton, also refers to the resurgence of trinitarian thinking in the twentieth century. Besides the work of Barth and Rahner, he stresses the work of the Orthodox theologian, Lossky. More recent treatises represent many of the main traditions of Christendom, namely Roman Catholic (Kasper Hill), Orthodox (Zizioulas), Lutheran (Jenson), Reformed (Moltmann) and Anglican (Brown), (Gunton, 1993, p1).

Del Colle points out that trinitarian thinking in the most recent times are under the influence of the three Greek church fathers, the so-called Cappadocians (Basilius the Great, Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory of Nazianzus) who emphasised the interdependence of the three Persons in the Trinity. They described the relationship between the three Persons in terms of origin whereas the Latin church fathers do the description in terms of identity. Firstmentioned emphasised the diversity or plurality in the Trinity and lastmentioned the unity. Gregory of Nyssa described the Father as the Unbegotten, the Son as the Begotten and the Spirit as the Proceeding. Though they emphasise this diversity within the Trinity they also hold on to the unity. This they achieve by describing the relationship of the three Persons in terms of *perichoresis*. This means that there is a coinherence of the Persons in each other. In everything the one Person does the other two are involved (2001, pp129–132).

In a recent study on the trinity the North American theologian William Ury argues that recent theology indeed pays more attention to the social trinity. He nevertheless is of the opinion that many of these attempts still show a bias to the unity model of the Trinity. “Siebels modal perichoresis, Bracken’s ‘occasions’ of an evolving Trinity, Schoonenberg’s Rahnerian statement that the Three ‘face one another as persons in the history of salvation’, A.Kelly’s ‘sheer Being-in-Love’ without any hint of community, or specified relationality, are all statements couched in a radical monotheism but a questionable trinitarianism” (2002, pp 264–265).

Ury reckons that recent attempts at constructing a social Trinity do put emphasis on relations within the Trinity, but that it neglects the idea of the self-cons-

1 Gunton also acknowledges that the concept of relation in the Trinity mainly originates in the thinking of eastern theologians, specifically the Cappadocians, especially Basil. He does, however, argues that some western theologians also adhered to this relational view of the Trinity. Calvin, in opposition to some western theologians like Jerome and Augustine, and in conjunction with western theologians like Tertullian and Hillary of Poitiers, shows affinity to a relational view of the Trinity (1993:95–96).
ciousness of the Persons. This self-consciousness, however, does not coincide with the notion of individualism and autonomy of the modern understanding of self-consciousness. Just like the German word *individulität* that refers to individuality that only receives self worth in a social context, the words that the church traditionally applied to person, namely *prosopon, persona, subsistentia* and *existentia*, include individuated characteristics within a larger framework of relationality (2002, p 268). If this type of self-consciousness of the Persons are not accepted in trinitarian thinking, the risk exist, according to Ury, that important trinitarian notions be made vague, amongst others the reality and implications of divine selfdonation within the Trinity and alterity as essence of the Trinity (2002, p 265). Moreover an underemphasis of the self-consciousness of the divine Persons leads to a de-personalization of God with a concomitant de-humanization. It causes a tri-theism which feeds a rampant individualism on the human side (2002, p 267).

It is not the purpose of this article to critically evaluates Ury’s claims about the weaknesses of recent doctrines of the social Trinity, but his warnings is a reminder to look critically at attempts to construct such doctrines and especially to show caution in attempts to develop anthropologies in terms of such trinitarian doctrines.

In the light of these developments in trinitarian thinking Del Colle suggests that trinitarian thinking ideally should develop along the following lines: Firstly the emphasis on the diversity in the Trinity and the consequent relationship between the three Persons should be upheld. Various theologians support Del Colle in this regard. They describe the relationship between the three Persons in the Trinity as one of interdependence. In the second instance the focus on diversity should be done in the acknowledgement that there exists no discrepancy between the immanent Trinity (the essence of God) and the economic Trinity (as God revealed Himself). The emphasis on diversity and relationships does not nullify the unity of the triune God. Del Colle lastly suggests that since human beings are created in the image of God they do also reflect this unity of person, on the one hand, and openness to relationships on the other hand (2001, pp127–128). The various examples of work on the Trinity in different ways, and with more and lesser measures of success, strive to take criteria like these into consideration.
Trinity and anthropology

The notion of relationality and interdependence in God paves the way for the understanding of human beings as relational and interdependent creatures. This link between God and humanity can be made since we are created in God’s image, as del Colle suggests (2001, p 137). The Scottish theologian Kevin Vanhoozer qualifies that when we use the image of God notion to describe humanity we should take heed to view relatedness, communicative activity and interdependence as the essence of the image of God notion. Rationality is not the dominant feature of this notion as modernistic thinking claims (Human being, individual and social, p 177).

In this vein Gunton states that image of God firstly describes our relationship with God:

To be in the image of God is to be created through the Son, who is the archetypal bearer of the image. To be in the image of God therefore means to be conformed to the person of Christ. The agent of this conformity is God the Holy Spirit, the creator of community. The image of God is then that being which takes shape by virtue of the creating and redeeming agency of the triune God (1993, pp 116–117).

Image of God also denotes our relationship with other human beings and with the nonhuman world:

The human person is one who is created to find his or her being in relation, first with other like persons but second, as a function of the first, with the rest of the creation. This means, first, that we are in the image of God when, like God but in dependence on his giving, we find our reality in what we give to and receive from others in human community (1993, p 117).

The South African theologian, Adrio König reckons that this essential relational characteristic of human beings is also manifested in the biblical notion of covenant. Covenant refers to the partnership of humans with God as well as to the partnership, interrelatedness and mutual dependence among human beings and between humans and nature (1991, p 98).

The idea of human beings as essentially interdependent creatures is in opposition to the modernistic understanding of human beings as autonomous rational individuals. The modernistic anthropology of a selfconscious, autonomous, independent, rational individual was questioned from various circles. In the nineteenth century behavioral psychology started pointing to the determination and limitation of individuals by internal instincts and environmental
conditioning. Freudian psychologists refer to the determining influence of the unconscious dimension of the human personality. Twentieth century sociobiology suggested that human DNA determined every aspect of our social lives. Marxists pointed out that underlying ideologies determine individuals. Poststructuralist philosophers like Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault even suggest that habitual forms of language limit the freedom of individuals since language dominate history, culture and politics. The human “I” according to them is not a free rational speaking subject but an “effect” of language (Van Hoozer 2001, pp169–170).

In the same vein the South African theologian, Jaap Durand indicates that in philosophical circles the idea developed in the middle of the nineteenth and even more so in the twentieth century that everything, specifically human beings, cannot be explained in the rational terms that the modernistic thinking of people like Descartes (selfconscious selfknowing being), Kant (autonomous rational individual) and Hegel (selfknowing subjective spirit) suggest. Under influence of thinkers like Kierkegaard and Nietzsche philosophical schools like personalism developed in the twentieth century. This school questions the selfsufficiency of the reason and emphasised that knowledge can be acquired through concrete nonsystematic thinking which experiences the things that it investigates. Dialogism emphasises the fact that humanity is not constituted by the monological individual but through dialogue with the fellow human being. Martin Buber is a representative of this stream. Durand also refers to the existential philosophical stream that dominated the middle of the twentieth century and which emphasised that human beings form themselves through decisions and actions in an actualisation process of selftranscending. Jean Paul Sartre, Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers are famous representatives of this school (1981, pp128–130).

More recently the famous North American philosopher, Alasdair MacIntyre, has indicated that the emphasis on an anthropology of dependence is a highly neglected theme in western moral philosophy (1999, p 3). MacIntyre argues that there is no human being who does not experience dependence and vulnerability in his or her life:

From Plato to Moore and since there are usually, with some rare exceptions, only passing references to human vulnerability and affliction and to the connections between them and our dependence on others ... Dependence on others is of course often recognized in a general way, usually as something that we need in order to achieve our positive
goals. But an acknowledgement of anything like the full extent of that dependence and of the ways it stems from our vulnerability and our afflictions is generally absent (1999, pp 1–3).

This notion of dependence indeed reflects a certain vulnerability. Human beings are dependent upon others and are therefore also vulnerable. Within the Trinity this interdependence and vulnerability also exist. The North American theologian, Stanley Hauerwas, views God as the God of sacrifice, of weakness and suffering who draws people to Him not by coercive power but by sacrificial love. According to Hauerwas this genuine weakness lures people from their pretentious attempt to make their lives meaningful through power and violence. This weakness also entails that they do acknowledge that their attempt to eliminate the suffering of sick and disabled people – instead of being present to them, being available for them and personally caring for them – is merely a demonstration of their quest to affirm their own significance through power (1986, p 13; 1987, p 592).

The Dutch theologian, Hans Reinders, links the ideas of interdependence and care. With an appeal to the feminist ethicist, Joan Tronto, he argues that the one fundamental feature of human beings should not be independence, but care. Care is the result of the acknowledgement that we can never be fully autonomous, that we need each other, that we exist in a condition of interdependence (1996, pp 16–17).

**Trinitarian anthropology and unbuntu**

The African definition of life and of humanity in terms of *ubuntu* coincides with the trinitarian understanding of human beings as interdependent, vulnerable and caring creatures. According to archbishop Desmond Tutu *ubuntu* refers to that worldview which teaches that to be human is to be fellow-human being. Humanity is not defined by the modernistic formula: I think, therefore I am, but by the formula: I belong therefore I am. *Ubuntu* entails a life and anthropology of reciprocity, communion, care, responsibility and hospitality (1999, p 51).

Tutu also warns against the romantisizing of *ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* can easily become collectivistivistic in the sense that it does not make room for individuality and especially for difference of opinion. Where *ubuntu* becomes collectivism it is an instrument of oppression (1997, pp 50–53). When *ubuntu* is evaluated in terms of Christian trinitarian thinking it becomes clear that an emphasis
on relationship that nullifies the uniqueness and integrity of the individual is strongly objected. In the same vein the nullifying of individual freedom is objected. The notion of *perichoresis*, for instance, implies a non-forced cooperation and solidarity between the Persons of the Trinity.

A different kind of caution about attempts to link trinitarian views of humanity and *ubuntu* thinking about humanity should be raised. The two notions coincide in the sense that both understand humanity in terms of individuality in the context of relationality. However, in the Christian tradition the Trinity is viewed as the *basis* of all relations, that is relations between human beings and God, amongst human beings and between humans and nature. The notion of *ubuntu*, as a prevalent human view and way of life amongst many people in Africa, serves as a *vehicle* for enhancing the embodiment of the relationality and quality of life that is suggested by a trinitarian anthropology. As such it is open to critique and correction by this doctrine. This statement does, of course, not deny that *ubuntu* thinking also enables us to discover more of the wealth of this doctrine. To apply the well-known hermeneutical theory of Gadamar to this context one can say that our knowledge and experience of *ubuntu* forms part of our “fore-understandings” or “fore-concepts” which, if we use it positively, i.e. so that they do not dominate the understanding process, we can come to a better understanding of trinitarian anthropology (Habermas 1982, p 235, 261).

The question can also be posed whether we do need trinitarian foundations if we have *ubuntu*. What difference does the faith or theological perspective make? The German theologian, Michael Welker, is of opinion that faith does indeed have a unique contribution to make with regard to the development of an anthropology, specifically with regard to what he calls a sustainable model of personhood. The way in which this contribution is determined is important. Faith, namely, should not only be viewed as an objective reality which implies that the only role of human beings is to be passive and empty whilst God as the “ultimate point of reference” or abstract entity who inhabits the “beyond”, is the active partner. He reckons this vacuous understanding of faith, which is a strong tendency amongst many Christians due to the fear of people seeking certainty within themselves, leads to a reductionist view of both God and humans. This view of faith became the key to all epistemological and moral worth and the

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2 In this connection Reinhold Niebuhr’s classical description of the destructive effect that the morality of the group may have on the individual, needs to be remembered (*Moral man and immoral society*).
foundation of personhood. In opposition to this view he is of opinion that St. Paul’s and Luther’s understanding of faith provides a more adequate model. According to them faith has both subjective and objective dimensions. This understanding of faith paves the way for a dynamic and dialogical relationship between God and humans (with their uncertainty, distance from faith, lack of faith, or enmity towards faith). It also coincides with the reflection theory of self-consciousness which teaches that there is only an arbitrary distinction between the active and passive predominations in a dialectical relationship of giving and receiving (Welker 2000, pp 105–111).

This understanding of faith also rejects a totalitarian understanding of religion. According to Welker such a totalitarian approach relates all and everything to God and God to all and everything in such a way that nothing becomes clear. He agrees that faith sees the possibility that everything can in principle be related to God, but then it is important to ask where that relationship becomes clear. This clarity comes from that understanding of faith which acknowledges that faith does not exclude the rational and affective human experiences, that it is permeated by knowledge, that it is open to and in dialogue with the questions of certainty and truth posed by other sciences, that it needs to pursue in conversation with non-Christian religions and secular positions the question of what it means to be the image of God (2000, pp 109–112). Welker reckons that not only faith or theology’s quest benefits from this approach, but also those sciences that hold themselves accountable to the classical religious and philosophical standards for a complex concept of the person (2000, p 113).

Welker’s dialogical, dynamic and creative approach of the relationship between God and humans and of the interhuman relationships deserves serious consideration in the quest of theologians to determine the unique contributions of faith suppositions in the quest for adequate understanding of human beings.

Towards a human rights culture

In an Afrikaans newspaper a writer in the letter column describes South African society as follows: The country with the most noble Constitution for the most barbaric people (Die Burger 26 January 2000, [my translation]). This writer lashed out against the fact that in spite of the very good principles in the Bill of Rights in the South African Constitution we experience the highest levels and cruelest forms of crime. At the launch of the Moral Regeneration Movement on initiative of the South African government on 18 April 2002, the South
African theologian Cedric Mayson describes the stance of morality and human rights in South African society as follows:

It has the ring of a prophet of ancient Israel, especially Amos. Murder! Robbery and theft! Rape! Women and child abuse! Domestic violence! Drug trafficking! Fraud! Embezzlement of public funds! Crooked business dealings! Racism! Muggings! Hijacks! Gangsters! Abusing the Bill of Rights! Laziness! Collapse of the family! Land hunger! Lack of will to resist evil! The growing gulfs between haves and have nots! Slow delivery! Perverted religion! Backbiting! Greed! Selfishness! Moral collapse! Corruption from police to parliament! ... (quoted by Richardson 2002, p 3)

Creating a human rights culture implies that the noble principles that South African society adhere to on paper be embodied, that South Africans become a people of integrity, who practise what they preach, a people whose proclaimed and practiced moralities are integrated, a people who give content to the human rights that they in theory adhere to. The explanation that the North American philosopher, Alan Gewirth, offers about what can happen to human rights, further our understanding of a human rights culture. He states that rights can either be fulfilled, infringed, violated or overridden (1984, p 92). A human rights culture, I believe, comes into existence where rights are fulfilled, not infringed or violated and as far as possible, not overridden.³

In creating a human rights culture a Trinitarian approach to anthropology and ubuntu can play an important role, as the last section of this paper strives to illustrate.

**Interdependent human beings and a human rights culture**

A few suggestions are made on how the notion of dependent, vulnerable and caring human beings contributes to the realisation of a human rights culture. But firstly some comments on the inadequacy of the so-called modern anthropology to create such a culture.

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³ "A right is fulfilled when the correlative duty is carried out, i.e. when the required action is performed or the prohibited action is not performed. A right is infringed when the correlative duty is not carried out, i.e. when the required action is not performed or the prohibited action is performed. Thus someone’s right to life is infringed when the prohibited action of killing him is performed, someone’s right to medical care is infringed when the required action of providing him with medical care is not performed. A right is violated when it is unjustifiably infringed, when the required action is unjustifiably not performed or the prohibited action is unjustifiably performed. And a right is overridden when it is justifiably infringed, so that there is sufficient justification for not carrying out the correlative duty, and the required action is justifiably not performed or the prohibited action is justifiably performed”, (Gewirth 1984, p 92).
The anthropology of dependence ensures that not only first generation individual political rights (so-called blue rights) be actualised, but that second generation rights that focus on economic and related social liberation (so-called red rights) and third generation rights that focus on development in the context of ecological integrity (so-called green rights) be adhered to in practice. In this regard MacIntyre comments that where the notion of interdependence, of the mutuality of giving and receiving, is adhered to, there is no room for the politics of competing interests. There consumerism makes room for an ethos of care, and there the gap between rich and poor (on local and global levels) eventually begins to disappear (1999, pp 144–145).

It is also remarkable to note how the South African theologian, Frans Kekana’s, definition of ubuntu reflects the concrete practicing of these various types of human rights.

... the human relations to land, treatment of visitors and/or strangers as an indistinguishable part of the family or household, sharing of land another edibles which has given rise to the African idiom ‘a person is a person through other persons’, the inalienable right of every person to land, food health, education and work in such a way that hardly any one ever starves or feels lonely, interpersonal relations in which community concerns take precedence over the individual, parent-child relations where children respect parents and the elderly, and are protected from scandals and abuse. (quoted by LL Pato 1997, p 60).

An anthropology of vulnerability also enhances a human rights culture. Where rights are to be prioritised, where rights are in conflict, where the access to appeals to rights are measured, the guiding question would be this: how is the most vulnerable in society affected by the choice that will be made. In fact, the quality of a human rights culture, of development and civility in a society is measured by the answer we give to this question.4

From within Christianity it can be argued that where the dependence on others, specifically on God, is seen as essential part of humanity there the fear for receiving disappear. There people recognise that the value of human beings does not only reside in what we can give, but more so in that we receive. There the protestant confession of justification by grace, of salvation without merit

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4 In his well-known study on justice the moral philosopher John Rawls states this point remarkably. “All social primary goods – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favored” (A theory of justice 1971, p 303).
or any giving or contribution from the side of the human being, is cherished. And where we learn to receive, we learn to claim the godgiven rights of others and may I even say of ourselves. Justified people in this sense can then be also just people. The justified ones may seek justice in the world. The implication of this exposition for the opposition of human rights by some mostly protestant Christians with an appeal to the doctrine of justification by grace and faith is hopefully clear. These Christians use the doctrine of justification by grace as an argument to prove that Christians cannot claim rights, because they are sinful and can only depend on the privileges that God in his grace bestow upon them. The revaluation of this central Christian doctrine might enhance the commitment to the creation of a human rights culture amongst Christians who adhere to last-mentioned view.

Lastly, where one’s own and the dependency and vulnerability of others are recognised, there basic rights to equality and freedoms of different kinds are more readily adhered to and concretely embodied. In this regard the feminist theologian, Harriet Harris, states that a relational anthropology does not only pave the way for a social critique of structures and attitudes which foster distorted relations, that is relations of domination and exclusion, but its emphasis of vulnerability and interdependence also helps to rediscover trust among human beings as a central aspect of moral life that has mostly been overlooked by great moral philosophers who, according to her and feminist scholar, Annette Baier, who she also refers to, “were for the most part ‘clerics, misogynists, and puritan bachelors who had minimum adult dealings with women’” (Should we say that personhood is relational? 1998, p 230).

Above-cited examples hopefully illustrate the potential of a Trinitarian anthropology in a context where ubuntu is cherished for the creation of a human rights culture.

It is my contention that an anthropology of vulnerability and dependency will help establishing a culture where human rights will be fulfilled and not fiercely violated as we see in almost all facets of life, the personal and social, and in all contexts, the local South African context, other local contexts as well as in the global context. With regard to last-mentioned context the current war in Iraq that indirectly involves all powers of the world, proves that where humanity is defined in terms of power, domination and independence, there human rights are violated – even by those who have long traditions of human right bills – there life is destroyed, there the powers of death and evil reign supreme.
The notion of an anthropology of dependence and vulnerability, therefore, is not merely a question of theorizing and intellectual gymnastics. It is indeed a life and death issue that deserves urgent attention.
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Other document

GENDER ISSUES
AND HUMAN RIGHTS
Men’s violence against women is a violation of human rights. It is a problem recognized by the UN as one that ought to be given priority. The Beijing Platform for Action (1995), states that: “Violence against women is an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality, development and peace. Violence against women both violates and impairs or nullifies the enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. The long-standing failure to protect and promote those rights and freedoms in the case of violence against women is a matter of concern to all States and should be addressed. /.../ The term ”violence against women” means any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life.” (Paragraph 112 and 113 of the Beijing Action Platform)

This article is based on my PhD research on young people’s attitudes to rape in Sweden (Jeffner 1997), but before I present my research I will give a short background in order to put my work in context.

The Swedish context

Today violence against women is a topic widely discussed in Sweden. The Government and governmental organizations as well as non-governmental organizations and individual men and women regard violence against women as a big problem in Sweden. More and more Swedes realize that violence against women is a structural problem closely connected to the power imbalance between men and women.

The latest proposal from the Government to the Council on Legislation (Kvinnofridsproppositionen 1997/98:55) exhibits an astounding knowledge and also concrete proposals for change and concrete resources to carry it out. New legislation has been introduced where the systematic and repeated violence that men commit in domestic violence is to be taken into account. The
law on rape has been changed so that greater consideration is to be given to the abusive violation of the woman instead of the specific action of the man. There is also a new law prohibiting the purchase of sex, that is to say that those who buy sex from prostitutes are declared to be criminals. Social Services are requested to work more actively to help and support women who are victims of men’s violence. All employers have greater responsibility to prohibit sexual harassment and to deal with the problem if it arises. The women’s shelters have received more money and there is also more money for research on violence against women.

All this is good news and I see it as a result of long and hard work within the women’s movement and especially the women’s shelter movement. A number of problems are, however, yet to be solved. In Swedish schools today, boys can be heard calling girls ”whore” or ”cunt” without anyone doing anything about it. Girls and women are still taught to be sexually and caringly accessible. In the media, such as TV, movies and videos such images are very evident. Pornography can be bought in every store in Sweden and resistance to prohibiting pornography is strong. Boys and men are still taught (by informal learning) to think that they have a right to sex whenever they want and that they have a right to exercise power, a finding which is basic in my own research and to which I will come back in greater detail (Jeffner 1997, Berg 1999).

Rape – differently understood

In spite of all the talk of violence against women as a problem connected to the power imbalance between men and women, very little is done to make changes to this power imbalance. In order to understand this, I think it is important to recognize that violence against women, here rape, can be dealt with from different perspectives and on different levels.

The first perspective is based on the need to provide help (medical, legal, housing etc.) to victims of rape. On this level, it is important to find ways to re-empower women. In Sweden, this first level is not a very controversial one but providing resources for this work is still an extremely urgent matter. Most European governments would at least say that they think it is important to provide help for women who are victims of violence against them. That is, however, not to say that all governments do something about it but, if presented with a concrete proposal, they would have problems arguing against it. On this level, financial support for refuges, shelters and other NGO organizations
working with violence against women is of great importance. Information and education for those people who come into contact with rape victims (police, medical care, treatment of offenders, social workers etc.) are also important.

The second level is more about empowering all women. This is a bit more controversial, but still not too hard to carry out. On this level, actions to be taken concern supporting both governmental and non-governmental initiatives from organizations working with women at large. Such initiatives can be special girls’ groups in schools or youth recreation centres, teaching young girls that they have a right to say “No” as well as support for other actions promoting equality between men and women.

Coming to the third perspective, this is where I think that resistance is most likely to come. One might say that actions on this level are about calling the patriarchal structure into question.

My point of view, based on the analysis of the results in my interviews, is that all work on the two other levels can be counterproductive if this third level is not taken into consideration. If society provides help for women who are victims of rape and works to empower all women, without at the same time putting the perpetrators and the male “right” to sex in question, then we face the risk of ending up in a situation where the cultural gender norms of men as violent and holding power positions are accepted. Without doubt, the work that needs to be done on this level presupposes a feminist analysis, which might be controversial. I consider my research to be dependent on feminist theory and, thus, a feminist analysis and, for this reason, I depart from the point of view of the third level described here.

**Points of departure**

In this article, I will focus on a discussion of what I conceptualise as “the different space for action” that is provided for boys and girls, and why I think an understanding of this is crucial to the work against rape. The relevance of gender and heterosexuality to young people’s perception of rape was the overall theme in my research, particularly the relationship between what young people regard as “normal” – in terms of their ideas about and their experience of gender and heterosexuality – and what they regard as “extreme” – in terms of their ideas about and/or their experience of rape. The empirical data consist primarily of several interviews with 16 fifteen-year-olds of both sexes.
The theoretical framework on gender theory that I use draws on the Swedish sociologist, Eva Lundgren's, work (Lundgren 1993), in which gender is regarded as being constituted through a lifelong process of interaction. A key analytical tool used to understand my informants was the concept of cultural gender norms. I speak of cultural norms for gender and heterosexuality against the background of the idea that gender and heterosexuality can only be understood as an interplay. Following Eva Lundgren’s (1993) position, cultural gender norms are not viewed as static or unchanging at either the cultural or individual levels but, nonetheless, every individual must relate to cultural norms, either by observing them, violating them, or some combination thereof, as well as possibly by contributing to changing them also.

**A space for negotiation**

One truism that all the informants appear to relate to at what I call “a level of principle” is that rape is wrong and unacceptable, while “good sex”, which implies romantic love¹, is worth striving for. Another principle accepted by all the informants is that the refusal that defines rape (saying no) constitutes a kind of boundary. If this boundary is transgressed, the effect is condemnation, not only from society in the form of a legal sanction, but also from the local community, where the perpetrator ought to be regarded as an outcast. So, at the level of principle, for all my interviewees, rape is anything that happens after the girl has said “No”, whereas romantic love is based on reciprocity and trust. Reciprocity suggests mutual consent, and if the girl says “No”, there is no reciprocity. In the light of this definition, on the level of principle, the boundary for where good sex ends is where rape begins, and vice versa.

Young peoples’ interpretation of what is to be defined as rape, therefore, is when a man has intercourse or performs any other sexual act against the will of the woman. But this interpretation also turned out to be open to reinterpretation. I found that there is constant negotiation about boundaries, and constant reinterpretation of what conditions have to be satisfied for an event to be defined as rape. Analysis of the interviews highlighted six different conditions: a/ how “No” is said; b/ the significance of love; c/ the effects of alcohol; d/ notions of the whore; e/ notions of the rapist as deviant and f/ the consequences for the girl.

¹ I have borrowed the concept of romantic love from Anthony Giddens (Giddens 1995).
These conditions serve as tools for negotiation in the process of reinterpretation. In the exploration of concrete examples, both personal accounts and fictional examples, a space appears between rape and good sex. Rape may still be understood as anything that happens after the girl says “No”, but this also appears to apply only: a/ if the girl said “No” in the right way; b/ if the girl still isn’t in love with the guy afterwards; c/ if neither the girl nor the guy has had too much to drink; d/ if the girl cannot be categorized as a whore; e/ if the guy cannot be classified as “normal” and/or f/ if the girl is in really bad shape afterwards.

These conditions mean that actions and events that can be defined by the boys and girls as rape can also be interpreted as something else; it is then no longer possible to specify any exact boundary for when something is to be interpreted as rape and when it is to be interpreted as something else. I have chosen to call this the *space for negotiation*. This space depends on the conditions, and arises *between* what is understood as rape – i.e. something deplorable and normatively wrong – and good sex – i.e. something worth striving for and normatively right. When young people discuss rape at the level of principle, the conditions are not visible. They do not become visible until there is an encounter with concrete examples of what the informants perceive as normal heterosexual interaction.

Crucial – and the first step in my analysis of how young people see rape – was to step aside from the way rape is perceived in principle and to identify and interpret some of the circumstances that change the way rape is perceived on a more concrete level. The next step was to interpret the circumstances in relation to cultural codes for heterosexual interaction by linking the findings from questions about gender and heterosexuality to the findings from the explicit questions about rape. The space for negotiation is thus located as part of the so-called normal cultural codes for heterosexual interaction. Since each of the conditions discussed below are marked by the cultural perception of the sexes as different from one another, the space for negotiation has differential consequences for the potential space for action for young women and young men, respectively.
Different space for action

All my interviewees appeared to assume that young women and young men have the same points of departure in heterosexual relations. This may be a typical Swedish opinion since the principle of equal opportunity (jämställdhet) is widely accepted and promoted as an ideal. This is not, however, to say that gender equality is achieved in Sweden. If we take a closer look at each of the conditions, which mark the space between rape and good sex, a different picture appears. All the conditions can be interpreted as reducing the space for action available to young women and correspondingly increasing the space for action available to young men. I will illustrate this by looking closer at three of the conditions; the way in which “No” is said, the notion of the whore and the significance of alcohol.

No – a Simple Two-letter Word?

The importance of how “No” is said is one of the conditions that all my interviewees discuss. A real “No”, or a definite “No” is distinguished from a “No” said at the last minute or a “No” that means “No” to sexual intercourse but “Yes” to, for example, making out. Which type of “No” it is is crucial to whether the intercourse that follows will be interpreted as rape or not. So, what does this tell us about the everyday life of young women and men?

It is possible to argue that a girl who does not want sex with a boy ought to say a clear and definite no and that she should also leave the situation. There are rules and regulations very familiar to young people saying that one should say no if one does not want to have sex and also how this no is supposed to be said. The way in which “No “ is said, therefore, appears to be something that girls can control and also something girls are responsible for.

But if we take into consideration the cultural codes/norms for heterosexual interaction, the situation becomes more complex. According to my study, hegemonic norms for gender and heterosexuality prescribe: that girls are nice and supportive; that they should be emotional and caring; and that they should be neither too sexually active nor too sexually passive. A girl who fulfils these expectations does not violate the norm if she says a weak “No” at the last minute. But she does violate the same norm if she says a definite “No” to someone who wants something from her. The girl who does not say a clear and definite “No” breaks the rule she is well aware of in terms of rape, whereas at the same time she obeys the rules of femininity.
Teaching girls to say “No” in a clear and decisive way is often presented as a simple solution to the problem of girls being raped and sexually assaulted. But recognizing that this, at the same time, requires girls to break the cultural norms for gender means the simple solution becomes a bit more problematic. It is, for example, very likely that the girl would suffer in relation to what is understood as good sex; she is putting her chances of being part of the heterosexual interaction at risk. To participate in the heterosexual interaction demands that girls stay within the frame of the cultural norms for gender. To minimise the risk of being raped the demand is simultaneously that girls violate these very same norms. A Catch 22 situation!

Unreflecting notions presuppose that it is, and should be, the responsibility of the girl to say “No”. Girls are expected to take this responsibility and so the cultural norms demand that they accept this Catch 22, which to a very large extent restricts their space for action.

Of course, there are boys who really do take “No” for an answer, in whatever way it is said. The boys who do not, however, do not automatically become rapists. There is an extra space available for them because it is possible to interpret the “No” as having been said in the wrong way.

Notions of the whore

Perhaps the most manifest limitation for girls in the heterosexual interaction is the risk of being regarded as a whore or a slut. It is impossible to walk through schools all over Sweden today without hearing boys of 10, 11 up to 17,18 years shouting the word: whore, at girls. The word has become an accepted invective that every girl risks being called, but at the same time there is also a small number of girls in every school who have the reputation of actually being a whore.

The Swedish sociologist, Lena Berg, interviewed girls about sexuality (Berg 1999). ”Just enough” is the concept that, according to her findings, best describes the girls’ understanding of sexual interaction with boys. The goal is to pass as a ”just enough” sexually active girl. If too sexual, there is always the risk of being regarded as a whore, but if too asexual, there is, on the other hand, a risk of being regarded as dull. According to Berg, the girls develop different strategies to manage heterosexual interaction, strategies in order to pass as ”just

2 Just enough is not a completely adequate translation of the Swedish word ”lagom”. A word that only exists in Swedish and could also be translated as not too much and not too little, or sufficiently, or moderately, or appropriate, or suitable.
enough”. The girls make demands for emotional bonding, they make every possible effort to assess the boy’s intentions, they wait for a sexual invitation from the boy and they try hard to understand what is really going on in the boy’s mind. All this emotional work is done to avoid the risk of being regarded as a whore. (Berg 1999)

My own empirical work points in the same direction as that of Berg and in combination with notions of rape the consequences become even clearer. The notion of the whore imposes strict limitations on girls, they have to be very careful not to sleep with too many boys in order to keep their ”reputation”. There is no corresponding risk for boys, rather the opposite. The notion of the whore, in addition, provides boys with a justification to do what they want with some girls, without it being regarded as rape. Thus the risk of being labelled a whore restricts a girl’s space for action and the notion of the whore, and what you are free to do to her, provides an extra space for action for boys.

**Alcohol**

The young people in my study interpret drunk boys and drunken girls differently. A boy who is drunk has a legitimate excuse for behaving badly, to act in ways he normally would not. One of the boys says, for instance, that emotions towards the girl are not important at all if he is drunk, and another one says that his friends thought he should have ”gone for it” when he had the chance with a girl who was even more drunk than he was. Being drunk provides a space for boys to step outside the boundaries of the ideal relationship.

The situation is different for the girls. They have to be aware that things can happen if they are not careful with drunken boys. One of the girls said: ”Well it’s a fact of life, everybody knows what drunk boys are like”. Drunken boys are located in some kind of state of nature that cannot be dealt with other than by avoiding them. If girls fail to do this, then they only have themselves to blame if something happens. Additionally, girls are not to be too drunk themselves. One young woman, Josefine knows what she is talking about after a boy had sex with her when she was so drunk that she ”wasn’t really there”. Again, the space for action shrinks for girls when they have to be both on their guard against drunken boys and avoid getting too intoxicated themselves.

Similar analyses can be made around the other three conditions. The significance of love and the notions of the rapist as deviant can both have the effect of taking away responsibility from boys. If a rapist is someone who is deviant,
the boy next door cannot really be one. If loving someone is wonderful and something to strive for, a boy she loves cannot be a rapist. When all research points out that the majority of rapes are committed by known men and when known men, according to the conditions, cannot be rapists this again opens up for different space for action for boys and girls.

Consequences for girls have to do with notions of rape as the worst possible crime that will ruin a girl for life. A girl has to behave in accordance with these notions in order to be believed. There is one kind of behaviour that is the ”right kind” of behaviour. This again limits her space for action even after something has happened to her.

Each of the conditions works differently for boys and girls, expanding or narrowing the space for action, and it can be illustrated as the model below.

**SPACE FOR ACTION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The interviewees' assumptions of heterosexual relations</th>
<th>Heterosexual relations related to the conditions</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>Boys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>Girls</td>
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Thus the options available to young women and young men within the framework of heterosexual interaction are different, and when these different options are related to rape, they may have decisive consequences.

**Opening up space for reflection**

The culturally accepted conditions that constitute the space for negotiation are almost always hidden in discussions about rape. On the level of principle, rape and “good sex” appear to be exclusive categories and at this level young people’s attitudes and opinions are clear. My point is that the very wide definition of rape as everything that happens after the girl has said “No” can contribute to maintaining the invisibility of the concrete conditions of young people’s everyday life.
The model shows how little space is available for girls and how large a one is available for boys; this is the picture of what young people regard as “normal”. By making this explicit and visible, the “normal” can be seen as quite “extreme”. If rape is regarded as “extreme” and at the same time as everything that happens after the girl says “No”, then the “extreme” is also quite “normal”.

There were several examples in my material of boys who choose not to use the whole space available to them and also of girls who found ways to increase the space for action available to them. The point of my argument is however that the model above shows us the different possibilities for girls and boys within heterosexual interaction. Using Catharine MacKinnon’s theory, the different space for action can be understood as currently structuring how girls are positioned in heterosexual interaction:

Women often find ways to resist male supremacy and to expand their spheres of action. But they are never free of it. Women also embrace the standard of women’s place in this regime as “our own” to varying degrees and in varying voices – as affirmation of identity and right to pleasure, in order to be loved and approved and paid, in order just to make it through another day. This, not inert passivity, is the meaning of being a victim. The term is not moral: who is to blame or to be pitied or condemned or held responsible. It is not prescriptive: what we should do next. It is not strategic: how to construe the situation so it can be changed. It is not emotional: what one feels better thinking. It is descriptive: who does what to whom and gets away with it. (MacKinnon 1989)

It is not passivity that characterizes the victim in MacKinnon’s understanding but rather the activity it requires to fight for a space that is too small to begin with.

The conditions which structure whether an incident will be constructed as being something other than rape, something “normal”, can be understood as implying for girls that, in principle, they are not “rapable”, while for boys the implication is that they cannot be designated a rapist. Taking this to the extreme, therefore, only a sober woman who does not have a bad reputation, who has not behaved sexually provocatively and who has said “No” in the right way can be raped, and only by a man who is sober and “deviant” and with whom she is not in love. Thus, the different space for action for girls and boys within heterosexual interaction can be understood as a description of “who does what, to whom, and gets away with it”.

DIFFERENT SPACE FOR ACTION – A WAY TO UNDERSTAND RAPE
My analysis here has focused on a different space for action for boys and girls in the field of heterosexual interaction. The conditions serve to place the responsibility with the girls. Girls have to learn to say “No” correctly. Girls have to be on their guard against drunken boys and not get too drunk themselves. Girls have to be on their guard against the reputation they can get if they are too sexually active. But what is it that we expect the girls to learn and be on their guard against? Do we want the girls to just accept that ”boys will be boys”? My conclusion is that what girls as well as boys do is just participating in a sex/gender culture by following norms that prescribe ”normal” heterosexual interaction. The building of a human rights culture demands that we call into question the so-called normal because the ”normal” is nothing but specific cultural values.

One problem with rape is that it can be understood as a violation of human rights and as such be the object of debate, but at the same time, as argued here, rape can be interpreted as something ”normal”. When understood as something normal, we tend to forget to fight it because it comes too close to us.
References


In early modern Europe, fathers were generally considered as more important than mothers in the caring, raising and education of children, including over-seeing wet-nursing and feeding of infants and taking primary responsibility for older children’s moral and religious instruction, preparing them for their adult duties (Lupton & Barclay 1997: 37).

In recent years unmarried South African fathers have had to fight for the right to be legally recognised as fathers. Lawrie Fraser, an unwed South African father, is, for example, currently part way through his four year sentence for kidnapping his biological son, Timothy. As an unwed father Fraser had no rights to his child when his ex partner, Adri Naude, decided firstly to give up her baby, and secondly to refuse Fraser’s request to raise the child himself, on the grounds that she deemed him to be an unsuitable parent. Despite Fraser’s plea to the court to rule against Ms Naude, his request for permission to raise his son himself was denied. His appeal to the constitutional court brought no relief. Although it ruled in Fraser’s favour, deciding “that fathers of illegitimate children had the right to veto decisions by mothers to give up their children for adoption” the court also ruled that this could not apply retroactively. Because Timothy had already been adopted Fraser could not reclaim him. It was in response to this ruling by the highest court of the land that Fraser concocted the unsuccessful kidnapping plan that eventually saw him charged and convicted of conspiracy to kidnap (Cape Times, 4 April, 2003).

In South Africa there has been a degree of change regarding fathers rights since the dramatic events surrounding the foiled kidnapping of little Timothy. But even though the Natural Fathers of Children Born out of Wedlock Act of 1997 has allowed natural fathers rights to their children, these are not automatic rights, and to obtain them a father has to apply to the High Court (de Villiers 1998). Even married men’s access to their offspring cannot be taken for granted. South African Trade Unions, for example, have endeavoured to move away from the notion of maternity benefits to parental benefits, but this has had limited impact because paternity agreements normally offer about one weeks leave to
fathers, and only provide this leave when the baby is new-born (Appolis 1998). South African employers furthermore are generally unwilling to offer leave to fathers because child rearing is understood as a woman’s issue, while fathers themselves are often reluctant to use parental leave to care for their children, fearing either that “friends would make fun of me” (Appolis 1998: 79) or that they might lose seniority or be seen as less ambitious. Further afield one only has to think back a few years to the birth of British Prime Minister Tony Blair’s child to recognise how contentious an issue paternal leave is: the public debate about whether he should or should not take the minimum paternal leave raged in British newspapers for months before the child was born, and reached even South African papers.

Such struggles around fathers rights need to be seen as the product of our histories and the consequence of essentialist ideas and discourses around motherhood and fatherhood that are almost diametrically opposed to those quoted at the beginning of this paper. Essentialism understands contemporary notions of ‘motherhood’ and ‘fatherhood’ to be ahistorically rooted in biology, to be an unchanging and fundamentally unchangeable essence of our humanity – in other words to be just ‘human nature’. My argument here is that far from being an essential part of human nature, the meanings we ascribe to ‘fatherhood’ and ‘motherhood’ can and do change according to time and place, and that if we look carefully we can start to see how those meanings change. In the West, the twentieth century has seen, at least until recently, a privileging of the role of ‘mother’ at the expense of that of ‘father’. It was widely believed – and reflected in our laws – to be only ‘natural’ that as well as bearing children, it was also women’s work to raise them, and that all women were born with the innate ability to nurture – or to mother. Instead of a skill that was learnt, child raising was perceived to be an inborn quality. There were, in contrast, very different expectations of men. A brief comparison of the wording of Universal Declaration of Human Rights with that of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, documents separated by a mere 40 years in time, illustrates clearly how such understandings change.

In the preamble of the former, adopted in 1948, the discourse is almost entirely around man and men. The human subject is clearly understood as male. As Article 1 makes clear “all human beings” are expected to “act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood”. “Everyone” states Article 13, “has the right to leave any country, including his own”. “No one”, continues Article 15, “shall
be deprived of his nationality”. In contrast, the wording of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – adopted in 1990 – is scrupulous in its avoidance of such an assumption. In this document there is no sense that the human person is seen as male, and the discourse is consistently around “persons” who could be of either sex. Implicit in both of these documents are changing ideas about gender roles, and change in the social understandings of ‘fatherhood’ and ‘motherhood’ in the decades between the production of these two documents is clear from the wording each uses. For example, despite stating, in Article 16, that “the family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society”, ‘fatherhood’ is not mentioned once in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Motherhood, in contrast, is singled out as in need of special assistance. As Article 25 puts it, “[m]otherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance.” In contrast, the Convention on the Rights of the Child refers to mothers only in terms of their specific pre and post-natal health care (Article 24). All references to financial and material obligations towards children are couched in language that is gender neutral, as, for example, the wording of Articles 26 and 27 demonstrates. Speaking of “persons having responsibility for the maintenance of the child” and “persons having financial responsibility for the child”, there is little sense that these are understood to be gender specific roles. In reflecting the values of the societies in which it was produced, the terminology of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, simultaneously helped reinforce those values. In privileging the role of ‘mothering’, in reflecting and tending to establish ‘nurturing’ as something of which only women – and all women – are capable, the document concurrently denies such a role to fathers. It is this understanding that has shaped much twentieth century family law, and that, in South Africa, has seen Lawrie Fraser’s rights as a father denied.

As the quotation at the beginning of this paper suggests, there is a great deal of evidence to suggest that in other times and other places fatherhood – and motherhood – have been constructed differently. “[I]t was the father who was considered to shape the child, to be the ‘natural parent’” in early modern Europe for example (Lupton & Barclay 1997: 37). Closer to home, in the early 19th century Western Cape slave society, ‘fatherhood’ was reserved for freemen. Slave men were not acknowledged as fathers before the law, and had no legal claims or obligations towards their biological offspring, and at least one slave rebellion was partly inspired by conflict over the meaning of fatherhood (van der Spuy 1996). Scully (1997) argues that for male slaves emancipation was given
meaning by the social recognition of the role of father it entailed. In assuming that what it means to be a ‘father’ – or a ‘mother’ – is culturally and historically specific, this article explores a momentary ‘lapse’ in the broader construction of the twentieth century essentialist and hegemonic discourses around motherhood/fatherhood exemplified by the wording of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The article emerges from my recent PhD study that explored changing constructions of masculinity in Drum magazine in the second half of the twentieth century. As an historian interested in changing gender roles, and based in a department of Women’s and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape, I had embarked on the study to explore change in the magazine’s representations of femininity. But when I came across, for instance, advertisements for baby food that featured no women I soon found my focus shifting to an exploration of the way the magazine constructed masculinity and manhood.

In marked contrast to images elsewhere (Lupton & Barclay 1997; Chopra 1992; Davidoff & Hall 1987) the ‘nurturing father’ was a crucial component of the manhood portrayed by the early volumes of Drum magazine. Between 1951 and 1965 when the magazine turned into a supplement to the weekly newspaper Golden City Post, images of men privileging their roles as fathers slowly vanished. Far from muted, fatherhood was central to representations of manhood in the early editions of Drum magazine. In contrast to magazines aimed at white audiences Drum consistently represented manhood as something achieved through the social recognition of the male roles of husband and father, brother and uncle, son, grandson and grandfather. These early editions acknowledged the complex and mutually supportive relationships centering on family members inside and outside the home, and provided public recognition of a social ‘manhood’ that was rooted in an extremely wide variety of domestic obligations inherent in these roles. Men’s relationships with their children were privileged by the magazine in a variety of ways. Over the course of the 1950s though, this began to change such that by the 1960s it was a man’s relationships with his colleagues and employers that were increasingly emphasised. At the same time Drum recognised fewer familial obligations to the extent that, by the middle of the 1960s, a man was represented as having little or no domestic obligations to his children beyond that of financial provider. Vanishing from texts or advertisements that contained children, by the mid 1960s manhood had been largely separated from fatherhood, with the former established via
relationships with apparently independent and autonomous interactions with non kin men outside rather than inside the home, as well as (although not the focus of this chapter) through sexual relations with women (Clowes, 2002). Establishing, by the mid 1960s, a manhood with few connections to fathering/children, men were effectively written out of *Drum’s* discourses around fathering.

**Drum Magazine**

What has come to be known simply as *Drum* first appeared as the *African Drum* in March 1951. Funded, owned and edited by white men, the post World War II society into which the magazine was born was one in which industrialization, and its corollary, urbanization, had seen significant change in South Africa’s racial demography. Census records indicate that there were more than two million black South Africans living in urban areas in 1951, compared to a little over one and a half million in 1946, and just one million in 1936 (SA Statistics 1980: 1.17, 1.13). The rural migrant labour workforce upon which white industrialists had previously relied had effectively been replaced by an urban black working class during the course of the 1940s, a working class that was both ’settled’ and ’permanent’ according to a government commission of 1948 (Fagan nd: 7) In the 1950s this urban black population was to become *Drum’s* main audience.

Within a year of the first edition *Drum* had established a solidly increasing circulation with a primarily urban black male audience, and by the following year was claiming to articulate ’the authentic voice of non-Europeans in Africa’ (*Drum*, November 1953: 5). This growth was matched by an increase in the number of employees who were, in contrast to the white owner and editor, almost without exception black. All were male. This was a trend set to continue such that by the mid 1960s every editor was white and male, and almost every writer published in the magazine had been male and black. On those rare occasions when authorship was attributed to women, closer inspection frequently revealed the authors to be black men (Driver 1996; Nicol 1991). The audience too, was imagined to be largely male, because, as an early editor noted, it was urban black men ’who were the main buyers because they had the spare cash’ (Sampson 2000). So although it was owned and edited by white men, the magazine was written and produced by black men for an urban black male audience.
The magazine was enormously influential, and by the mid 1960s had developed into five separate editions produced in five different locations around Africa. It was, according to one analyst, ’one of the most popular magazines in Anglophone Africa in the 1960s and 1970s’ (Mutongi 2000: 1). Wole Soyinka records that the ’average Nigerian reader’ of the mid 1950s ’was weaned on Drum’. (Soyinka 1988: 168). The focus of this paper though, is on the South African version of Drum, which produced world class photographers in the persons of Peter Magubane and Bob Gosani, and employed as journalists men who, through their writing, subsequently became household names in South Africa. Henry Khumalo – Mr Drum himself – was joined by Todd Matshikiza, Arthur Maimane, Can Themba, Casey Motsisi, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Nat Nakasa, Stan Motjuwadi as well as many others.

**The Political Context**

The political context into which the magazine emerged was one in which, after winning the election of 1948, the Nationalist Party was in the first stages of implementing its plans for separate development or apartheid. The times were characterised by the growth of authoritarianism and political repression alongside rapid economic growth. The racially charged conditions touched the lives of both producers and consumers of Drum, helping to infuse both black and white notions of sex and gender and informing the particular images of manhood and masculinity produced by the magazine. The magazine regularly alerted readers to the appalling impacts of the unequal power relations between black and white South Africans, constantly protesting against the apartheid regime. If apartheid is imagined to be – at least in part – an attempt to construct and maintain a subordinate masculinity defined by race, then Drum’s challenges to the apartheid state can be seen as repeated attempts to assert the manhood of black men. As black American writer bell hooks notes, ’[s]ince competition between males is sanctioned within male-dominated society, from the standpoint of white patriarchy, black masculinity must be kept ’in check”, and ’black males... made subordinate in as many cultural arenas as possible’ (1995: 99). Growing increasingly intolerant of opposing voices, the patriarchal white state made a number of increasingly successful efforts to limit what could be said, and Drum was not alone in finding itself confronting the government in court several times in the 1950s and 1960s (Merrett 1994).
**Images of men at home**

In marked contrast to accounts in magazines aimed at white audiences, such as *Outspan* and *Femina*, the early *Drum* treated men as males whose lives were shaped in important ways by kith and kin, hearth and home. Not only were fathers, mothers and wives acknowledged to have played significant roles in both the private and public lives of the soccer stars, musicians, community leaders and gangsters featured on the magazine's pages, it was also recognised that men, as husbands, fathers and sons, had significant domestic roles to fulfil. Articles about older men frequently observed that as young boys they had been expected to fulfil their share of the domestic chores. *Drum* revealed, for example, that as a child the ex-mayor of Benoni location had received a “thorough spanking for forgetting to wash the pots and pans for his mother at home” (November 1955: 61). The young Ezekiel Mphahele, (a journalist at *Drum* and later one of South Africa's most eminent novelists) had, said *Drum*, been responsible for several chores including fetching and carrying washing for his mother (January 1956: 6).

Older men too, had important tasks around the house. Marshall Zibi, whose claim to fame was his newly acquired status as husband of cover girl, Priscilla Mtimkulu, washed dishes after meals and helped hang out washing according to the magazine (April 1956: 40,41). An 18 year old soccer player who lived “with his parents and his elder brother, Lucas, at Moroka Section JX, Johannesburg” played a highly significant household role according to *Drum*. “His brother and he are the only children at home, and as he is the youngest, he does most of the domestic work. With mother’s help Steve does the cooking, cleans the home and washes and irons the family’s clothes” (November 1955: 39). Photographs of local heroes engaged in a variety of domestic chores and contexts further reinforced the idea of men as males intimately connected to the home and to women. The magazine seemed to see nothing unusual in the photograph of well known local musician Wilson “King Force” Silgee of the Jazz Maniacs cooking bacon and eggs for his wife (February 1955: 38). Golfing champion Simon ‘Cox’ Hlapo, was snapped washing dishes in his parent’s house, another photograph captured a defeated boxer engaged in the task of reading to his grandmother, while yet another depicted Peter Clarke hugging his mother on receiving the news that his entry had won *Drum*’s short story competition (February 1955; June 1955; April 1955).
Men and families

Domestic interactions with parents, grandparents and siblings were thus an unremarkable part of a man’s daily life, as recorded by Drum. The intergenerational familial relationships between individuals were marked by the magazine both through the naming of those relationships and through the foregrounding of such relationships. The members of a man’s family were very clearly foregrounded in an article about a retired black cricketer. Oom Piet Gwele was the ostensible subject of an article entitled “Old Man Cricket”, which began with the words:

“We found the Gwele family cuddled around a glowing fire on a chilly evening: parents, children and grandchildren. Mama Nancy Gwele had a bad ‘flu, and eldest daughter Edna Mnguni had left her boxing promoter husband in Germiston to nurse her – and contracted the ‘flu too (November 1954: 21)."

The first mention of Oom Piet himself, only occurred in the second paragraph. The successes and ambitions of each of Oom Piet’s several offspring were recorded, while photographs of his extended family framed the text. Oom Piet was surrounded, both metaphorically and literally, by his offspring, his grandchildren and other individuals marked as family.

Articles in magazines produced for white audiences, such as Femina and Outspan tended, in stark contrast, to downplay white men’s experience of domesticity. Such magazines seldom had much to say about the individuals who shared the lives of the male subjects of their articles, and had even less to say about the domestic chores white men might have undertaken. Even on those rare occasions when white readers were promised something more than a simple account of a man’s public life they were disappointed. “It seems queer, somehow that these great national figures should live quite ordinary, suburban lives and go to work everyday just as lesser mortals do” noted Outspan in a feature article focusing on Dudley Nourse, Captain of the South Africa cricket team. But despite promising that “we [will] tell you about the man very few people really know” the text held almost nothing other than a summary of Nourse’s cricketing career, mentioning Nourse’s father simply because he too had been a cricketer and that young Dudley had equalled “his father’s record as the country’s most prolific runner” (May 18 1951). The focus was, very clearly, on Nourse himself.

The Vanishing Father
Fathers and children

Articles in Drum, on the other hand, frequently saw a man’s children claim centre stage in stories about their fathers. Israel Alexander, hailed by Drum as “South Africa’s richest African” was photographed with his daughter, Joy, at work, and with his family at home (December 1954: 21). It was Jake Tuli’s children who were foregrounded in Drum’s coverage of the boxer’s fights. After losing the Empire flyweight title Drum’s headline declared that “Jake loses crown, kids comfort him”, while two of the three pictures published alongside the text featured his children (December 1954: 41). An article which emphasised the large debt he owed his mother, portrayed King Edward Masinga (the first black radio broadcaster to be employed by the South African Broadcasting Corporation) with his two daughters and a niece. (April 1955). Even political and traditional leaders – as the coverage of future Botswanan President Seretse Khama, his wife and children made clear – were portrayed against the backdrop of their families, while at the other end of the social scale it was “husbands” and “fathers” rather than “men” who were the victims of homicide attacks (July 1955; June 1955). Further demonstrating the richness and complexity of intergenerational male relationships, notable men without children of their own were often featured with youngsters identified as cousins or siblings (January 1955; May 1956).

Family and community was central even to Drum’s investigative journalism. An exposure of the harsh conditions on farms and the dangers of the ‘tot’ system (by which labourers were paid with alcohol), made it clear that such practices dated back many years and had been condemned not only by the Dutch Reformed Church, but also by successive governments as well. But the main problem of the ‘tot’ system, as outlined by Drum, was not its cause (decades, if not centuries of racist laws), but its results: the destruction of family life. Of the seven men whose views were sought, four were recorded as expressing concern over its effects on family life. One “had all too often seen homelife spoilt”, another argued that “people who have tots don’t care a hang for the family”. A third believed it led “to the breakdown of families”, while a fourth complained that drink played havoc with domestic life. The only woman whose views were recorded expressed concern about health rather than family affairs (June 1952: 8). Similarly, an article attacking the colour bar did so on the basis that it broke up families, while coverage of the long queues for buses condemned the resulting delays on the grounds that parents did not see their
children, or, more significantly, that fathers did not see their sons (November 1955:49; July 1952: 32).

As late as 1959, in a report on changes to the criminal law, Drum framed its discussion in terms of the likely impact on fathers and families. The example given to illustrate the likely effect of the law was that of a “desperate father-to-be” who rushed from home at midnight to call a midwife and was duly arrested under the pass laws. To the new father’s distress, his wife was forced to give birth alone at home. Seen through the eyes of an involved father, Drum’s opposition to the changes in the law was couched in the language of the family, and the nuclear family at that (April, 1959: 23).

Fathers and babies

Advertisements in the early 1950s also clearly signalled that fathers and husbands were intimately acquainted with mundane household matters, concerned for and involved with, the well being of sons (if not daughters). Perhaps constructing the black male breadwinner as guardian of the family purse, advertisements (usually placed by white owned firms) tapped into notions of black fathers’ pride in their sons to sell products. A variety of advertisements featuring black men and babies but not mothers (which were almost unthinkable later on, and which did not appear in magazines aimed at white audiences) clearly privileged the role of father, suggesting that at least some advertisers believed the route to a man’s pocket lay through his male offspring. “Your baby is a fine healthy son” declared a female nurse to a solitary man in an advertisement for the antiseptic liquid, Dettol. “How happy a father feels when he hears those words” commented the text (September 1952: 12), while another advertisement for Dettol, erased both the female nurse and the mother who had given birth, portraying one man congratulating another on “a healthy childbirth – and such a fine baby” (October 1952: 30).

These kinds of advertisements constructed explicit emotional links between black fathers and sons, linking the health of sons to the happiness of black fathers through the latter’s involvement in the domestic preparations for the arrival of the former. But advertisers in Drum did not stop at portraying a black father’s part in the preparations for a successful birth. Manufacturers clearly believed that black fathers continued to be involved in child rearing after the birth, and drew on this belief to boost sales. Ovaltine, a milky drink, was mar-
 marketed to men on the basis that, amongst other things, it gave tired fathers the strength to play with their children (September 1955). It was father, rather than mother, for example, who appeared to be holding the baby in an advertisement for Incumbe baby food that ran in April 1952 (April 1952).

Contrasting with the kind of advertisements placed in both *Outspan* and *Femina* which used only white women and white babies, the manufacturers of Nutrine baby food employed both black and white fathers of sons to sell their product. Tapping into local working class aspirations of upward mobility, and employing the racialised hierarchies so familiar to South African audiences, Stanley Msomi, a skilled mechanic is confronted by his white male boss. “You used to be a good worker Stanley, now you stand around doing nothing. What’s wrong?” Msomi explained that it was domestic affairs that had impacted so adversely on his work. “I’m worried about my little boy. He’s thin and weak and always crying.” The supervisor’s response, as another knowledgeable and concerned father, was to identify with Stanley’s problem, and recommend Nutrine. “My son was thin and weak too till Nutrine made him strong. You should try Nutrine.” The next frame shows Stanley informing his wife, Rose, of the values of Nutrine and declaring that “we must get it”, followed by the penultimate frame in which Rose informs us that “Nutrine certainly is nourishing. It has made baby fat and strong in only 3 months”. The final frame presents the reader with a smiling Stanley Msomi who “works better than ever now” (November 1952).

The rare advertisements drawing attention to white fathers published in magazines aimed at white audiences tended, in contrast, to identify a narrow financial obligation as the province of fathers or family men. One example of a company that advertised in white magazines (but not *Drum* at this time) was Old Mutual life insurers, which drew extensively on the discourse of ‘the family’ (i.e. nuclear family) to sell insurance. But the images such advertisements employed were those of children with weeping women, or solitary children whose futures had been ’smashed’, to draw attention to absent men (*Outspan*, March 9 1951: 56).

The early 1950s saw the male writers, editors and publishers of *Drum*, as well as its advertisers, position the males they portrayed firmly inside nuclear and non nuclear families and households where members relied on each other through a fluid rather than a rigid gendered division of labour, and where the intergenerational ties surrounding men were highly significant. The early *Drum*
saw males portrayed as men through the strong social and emotional ties they had with their children, wives, and parents as well as through their intimate involvement in child raising and household chores. Even though many children, wives, parents and grandparents lived apart from their husbands, fathers and sons, most of the successful males whose stories appeared on the pages of the early *Drum* were, in contrast to magazine coverage of white men, established as men precisely through the social recognition of these relationships.

**Images that distanced men from their families**

This way of representing manhood was not to last, and as the 1950s drew to a close articles and features about important men contained fewer details of their domestic arrangements and the inhabitants of those domestic spaces. Likewise, photographs of men with their children, or busy with household chores grew scarce, giving way to images of men away from home. Advertisements for household products tended increasingly to group women with children rather than men and children. Although men were often still acknowledged to be husbands, they were seldom acknowledged as fathers, let alone as sons or brothers. And even where men’s marital status was proclaimed, the chances of pictures or texts revealing any of the practical ways they shared their lives with their children and wives diminished.

**Feature articles**

Signs of change were evident from as early as 1956. In a story about Jeremiah Mofokeng, who apparently opened the first African owned hotel in South Africa, not a word was said about his children or any other family members. Instead the focus was on Mr Mofokeng’s business dealings, with his wife named only in the caption to a photograph (*Drum* 1956). The same edition saw a story about a dead gangster, the story of “how an ordinary man went wrong” make no mention about any of those who had been part of the man’s life (*Drum* 1956:57). Later on such reporting became more common. A feature article on gang leader and ex-boxer King Kong in 1959 made no reference to his family circumstances. Just a few pages further on was a profile of a nineteen year old black South African athlete who had beaten the world champion, and again no mention was made of his domestic arrangements – in marked contrast to the sorts of coverage of young sportsmen earlier in the decade (February 1959).
These kinds of shifts in reporting were underlined in a three part biography of black South African cricketer, Basil D’Oliviera the following year. In this biography the magazine remained entirely silent about D’Oliviera’s family, apart from one brief mention of his father, but even then only in his capacity as his son’s first cricketing coach. Although the Cape Town street in which D’Oliviera and his family lived was named, the people comprising that family were neither identified nor mentioned (Drum June 1960; July 1960; August 1960). Both text and images more closely resembled that of Outspan’s article about Dudley Nourse in 1951 than they did Drum’s article about Oom Piet in 1954. Other sportsmen too, were represented as self made. Boxing champion Kangaroo Mado appeared, according to Drum a few months later, to have made it to the top entirely on his own, while the domestic background and relatives of another boxer, Enoch ‘Schoolboy’ Nhlapo were passed over for details and pictures of his actions and deeds in the ring (October 1960; March 1963).

Politicians were increasingly divorced from their families as well. Where much had been made of Sir Seretse Khama’s children in an earlier story in 1955, not a word was written about the family of Hastings Banda, future president of Malawi, in an account of Banda’s achievements in March 1959. The same year saw attempts to identify “the man of Africa 1959”, remain absolutely mute on the subject of the children, wives or parents of the men short listed for the title, and when the photograph of a woman accompanied those of the male contenders, she was neither named nor discussed in the text (January 1960). Anonymous children and unnamed wives might be the justification for the demand for higher wages which “would bring immense benefits to a majority of below breadline workers” and let “the black man...stand on his own two feet”, but this was a construction that, like those in magazines aimed at white audiences, emphasised a masculinity built around financial commitment only (July 1960: 33).

Advertisements

Similar trends were evident in advertisements. Although the range of baby foods promoted in Drum increased, the number of adverts portraying involved fathers decreased, and by the mid 1950s black fathers had vanished from baby food advertisements. Instead, emulating advertisements placed in white magazines, it was either women or white males dressed in the white coats of authority who exhorted mothers, rather than fathers, to buy the products (Drum, May 1956;
Drum, August 1956). Dettol dumped fathers as well. Replacing fathers and children with solitary men dabbing the liquid on themselves, or being treated for injuries by anonymous women, nurses or white male doctors, the ties and obligations of kinship amongst and between black men and children seemed to have evaporated. If women still regularly nursed men in these advertisements, the care they took was never reciprocated by men. Although Dettol was still marketed to children and babies, it was done so through black mothers, or white male doctors rather than fathers.

Numerous advertisers utilised images of crowds witnessing some spectacular male achievement to demonstrate the popularity or versatility of their product. Men, women and children were portrayed watching other men win races, score goals, thrash opponents and so on. These images reinforced the notion of men as individual rather than social beings. Producers of canned milk goods Nestle and Gold Cross for example ran a series of advertisements in Drum in which goalkeepers, cyclists and labourers were set apart from their team members, competitors or co-workers. There was little hint that winners or achievers were the product of anything other than individual effort and the canned milk promoted by the advertisements. Such men, it seemed, owed little to their teams, their competitors or their colleagues let alone the invisible members of their families (February 1960; March 1960). In contrast advertisements produced by the same companies, and focusing on women, retained either children or babies in close proximity to women. If men were no longer constructed as fathers, women remained constructed as mothers, a division that was very clearly symbolised by an advertisement for Gold Cross Milk in August 1960. While reuniting the family in one sense, the advertisement used a band drawn diagonally across the advertisement to very clearly segregated men from both children and mothers (August 1960).

There were, of course, one or two advertisements that bucked the trend. “Proud fathers”, for example, appeared once or twice in advertisements for Klim (a dried milk product) the early1960s, but were seriously outnumbered by the “worried mothers” and “clever housewives” who dominated the adverts (Drum July 1961: 34; February 1962: 56; April 1962: 65). In terms of articles, while the magazine published far more stories, articles and features about men than it did about women, it seldom acknowledged them to be husbands, fathers or sons, consistently downplaying or disregarding the roles of family members in men’s success. Instead, on those rare occasions when images of men
did appear in a domestic setting, it was to demonstrate just how low they had sunk. “Downfall of the Playboy Prince”, for instance, was an article illustrated by a photograph of the prince in question helping his wife wash dishes in their Johannesburg home (June 1964: 24).

The ‘new’ man
By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a much clearer and more consistent division had emerged between public and private in Drum’s construction of gendered urban life. While there were obviously exceptions, the articles and advertisements in the magazine generally constructed men as solitary and autonomous individuals who inhabited a public world far away from the home as workers, politicians, employees and sportstars rather than fathers, sons or husbands. Women and children, on the other hand, were portrayed as inextricably rooted in the private world of the home. Men were breadwinners; women were mothers, housewives and nurturers. Yet Drum had constructed men as breadwinners and women as financially dependent housewives from its earliest days (January 1952). What had changed was the meaning Drum ascribed to the term ‘breadwinning’. Consistently imagining breadwinning to be primarily a man’s burden, the early Drum had portrayed it as an activity shaped by intimate relationships with numerous others in a social context where domestic obligations were everyone’s business. But as the changes discussed above indicate, the male role of breadwinning became increasingly to mean a simple financial obligation.

Accounting for change in the representations of men
It is difficult trying to account for these changes, and in this article I will only tentatively point to what are probably a multifaceted and complex set of causes. The first thing to note is that although, by the mid 1960s, Drum portrayed men as solitary, autonomous and distanced from their kin, these images hinged on the continued presence of invisible wives and unseen children. Drum’s portrayal of men located them within the archetypal nuclear family of a breadwinning father, a home based wife and mother of two or three children. These family members were a continuous but absent presence in the lives of the men represented in the magazine: the role of breadwinner required such dependents. By the 1960s advertisements and articles reiterated over and over again that women’s work revolved around children and the home maintenance that (implicitly and invisibly) permitted men’s expeditions into the world of work. But if this was the image, the reality was a little different.
The material world

To begin with the deteriorating conditions in the rural areas, alongside the rapid economic development after the war had impelled increasing numbers of wives into joining their husbands in towns (Mager 1998; Bonner 1990). By the middle of the twentieth century some urban couples “were remarkably Western in form,” with “increasingly large proportions” of urban Africans on the East Rand, for instance, “living ’in family circumstances.” (Bozzoli 1991: 238; Bonner 1988: 394). But instead of supporting the continued development of nuclear families, the political changes following the election of 1948 saw the possibilities for men and women to live together in towns as husband and wife (let alone as breadwinner and housewife) increasingly undermined by the apartheid measures of influx control, pass laws, forced removals and the Group Areas Act (Bozzoli 1991). According to one source, the 1950s and early 1960s had seen the “number of men living with their wives and children in urban areas... drastically reduced” while the “only family life for by far the greater proportion of African men and women in the country is the short period they are at “home” in the reserves (Wollheim nd: 6,8). Making no mention at all of whether children lived with their fathers, surveys in the 1960s indicated that around 30% of children did not live with their mothers in towns (Market Research Africa 1968: 27,28). By the mid 1960s it seems that few were able to live together in the kinds of “Western families” that had been relatively common just 10 years earlier, and as the apartheid regime tightened access to towns more and more children were forced to grow up with their grandmothers in the rural areas rather than with their mothers in towns.

Familial or kinship ties evidently remained important though. Despite recording that “the transformation from a society based on kinship to one based on association is complete” with the “very fact that kinsman are so scattered prov[ing] that kinship is no longer dominant,” one study took care to emphasise that although “kinship ties have weakened, they are more evident than among the majority of whites in the cities of the Republic” (Wilson & Mafeje 1973: 174,175; Hellmann nd: 21). And Bonner notes that the ties of kinship were further maintained in town through the clustering of urban residents with others from their home region (Bonner 1995). The evidence thus suggests that the archetypal nuclear household, with breadwinning fathers and homebased housewives and mothers, was more common in white society than it was in black. Certainly magazines aimed at white audiences portrayed white men as

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if this was the norm: wives and children were silently and invisibly present in the stories about white males, just as magazines aimed at black audiences suggested they were for black men. But, for black families, the material reality of *apartheid*, and its impact on access to education, jobs, housing, and the right even to be in an urban area for more than a couple of days, limited the accuracy of this image.

But if not a simple reflection of socio-economic change, how else can the shifts in representing men over this period be accounted for? Any answer to this question needs to take into account that there were two entirely different sources for the material that ended up in *Drum*. Advertisements were, for the most part, drawn up and placed by white men. In contrast feature articles, stories, investigative journalism and photographs were produced, and even edited, by mainly black men. That the material from both sources changed suggests either a link between them, and/or wider change that affected both in similar ways.

Different discourses

Nineteenth and twentieth century Western discourse has, by and large, written nurturing out of the role of ‘father’. As van der Spuy notes of biographies of South African political leaders (with the exception of Stephen Clingman’s study of Bram Fischer) “any form of domestic relationship is profoundly silenced” (van der Spuy 2002: 9). As de Kanter (1987) notes there are multiple meanings to the term ‘father’. It may mean, for instance, an individual who has never met his offspring, whose role may simply have been to provide the biological material that generated a child. On the other hand there may be no biological relationship between a father and what are perceived to be his children, either legally, through adoption, or informally, as the live-in partner of their mother. A ‘father figure’ may also be simply be a friend of the family (Lupton & Barclay 1997). The term ‘father’ does not automatically imply the same emotional and physical interaction with a child that the term ‘mother’ suggests: the twentieth century Western world has tended to see the praxis around child raising centralise the role of the female parent. Baby and childcare manuals are generally addressed to women, advice about how to raise one’s offspring is either located in women’s magazines or on the women’s pages of magazines and so on. Nurturing, as even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights indicates, has not been understood as men’s work. The “nurturing father”, as the historian Chopra argues, has been “muted” within the “gendered discourse of childcare” in the
West in the twentieth century (Chopra 2001: 445). As Lupton and Barclay note of the English speaking world:

both childcare manuals and magazines for parents have been in existence in the Anglophone world since the early nineteenth century, and were at first directed at both fathers and mothers. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, fathers were rarely mentioned in these texts, while mothers were positioned as having primary responsibility for raising children. This has remained the case until the last few decades (Lupton & Barclay 1997: 88).

It is only very recently that academic studies focusing on men and masculinities have begun even to speak about men as fathers. Critiquing contemporary feminist scholarship that has sustained a discourse around motherhood and mothering as a single role and practice for women only, Chopra’s examination of ethnographic studies conducted in the decades since World War One, alongside an exploration of contemporary film suggests that “fathers have been written out of the picture” and that “the ’absent father’ as the hegemonic ideal eclipses any alternative versions of fathering and care provided by them.” “The presence of the father is posited as an absence, in contrast with the hands-on vital involvement of the mother” (Chopra 2001: 447). It is only very recently in the West that this kind of understanding has begun to break down, as the shift in wording between the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child demonstrates.

Editorial change

The early Drum’s recognition and celebration of fatherhood and the family man, may then, have been connected to the unfamiliarity of Drum’s black employees, most of whom had no experience of writing, with the ’proper’ Western discourse of fatherhood characterising the early to mid twentieth century. Editorial inexperience may have further contributed to the ’improper’ discourse. The owner of Drum, Jim Bailey, is on record for noting how Anthony Sampson, editor between 1951 and 1955, was an outsider, with no journalistic experience, who “knew nothing whatever of Africa”. This, said Bailey, had permitted Sampson to allow South African writers to write what they wanted (Bailey in Caccia 1982: 124). “[I]gnorance” recalls Sampson, “had its advantages. I had to let the black journalists tell their own stories with a vigour and freshness that broke all the rules, but that expressed the true spirit of the townships” (Sampson 2001: 13). Perhaps it is no more than a coincidence that the first
signs of change corresponded with Sampson’s departure and the appointment of South African journalist Sylvestor Stein, highly experienced in writing for white South African audiences, as the new editor. Nevertheless, change of editorship might well have played a role in subtly changing the discourse around men and families, especially if Stein and, later on, Humphrey Tyler, adopted a more hands on approach. Later still, the end of the 1950s, another British emigrant, Tom Hopkinson, was appointed as editor. Unlike Sampson and Stein however, Hopkinson had vast amounts of experience in publishing and representing men in the European manner, and there is little evidence to suggest that he took anything remotely approaching a back seat during his tenure.

Journalists

On the other hand, it is possible – and perhaps more likely – that black journalists themselves subtly adapted their writing to embrace the ‘modern’ (i.e. Western) narrative of white writing that, even within the nuclear family, treated men as isolated, autonomous and independent of both women and children. Perhaps, early on, local discourses around the social importance of fatherhood, and the recognition of a black manhood that was built around social relationships and responsibilities outweighed the more ‘modern/Western’ discourse of individualism. Hall has claimed that the very idea of modernity and its celebration of civilisation, progress and rationality, is predicated on difference (Hall 1992). As Hodgson has put it “the modern not only presupposes but requires the existence of the traditional to acquire its meaning” (Hodgson 1999: 144). At the same time, feminist scholars have argued that the discourse around colonialism is characterised by “a common pattern of regarding the colonised country and the colonised people as ‘feminine’” in opposition to the colonisers who are set up as masculine (Moane 1999; Sinha 1997; Markowitz 2001). Although it would be simplistic to argue that these two dichotomies of traditional/modern and feminine/masculine can be superimposed onto each other so that feminine/traditional are set up in opposition to modern/masculine, it is possible that representations of black men with women and children (in opposition to white men without them) were understood by some to imply the absence of modernity.

Given that early twentieth century biomedical discourse in South Africa had already established “Hottentot women” as representing “the least advan-
ced human life form” it may also have been deemed an advance for men to be distanced from women (Burns 1996: 8). Ferber has made this point in relation to white supremacist discourse in the United States, noting that “[t]he more pronounced degree of differentiation between white men and women is offered as one factor separating whites from other races and signalling their superiority” (Ferber 1999: 77). That this notion was held by significant elements of the South African establishment is clear from the 1957 report of a Commission of Enquiry into undesirable publications that examined the South African Press which noted that:

[i]n every civilised community and among all cultured nations it is a characteristic feature that women are held in esteem and treated with respect. Women are pre-eminently the guardians of morals and the upholders of moral values. They are the embodiment not only of motherhood but also what is good and noble in this country (UG 42/1957: 52).

Combining editorial change with a context in which texts recording the lives and achievements of white men remained silent about their social existence and the people who shared that existence, and as the journalists of Drum grew more familiar with their trade, as they themselves perhaps aspired to the trappings and trimmings of the ‘modernity’ described by Driver as a ‘Western future’, it may be that the ways in which black writers positioned black men in their writing also changed (Driver 1996: 232).

The ideas outlined above can offer only a partial and limited explanation of the changes that took place in Drum’s representations of men because, as noted earlier, advertisements were changing in more or less the same way and at more or less the same time, and neither journalists nor editors had much to do with the construction of advertisements. Perhaps the beginnings of an explanation for why advertisements changed can be found in an exploration of developments within the advertising industry itself. To begin with, a spokesman for the industry had declared, in the late 1950s, that advertising was “the most important single factor in influencing, particularly our urbanised Bantu, towards the acceptance of at least the outward symbols of our Western civilization” (O’Grady in Burke 1996: 126). Evidently the industry saw its task as one of bringing modernity to those it constructed as ‘traditional’.
Advertising

At the same time the middle of the twentieth century saw the South African advertising industry in a state of transition. The industry professionalised firstly by setting up the Society of Advertisers in 1951, and secondly through establishing the first industry wide journal in 1953. It also began to systematically support research which explored the changing relationships between black consumers and advertising in the post-war period (Sinclair 1997: 236). The late 1950s had also seen the government commission alluded to earlier express its “shock” at the kinds of images of women appearing in advertisements in magazines aimed at non-Europeans, and advertisers were also having to take stock of this report (UG 42/1957: 65). At the same time advertising organisations had taken the dramatic step of recruiting black men into white owned firms as advisors on how to approach the black market. Nimrod Mkele, with an M.A. in psychology, had been appointed head of the African market division of J. Walter Thompson and, by 1959, was making conference presentations discussing the nature of the black market from his unique involvement in both worlds (Mkele 1959). Likewise, Dan Chochco, who had joined Drum straight after leaving school, was appointed first as an advisor and then as the manager for the African Research Division of a local agency in 1960 (Selling Age March 1960; May 1960). In 1959, Mkele argued that:

The most important values that influence African buying behaviour – and this includes advertising reactions – derive from European standards, which the African has come to accept as the yardstick with which to measure his own integration into the society whose ideals he has come to accept as his own (Mkele 1959: 23).

Given the absence of family men from advertisements in white magazines, alongside input of this nature from Mkele it is possible that advertisers simply reworked their focus in the mid to late 1950s to treat black and white men in more similar ways. If Mkele was right in his argument that “Africans” accepted European values and standards as their own then it made sense for advertisers to recognise this. It is clear from Burke’s research that, by the mid 1950s, a good many advertising executives had come to believe that one could not successfully market products advertised specifically for Africans (Burke 1996: 135). “It was, in fact, extremely difficult to sell [the African] any article which was packed differently from that packed for European trade” noted the advertising manager of Lever brothers in 1953 (Cited in Burke 1996: 135).
Another black advertising executive, J. E. Maroun, believed that rather than wait for blacks to “come to accept” European standards, it had been and still was the role of advertising and marketing to “change culture”. “The only African markets that do exist”, he claimed in 1960, “are those that have been created, those that have been made through the efforts, conscious or otherwise, of manufacturers and marketers” (Maroun in Burke 1996: 127). The increased emphasis on marketing directly to black women was apparently precisely because by the late 1950s local advertisers had come to believe that, as in the west, “it is [women] who determine what shall or shall not be bought” (Mkele 1959: 25). It seems clear then that the nature of advertisements was more closely linked to the beliefs of the producers of the advertisements than it was to the material worlds of the consumers and purchasers of such products.

Whether black consumers “naturally” aspired towards these kinds values, or whether, as Maroun argued, they learnt to aspire to them, it appears likely that advertisements aimed at black customers would be considered more likely to achieve the desired result if they reflected the values portrayed in advertisements typically aimed at white consumers. Values which, as one analyst was later to claim of advertisements in American magazines “conjure a world of objects detached from people and of people disengaged from others” (Masse & Rosenblum 1988: 132). So while it is possible, that the disappearance of family men and fathers from the advertisements reproduced in *Drum* reflected the influence of the black men asked to advise on how best to attract black customers, it may also have reflected broader changes in advertising representations of gender emanating from the industrialised world. Or, more likely still, it was an uneven combination of all these possible explanations that explains the shift away from representations of the family to the solitary man.

All men live their lives surrounded by a network of connections with both other men and women. Relationships between men as fathers and sons, uncles and brothers, grandfathers and colleagues, lovers and opponents etc. are an integral part of a man’s life. Women, in the form of mothers and wives, daughters and sisters, grandmothers and aunts, friends, lovers and neighbours also impact in varying ways on each man’s life. The evidence outlined above suggests that urban South African men of the 1950s lived lives shared with both children and wives: many families “were remarkably Western in form” at the beginning of the second half of the twentieth century (Bozzoli 1991: 238). This began to change with the imposition of apartheid laws that increasingly tried to restrict...
the access to towns of a workers dependants, that determined, on the basis of racial classification, where one could or could not live and so on. Children and wives were supposed to stay in the rural areas, and as the second half of the twentieth century wore on, fewer urban families were able to aspire to the Western format of the nuclear family.

**Conclusion**

Yet this is not what is portrayed by *Drum*. The early years of the magazine saw an adult man established as such through the portrayal of personal relationships with a wide range family members, in particular through the foregrounding of children. The magazine was comfortable publishing images, texts and advertisements that publicly demonstrated men’s proximity to and interactions with the private space of the home, to the extent of showing men playing with children, buying baby food, washing dishes and reading to their parents. The family structures concerned were represented as tending towards the nuclear with fluid gender roles in which men had a wide set of obligations towards their children and towards household maintenance. In contrast, by the middle of the 1960s, although families were still represented as nuclear, the gender division of labour seemed to have solidified, with men appearing outside the home and having little to do with the mothers and children who were supposedly located inside the urban home. Child raising and home maintenance was conceptualised by the magazine as women’s work, with motherhood increasingly represented as “the essence of a woman’s being” (Gillis in Lupton & Barclay 1997: 38). Marginalised as parents, manhood for men was established through a narrow portrayal of a male’s relationships with other non kin males. Within the space of a decade, urban black men (like urban white men, and despite a social reality that was very different) were constructed as autonomous and isolated individuals, having little or no emotional or physical legacies from – or attachments to – parents, grandparents, siblings, children or even wives.
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Although there is a worldwide movement towards the recognition of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a form of torture and a violation of human rights there are still protagonists who believe that the practice of FGM is justified. While researching the phenomenon FGM, it has become increasingly evident to me that certain pronouncements are being made regarding the practice. For example it is often stated that FGM is not a form of torture or a human rights violation and that it is an important cultural rite which must be enforced. These statements were usually made by those who personally did not undergo FGM and/or have a vague notion of what it is. Although the sincerity of these views might be respected it is apparent that they are not always grounded on any detailed insight or knowledge regarding the procedures involved or the suffering endured. This study is an attempt to fill that hiatus. Through a detailed descriptive analysis of the phenomenon FGM I will show that FGM is indeed a form of torture.

In order to situate this study vis-à-vis FGM as a form of torture it will be instructive to provide a definition of torture. The Oxford English Dictionary defines torture as “severe physical or mental pain” and synonyms include “agon, misery, suffering, wound, deform, disfigure”. Furthermore the Declaration On The Protection Of All Persons From Being Subjected To Torture And Other Cruel, Inhuman Or Degrading Treatment Or Punishment notes that “Torture constitutes an aggravated and deliberate form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment...” (United Nations, 1983).

Using the above as a convenient point of departure, I will a) show how and why FGM constitutes a form of torture; b) delineate which human rights are violated; and, c) list some of the legal measures that have been adopted by certain countries in relation to FGM. It must be stated at this juncture that what follows is a general overview of FGM and while some countries may perform the mildest form of FGM, in other countries the most extreme type may predominate.
Brief Historical Overview

Historically, this ancient ritual was practised in Egypt, Asia and by some Australian aboriginal tribes (Abdalla, 1982:6). It is still a prevalent custom in some 26 African countries, in some parts of the Middle East, South East Asia and African immigrants to the North and West continue to maintain this tradition (Mekuria, 1995:1). It is estimated that 130 million girls and women have experienced similar practices (Toubia, 1995:5). According to FORWARD (1996:1) five women every minute and two million girls are added to this figure annually, making it, “...the widest form of brutal female torture in contemporary society.”

Female circumcision or female genital mutilation (FGM) is not a nascent phenomenon and many writers attest to its ancient provenance. According to Walker & Parmar (1993:82) the first documented case was estimated to have been performed approximately 6000 years ago. This ancestral custom was known and discussed by physicians of the Roman Empire (Rathmann, 1959:115). In Egypt it dates to the Pharonic times, approximately 1500 B.C and predates the advent of Islam (Lancaster, 1997:6; Slack, 1988:443).

In ancient times FGM had a definite class component as it was performed only on women from the upper socio-economic echelons and on relatives of priests and rulers (Daly, 1978:162). Conversely, among present day practising communities, circumcision is defended as a ‘social leveller’ in that it maintains equality as it is performed on all females irrespective of educational, religious or socio-economic status (Lamb, 1992:13).

FGM has survived through 6000 years because it was a closely guarded rite and was usually enshrouded in absolute secrecy and superstition. This strict adherence to the laws of secrecy made it virtually impossible to obtain definite information on FGM. Koso-Thomas (1987:20) is of the view that it was only during the 19th century that researchers were able to obtain decisive information on FGM. This conspiracy of silence is also evident in the fact that circumcised women are themselves unaware of the different types of FGM as this subject is taboo and any discussion of it brings dishonour to the families (Bartels & Haaijer, 1995:72). In certain tribes there are no actual words that can be used to name the procedure (Mekuria, 1995:3).

Various terminologies have been utilised to describe the procedure viz. female circumcision, female sexual castration, female genital cutting, female genital surgery and female genital mutilation. Since the early 1990’s the term FGM has been adopted by the United Nations and is used internationally to refer to
traditional practices performed on women (WHO, 1996:4). There have been some negative reactions and resistance to this forceful and controversial term but it is the term that is generally accepted.

Types of FGM
In order to understand fully why FGM is regarded as a form of torture and a human rights violation it would be pertinent at this juncture to offer a description of the various types of FGM and the procedures involved.

Incision or Prick
This is the mildest form with little chance of adverse or long term debilitating effects. The incision into the clitoris is more of a symbolic nature and does not damage any part of the female genitalia (Reyners, 1993:23). This form is encouraged by immigrants especially to the USA and Europe who seek alternative rituals to compensate for not performing FGM at all (Bartels & Haaijer, 1992:16). These alternatives ensure that they satisfy their religious and cultural obligations.

Clitoridectomy
This type includes the total removal of the prepuce and the clitoris and it has been suggested that this form is ‘true circumcision’ because it is analogous to male circumcision (WHO, 1996:4). Following this procedure the chances of complications such as excessive bleeding and infections are extremely high (Reyners, 1993:23).

Excision
The clitoris and the labia minora are removed completely. The labia majora are left intact and the vagina is not closed.

Infibulation
This type is regarded as the most extreme form and is also referred to as severe circumcision. Infibulation involves the complete removal of the clitoris and the labia minora as well as the inner surface of the labia majora (Koso-Thomas, 1987:17) The two sides of the vulva are stitched together with one of the following: acacia thorns – which are soaked in ‘mammal’ a special oil mixture, silk, catgut, horsehair, pins or other metal objects, so that when the skin of the remaining labia majora heals, a bridge of scar tissue forms over the vagina (WHO, 1996:2; Yidu, 1998:13; Crul, 1992:99). Consequently the entrance to the vagina is completely obliterated, which is the initial purpose of this procedure. Nevertheless, a false vaginal opening, which eventually is no larger
than a corn kernel or a grain of rice (Warsame et al, 1985:2), is maintained by the insertion of a sliver of wood, reed, matchstick or straw to allow for the flow of urine and menstrual blood and in some cases women have actually conceived through this tiny aperture (WHO, 1996:2; Allen, 1995:1; Walker & Parmar, 1993:367).

Toubia (1995:10) mentions that the opening:

[...] is sometimes as small as the head of a match stick or the tip of the little finger. If the opening is more generous, sexual intercourse can take place after gradual dilation, which may take days, weeks or even months. If the opening is too small to start the dilation, recutting has to take place before intercourse.

The smaller the hole the more prestigious the procedure. The family honour is dependent on making the opening as small as possible which increases the value of the girl which in turn raises the bride price (Hosken, 1999:3).

**Gishiri Cuts**

According to Reyners (1993:26) and WHO (1996:2) the term Gishiri is used to describe ostensible problems associated with the reproductive system e.g. infertility, painful intercourse, and amenorrhoea. This process entails the scratching of either the anterior or posterior vaginal wall with a sharp knife in order to allow a little blood to flow. Following the flow of blood it is believed that the problems will abate.

**Defibulation**

This term refers to the opening of the infibulated vulva. It occurs after the marriage, once the husband or a female member of the family has inspected and confirmed that the wife is a virgin or ‘closed’ (Bartels & Haaijer, 1995:84). In some instances where the opening is the size of a pinhole, penetration can take up to fifteen days or more with much pain and bleeding (WHO, 1994). Often, full penetration only occurs after three to 24 months (Khalifa, 1994:21). If the husband is still unable to attain full penetration, he uses either the assistance of certain instruments such as a knife, piece of glass, or his fingernail (Slack1988:453) which can result in further complication, or the circumcisers and other female members are approached to assist.

In yet a different tribe the husband’s mother or grandmother measures his penis, makes a wooden replica of the same size and cuts the infibulated opening of the bride accordingly (Slack, 1988:453). How this is of assistance is not clear. In still another variation, the bridegroom has a friend who is present during the wedding night. While the friend ties down the bride, the groom
opens the bride with a razor either upwards or downwards. Thereafter, sexual intercourse occurs (Khalifa 1994:16–34). Whether the friend is still present at this point is also not clear.

Another reason for defibulation is that during birth it is impossible for the foetus to emerge through the tiny aperture and the mother has to be defibulated (Reyners, 1993:26). This process recurs with each new birth.

**Reinfibulation (Recircumcision)**

This process entails the suturing of the raw edges after the woman has given birth and is also done to repair an interrupted circumcision (Lamb, 1992:17). It is a simulation of virginity and entails:

> The closing of the vulva to its post-wedding night size and is repeated after each child is born. (Forms of FC, 1999:1)

Reinfibulation is therefore seen as a symbolic regeneration of purity and honour. According to Lamb (1992:28) in Sudanese Arabic reinfibulation is referred to as *Adlat El Rujal* (men’s circumcision) because it is designed to bring greater pleasure to the man. After the baby has been weaned the woman is opened again for intercourse (Hosken, 1999:2). Reyners notes that the term ‘vulva reconstruction’ is also used but he argues that this is not a suitable description as it involves reconstructing the tiny aperture only and does not entail the reconstruction of the vulva to its original form (Reyners, 1993:26). In traditional societies because virginity is highly prized, it is believed that this physical state could be regained through reinfibulation. Widows and divorcees therefore often undergo this process in the hope of regaining their ‘virgin status’ thereby increasing their status as prospective brides. Girls try to procure this procedure after premarital sex (Allen, 1995:2).

From the above account it takes little imagination to note that whatever the type of FGM there is certainly pain, anxiety and suffering that accompanies the procedure.

**Other Practices**

Besides the above mentioned types of FGM, the World Health Organisation recommends that the following debilitating practices should also be included in any classification or definition of FGM:

- stretching the clitoris and /or labia
- cauterisation by burning of the clitoris and surrounding tissues
- scraping (angurya cuts) of the vaginal orifice
• introduction of corrosive substance into the vagina to cause bleeding or herbs into the vagina with the aim of tightening or narrowing the vagina
• any other procedure that falls under the definition of female genital mutilation. (WHO, 1996:6)

Conditions for the practises
To carry out any of the above procedures Hosken (1999:1) adamantly states that it requires a great deal of skill, good light, proper surgical tools, a correctly anaesthetised body together with a detailed knowledge of the female anatomy. The reality is that the procedure is ordinarily performed by a variety of untrained persons which include barbers, elderly female laypersons, priestesses, male priests, wandering gypsies, fortune-tellers, blacksmiths and also traditional midwives, nurses and physicians (Koso-Thomas, 1987:21, Toubia, 1995:29, Tracy, 1997:3, Lightfoot-Klein, 1989:36). Unsterilised instruments such as knives, scissors, scalpels, pieces of glass, broken bottles, tin, sharp rocks, pottery and razor blades are often used (WHO, 1996:2; Pielou, 1998:87). These instruments are regularly reused immediately on several girls without even rudimentary cleansing thereby increasing the risk of the transmission of a number of diseases and infections. Neither anaesthetic nor antiseptic is utilised. Consequently the young girl is fully conscious of what is happening to her. The girls are required to undergo the full procedure without any traces of fear or crying, if they do they bring dishonour to their families and some societies stipulate that the girls must dance after the procedure (Burnett, 1997:1). Some societies have certain means of desensitising the affected area e.g. initiates are commanded to sit in a cold stream so that the genital areas are numbed in order to decrease the initial pain, the actual pain is therefore experienced later (Koso-Thomas, 1987:2). In other societies the clitoris is cauterised with fire or stung repeatedly with nettles to deaden the nerve endings (Morgan & Steinem, 1984:292). Another variation to this procedure is that prior to the excision, each girl is given a stupefying mixture to drink so that the immediate effects are not fully experienced (Koso-Thomas, 1987:22). The amount of flesh that is removed also depends on the dexterity and skill of the circumciser, her eyesight, the sharpness of the instruments and the co-operation of the initiate (Koso-Thomas, 1987:23). A girl who resists or struggles may have other parts of her genitalia accidentally removed. Pastes containing herbs, porridge, ash,
alcohol, lemon juice, cow dung, eggshells, sugar, eggs, gum arabic and oils are frequently applied to the wound to arrest the bleeding (Hosken, 1999:2; Koso-Thomas, 1987:21; Bartel & Haaijer, 1995:42). After the procedure the girl’s legs are tied together with ropes of goatskin. The girl is bandaged from the knees to the waist and is left undisturbed for two weeks. She remains immobilised during this period and any excrement remains in the bandage (Hosken, 1999:3).

Besides experiencing the shock and trauma of the above mentioned procedure the young girl or woman is then faced with the possibility of enduring some debilitating effects which are the direct result of the mutilation.

It is my contention that the above constitutes an aggravated form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

**FGM – a form of torture**

Consequences of FGM

Before embarking on the negative effects of FGM it would be pertinent to ascertain if there are any positive effects that can be ascribed to FGM.

Arguments surrounding the health benefits of FGM are not unique to Africa. In the mid-19th century some Western countries also used various forms of FGM to ostensibly cure a variety of female sexual ‘deviancies’ e.g. nymphomania, excessive masturbation or the unnatural growth of the clitoris (Abusharaf, 1997:19). A circular reasoning in practising countries is that FGM is credited with curative powers and that a direct positive consequence of FGM is that women seldom complain of ill health, and where there is any indication of ill health, this disappears after the procedure (Koso-Thomas, 1987:9). Other ostensible benefits are that it enhances fertility and makes childbirth easier (Robertson, 1996:622). But these pronouncements are not based on any medical facts but rather are enshrouded in the mysticism of a particular cultural or religious belief system (Amnesty International, 1999a:6). Health benefits are therefore not the most frequently cited justification for FGM. A more likely explanation that is offered is that FGM prepares women to be strong and uncomplaining about illness (Amnesty International, 1999a:6). If women in traditional societies are therefore socialised into believing that they are strong and can endure any form of illness then very little of their actual suffering will be reported. This is further exacerbated by the fact that the com-
plications of FGM are not seen as a direct result of the procedure but is viewed as a natural course of a woman's life. As such, serious life threatening infections are insufficient reasons for defibulating an unmarried girl as this will decrease her chances of marriage or lower her bride price (van den Berg, 1992:16). It seems therefore that in practising communities suffering and death are the more acceptable choices.

Most practising countries are silent about any negative consequences of FGM. The secrecy surrounding FGM, the delicacy of the subject, and the protection of the circumcisers make it difficult to collect accurate data on the effects of FGM. Where information has been collected it is done retrospectively, i.e. a long time after the event and women in traditional societies do not readily associate their illness to something that occurred during their childhood (Amnesty International, 1999a:3). Women therefore have different perceptions of illness than researchers. Symptoms that researchers ascribe directly to FGM may be considered to be natural and normal in societies where FGM is a universal practice (Carr, 1997:37). Women are also reluctant to seek medical assistance and complications usually go unreported (Kouba & Muasher, 1985:95). These women do not see the link between FGM, the pain, infections and infant mortality, situations which she may experience only later in life (WHO, 1994:B1; Amnesty International, 1999a:3). Large parts of the population in practising communities fail to perceive the hazardous health consequences of FGM and males, especially, are:

[...] ignorant, content to dismiss damages arising from FC as part of the natural, inevitable consequences of being born a woman. Many women share this predisposition. (Rushwan et al, 1983:7).

In instances where research has been done, it is noted that the physical damages of FGM and the subsequent harm that follows is indisputable medically (Rushwan et al, 1983:7). To this effect Pereria (1989:11) states that:

No single medical voice can be heard stating that mutilation is good for the physical or mental health of girls and women and a growing number of research show serious permanent damage in health.
Potential health risks
In societies where FGM is a universal practice females are at risk for a number of interrelated reasons viz.:

Circumcisers
Many of the circumcisers have no medical training or formal knowledge of the female anatomy, they have poor eyesight and are sometimes intoxicated and the damage that could result could be immeasurable (Amnesty International, 1999a:6).

Instruments
Unsterilized equipment is utilised both for cutting and binding of the wound. This increases the propensity and the transference of infections (Carr, 1997:38).

Context
FGM is generally performed outside recognised medical facilities. Post-operative care is virtually non-existent and if complications arise families are reluctant to broach this sensitive subject with medical personnel (Kouba & Muasher, 1985:95).

So even before the actual procedure, the girls are already potentially at risk, which is unavoidable. Even if they survive this round there are other serious debilitating consequences, which await them.

Physical consequences
The physical consequences are numerous and occur at different stages of a woman’s life. As such, it can be divided into the immediate, intermediate, long term, obstetrics, and sexual and psychological consequences. While the immediate consequences are experienced during the performance of the different types of circumcision, the intermediate, long term and other consequences are usually experienced with the most severe forms of circumcision.

Immediate consequences
As an immediate response to having one’s genitals cut off most girls and women experience at least some of the following:

- Excruciating pain: During the process the dorsal nerve of the clitoris is severed resulting in the whole genital area becoming permanently and unbearably painful. Some groups recommend cold baths as a means of anaesthetising the area but this is insufficient to curb the excruciating pain. The acacia thorns that are used to bind the wound are thought to have anaesthetic properties but this has not been proved medically. Even in settings where anaesthetic
is available it is difficult to administer because the clitoris has a dense concentration of nerve endings and to therefore anaesthetise the area, multiple painful application of the needle is required. (WHO, 1994:E2; Reyners, 1993:30).

- **Shock:** The young girl may have some idea of what she is to undergo but the actual procedure of having parts of her hacked off, coupled with unimaginable pain and the feeling of flowing blood, is sufficient to leave girls in a state of post-operative shock (Smith & Werde, 1992:22).

- **Haemorrhage:** Haemorrhaging and FGM are inextricably connected. Excision of the clitoris involves severing the clitoral artery which has a strong flow of blood at high pressure. Packing, tying or stitching to curb the bleeding may prove to be ineffective. Haemorrhaging is the most common and life-threatening complication of FGM as extreme or protracted bleeding can lead to anaemia or shock and in extreme cases, death. (WHO, 1996:7; Reyners, 1993:30).

- **Transmission of infections:** Unsterilised instruments commonly result in the transmission of infections, e.g. tetanus which can be severe enough to result in death. Noting that the procedure results in the flow of blood and in light of the fact that one instrument is used for a number of girls this may result in the transmission of blood borne diseases, e.g. HIV and Hepatitis B. (Smith & Werde, 1992:24; WHO, 1996:7; Kosob-Thomas, 1987:25; Kouba & Mausher, 1985:101).

- **Septicaemia** (blood poisoning): The traditional circumcisers very often do not wash their hands before the procedure; the water that is utilised is often already infected and this is transferred to the open wound. The wound is also contaminated with urine and faeces because of the binding of the legs for long periods of time (WHO, 1996:7).

- **Acute urine retention:** The pain and the burning sensation on the raw wound usually result in conscious retention of urine (Reyners, 1993:30).

- **Fractures:** Fracture to the femur, the clavicle or dislocation of the hip joint is not infrequent due to the pressure of a number of heavy women in immobilising the struggling girl (WHO, 1996:7).

- **Injury to adjacent tissue:** A circumciser not gifted with precision and with poor eyesight, coupled with a patient who physically wrestles against the procedure, can inflict serious damage to areas surrounding the genitals, e.g. the urinary canal and the perineum and can result in incontinency (Rushwan...
• **Death**: Quite a number of girls are estimated to die due to shock, haemorrhaging and the lack of immediate medical attention (Koso-Thomas, 1987:26).

**Intermediate consequences**

These effects usually occur some time after the actual procedure.

• **Delayed healing**: Due to infection, irritation from urine, friction when walking or an underlying condition, e.g. malnutrition, can lead to a purulent weeping wound which sometimes never heal (WHO, 1996:9).

• **Pelvic infection**: Pelvic infection can be caused from the infected genital wound and through the poor urinary flow (Lee, 1994:39).

• **Painful intercourse**: Due to vaginal stenosis (tight or narrow vaginal opening) and recurring damage caused by vigorous and violent thrusts, vaginal penetration is always painful and can sometimes be impossible. This condition is non-existent in non-mutilated women (Lee, 1994:39; Ozumba, 1992:106).

• **Dysmenorrhoea**: Girls experience extreme painful menstruation due to the total occlusion of the vaginal opening, accompanied by chronic stomach-aches and abnormal swelling of the stomach. A normal menstrual cycle of three to five days may continue for ten days, disabling the girl with pain and toxicity (Rushwan, 1994:7; Lightfoot-Klein, 1993:190).

• **Infection**: There are a number of ways in which the girls can become infected. Infections often arise as a result of girls trying to dislodge the accumulated clots, using their infected fingernails, if the opening is large enough (Dorkenoo & Elworthy, 1992:8). The consummation of marriage is bloody and the demand of absolute chastity does not extend to men. Thus HIV infected bridegrooms may have an increased risk of infecting their ‘chaste’ brides and in instances where anal sex is an alternative the risks are higher (WHO, 1992:153; IAC, 1990:75–91).

• **Urinary infection**: This is caused by the retention of urine and the usage of unsterilised equipment and unhygienic dressing, such as cow dung and ash. These dressings are excellent growth medium for the bacteria which ascends into the bladder and kidney (Koso-Thomas, 1987:25).

• **Dermoid inclusions**: Cysts and abscesses are caused by the edges of the wound being turned inwards. These cysts form on the scar line and could also arise as a result of an accumulation of skin and products secreted by the skin, e.g. fats and hair cells. These dermoids are sometimes as large as a grapefruit (Rushwan, 1994:7; Sanderson, 1981:37).
• **Keloid formation:** Slow and incomplete healing of the wound and infection leading to production of excessive connective tissue on the scar. The keloid are so enlarged that it obstructs walking (Slack, 1988:452).

### Long term consequences

These long term consequences have extremely serious physical and social effects.

• **Haematocolpos:** The closure of the vaginal opening by the scar tissue causes severe retention of menstrual blood. This causes the stomach to become severely enlarged. According to Dorkenoo & Elworthy (1992:8):

  Dr Ollivier [...] describes a 16 year old girl brought to the hospital with unbearable abdominal pains. She had not menstruated for several months and had not had intercourse, but her abdomen was swollen and sensitive, with the signs of a uterus in labour. She was infibulated, with a minuscule opening. Penetration would appear to have been impossible and there was no sign of beating of a foetal heart. Dr Ollivier performed a disinfibulation [...] and released 3.4 litres of blackish foul smelling blood.

  This sometimes leads to the girl being murdered by her family because she is suspected of being pregnant thereby dishonouring the family (Smith & Werde, 1992:23; Koso-Thomas, 1987:26).

• **Infertility:** Infertility is frequently caused by the infection of the ovaries and the Fallopian tubes. It is reported that a quarter of the cases of infertility in Sudan is due to FGM. Infertility is discovered many years later and is usually not seen as a direct result of FGM (Smith & Werde, 1992:22; Mustafa, 1966:304; Slack, 1988:454).

• **Incontinency:** Frequent bladder infection often leads to chronic urine incontinence where women are continually dribbling urine. Rectal intercourse also causes anal incontinence. These incontinences can lead to the casting off or alienation of these women from the community because they are constantly smelling of urine (Dorkenoo & Elworthy, 1992:8; Koso-Thomas, 1987:26; Smith & Werde, 1992:23).

• **Calculus formation:** Vaginal stones are common because of the retention of urine. Most women report substantive difficulty in urination:

  The average period of time required by an infibulated person to urinate is 10–15 minutes. She must force it out drop by drop. Some women report requiring up to 2 hours to empty their bladders. (Lightfoot-Klein, 1983:356)

• **Partially erected clitoris:** The erection of the partially mutilated clitoris stretches the scarred erectile tissue and stimulates damaged clitoral nerve tissue.
can be painful and is mentally inhibiting because it impairs arousal which inhibits sexual foreplay and effects the development of sexuality (Smith & Werde, 1992:24; WHO, 1996:10).

Years after the procedure women still suffer immense pain as reported by Scott (1995:9):

> When the weather is too hot, its like fire between the legs, its torture, inside it is a burning sensation.

**Obstetrics**

FGM is not only debilitating to women themselves but also has far reaching implications for babies at birth. Women experience various problems associated with childbearing:

**Fear**

It has been reported that women eat less because they fear that the baby may grow too large to pass through the tiny vaginal opening. Many women drink only sweet tea or eat small stones which can be detrimental to the health of both mother and child (Kwaak, 1992:780).

**Prolonged labour**

Prolonged and obstructed labour is caused by the tough scar tissue which must always be slit to allow the baby to emerge. The tough obliterated vulva loses its elasticity and if not opened timorously may fatally obstruct the second stage of labour. Dilation is obstructed increasing the chances of asphyxia and subsequent brain damage to the infant. Such children are unable to fulfil their intellectual and social potentials. It is noted that there are significantly more severely asphyxiated babies among mutilated women than non-mutilated women. Women in Sierra Leone know that the scar tissue will not yield for the first child and therefore promote the belief that it is usual to lose the child at birth. An obstructed birth where both mother and child die will probably be blamed on fate or God’s wishes but never on the unnatural build up of inelastic scar tissues. (WHO, 1996:9; Lee, 1994:40; De Silva, 1989:235; Slack, 1988:454).

**Fistulas**

Fistulas are holes that develop between the bladder and the vagina or between the rectum and the vagina. This occurs when there is constant pressure of the baby’s head on the posterior wall of the bladder causing necrosis (death) of the vagina and bladder walls. Sufferers from this condition constantly smell of urine and this offensive malodorous condition can put off any potential male
partners. In the unlikely event of conception recurring the urine can poison the foetus and repeated miscarriages can occur (Koso-Thomas; 1987:27).

Women do not only have negative physical consequences but the psychological effects can be just as debilitating.

**Sexual and psychological consequences**

According to Smith & Werde (1992:10) all forms of FGM effectively rob women of experiencing sexual enjoyment. The clitoris with its specific sensory apparatus is a prime erogenous zone. When it has been reduced to scar tissue no orgasm can be released (McLean et al 1980:5). Research suggests that although FGM does not necessarily attenuate women’s sexual desire it may affect her capacity for sexual gratification showing that there is a correlation between FGM and sexual frustration (Rushwan et al, 1983:91).

According to one woman (Housten, 1979:51):

[…] we are not allowed to show any pleasure in lovemaking. That is the reason for clitoridectomy – so that we don't have any desires. But if it were to happen that you felt something you couldn't say anything, since that would mean you had had a previous experience – that you were a bad woman. So even if you do feel something you just keep quiet.

Shandall (1967:188) found that some women in Sudan had no idea at all of orgasm and that women were also meant to enjoy sex. In societies where FGM is performed to curb sexual desires, sexual intercourse is not something women expect to enjoy. Women experience extreme pain and this takes away any joy they might experience and women are in fact afraid of sex (Slack, 1988:455). Waris ( Fritz-Patrick,1996:47) in talking about her own experiences of FGM states:

Men invented it so that sex is just for men. Some women are cut and sewn again and again like a piece of cloth. Its cruel, its unfair, its humiliating, it's unacceptable, it changes your whole life.

Psychological complications are considered to be life long. Depression, anxiety, psychoses, sexual dysfunctions and marital disharmony form part of the psychological consequences (Lee, 1994:40). Immediately after the procedure there is reference to the experience of pride in being like everyone else, in being made clean and in having suffered without screaming (Dorkenoo & Elworthy, 1992:10). How can a child scream if she is made to believe that if she does her mother will die? (McLean, 1980:10). But these feelings of euphoria are short lived because the existential realities reveal a different picture. Research show
that personal accounts contain references to feelings of anxiety prior to the procedure, terror at the moment of being seized and pinned down by several huge women, unbearable pain and the feeling of humiliation and betrayal by parents especially the mother who is part of the proceedings (Dorkenoo & Elworthy, 1992:10). All the above anxieties are further exacerbated by the fact that they are forced to watch the mutilation of other girls. According to Grassivaro Gallo & Moro Moscolo (1984:187) most girls cannot forget the moment of FGM, they remember the precise day, the time and the circumciser. This procedure is therefore a traumatic experience and leads to life long nightmares and fears.

In light of the immediate, intermediate and long term consequences the occurrence of death seems to be ever-present in practising communities, but few are willing to disclose the extent of death and to admit that it is directly related to FGM.

**Death**

According to WHO (1996:5) the mortality rate of females as a consequence of FGM is unknown as inaccurate records are kept and death due to FGM are rarely reported. It is nevertheless estimated that 500,000 women die annually due to complications in pregnancy or childbirth following FGM (Leeuw van der, 1993:14). Doctors in Sudan estimate that one third of girls die because of FGM and health ministers were alarmed by the increasing number of deaths due to unhygienic and unsafe methods both in rural and urban areas (Daily News, 25.7.1996:20). It has also been shown that there is a positive correlation between high rates of infant mortality and countries that practice FGM (Slack, 1988:450). It is therefore difficult to estimate the number of deaths since the secrecy that enshrouds the practice makes it easier to conceal unsuccessful attempts from strangers and health authorities and a very small proportion of cases with complications reach the hospitals (Dorkenoo & Elworthy, 1992:8). Deaths are also rarely seen as a direct result of FGM and are usually blamed on the act of either an enemy, evil spirits, failure to appropriately appease the ancestors or it may be the will of God. The most common reason is that the girls are blamed for being promiscuous (Kouba & Muasher, 1985:103).

The extensive description above is necessary in order to lay the basis for determining whether I can show that what the women undergo, the agony, anxiety, prolonged suffering, the psychological turmoil is tantamount to a form of torture.
FGM – a form of torture – conclusions so far

In light of one of the meaning of torture whereby torture is constituted by the infliction of severe physical and mental pain it will follow from the above that a woman exposed to FGM is subjected to a form of torture. This torture, in my view, is experienced throughout her life. Pain is experienced from an early age when the actual FGM occurs. This pain is aggravated by the fact that the woman is fully conscious and no anaesthetic is used. If any infections occur she is subjected to serious suffering, misery and agony. Through the removal of her genitals she is clearly deformed and disfigured. Then through the occlusion of the vagina she may suffer severe abdominal pain during the onset of menses. On her wedding night the couple may not be able to consummate the marriage and the young bride has to be slit open again. If infection has not rendered her infertile the young expectant mother is subjected to intense fear because she is aware that the baby cannot be delivered through the tiny aperture. During labour, notwithstanding the trauma of giving birth, she has to contend with the fact that her vagina has to be opened once more. After delivering her child the mother is stitched again and this cutting and restitching will recur with each new birth. Besides the physical suffering FGM can have substantial consequences for women’s self image and sexual lives and it manifests itself as severe depression, irritability, frigidity and feelings of incompetence (WHO, 1994).

From the aggravated and prolonged suffering described above there is little doubt that FGM is indeed a form of torture. What then is being done nationally and internationally to protect girls and women from such practices?

**Human Rights**

Violations of Human Rights

The subordinate position historically occupied by women within the patriarchal family, country and society has meant that abuses such as FGM have been ignored for centuries.

It is only recently that many anti-FGM activists have concentrated largely on health arguments to campaign against its continued practice. At the present moment the human rights dimension is also being debated as another major reason to bring this practice to an end (IAC Newsletter, 1993:3). As a consequence of this debate FGM is now emerging as an international issue with concentrated and visible efforts of organisations and institutions to address it as a human rights concern (IAC Newsletter, 1998:2). The urgency to fight
FGM as a human rights issue is that although the conferences of the early 90s have brought into sharp relief that women's rights are human rights, these rights still continue to be universally abused and infringed on a normative scale (IAC Newsletter, 1997:2). Mackie (1996:999) reports that rather than diminishing with modernisation, FGM is spreading and some observers predict that eradicating the practice will take up to 300 years.

Since the Second World War various declarations and conventions have been adopted where increased attention has been given to harmful traditional practices which have been declared a violation of human rights and injurious to the health and well being of women and girls (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida, 1996:iii). Since the late 1970’s a series of international and regional conferences and meetings have taken place where the prevention and eradication of FGM was the core issue and strategies for national coherent policies were discussed and adopted (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida, 1996:24). These declarations include, UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) 1979; United nations Commission on Human Rights 1981; The 1992 London Declaration on FGM; UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women 1993; International Conference on Population and Development 1994; Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995; African Ministries of Health 1995; Dakar Declaration 1997; Addis Ababa Declaration 1997 and The Banjul Declaration 1998.

By ratifying any one of the above international instruments on Human Rights countries have in effect agreed to uphold the following:

• Everyone has the right to life, liberty and the security of the person.
• No one shall be subject to torture or to any cruel inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
• Every human being shall be entitled to respect for his/her life and the integrity of his/her person. No one may be arbitrarily deprived of this right.
• All forms of exploitation, inhuman or degrading punishment and treatment shall be prohibited.
• Every individual shall have the right to enjoy the best attainable state of physical and mental health.
• The state shall ensure the elimination of any discrimination against women and also ensure the protection of the right of the women and the child as stated in the international Declarations and Conventions.
States shall take appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women in order to eliminate prejudices and customary practices, which are based on the notion of inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes. (Slack, 1988:464–5; Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida, 1996:23; Dorkenoo, 1995b:49)

Taking the above into account, it is noted that the following rights of women are violated when they undergo FGM:

A. Rights afforded to women
   During FGM women are subjected to dangerous health comprising and unnecessary operations. Women are discriminated against on the basis of the fact that they are female, men do not have to undergo the same procedure. Women undergo FGM because of their inferior positioning in FGM practising countries, they are subjected to the control of their husband and other male members of the family.

B. Right to life / Right to reproductive life
   Morbidity and mortality are reported to be quite high in FGM practising countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida, 1996:3). It could also be argued that the reproductive organs of the woman, which give life to future generations, are mutilated thereby denying women the right to reproduce life (Slack, 1988: 446).

C. Right to health
   When FGM is performed, untrained old people with poor eyesight generally do it in unsanitary conditions and and these factors can adversely affect the physical and mental well being of the woman.

D. Right not to be subjected to torture
   When young women are subjected to having their external genitals removed without any antiseptic and then stitched together with acacia thorns and being subjected to the disastrous effects of complications, this can be considered as being subjected to torture and to cruel inhuman and degrading treatment.

E. Right to bodily and sexual integrity
   FGM is conducted primarily to curb the sexuality of a woman thereby denying her any sexual pleasure. Her external genitals are altered because it is considered ‘ugly’ and ‘dirty’ and it should be reconstructed so as to ensure that the male receives more pleasure. By totally destroying her natural organs, especially the clitoris which assists in orgasm, the woman is denied the right to bodily and sexual integrity.
F. Right to protection
By states refusing to enact definite legislation on FGM or where legislation is not properly implemented women are denied proper protection from the state. The fact that some communities advance FGM show that these states have not modified the cultural and social patterns of conduct of both men and women in those communities and this only serves to perpetuate the discrimination against women.

A major shortcoming of international declarations and instruments is the lack of enforcement mechanisms by which the above rights can move from theory to practice. States in which FGM is practised are hardly likely to embark upon incorporating these international instruments into their domestic law which may entail the need for greater resources or which may stir up political controversies as a result of perceived state interference in cultural or religious practices. Nevertheless, we shall note later that some states have indeed legislated against the practice, but the question (which falls outside the scope of this study) still remains “how does one ensure the enforcement of these declarations?

Religious communities and the rights of the individual
At what point do human rights apply universally and at what point can religion and culture take precedence over human rights? In the case of FGM, which is declared to be a violation of universal human rights by the world community (IAC, 1994:28), can the practising communities argue that it is an important part of their cultural and/or religious obligations and should be respected at such? Buteegwa (1993:16): is of the view that:

Human rights are universal in that they apply to all human beings. The international community of states recognise human rights for all persons throughout the world. All persons are seen as equal and valuable beings endowed with certain inalienable rights.

Maher (1996:14) states that:

The theory of universality holds that there are human rights so fundamental to every human being that they transcend all societal, political and religious constraints. Various human rights instruments have codified this theory.

Maher (1996:4) confirms unequivocally that the UN and other international human rights organisations have identified FGM as a violation of those fundamental human rights such as the right to life, integrity, protection etc.
On the question of the violation of rights there are two opposing views. Protagonists of FGM declare an absolute right to cultural self-determinism and state that cultural practices that result in death cannot be attacked as a violation of human rights (Slack, 1988:439). What then, is the responsibility of the world community to those who are threatened by suffering and possible death through those practices? Anti-FGM lobbyists, argue that traditions that harms and kills an individual is a violation of fundamental rights and cultures should be barred from continuing such practices (Slack, 1988:439).

Practising communities could argue that engaging in any cultural and /or religious practices is the prerogative of that society and external societies have no right to impose contrary morals and beliefs on them. It is clear that with the present persistent continuation of FGM the concept of universal human rights have therefore not been readily accepted by all members of the international community of states. Some states with strong cultural and religious obligations opine that individual human rights must be subjected to traditional and/or religious rules, which take precedence over everything else (Slack, 1988:435). Accordingly, there is no need to respect or protect the rights of specific groups, e.g. women who undergo FGM, because practising communities do not view it as a problem or a human rights violation, but rather see it as a cultural and/or religious injunction.

The Secretary General of the UN, Mr Kofi Annan, discounts the above view and reaffirms the universal nature of human rights by stating that the rights of women and girl children are not something that could easily be explained away by cultural specificity (IAC Newsletter, 1998:10).

At the international conference on human rights in Vienna in 1993 the indivisibility of human rights, regardless of the cultural and social context, was presented and adopted (IAC, 1994:39). According to Cook (1993:45) the CEDAW convention clearly mentions that state parties should take appropriate measures including legislation to abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which constitute discrimination against women. States were also urged to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women in order to eliminate prejudices, which are based on the inferiority or superiority of either of the sexes (Cook, 1993:45). The draft Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women also proposes that states should condemn violence against women and should not allow custom, tradition, religion or any other consideration to deter it from eliminating such violence (Cook, 1993:46).
Despite the ratification of several human rights instruments, lack of adherence in some countries remain in the name of morals, culture, religion and many myths, taboos and beliefs are the very foundation used to the continuation of women’s inferiority and lack of protection by basic human rights (IAC Newsletter, 1997:3).

The Norwegian Prime Minister condemned FGM as “a stain on the world map” (IAC Newsletter, 1995:5) and mentioned that there are limits to the practice that countries can expect the international community to accept, immaterial of the deep cultural roots these practices may have. According to her (IAC Newsletter, 1995:5) this is where universal human rights take over because FGM does not become sacrosanct just because it is part of a cultural pattern.

In the case of FGM, when it comes to the question of people’s right to cultural collectivity and an individual’s right to self determination, does a woman give up her rights to life, bodily and sexual integrity, protection, health, etc. in order to ensure that the collective values, norms, identity and cohesiveness of the group is upheld?

One response to this question is the following from The President of the Court of Appeal in Togo (IAC Newsletter, 1995:10) stating that:

People have the right to protect and promote their cultural values but such moves should not violate the rights of women.

According to Freedman (1997:331) in international discourse the problem of rights is often viewed as a dichotomy between the individual versus the collective and antagonists of women’s rights characterise any efforts by women to direct the cause of their own lives as a denial and rejection of their responsibility to others or the collective. Freedman (1997:331) states further that:

This basic conception of the ‘uncontrolled’ woman as a dangerous and destructive force explains, in part, why human rights, with its apparent defence of the individual as against the collective, has become so explosive, particularly when applied to women’s reproduction and sexuality, the area in which control over women is guarded most jealously.

According to Lamb (1992:17) where collective identity depends on cultural solidarity, FGM is regarded as a necessary and honourable tradition which allows the young girl to become fully integrated into the community. It is therefore extremely difficult for a young woman to try and develop an individual sense of worth and identity that is in direct contrast to the collective expectation (Lamb, 1992:17). In FGM practising countries women who refuse to undergo the procedure are therefore ostracised, dishonoured and alienated.
from all ceremonial process with the group (Oukbih, 1992:6). Women will be accepted as full members only if they abide by the collective will of the group and undergo the mutilation. FGM therefore still remains a prerequisite to the rights and purity of adulthood. According to Lamb (1992:17) the individual is socialised into firmly believing that the community, the collective, takes precedence and that the individual's honour is bound to that of the family. Any assertion of individuality by women is readily regarded as the betrayal or reckless abandonment of the collective and women are therefore forced to choose between a sense of themselves and the assertion of the group and the religious and cultural identity (Freedman, 1997:333).

The conflictual nature of the two versions of rights, one based on the Enlightenment ideal of the sovereign individual subject and the other grounded on the notion of collective identity cemented by cultural solidarity therefore so clearly plays itself out in the complexities of FGM: where it illustrates total cultural conflict between the rights of the woman to bodily integrity on the one hand and the need to be accepted and integrated into the community on the other. Faced with this dilemma, there is undisputed consensus that women lack control over their sexual and reproductive lives and this is one reason why the collective values and norms predominate over women's individual rights (Garcia-Moreno & Claro, 1994:47–52).

Having noted the above dilemmas regarding religious/cultural dominance versus individual rights, women's rights versus collective/community rights etc what then have particular states done to ensure the protection of women?

**Legislation**

The adoption of legislation as a means to eradicate FGM has been a subject of intense debate because of the complexities engulfing FGM. Although some countries have adopted specific legislation against FGM (IAC Newsletter, 1998:3) other governments have been reticent to legislate against it, citing the following reasons for their reluctance:

- the problem of ethnicity and prosecution are remnants of the colonial time and FGM was seen as a national symbol of freedom and this has remained to the present time; and
- in countries where the majority of the population practice FGM to legislate against it may further exacerbate the situation as people will then resort to
backstreet procedures thereby increasing the health risks of women and girls even further (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Danida, 1996:25).

Notwithstanding the above fears some countries have adopted definite steps in legislating against FGM. For instance, Burkina Faso has passed a law against FGM in February 1997 and any person harming the physical integrity of the female genital organs can be imprisoned for three years. In the Democratic Republic of Congo the Ministry of Health declared that FGM is a violation of the rights and freedom of girls and women. In Egypt, after a long protracted battle, FGM has been declared as physical mutilation and is punishable by law. Activists in Ghana have succeeded in amending the Criminal Code 1960 (Act 29) to include FGM as an offence and can have a sentence of three years imprisonment. In May 1989 the government of Guinea issued a declaration against harmful traditional practices including FGM under Article 6 of the constitution which notes that the State should safeguard the moral and physical integrity of any individual (IAC Newsletter 1996:9). At a conference on jurisprudence of FGM in Nigeria it was adopted that FGM is a form of violence against women and is against the right to dignity which is guaranteed in the Constitution of Nigeria. On June 17, 1999 the National assembly of Senegal effectively passed legislation viz. Article 299, which completely bans the practice of FGM and any defaulter, can be imprisoned for six months to five years (Awaken 1999:11). The government of Sudan integrated the anti-FGM strategy in the government’s ten-year plan of action. In 1990 the President ratified the Convention on the Rights of Children which indicates the intention to eradicate FGM. Togo is the third member of the Economic Community of West African States, in addition to Ghana and Ivory Coast to ban FGM. In Australia each state and territory was requested to develop legislation against FGM. Canada has amended the Criminal Code to prohibit FGM and any practice that causes harm to a child and which has been procured in another country. Perpetuators can be prosecuted when the child returns to Canada (Hussein 1995:2). In Paris, 53-year old Malian women described as the ‘superstar of circumcision’ was convicted and sentenced to eight-year imprisonment for performing FGM on 48 young girls (Herbert, 1999:5). It is estimated that 20,000 women in Germany have undergone FGM and political asylum was granted on the basis of FGM to a woman in 1996. Approximately 5000 women from Somalia have sought political asylum in the Netherlands and the Dutch government was confronted with the dilemma of medicalising FGM, but it decided to oppose all forms of FGM.
In 1992 FGM was made illegal in Sweden with the signing of the FGM Act (Nath 1994:1). Since the President of the USA signed the Omnibus Appropriation Bill in 1996, FGM has become illegal in all states as from March 1997, punishable by up to five years imprisonment (Dugger, 1996b:1–2). According to the US legislation political asylum can be granted to women who ‘fear’ persecution through FGM (IAC Newsletter 1996:10).

That the above countries have deemed it necessary to have laws relating specifically to FGM supports the thesis that FGM is harmful and causes severe physical or mental pain.

**Conclusion**

From my description above I am prepared to state that FGM is a form of torture and a human rights violation. It is encouraging to note that some countries have legislated against the continuation of the practice. Until recently Western anti-FGM lobbyists were attacked for being ethnocentric, racists and cultural imperialists for attempting to protect young girls and women from FGM. It is encouraging to note that African women and men in FGM practicing countries are now themselves involved in the campaign to eradicate FGM. As such, intensive educational programmes have had positive results in some countries. These campaigns and lobbying have influenced some governments to ban the procedure completely. But the *de facto* reality is that out of the 26 African countries that practice FGM approximately 12 have taken definite legislation against FGM. If it were to be true as some observers have predicted that it will take another 300 years to completely eradicate the practice then this is a serious indictment on the world community to continue to allow young girls and women to endure such suffering.

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A PROFILE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION (FGM) AND HUMAN RIGHTS


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Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children,
A HUMAN RIGHTS CULTURE
We live in an age of a rapidly expanding culture of human rights since the first Universal Declaration of Human Rights was made in 1948. Yet in South Africa with its traumatic history of, inter alia, racial oppression a Bill of Rights was only accepted late in 1996 and enacted on 4 February 1997. The constitution of 1854 of the old Boer Republic of the Orange Free State, a sovereign territory in the larger South Africa at the time, did include a charter of fundamental rights, but it disappeared with unification in 1910 and in any case did not provide equal rights for Blacks.

Given the diversity of cultures, languages, religions and even moral praxes in South Africa, the question arises whether the cause of this praiseworthy moral progress in the history of South Africa is due to progress in her moral knowledge. Have South Africans now acquired knowledge about what it means to be a good human being that they previously lacked? More universally though, do those societies that have already incorporated human rights into their constitutions have some additional moral knowledge that those who have not yet done so, do not have? Articulating the question in this way does imply, however, that we have some notion of what we regard as “best”. It also raises the question whether any significant answer can be given to the question about the cause of moral progress without also stating what one deems to be “best”, because how can we talk about moral progress if we do not know what it is that we are progressing towards.

With regard to the first question about additional moral knowledge as the cause of moral progress as indicated by, at the very least, the enactment of a Bill of Rights in post-apartheid South Africa, I agree with Rorty who responds negatively to the universal question by positing instead that the causal work is done by what he calls “sentimental education” (1998:180). In other words, for me Rorty’s view implies that South Africans have not discovered a universally accepted definition of what it means to be a “human being” and they have not
been able to erect a new morality that legitimised a charter of human rights on the foundation of the knowledge of this definition they allegedly have. The point is rather, for Rorty and for me, that such a definition and the supposed, concomitant knowledge of it are not prerequisites for the building of a human rights culture.

Rorty, born in the USA in 1931, made what we can term the key projects of modernity the major target of his criticism. Among these key projects we can count metaphysics and epistemology, two of the major philosophical achievements of the 17th and 18th Western World. In other words, at the centre of his life’s work are the efforts to expose the fluidity or inherent contestability of such notions as “truth”, “knowledge” and “objectivity”. In his first major work, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty sets out to demonstrate that there are no final and immutable essences of any kind in our minds that are mirrored in the extra-mental world. This has earned him the label of “irrationalist”, particularly as his proposed alternative is to show the pragmatist alternative, as he sees it, of what culture would be like without the dominating metaphors of modernity of mind and knowledge.

I need to stress though that my agreement with Richard Rorty is based on critical scrutiny of his arguments, rather than on either a loyalty to him of any kind or to any tradition to which he might belong. In this paper I examine critically, on the one hand, his arguments against moral foundationalism, the view that our distinctions between what is morally good and bad are based upon a firm basis such as the decrees of a god, some religious beliefs or some view of human nature. For Kant, for example, morality had nothing to do with sentiment. Our decisions about what is good and what is bad has nothing to do with such things as friendship, trust, love and social solidarity, but is determined solely by a distinctively human capacity called our “sense of moral obligation”. The latter capacity would not be particular to members of any particular group of people, but would cut across all cultures universally. As such this is typical moral foundationalism, because it founds morality on our supposed sense of moral obligation.

On the other hand I also examine his reasoning in favour of sentimental education, and draw out some implications of the meaning of the notion of sentimental education. By “sentiment”, in this paper, I mean “feeling” and in a moral context this use of the term “sentiment” has its origins in the view that the source of our moral judgements is not reason, but “feeling” or, then,
“sentiment”. An object of moral judgement can evoke a feeling of either pleasure or pain in an observer and one could say that the resultant judgement of either moral approval or disapproval is governed by sentiments of approval or disapproval. A “sentimental education” is thus an education of our feelings for the sake of promoting mutual human recognition.

The Dangers of Moral Foundationalism

If our reply to the question about the possession of superior moral knowledge were “Yes”, and we supported this positive response with a belief that what has driven this moral progress is knowledge of a special ingredient in the human make-up that enables us to distinguish between human beings and non-humans, and thus between those to whom human rights properly belong (human beings) and those who do not qualify for such rights (non-humans), then there would be grave danger. This danger would be the variety of conflicting notions of what that special ingredient is, for whatever the ingredient is conceived to be it would serve as the particular paradigm or model in terms of which a particular group of people judge the humanity or non-humanity of others. The example used by Rorty is that of Serbs in Bosnia who, using themselves as the paradigm of being human, judged Muslims to be less than human for the simple reason that they were “unlike” Serbs and ordered Muslim prisoners to bite off the penises of their fellow-prisoners. For the Serbs no human rights violations were committed, because they did not deal with human beings.

In the South African context the display of the late Sarah Baartman, a woman of Khoisan descent in the nude in public, is a case in point. Lured to London during the 19th century by a promise of wealth, her fate abroad turned out to be worse than that of an exotic animal, for she was exhibited naked in public because of her unusual anatomy. Upon her death in Paris a French scientist made a plaster cast of her corpse for continued display in a museum and her mortal remains were also preserved. The process of negotiating for the return of her remains was initiated by a simple, nostalgic poem written by a South African woman during her moments of loneliness whilst studying in the Netherlands. The gross violation of Baartman’s dignity in England and France, the two major colonial powers in Africa, was seen by South Africans as typical of the wide ranging human rights violations that were committed during the colonisation of Africa. Consequently the eventual return of Sarah Baartman’s remains to South Africa meant to the vast majority of South Africans the symbolic return
of their human dignity. Within the context of this paper, the perpetrators of
the violation of Baartman's dignity signified through their conduct that they
founded their recognition of humanity upon a particular physiological and
anatomical picture which was a mirror reflection of themselves.

Furthering his argument, Rorty contends that there are at least three very
popular ways in which people that regard themselves as the model or para-
digm of being human differentiate between themselves and those whom they
regard as not quite human (“borderline cases”). The unpleasant history of the
policy of apartheid in South Africa, of course, bears ample witness in support
of this contention and my own experience of it makes Rorty’s contention very
compelling. In the first instance our distinction between humans and animals
is often not a distinction between all “featherless bipeds” and “the rest”, but
between some human beings and others that merely have a humanoid form.
An example of the second instance is using the colour of the skin as the para-
digm for being human and regarding those of another skin colour as children.
In the third instance the paradigm of being human is being “male” – being a
non-male is not quite human in the full sense.

**Anti-essentialism: Arguments against “human nature”**

On the basis of his contention about the ways in which we often distinguish
between human beings and non-humans, Rorty proceeds by claiming, quite
rightly I think, that in the history of Western thinking several honest philo-
sophical attempts have been made to overcome this way of thinking by trying
to find a fixed, universal essence or “human nature” that would serve as an
infallible, universal guide to separate humans from non-humans. I support
Rorty’s comment that these attempts have not only been unsuccessful in ex-
plaining moral progress, but have also been unwitting sources for gross human
rights violations. As he justifiably claims, for some, like Plato for example, our
capacity to reason is that universal essence or special ingredient that suppo-
sedly distinguishes human beings from non-humans and by developing this
ingredient, respect for all humans is established.\(^1\) Clarifying his stance, Rorty
names Nietzsche who, according to him, in sharp contrast to Plato, thinks that
human nature is inherently brutal, causing us to rape, murder, steal, and so on.

\(^1\) Possibly the whole of Plato’s *Republic* can be regarded as an extended discursive argument against Thrasy-
machus’ stance that justice is whatever is to the advantage of the stronger – an argument which in the end
does not succeed.
Although I disagree with Rorty’s nomination of Nietzsche as arch exponent of this view, I support his argument that such a view demonstrates the futility of searching for a universal human essence or “nature”. However, for Rorty the twentieth century made watershed intellectual progress by dropping this project of trying to discover what human nature is. The crucial realization that made the difference is that the most that we can say about ourselves is that we are “extraordinarily malleable” (Rorty 1998:170). In other words, there is no fixed or given, universal human essence floating about and waiting to be discovered.

**Arguments against Human Rights Foundationalism**

The persistent efforts of the past to justify and accord human rights on the basis of what “human nature” is, is known as “human rights foundationalism”. One thinks in this regard of the limited rights accorded to the English aristocracy by the charter known as the “Magna Carta” which is a clear example of a distinction between “human” and “less-than-human” on the basis of an inherited bloodline. The latter is no more than a biological metaphor for inheritance of an innate essence. Part of this foundationalist perspective is that the fixed, universal human nature or essence serves as a foundation upon which the superstructure of morality is based. A more recent and a lucid twentieth century example was the founding of a public morality based on colour in South Africa that was expressed juridically in an apartheid law, the “Immorality Act”, that forbade intimacy across the so-called colour line and thereby infringing on the right to freedom of association. Moreover, informally and “non-juridically” in the Afrikaans language, one of South Africa’s only two official languages during the years of apartheid, a string of racist terms developed, prefaced by the highly degrading racist label, “kaffir”, to distinguish between the real and the “pseudo-human”. Afrikaans literature from this period abounds with examples of depictions of blacks as incapable of “real virtue”, for instance, but of whites alone as capable of it. These are concrete examples of a morality founded on the assumption that a certain moral essence accompanies a white skin.

In the Platonist tradition as judged by Rorty, since the essence of being human is to reason, only those who can reason can be moral. The moral progress...

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2 The existentialist tradition with its slogan of “Existence precedes essence” must have been a telling factor in this regard.

3 Losing any contest against an unworthy opponent, for instance, got to be known as a “kafferpak” (kaffir-hiding), which emphasized Black people as “unworthy” or pseudo-humanity.
of an expanding culture of human rights would then be due to increased rational persuasion of the unconverted. I am in partial agreement with Rorty here that this is not only an outmoded way of thinking; it also harbours the danger of withholding human rights from whomsoever we regard as “irrational”. My opinion in this regard is that besides the notion of “rationality” being contested itself, the recognition of the common humanity of “others” does not require an epistemologically or metaphysically justified conceptual grid of any kind. What Rorty needs to assert more emphatically though, is that once this initial recognition is gained, such conceptual grids need to be taken into consideration, for equally pragmatic considerations as for the initial recognition of mutual humanity. I have in mind here the eventual formal and legislative enactment of such recognition, as well as the eventual human rights culture building. Nevertheless, Rorty proposes a pragmatist approach to understanding why there has been significant moral progress in the area of human rights (1998:172).

What, then, does the pragmatist see as the “cause” of moral progress in the sphere of human rights? Rorty’s initial answer is negative in the sense that he claims that nothing that has anything to do with how we decide between what is morally good and morally bad can be used to separate human beings from animals (Rorty 1998:170). This stance has led to the charge of “cultural relativism” against his pragmatist proposal – the perspective that what is morally good or bad is relative to culture. As I see it, one implication of cultural relativism is, of course, that there can be no universal human rights. If in one culture it is morally unacceptable for husbands to beat their wives, then it is not necessarily unacceptable in another culture, which does not augur well for universal women’s rights. Another implication of cultural relativism is that no one would be able to claim that a human rights culture is morally superior to other cultures, as in fact Rorty does. Such superiority, for me, would not consist in knowledge that others lack, but merely in giving explicit expression and implementation to the recognition of human dignity.

4 What if we regard women, Blacks, children, gentiles, Jews or mentally retarded people, to name but a few, as irrational?
The Charge of Cultural Relativism

Rorty confirms that although a human rights culture is morally superior to other cultures, this is not a proof that there is indeed a universal human nature. According to his reasoning, moral superiority can only count as such a proof if such superiority is asserted to include a claim of superior knowledge, i.e. knowledge of a distinctively human attribute – a special ingredient. From the pragmatist perspective, however, it is not clear at all why one first has to have knowledge of some distinctive or special human ingredient before one can entrench respect for human dignity in human rights in a Bill of Rights. We do not first have to give a sophisticated intellectual account of what human nature is before we can justifiably show respect to those who are quite simply different from us.

The apparent strength of the presupposition that there is a fixed, universal human nature is that it indemnifies one from the charge of cultural relativism. In addition, if we assume rationality to be that distinctive human attribute and the attribute upon which morality is founded, the presupposition gains in strength. After all, on this understanding of what human nature is (viz. rationality) and its relationship to morality, cultural relativism is irrational. But rejecting rationality as the special human ingredient and as the basis of morality does not imply that one’s system of moral beliefs is incoherent and contradictory. One could be as coherent and clear as possible about one’s beliefs and the connections between them, without trying to prove the moral superiority of a human rights culture by appealing to some transcultural human nature.5

For Rorty, philosophy can at most summarize culturally influenced intuitions about what is right and what is wrong for the sake of building the predictability of public institutions. Such an exercise, amounting to generalizations and not justifications of those intuitions, would enhance awareness of our membership of a moral community, but for foundationalist thinkers, these generalizations are still in need of more basic support and according to them that basic support could be provided by knowledge about human nature (Rorty 1998:171).6 I surmise that this knowledge would then also be the decisive factor, for human rights foundationalists, in spreading a human rights culture. However, I think

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5 Prior to a very closely-knit argument in their article “Sentiment and Value” Justin D’Arms and Daniel Jacobson point out that Hume himself who claimed that moral evaluation is grounded in sentiment, cautioned that refined reasoning paves the way for sentiment to make proper judgements (2000:722)

6 Cf. Plato, Kant and Aquinas.
that in contrast to this view that the initial impulse for the mutual recognition of human dignity cannot be provided by philosophy. But in so far as philosophy is a normal human activity, its role in establishing, defending and upholding a human rights culture is to cultivate the self-awareness of its limitations in this regard. One crucially important limitation is that of providing an eternal and immutable foundation for morality and human rights.

**The End of Moral and Human Rights Foundationalism**

Usually when we ask if such knowledge as is sought by the foundationalists is possible, we are said to be dealing with a matter of “epistemology” or theory of knowledge. Rorty, on the other hand, wants to answer that question pragmatically – he wants to show that the job of raising awareness of human rights and the enactment of the rights is not done in human rights societies by increased epistemological sophistication about “human nature”, but rather by “manipulating our feelings” (Rorty 1998: 172). I interpret Rorty to mean by “manipulating our feelings”, evoking feelings or sentiments of sympathy and compassion for others which, on the one hand, result in the approval of conduct that bear witness of the recognition of their human dignity and conduct that promote their good and, on the other hand, disapproval of conduct that denies mutual human dignity and harms the good of others. For Rorty there are some historically significant intellectual conditions that worked in the favour of sentiment, which I summarize below.

First is that despite the criticism that has so far been levelled at Plato and Kant as moral foundationalists, we can still appreciate their respective efforts to “prophesy”, as it were, “cosmopolitan utopias”. These so-called “prophesies” at least set in motion struggles to attain these ideal states which, in their turn, helped to advance progress towards a human rights culture. The objectionable part of Kant and Plato’s thinking, in Rorty’s opinion with which I concur, remains the importance that they attached to the question, “What is man?” and to the ability of human beings to “know”.

A second factor quite plausibly postulated by Rorty is that besides dropping the search for a distinctive human ingredient, the work of Charles Darwin not only further persuaded the West that human beings do not need a special, ad-

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7 David Miller argues that the basis for making value judgements “is the temporal dimension of the human mind. It is when the response to the distant stimulus ["cosmopolitan utopias"] is internalised [...] that we are in a condition for passing primary value judgements...” (1947:63).
ded ingredient in order to evolve, but also did so with rather unexpected ease. This might well have been due to the belief that the philosopher is a specialist on the nature and limits of human knowledge was already on the wane when Darwin published his key work and because late 19th century historicism made the world even more sceptical about essentialism. Historicism is the view that the history of anything is a sufficient explanation of that thing, implying that besides the history of human beings, no additional essence or special ingredient is necessary for a sufficient explanation of what a human being is. The major achievement of this anti-essentialism of the late 19th century was to create space for intellectuals “to look to the future rather than to eternity” (Rorty 1998:174). In other words, the interest of humankind shifted from efforts to gain knowledge about eternal truths to concentrating on attainable and accountable projects for the future – projects like the culture of human rights.

Third, there is also some explanatory force for humanity’s moral progress in the increased wealth, literacy and leisure of the developed democracies (in Europe and America). They realized, Rorty theorizes, that by getting rid of slavery and feudalism they contributed to a better world – progress that needs no further non-historical explanation. The aggregate of the three explanatory factors for the decline of our interest in a-historical explanations for moral progress and the major lesson since the time of the French Revolution that we humans are extremely malleable, has resulted in the confidence to change or recreate ourselves. I support the view then that consequently, the key question has since become the one about the kind of world we would like to leave to our descendants, rather than about what we really are.

In spite of these developments there is an enduring popularity of interest in the question of what our a-historical nature is and in the suggested pointer that only human beings can know as well as feel. As a way of overcoming the enduring popularity of moral foundationalism Rorty proposes that we understand the difference between human beings and animals not to be that human beings can feel and animals not, but rather that human beings can feel for each other and to a much greater extent than animals (1998:176).

8 In brief, love matters and in this regard this great moral narratives embodied in the teachings of Christ, Mohammed, Buddha and the Vedas, among others, make better sense than the belief that knowledge of the truth will set us free.
The end of moral foundationalism would then mean the possibility of focusing on what Rorty terms “sentimental education”. Such education, in his opinion, would eliminate that distance between human beings that makes us think that those who are different from us are less than human. The narrow confines of terms such as “our kind of people” or “our people” could be expanded.9

**Factors Inhibiting the Spread of a Human Rights Culture**

But why then is there still not a universal human rights culture? One factor that Rorty posits is the risky and insecure world outside Europe and America or those countries that have not yet been influenced by a human rights culture. But it is certainly not because of a lack of rationality on the part of the latter.

Experience in South Africa in the past and present bears strong witness to what Rorty non-quantifiably but plausibly observes to be a second factor. Frequently people who regard themselves the paradigm of humanity and who are the people that one would want to convince of the need for universal human rights claim that they are not aware that they have anything in common with those who are different from them and might even feel morally offended at the thought of doing unto others what they would have done unto themselves. So, for instance, when in the mid-eighties of the twentieth century a South African genealogist declared in public that he had found documentary evidence that several of the forefathers of the White Afrikaner “Volk”, including Paul Kruger, were descendants of a black slave woman from West Africa, he was threatened with legal action by one of the leading Afrikaner politicians of the day, the Reverend Andries Treurnicht. The latter was adamant that the claim was slanderous, implying not only that there was nothing in common between white and black in South Africa, but also that to assert so on whatever

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9 In his day Plato, the arch-foundationalist, faced brutal, self-interested tyrants whom he tried to persuade that to be rational and therefore moral would be in their own interest. At least, that is one way I would suggest one can read the Republic. In the process Plato managed to convince us that knowledge of universal truths matters so much that he distracted the attention of moral philosophy from the real problem consisting of that category of people who treat only a limited number of fellow human beings (those who are like them) quite affably according to high moral principles, but who are coldly indifferent to the suffering of those unlike themselves. For Rorty this line of thinking by Plato, despite all the honesty of the endeavour, was wrong because it was addressed to psychopaths and mentally deranged egotists. And by placing morality on a foundation of rationality to counter them, he placed moral philosophy on a non-sentimental path. What the Serb example and the others illustrate is that problems of tragic proportions quite likely to arise if we see only members of “our moral community” as human — whether or not that community is one of sinners, believers, non-believers, blacks, whites, or racial and sexual “in-betweens”.
grounds was both morally and legally reprehensible. Rorty’s explanation for this kind of reaction, which to my mind makes good sense, is that ever since “human being” meant one of our “tribe” or “group” we (members of a specific group, e.g. the Afrikaners) have tended to consider ourselves as real human beings (the paradigm of human beings) and others as pseudo-humans. Part of his postulation is that those Eurocentric thinkers who regard themselves as the paradigms of humanity on the grounds of their “use of reason”, also tend to regard disagreement with them as due to prejudice, because distinguishing between right and wrong is in their opinion not so difficult. Indeed, they often nominate superstition and prejudice as the obstacles to agreement with them.

I think that in our South African context with its racist past, Rorty’s diagnosis of the limits of placing faith in reason to do the work of building a human rights culture is particularly significant for both black and white South Africans. Borrowing from Rorty’s language, eager as young white South Africans might be to redefine themselves in non-exclusive terms because they have been taught the wrongness of, inter alia, racial and religious prejudice, and have been sensitised to the indignities of the oppressed and the marginalized, their new inclusive identity might still be seriously limited. This would be so if they have been taught to exclude as “irrational” those whom they still find intolerable, like common criminals, black racists and rapists, to name but a few. Similarly young black South Africans would limit themselves in their new expanded identity if they abandoned as irrational those whom they still cannot tolerate.

**Rorty’s Alternative to Human Rights Foundationalism: Sentimental Education**

On the basis of the South African experience, I am in full agreement with Rorty that it is not advisable to encourage people to call “irrational” those who are intolerant of society and intolerable in society. The reason that Rorty advances is that this label implies that “we”, the good people, know something of which those people are ignorant and that it is through their own fault. His alternative proposal is that we think of such people as deprived of security and sympathy. The former is “conditions of life sufficiently risk-free (so) as to make one’s difference from others inessential to one’s self-respect, one’s sense of worth”. Crucially for the purposes of this paper, Rorty defines sympathy almost concretely rather than theoretically as “the sort of reactions Athenians had more of after seeing Aeschylus’s *The Persians* than before, the sort whites in the United
States had more of after reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin than before, the sort we have after watching television programs about the genocide in Bosnia.” (1998: 180). Furthermore security and sympathy go together and one cannot have the one without the other.

Taking all the mentioned factors into consideration, Hume’s view that “corrected (sometimes rule-corrected) sympathy, not law endorsing reason, is the fundamental moral capacity” is preferable for Rorty to Plato’s notion of the true self and Kant’s dictum that it is rational to be moral. In simpler terms this means that the most authentic sympathy, for Rorty, is that which is aroused and given spontaneously rather than dutifully or in fulfilment of a rule or command. Spontaneous recognition of mutual dignity is more likely to create trust among people of different background than recognition into which people are forced or coerced. Thus it seems prudent that in building a human rights culture, trust engendered by a spontaneous recognition of mutual dignity, rather than obligation “at gun-point”, so to speak, to make such a recognition, becomes the fundamental moral notion. However, we cannot always wait for such spontaneity to happen and it is in such circumstances that through sentimental education we can encourage a progress of authentic sentiments of sympathy and the spread of a culture of human rights based on trust rather than obligation. This would be the kind of education that makes us see that the similarities between others and ourselves are much more important than the differences.

But this requires that philosophers and, perhaps the general public, eliminate resistance to sentiment as a persuasive force, a resistance that is quite persistent and which might be due to a vague awareness that this would mean giving our hope over to condescension. All those of a rationalistic bent might be vaguely aware that they would have to rely on those who have the power to change things, like journalists, playwrights, novelists and poets, for example, to portray victims as being more like us than we previously cared to admit.

D’Arms and Jacobson argue that sentimentalists don’t have to claim that in making value judgements one has to actually feel, experience or be in possession of the appropriate sentiment. Instead, they reason, by making a value judgement one merely endorses the appropriate sentiment (2000:725). I would add that an implication of this argument is that the critical proviso to endorsing a sentiment meaningfully without actually experiencing it is that one at least has

10 In the South African contexts we recall such works as Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country* and Elsa Joubert’s *Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena*. 

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previous experience of it – that one at least knows what it is that one endorses. I further contend that art in its broadest sense of including, inter alia, literature and theatre, has a key role to play in educating the public about sentiments. Literary accounts of the dehumanisation of Sarah Baartman, for instance, expose readers to the humiliation of being dehumanised and evoke the desire to be safeguarded against such humiliation without the actual physical coercion to public exposure in the nude. After all, one of the pivotal moving causes of the efforts to restore Baartman’s dignity as well as that of the anonymous multitude of women all over the world was a poem of sentiment.11

In 1843 a slave women, known only as “Belinda”, petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for compensation from the estate of the deceased owner Issac Royall for the injustices suffered by her as a slave. In a lucid analysis of the literary strategy of this petition, Jocelyn Moody reveals how Belinda appealed, via her interlocutor, to the sentiments of the Massachusetts legislature (2001:6ff.). We bear in mind that the members of the Massachusetts legislature ruled in favour of the petition, although they had themselves not ever been slaves. Clearly then their decision was not taken on rational grounds alone, but also on the basis of the sentimental appeal of her petition that exposed the legislature to the depravity of slavery.

I conclude from these historically documented examples, then, that the line of argument employed by Rorty that the causal work of promoting a human rights culture is done by a sentimental education, implies the reaffirmation of the value of recovering the major moral narratives of the world, particularly those contained in the religions of the world.

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11 I refer here to the poem written by Dianne Ferrus referred to earlier.
Bibliography


One question – and another

In a global perspective, the Scandinavian countries are often seen as having made quite a lot of progress regarding equality between women and men. In Sweden, 45% of the government posts in May 2002 were held by women. In 2000, the percentage of women in parliament was 44% (SCB, 2002, pp 89, 84). In the fall of 2002, three out of seven major political parties in Sweden had a woman as leader of the party. In new elections in September 2002, the percentage of women in parliament increased by one percent to 45%. Since 1921, when women received the right to vote and became eligible for all parliamentary bodies, Swedish women definitely seem to have made progress within the field of political representation. But is there more to be said concerning equality between women and men? In this article I intend to expand this discussion.

Harald Ofstad, a Norwegian-Swedish moral philosopher, was a professor at the University of Stockholm from 1955 to 1987. In introducing moral philosophy in his *Ansvar och handling. Inledning till moralfilosofiska problem* he wrote:

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2 Gudrun Schyman leads Vänsterpartiet, a former Communist party, nowadays stating themselves to be socialist and feminist. Maud Olofsson leads Centerpartiet, formerly a farmer’s party, which today strongly advocates development in all regions of Sweden. Maria Wetterstrand is one of two leaders of Miljöpartiet, a party focusing on environmental and ecological issues. The parties that have male leaders are the Social Democratic Party, the Liberals, the Conservatives and the Christian Democrats.

3 The title of Ofstad’s work in English would be: Responsibility and Agency. Introduction to moral philosophical problems. When the cited works in my article do not exist in English I will offer a translation so as to give an idea of the meaning of the Swedish title.
Ethics is taking seriously that which is serious. What is serious is that human beings and animals suffer, are humiliated and do not fare well. Taking that seriously means getting involved, gathering as accurate knowledge as possible, and trying to act in such a way that the world may become less evil. (Ofstad, 1982, p 10), (my translation).

Here I will draw quite considerably on the thinking of this particular moral philosopher as well as bringing into the discussion a few womanist and feminist ethicists/moral philosophers, like Katie Cannon, Iris Marion Young and Beverly Wildung Harrison. I will also include statistics and two literary sources.

The first question I will discuss can be formulated thus: how come, in a society like the Swedish society, where women’s rights have been developed legally and politically to a fairly advanced level, that women still are discriminated against? This question is in its turn influenced by a second one, namely: how to build a human rights culture? I address the questions as an ethicist and will start by illustrating and discussing the first question and conclude with the second. My perspective is feminist.4 However, I do not take it upon myself to solve the two questions, once and for all but I do hope my article will shed more light over the issues involved.5

I maintain that, when one takes a closer look, the positive picture of the situation of women in Swedish society can be challenged both qualitatively and quantitatively. When doing this I will use a narrative as well as a statistical approach, both methods commonly used by ethicists.6 When relating my discussion here to the explicit framework of human rights, an immediate background is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, CEDAW, adopted by the UN, on December 18, 1979. Sweden signed it in 1980 and South Africa, in 1993. Now in 2003, 90 % of the UN members have signed the Convention. My discussion relates to the following articles of the Declaration: 11d/ and e/, 7b/, 6, 2d and e/, and the more general article no. 1. (For the full text, see http:/www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/content.htm)

4 I discuss my understanding of feminism in Först när vi får ansikten – ett flerkultureellt samtal om feminism, etik och teologi, (Eng. First when we have faces – a cross-cultural study of feminism, ethics and theology), (Sporre, 1999, pp 60–75, see also chapter 2 in total).

5 Some of the problems related to justice being done to women or not I have discussed in the concluding chapter of Sporre, 1999, pp 489–498.

6 For a thorough discussion of ethics and literature see Nussbaum, Martha, Love’s Knowledge. Essays of Philosophy and Literature, (Nussbaum, 1990). Ethicists often use statistics to establish a factual background of problems we discuss.
The structure of my article evolves like this: first a narrative and a statistical description of the situation of women in Sweden; second, a presentation of some of the fundamental ideas of the moral philosopher Harald Ofstad, particularly focussing on what might be of importance when dealing with equality between women and men; third, a critical discussion concerning the question of how to build a human rights culture, aiming at identifying the crucial basic ideas of such a culture.

**Two stories from literature**

Two different literary sources, *Slumpvandring* by Majgull Axelsson (Axelsson, 2000) and *Catrine och rättvisan*, by Hanna Olsson (Olsson, 1990) will here serve to narrate the situation of Swedish women. My underlying assumption is that literature and authors do reflect their own society and its actual tendencies.

Mother Augusta and her relatives

Axelsson has achieved fame and recognition for works like *Aprilhäxan* (Axelsson, 1997), *Rosario är död* (Axelsson, 1989) and *Slumpvandring*. Several of her books have been translated into other languages such as Spanish, German, Dutch, Norwegian, Danish and others, and also into English. *Slumpvandring*, however, is so not yet available. Axelsson is characterized as an author who

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7 To argue your choice of two certain literary sources always becomes difficult: there are a vast number of possible alternatives to the one(s) you choose. I have chosen, primarily, a novel, written by the author of several other novels which have been widely read and recognized. This particular one gives an overview of Swedish women’s lives during the 20th century, which here can serve as a narrative background to the issues discussed. My second choice is of a documentary novel, where a court case forms the content. This book was chosen because the court case brings the attention to how “truth” can be negotiated when the victim of a murder was a most devalued citizen, a woman prostitute. The work of this author, in my opinion, deserves recognition because she devoted her time to documenting this woman’s life and death so that these negotiations can be revealed.

8 The literal English translation of the title would be “Wandering at random”, but in translations to other languages than English the book has been called “Augusta’s house”; Augusta after the first woman described in the book.

9 English: Catrine and justice.

10 For a theoretical methodological discussion of this see, Kirsten, Grönlien Zetterqvist (Zetterqvist, 2002). See also Martha Nussbaum, (Nussbaum, 1990). However Nussbaum’s main point of argument is that literature is the best way of expressing moral dilemmas.


12 English: Rosario is dead, 2000.
consistently maintains solidarity with the most vulnerable, denigrated and exploited. In *Slumpvandring* Axelsson tells the life stories of three Swedish women in particular, all related to one another. The eldest is Augusta, born in 1895; then come Alice, born in 1940, and the youngest one, Angelica, born in 1984. Augusta’s life, as well as those of the women related to her, mirror different situations of Swedish women in different phases of the twentieth century.

A crucial site for the stories so told is a house, Augusta’s house, where the women come and visit, more or less openly, sometimes also in secret. The house becomes a kind of shelter for them – a place for withdrawal and reflection where they can meet, live together or in solitude, seek themselves and try to find roots. The house also has a “shelter within the shelter”, a small room up under the roof, where the women retreat with their pain and sorrow – for instance Alice during and after an “unwanted” pregnancy. In the room, the women seek to find healing from destructive and/or broken relationships with men.

Angelica, 17 years old, the youngest of these women, is very lonely and vulnerable. Being the last of Augusta’s relatives, the young one, she could have been expected to look ahead and to carry the future. She does not. She has a number of destructive sexual relationships behind her, e.g. one with a married man, in wealthy circumstances and – later to be discovered – the father of one of her class-mates at school. The only way Angelica can find out of her situation seems to be to take her life. She chooses to do that and does so in Augusta’s house.

What I have found interesting in relation to the small room, earlier mentioned, is that Axelsson has created a reference to a novel by another Swedish author, Ivar Lo-Johansson, one of the most recognized authors of the literary tradition of “worker authors”, authors coming from the working class. Axelsson’s women find a book by Lo-Johansson from 1947 in the small room up under the roof. On the title page of the novel is a quote from one of the protagonists of the book stating: “We need to set our girls free”. Implied then is free for freer sexuality. However Axelsson’s women, Alice and Angelica, who both in different times and ways have experienced this freer sexuality in relationships where they were exploited are each separately provoked by the quotation from the book. At the end of the book, Alice, after attending Angelica’s funeral, finds the book anew and reflecting over her own life, critically expresses how her life could have taken a different route if she had seen with critical eyes how women were made objects for men. How they were not seen for their own value and so could not then see other women either.
Catrine – a young Swedish woman

The other book is based on an event which came to be a long and complicated Swedish court case. In early June, 1984 a young Swedish woman disappeared. Her name was Catrine da Costa. Her remains, except for her head, were gradually found, during the following months. She had been murdered, her body had been dissected, put in waste plastic bags, which were dispersed and then found in different places around the city of Stockholm during the same summer. When the body remains were examined, the pathologist interpreted the dissection of the body as having been done by persons with professional anatomical knowledge and skill. In his judgement, the deed also revealed sado-masochistic sexual leanings in the perpetrators. Following thorough investigations two medical practitioners became the main suspects, one of them being a pathologist (Sw.: obducent) and the other a general practitioner (Sw.: allmänläkare). The latter was brought to the attention of the police through the testimony of his young child, a daughter, who with the language of a small child seemed to be telling a story about having been present at the cutting up of the dead body of a woman.

The court proceedings were very long and complicated. The doctors denied any knowledge of the deed. The evidence against them was not strong enough to prove them guilty of murder, even though there was enough evidence against them to make extended court procedures possible. So, they were not found guilty of having murdered Catrine, but guilty of having cut her body up. The testimony of the child played an important role for this verdict together with other witnesses and informants. Consequently the suspects were fined for the minor crime of having desecrated a dead body. They also lost, but later regained, their licenses to practice medicine. They denied any knowledge of any crime throughout the proceedings.

In her book, Hanna Olsson reconstructs the life story of Catrine, a young woman who, due to tough circumstances, had become a prostitute. Olsson pieces Catrine’s life together through interviews with her friends and family and by gathering relevant information. Through this, Olsson got to know and in her book describes the person behind the name and the terrible fate. She retells how Catrine was afraid of some of the men she had sex with; she feared their violence and weirdness. She was also loved by a mother and sister; she had her friends and dreamt of changes in her life. Olsson also convincingly shows how the media, the police and the court in their treatment of Catrine’s case, show respect and give authority to men, educated men, “proper” Swedes, against a
woman, a prostitute and with a non-Swedish family name, which Catrine, by the way, had got through a brief marriage to a non-Swede.

Olsson goes through the whole material of this legal case, is present at the court proceedings and retells it all to her readers. In doing this she substantiates, as I see it, arguments for suspicions that gender, class and ethnicity definitely mattered in the proceedings around this court case. However, in writing her book Olsson also gives some of her dignity back to this young woman. Her life was brutally taken from her and was far too short. Through Olsson’s book, also, Catrine’s loved ones, who saw the memory of their dear one humiliated time and time again in the Swedish media and through words and acts in the court proceedings, might get some of their self-respect back.

How then are we to interpret these two stories? Acts of violence against women and exploitation of them sexually, among other things, seem to be there. They seem vulnerable and their rights to good lives are not respected. Are women not faring well in Swedish society? Are they being discriminated against? Does this happen even though equality in terms of political representation seems to have made great advances? What kind of a picture of equality between women and men do then Swedish statistics give?

**Women and men in Sweden – facts and figures**

The facts show a complex picture. For instance, regarding political representation, when women in 2002 held 45 % of the posts in government in May, in quite equal numbers to men, the administrative staff assisting and advising the members of government were to a great extent men. In 60 % of the cases, state secretaries were men and the percentage of top administrators in departmental work was as high as 72 %. (SCB, 2002, p 89).13

To understand the situation of women in Sweden one has to realize that in Scandinavia one crucial aspect of the situation of women is the high percentage of women enrolled in the labour force. This development in Sweden goes back to the 1960’s, when women began to work outside the home in greater numbers.14 In connection with this, publicly run day-care centres for children were set up. Professional training schemes for women and men working in

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14 Studies of women’s participation in the work force sometimes seem to forget the work of working-class women and single women, where being a housewife has not been an option.
these centres were developed.

In the year 2001, 79 % of Swedish women between 20–64 years of age were in the labour force, either employed, 76 %, or seeking employment, 3 %. The corresponding figure for men was 84 %, with 4 % out of the 84 percent who were seeking employment. However, the big statistical difference between women’s and men’s involvement in the labour force concerns whether they work fulltime or not. 51 % of the women in the labour force in 2001, worked fulltime compared to 74 % of the men. Of the women, 21 % work 20–34 hours a week, which only 5 % of the men do. (SCB, 2002, p 43). Given that they do not work fulltime, what do some of the Swedish women do the rest of the hours in a week?

Statistics show that women fill the greater part of that time with unpaid housework in their own homes. Men also to a limited extent spend some of their time weekly with such work, but much less than women do. Of the unpaid labour in homes women do two-thirds. The amount of time devoted to this unpaid housework varies from life situation to life situation. However no matter what the differences in life situations are, the facts point to an overall statistically significant difference between women and men: men have a few hours more of their time free every week, free from work, from unpaid house labour, free for leisure-time activities – compared to women. (SCB, 2002, p 34). One also has to point out the fact that women’s unpaid house labour of course has a negative impact on the amount of their pensions, as the pensions system builds entirely on the work done within the paid labour sector.

Differences between Swedish women and men exist also in terms of their choices of working careers. Only 12 % of women and 12 % of the men find themselves in jobs where women and men are “equal” in numbers, i.e. where the ratios of women and men are between 40–60%. The two “equal” jobs, employing these 12 % of the labour force are accountancy and upper secondary school teaching in general subjects. Greater numbers of women are found in caring and nursing professions, as support staff in offices, as cleaners etc. Men are found in greater numbers in technical professions, in construction, computer-related professions, in marketing and business etc. (SCB, 2002, pp 56–57). However, even though “equal numbers” do not exist in most professions, a minority of men or women are to be found there. There are women in construction work, in IT-technology, working as engineers or entrepreneurs.
etc, as well as there being men employed as pre-school teachers or nurses etc. However, in general, when salaries between women and men are compared, there is a clear discriminatory pattern coming to the fore – men have higher salaries.

When the ten most common professions of all in Swedish working life are compared, women in those professions have salaries ranging from 77–100 % of the salaries of men. 47 % percent of women and 31 % of men work within these ten professions. With one exception among these ten professions, women are discriminated against in terms of salary. The exception is the job of primary-school teacher where women and men have the same salaries. Only in this one of the ten professions do women and men have the same salary for the same job. The actual number of men working as primary school teachers is 21.000 and of women, 59.000. So the total number of women who have salaries equal to those of their male colleagues in the professions compared here, is 59.000 compared to those having less than their male colleagues, who number 756.000. (SCB, 2002, p 66).

When the statistics are structured so as to compare the ten most common women’s jobs and the ten most common men’s jobs the pattern is the same – women earn less money than men in almost all the twenty professions compared, with two exceptions: pre-primary teachers and cashiers and tellers. The number of men in these occupations is 8.000 (out of the total of 2.220.000 employed men in the labour force). When the figures are turned the other way around, it becomes clear that 64.000 pre-primary teachers are in a profession where the women, probably because of a higher average age than the men within this occupation, earn more than men, this being the only profession in the comparisons here where this is the case.15 Furthermore, 20.000 women working as cashiers and tellers have pay equal to that of men. (SCB, 2002, p 68–69). Of primary school teachers, as stated above, 59.000 are women who also have pay equal to that of their male colleagues. So out of a total of 2.030.300 women in the labour force when we look at the most common professions, as above, not many women have the same pay as their male colleagues.

When overall statistics are presented, they show that women in all sectors of working life receive in general eight percent less in salary than men. The

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15 I have discussed this matter with staff at the SCB and they believe the difference is due to the fact that men entering these professions are younger than the women, so the age difference accounts for the difference in wages.
figures have then been cleared from differences pertaining to age, education, working hours and differences in working sectors and professions. These eight percent cannot be accounted for by anything other than gender. (SCB, 2002, p 72). So the conclusion that equal pay for equal work does **not** exist in Sweden although this has been a political issue since the 1960’s is a well-founded one. Swedish women are exposed to economic discrimination. Women’s work can definitely be said to be valued less.

Other figures regarding the working life of women and men in Sweden that can be chosen to complete this picture, regard the numbers of women on the boards of business companies. In 2002, women constituted 6 % of the board members in listed companies (SCB, 2002, p 93). In state-owned companies, 37 % of the board members in the year 2000, were women (SCB, 2002, p 91) and in academic life in 2000, 13 % of the professors with full chairs were women (SCB, 2002, p 33).

I would like to conclude this statistical review with some figures regarding crime. More than 15,000 women have reported cases of assault to the police in 2001, the perpetrator being a person they know. The number of cases where the perpetrator is unknown to the woman amounts to 6,000. Men are somewhat more prone than women to experience violence, but not from people they know. Most violence against men takes place out of doors, whereas violence against women takes place indoors in more than 80 % of the cases. Women fear violence against them: 25 % in younger age groups, or in older age groups, 40 % or more of the women express fear of violence. In 91 % of all the court cases, men are responsible for crime/violence against persons. In terms of sexual violence men are the perpetrators in 99 % of the cases. (SCB, 2002, pp 80–83. See also Lundgren, 2001 and 2002).

**Harald Ofstad – a moral philosopher**

So where does this take us? At first glance, Sweden, one of the Scandinavian countries, seems to have made a lot of progress in terms of equality between women and men. When the picture is exposed to closer scrutiny it seems more complex. Even though there are laws stipulating equality between the sexes, even though equality is a stated goal for governmental activities, for universities and schools, even though companies are forced by law to plan for equality within their businesses – a gap seems to exist, between an ought, what ought to be, and what presently applies in terms of salaries, sharing of paid and un-
paid work, professional and political influence and security in daily life and in personal and sexual relationships.

However, it also has to be clearly stated that Swedish women have gained authority and freedom during the last century, through political struggle, through education and in working life. In the present situation, however, it is as if the discrimination of Swedish women takes place in a space “in between”, in a space where it becomes invisible and seems to be difficult to handle. It seems to happen somewhere in between accepted laws and officially recognised policy. In describing the situation, one might say that “everybody” is for equality between the sexes: the laws are in favour of it, the policy of companies, governmental and other societal institutions, they all strive for it. And still, this unfairness towards women does exist, statistically documented and reflected in literature: women run the risk of being exposed to violence, of suffering injustice in personal and societal relationships.

According to Harald Ofstad, the moral philosopher already quoted, ethics is about taking seriously that which is serious: when animals and human beings suffer, are humiliated and do not fare well. Taking this seriously means getting involved, gathering knowledge and trying to act in such a way that the world may become less evil, according to Ofstad’s understanding of ethics and moral agency (Ofstad, 1982, p 10). Women do not fare well. Injury is done to them as women. How could this be understood, in order to improve their situation? Can the work of a moral philosopher like Ofstad maybe contribute to an understanding of this? And why choose him?

Why Ofstad?
One of my reasons for choosing Ofstad is that it might be interesting in this more international context to (re)introduce this thinker to a wider audience. Another reason is my own curiosity: could the work, a few decades old, of this male moral philosopher cast light on this present issue? Could his work have a bearing on gender issues that were not so clearly stated a few decades back? A third reason has to do with the word contempt in the title of his book *Our Contempt for Weakness. Nazi Norms and Values – And Our Own* (Ofstad, 1989). Women’s experiences of discrimination and the expectancy of being “there” for

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16 Ofstad published in the 1950’s and 1960’s in English but later his writing appeared mainly in Norwegian and Swedish apart from *Our Contempt for Weakness. Nazi Norms and Values – And Our Own* (Ofstad, 1989).
men, shown here in the article, by statistics and the lives of women like Augusta, her relatives and Catrine, seem to imply a lesser value, or maybe rather an instrumental value ascribed to women. How come that their value is not equal to that of men? Can this perhaps be understood as being linked to contempt? If not, how could it then be understood? A fourth reason for choosing Ofstad is his definition of ethics, already introduced: that ethics is about taking the problem seriously when human beings and animals do not fare well.17 In some of his texts, he also uses the expression that they are oppressed. He does so in an interview in Den nödvändiga olydnaden18, by Maria Modig, (Modig, 1987, p 111–118). In texts I studied for my PhD thesis a few years ago oppression was a central concept and consequently I find it theoretically interesting when moral philosophers use that kind of terminology in investigating and theorizing ethics. Now the question is, how could a reading of Ofstad’s work contribute to the understanding of the questions dealt with here?

Contempt for Weakness

Ofstad’s Our Contempt for Weakness. Nazi Norms and Values – And Our Own, was first published in Norwegian in 1971, in 1972, in Swedish, with the title Vårt förakt för svaghet. Nazismens normer och värderingar – och våra egna (Ofstad, 1972). The English translation with the above title appeared in 1989 (Ofstad, 1989). In the study, Ofstad has analysed the “values, norms and interpretations of facts” of Nazi Germany. He describes and analyses the “‘Weltanschauung’ or ideology,” of Nazi Germany, “together with their identifications and psychological motivations”, which “formed those attitudes and conceptions of human beings which were the basis for their acts” (Ofstad, 1989, p 15). Ofstad states that his task is not one of offering causal explanations to the rise of Nazism in Germany, nor is he trying to psychologically understand those involved but what he is doing is to analyse the fundamental values and norms that guided the political movement (Ofstad, 1989, pp 15–17). Ofstad bases his analysis primarily on Adolf Hitler’s Mein Kampf; and includes other texts only if they shed extra light on a particular issue or assist in characterizing a tendency (Ofstad, 1989, pp 17–18).

17 In this text I limit myself to discussing the value of human beings, well aware of the discussion going on concerning the value of animals and other living species.

18 Eng.: The necessary disobedience.
So Ofstad’s purpose in *Our Contempt for Weakness. Nazi Norms and Values – And Our Own*, is to arrive at a characterization of Nazism and its followers. Through description and analysis of texts, Ofstad argues his way through the book. Central to his argument is that anti-Semitism was not the core of Nazism but “the doctrine that the ‘strong’ shall rule over the ‘weak’, and that the ‘weak’ are contemptible precisely because they are ‘weak’.” (Ofstad, 1989, p 5 and pp 165–214). This doctrine, Ofstad forcefully argues, did not disappear in 1945 but “expresses deeply rooted tendencies, which are constantly alive in and around us.” (Ofstad, 1989, p 5 and pp 212–214). He also expresses his findings in the following way: “We admire those who fight their way to the top, and are contemptuous of the loser.” (Ofstad, 1989, p 5).

In a later book, appearing in Swedish in 1987, *Vi kan ändra världen. Hur bör vi ställa frågorna?* (Eng.: We can change the world. How are we to phrase the questions?) Ofstad continues his ethical reflections and arguments (Ofstad, 1987). One can see lines from *Our Contempt for Weakness* as well as new questions that are discussed; among others: the use of nuclear weapons, the treatment of handicapped people, the right to refuse compulsory military service and others.

In both books, Ofstad describes, analyses and argues critically against ideas where thoughts are expressed, openly or indirectly, that the strongest are meant to rule, are meant to be more highly valued than other human beings, who are regarded as being weaker and who are to be despised precisely because they are, or rather, are described to be weaker. In addition to Nazism, in *Vi kan ändra världen* Ofstad chooses his examples from the world of science, like Social Darwinism, as well as from literature or philosophy.

“We and the others”

When Ofstad, in *Our Contempt for Weakness*, characterizes Nazism, he calls the tendency to admire those at the top, identification with power. This attitude is also linked with obedience exerted in a hierarchical system. This leads to a lack of responsibility, where the ideology identifies the enemy: those who are described as weak. Ofstad also discusses how a certain sentimentality, for instance about animals, replaces and represses actual feelings of guilt in the face of atrocities committed, one’s own or those of others. His analysis leads him to a point where he shows how individual understandings of what is moral or not, is replaced by an ideology where a system of thinking characterized by nihilism and neglect
of humanity is what follows. Ofstad also makes clear that, within Nazism, a
theory of hierarchy between what they called different races of human beings

In one part of the book, Ofstad discusses how aggression and projection
work as mechanisms within Nazism. Violence forms part of the ideology; the
categorization of peoples into strong and weak goes along with black- and
white thinking, where stereotypes are linked to the different groups of people.
The division of human beings into two categories further allows for projection
of what is bad onto other groups, i.e. the others. (Ofstad, 1989, pp 73–79).

In an earlier chapter, Ofstad describes the Nazi understanding of relationships between men and women. He then writes:

A man should be strong and ‘carry a sword’. He must have will power, physical courage,
fighting ability, Verantwortungsfreude and Entscheidungsfähigkeit. He must be unsen-
timental and commanding. Women are emotional, stupid and subservient to men. They
should be weak and poetical. (Ofstad, 1989, p 47)

Ofstad substantiates this statement by quoting from texts by Hitler. He draws
the conclusion that the view prevailing within Nazi ideology is that “[w]omen are by nature passive, longing for the supporting force of the male”, (Ofstad,
1989, p 47). He further states:

A real man can never have any deep emotional contact with a woman. Her world is
totally at odds with his. Real men can only have meaningful contact with other men,
e.g. in such organizations as the SS. There they share the bonds of companionship and
loyalty to their leader. (Ofstad, 1989, p 47)

Humanity and solidarity between human beings
In Vi kan ändra världen. Hur bör vi ställa frågorna? Ofstad has named one part
of the book “Vi och de andra” (Eng.: We and the others). Another part has the
title “Stark och svag” (Eng.: Strong and weak). In the chapters, Ofstad treats
questions like: Are we discriminating against immigrants? Are handicapped
people second-class human beings? Are we supposed to admire the one who
succeeds? How socialist ought we to be? – and other questions. (Ofstad, 1987,

Ofstad’s moral philosophy forms itself into a strong plea for humanity and
solidarity among human beings. Basically, he holds that the lives of living
creatures have a value in themselves. And as human beings we want to live our
lives out to their full length, he argues. We do not want our lives to end too
early. That wish to live our lives is common to all and ought to be mutually respected by us as human beings vis-à-vis one another. At the same time, as human beings, we are vulnerable in our desire to live a good life, exposed, as we are to natural disasters and also to the evil of our fellow human beings. A basic respect for one another and our will to life, supported by a human capacity for empathic understanding for one another is crucial for Ofstad when he develops what solidarity means and how it is lived out. (Ofstad, 1987, pp 129–150).

However, in evaluating the moral behaviour or the perceived lack of it in another person’s behaviour, Ofstad argues for the benefit of the doubt. When not knowing adequately the background of someone’s acts one ought to grant them the benefit of the doubt, so as not to be condemnatory. In many situations, Ofstad argues, our capacity for acting differently may be limited so that we are not able to act differently than we do. It is not always so that we can be responsible for our acts, but on other occasions we can definitely be responsible for them. What Ofstad links with responsibility is whether when we acted, we knew what we did, knew the probable consequences of our actions and whether it was within our power to act in a better way. (Ofstad, 1987, pp 29–41). Ofstad also argues that we human beings should actively engage in the moral issues that are at stake, not fearing their subjective character, but recognizing it and exerting our responsibility. Admit uncertainty, involve our emotions and gather as much knowledge as we can. (Ofstad, 1987, pp 14–28).

Reflections on Ofstad’s argument and observations

So where does the writing of Harald Ofstad take us? How does it shed light on the question of women still being subjected to discrimination in Sweden and for example, thought of as being “there” to meet men’s needs in relationships, sexual and other, through work and in providing “home-services”? I would now like to point to a few issues in Ofstad’s writings which I think address this problem.

Us and them

As I understand it, Ofstad has convincingly described how a group of people constructed themselves into an ‘us’ and constructed one or several other groups of people as ‘them’. Such a division of human beings presupposes a conceptual cleavage upheld among human beings where certain characteristics are used to denote and then separate individuals. From such an assessment the status of individuals is defined as belonging to one or the other of the two (or more) groups.
I would like to argue here that ‘men’ and ‘women’ are concepts that can be used in constructing precisely such a conceptual cleavage. To talk, think and act in such a way as to uphold this particular division of human beings may contribute to upholding this same division and so contribute to repetitiously constructing an ‘us’ and a ‘them’. The use of gender as a category then constructs women and men as different groups. The crucial criterion, as I see it, for when such a use is constructive and when it is not, is whether the use contributes to the respect and equal value of all human beings, here, women and men.

Strength and weakness

Added to the conceptual construction of human beings in different groups, Ofstad also describes how human beings are ascribed characteristics, particularly ‘strength’ and ‘weakness’ according to which group they are described as belonging to. These characteristics, according to Ofstad, are not neutral in themselves but carry an implicit valorization. Being strong within this understanding of human realities is positive and valued as more valuable than being weak, which is regarded as negative.

Turning to the relationship between the sexes, we see that men have traditionally been described as strong and women as belonging to the “weaker sex”. An implicit valorization has followed also from this – men and their activities are then regarded as being of more importance, women and their activities of less. In the statistics on salaries discussed earlier, such a valorization of women’s and men’s work cannot other than be said to be reflected.

Violence

Ofstad’s analysis shows how violence is exerted against those who are described as being weak. Under the Nazi régime this violence was carried out to the point of extinction. Both the literary and the statistical data here referred to describe how men exert violence on women, even to the point where death follows.

Admiration of power – and neglect of humanity

Among the findings of Ofstad is also the tendency within the ‘us’ group to admire the power of the leaders and other members of the group. He also describes an identification with power. Ofstad interprets this as a tendency on the part of the individual to strengthen his/her identity by belonging to a strong ‘us’ group’. I would also like to point out that the reverse side of the same coin
is the contempt for those not described as belonging to the ‘us’ group because they do not share in the execution of power.

Ofstad also describes how an ideology of nihilism and neglect of humanity follows admiration of power, hierarchal power relations and acts of violence against those described as “the others”. And I wish to pose the questions, rhetorically, whether the sado-masochistic murder of a young woman, or an older married man’s sexual relationship with a teenage girl, a classmate of his child, can be described as respectful towards their humanity? Below I will discuss two aspects of a human rights culture, self-actualisation and self-determination and I regard respect for those aspects in relationships to be crucial to preserving the humanity of fellow human beings.

Men and women

Above a few quotations were given from Ofstad’s texts, where he describes the understanding of the relationships between men and women found in Nazi ideology. Ofstad’s analysis shows a construction of sex/gender where men are described as strong and women as weak. Other characteristics are also mentioned as part of the descriptions of each of the sexes. Following the valorization of strong and weak, this means that men and their activities are more highly valued, whereas women and what is connected with them is ascribed less value. As a consequence of this, women are to be subordinated. Ofstad’s analysis also points to the opinion that men ought to socialize with other men rather than with women.

**How to build a human rights culture?**

The description of relationships between women and men made above in Ofstad’s analysis of Nazi Germany I would definitely call a patriarchal understanding. What, however, may be somewhat confusing is that in the Swedish society, where equality between women and men has progressed, where political representation is advanced and where in policy making efforts are made towards equality, there still exist obvious patriarchal patterns reflected in the clear economic salary discrimination of women, in the unequal time women spend on unpaid house labour, compared to men, in men having more time a week free, as well as in the sexual abuse and violence directed against women. Patriarchal patterns and structures operate at the same time as those promoting equality between women and men. How can then a further change be brought about?
What does it take to build a thorough human rights culture, a culture where the rights of women are thoroughly respected?

Such questions might find their answer on a number of levels. When I deal with them below, I will basically keep to a more philosophical and theoretical level by suggesting certain basic conditions for such a culture, but I will also draw practical conclusions from my discussion. My position does not imply that I regard material conditions as not being of importance for the realization of human rights. On the contrary, I do regard economic issues, the cultural representation of gender patterns, the existence of forceful equality politics and policy to be of utmost importance. Of course, women ought to have exactly the same salary as men. Of course, women’s pensions should not be lagging behind because they do more of the housework. Of course, women should be guaranteed safety in personal and sexual relationships etc. Here, however, I discuss certain underlying theoretical questions.

One humanity – no conceptual cleavage

When following Ofstad’s analysis of Nazism we have seen how an ‘us’ and a ‘them’ were constructed. We could also see how this thought pattern structured the description and distribution of stereotyping characteristics to the two groups and how a valorization followed, and from that discrimination, brutality, violence and death.

The presupposition for this, as for gender discrimination in Sweden, is what I have already called a conceptual cleavage, the construction of humanity into two (or more groups), of ‘us’ and ‘them’. When humanity, all human beings, are not regarded as one group, as a whole, but divided up into groups, where differences between human beings are used to separate, to describe, to denote, to (de)value, to assign to certain tasks and roles – then a process starts, a path is taken, away from an understanding of all human beings as equal. A process of what can be called an instrumentalization of the other is initiated.

As I interpret the ethics of Harald Ofstad, it has at its starting point an observation: we, human beings, want to live our lives to their full length. To make this possible we enter into a mutual agreement to respect this wish and not kill one another. For each one of us, one can conclude, life is dear; it has an intrinsic value, a value in itself. (Ofstad, 1987, pp 102–103). In this way, Ofstad formulates his humanist basis for his ethics, an agreement between human beings based on an interpretation of the conditions of human existence.
The African-American ethicist Katie Geneva Cannon, writing within a Christian feminist theological tradition, has written extensively on the conditions of African-American women. In her *Black Womanist Ethics* (Cannon, 1988), after having described how white people used certain norms for their relationships with white people and other norms for treating black people, behaviour that obviously was in conflict with their Christian faith, Cannon states that all human beings belong to a common ethical field, and so ought to be treated equally. (Cannon, 1988, p 165).

In *Our Contempt for Weakness* Ofstad points to how an ideology is formed in which nihilism and neglect of the humanity of others developed within Nazism. If the same is true for what happens when patriarchal understandings of relationships between men and women are at hand, then the ideology of patriarchy also has to be broken for a culture of the rights of all human beings, women included, to develop.

Self-actualisation and self-determination

In discussing justice and the good life in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Young, 1990) the American feminist political philosopher, Iris Marion Young, states two values she regards as the two most general ones: 1. developing and exercising one’s capacities and expressing one’s own experience, 2. participating in determining one’s actions and the conditions of one’s actions.

Here, I would like to call the first of these values, self-actualisation and the second one, self-determination. I regard these two values formulated by Young to be of utmost importance when the questions are discussed of how the rights of individuals are to be respected. In her book, Young discusses the hindrances preventing these two values from being exercised, the hindrance to the first she calls oppression and to the second, domination. She describes how these hindrances take shape in political processes.

For my discussion here it is interesting to note that Young mentions exploitation as one of the five faces of oppression that she discusses. Exploitation hinders self-actualisation. In the societal process of labour, then, the benefits resulting from of the work of one group is transferred to another. (Young, 1990,

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19 African-American feminists have chosen to call themselves womanists, in order to mark a certain distance to white feminists. The concept womanist comes from the writings of Alice Walker, as reprinted in her book *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. *Womanist Prose*, (Walker, 1983).

20 Parts of this book have been translated into Swedish and published together with other texts in the book, *Att kasta tjäkast*, (Young, 2000).
p 49). This has, as I see it, a bearing on our observations here: all the extra hours women spend per week on unpaid house labour; all the work women do in work place after work place with less pay than male colleagues – which group, as a group, benefits from this, if not men, economically as well as in terms of private comfort and pleasure?

Among the other faces of oppression that Young discusses are also powerlessness, marginalization, violence and cultural imperialism. (Young, 1990, pp 53–65.) Regarding the space needed for women to develop their capacities and express their own experience as well as self-determination I understand it to be of utmost importance for Swedish women to continue the processes of making public their problem issues: economic discrimination, violence and sexual abuse. Today there is also an extra challenge to be included in the understanding of “Swedish women”: the challenge of those women who have immigrated to Sweden in greater numbers since the 1960’s, to make sure that equality is granted them too. This is a most complex and recently debated issue which I cannot do justice to here; however, in line with the most of my argument above, I would suggest that these issues concerning women’s rights should also be approached as economic and social issues.

Women – as a political collective

The compilation of facts made at the start of this article concerning women’s political representation may, however, be misleading since it might be possible to draw the conclusion that, if women as a group gain political power, then it will be easy to focus on women’s issues and address them politically. Such a conclusion might reveal an essentialist understanding of women, taking for granted, that all women have the same political interests, think alike and value things alike – taking to an extreme such an idea may even ascribe to women common (psychological) characteristics. As women do not easily have common interests, think alike etc., this is a problematic understanding of women as a group, as a collective. How can then women as a political collective be understood?

In Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective Iris Marion Young discusses this question, (Young, 1997). With the help of Sartre’s concept series, she manages to find a way between the clear problems of essentialism and identity politics related to women and what may have seemed as a necessary dissolution of women as a political collective, namely if women’s identities were to differ too much. Using Sartre’s concept series, she develops an understanding
of women as an open and potentially political group, which, as a whole, or in parts, can be alerted and roused to political action given a particular historical situation. This however does not presuppose any particular common identity between women, nor essentialist understandings of what it means to be a woman. (Young, 1997, pp 12–37).

I find Young’s argument interesting because it problematizes the presupposition that if women only achieve political power, meaning accurate political representation, “women-matters” will automatically be solved. Achieving changes in politics is more difficult than that. Forming a women-friendly society demands more as the facts here have shown. On the other hand, Young’s conceptualisation still allows for the potentiality of women to form a political collective, on a particular issue, at a particular time.

Violence against women

One issue that cuts across the different economic classes and cultural backgrounds of Swedish women is the question of violence. The way violence against women is structured, as compared to violence directed towards men, clearly shows that Swedish women still live in a patriarchal culture. Women experience violence mainly from persons, i.e. men they know; in the majority of cases women are abused indoors, not outside and not in public arenas. We can compare this to men, for whom it is the other way around, as men run the risk of acts of violence against them in public and not from women but from other men, who in most cases are unknown to them.

From the point of view of a human rights culture, it is unacceptable that one part of a population violates the other, in this particular case the violence being based on intimacy, closeness exposed in personal relationships. Some may want to argue against this by stating that the violence is not so frequent, that a minor number of persons are involved etc. However, such arguments may miss the importance of the cultural aspects accompanying this. Masculinity (and thus male identity) is culturally expressed to a large extent as active, expansive and violent, in sexual and other relationships, in current media productions. I think it is fair to state that there exists a strong cultural backing for such behaviour by men. To change this, it would need to be strongly questioned and resisted publicly, and why not by men acting as a group? Until this is done, tacit acceptance remains the general attitude and these norms of masculinity must be said to have strong backing.
Critical studies

What is to be done then? I see a need for more and further critical studies. Above, I have mentioned culture as one area where patriarchal gender constructions prevail. I would also like to mention religion. Today religion is one of the ideological arenas where unequal ideologies and practices against women can find theoretical support and flourish. This is also true for ideologies other than religions where male-glorifying masculinities are found, Neo-Nazism being a crucial one, which ought to be mentioned. So, further critical studies in the fields of culture, religion and ideologies are needed.

Speaking of this, when Harald Ofstad published his *Vårt förakt för svaghet* the book was received with much hesitation, particularly his claim that Nazism as a political ideology could crop up again and that such an ideology was not a one-off event in human history. His claim was much debated and not believed, at the time. However he proved to be right. In Europe and Sweden Neo-Nazism has surfaced again.\(^{21}\) Having reflected over Ofstad’s analysis of Nazism, undertaken in that field of human relations and here brought to this other field of human relationships, namely those between women and men, I would like to raise a related question.

Could one say that Ofstad’s idea regarding what was at the core of Nazism, namely contempt for weakness, could be seen as being at the core of relationships between women and men, in this context also? Is it so that, at the core of a patriarchal view of men and women, there is a conviction that the one who is described as the stronger is meant to rule, that his power is to be admired, that he is to be respected to a larger extent, that more value is to be given to his person, his opinions and deeds, than to someone else, here women, who are meant to be regarded as weak, less valued for their persons as well as for their activities, and that they are, thus, meant to be subordinated and despised?

Is this at the bottom of the patriarchal ideology? If so, how can it be replaced by the thinking of a thorough human rights culture?

\(^{21}\) For studies of this development in Sweden see the works of Helene Lööw who after publishing her PhD thesis in 1990 (Lööw, 1990) has written a number of articles on this subject.
Directions for a thorough human rights culture

Above, I have argued that we should see humanity as one common humanity and not accept any conceptual cleavages so as to construct ‘us’s’ and ‘them’s’ but firmly hold on to our view of all humans as human beings equal in value and dignity and, like Ofstad, see the life of each and everyone as something to be respected. Such a position strives to give women equal respect. In addition to this, I have also argued that one cannot underestimate the difficulties women as a political collective face when entering the political arena, even when their numbers begin to approximate to those of men. Dealing with patriarchal power is not simply a question of statistics and numbers but is much more complex; it has, I would say, to do with long-lived mindsets, attitudes, emotions – complex constructs, which take a lot of power or energy to bring up to the surface, to challenge and change.

In bringing my article to a close, I also want to bring to our conscious attention what feminist ethicists have pointed to for a long time, namely the damage that patriarchal power does to women’s bodies, an underlying theme present also in this article. One of the early voices was the Christian social ethicist Beverly Wildung Harrison, who in her *Our Rights to Chose* (Harrison, 1983), in the USA of the early 1980’s, argued for women’s self-actualisation and self-determination when dealing with reproductive issues. Further in her *Making the Connections. Essays in Feminist Social Ethics*, she argues that a more body-affirming ethical code should be developed (Harrison, 1985). Her work is one among many others (see also Mananzan, Oduyoye, et al, 1996). A recent development of this kind of Swedish feminist thinking is a PhD-thesis with the title *Att vara kroppsubjekt* (Eng. Being a Body Subject), (Grönlien Zetterqvist, 2002), pointing in a direction where mind and body are not held apart but brought together. In the field of theories of knowledge, attention has been brought to the bodiliness of knowledge by theorists such as Donna Haraway and Lorraine Code.

A human rights culture would need, as I argue along with many other feminist ethicists, to take the bodily well being of women as a crucial criterion, this to counteract what the deprecation of women does, economically, socially and consequently also to their (our) bodies. Not only women, however, but also children and men may also experience that their value is regarded as less. So to conclude, the bodily well being of human beings as well as the mutual respect for the self-actualisation and self-determination of each and everyone is crucial for a human rights culture.
References

In recent theological discourse on human rights in the South African context a new emphasis on the formation of a human rights culture based on the dignity of all human beings has emerged. The focus is not so much on an academic or legal study of human rights. The emphasis is on the formation of a human rights *culture*, that is, on issues of moral formation, on the realisation that the formulation of a bill of human rights does not guarantee a society in which such rights will be respected. A moral society cannot be secured through legislation. In South Africa it is often said that we now have a new South Africa and an excellent new constitution. What we now need, I will argue in this paper, are new South Africans, communities of people that embody and practise the vision articulated in the constitution.

In this contribution I will remind us of some of the underlying problems that have to be addressed in any theological discourse on human rights. In the third section I will offer a substantive contribution to the theme by investigating two recent ecological discourses on a global ethos. The essay will conclude with a few comments on the role of religious traditions in general and Christian theology, more specifically in this regard. This will reflect my own interests as a South African Christian theologian with a strong research interest in ecological theology (see Conradie & Field 2000, Conradie 2000, 2001a, 2001b).

**Some disputes on a human rights culture**

a) The rights and wrongs of a right

The South African Bill of Rights enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom. The various rights enshrined in the bill of rights are based on everyone’s “inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.” The significance of this formulation is evident to most South Africans, especially

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1 Section 7(1) of the South African constitution (1996).
2 Section 10 of the South African constitution (1996).
given the way in which the dignity of human beings has been violated through centuries of colonialism, patriarchal systems, racial discrimination, cultural elitism and apartheid. This has to be understood in the light of the numerous gross violations of human rights as documented in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Furthermore, the many more subtle but equally degrading ways in which some people have been treated as inferior by others – through their tone of voice, jokes, body language and studied disregard – also have to be kept in mind. Indeed, the many contemporary manifestations of violence bear witness to an “unrelenting assault on human dignity” (Huber, 1996).

Notwithstanding the contextual urgency of an affirmation of each person’s rights, we have to remind ourselves of the difficult problem of describing the very foundations of human rights. Why does a human person have rights in the first place? Why should we honour the rights of others? Some rights are due to us on the basis of agreements, treaties, promises or legal decisions. However, these are rights that only apply in particular circumstances, they are not basic human rights. The South African constitution grounds such basic human rights in human dignity, equality and freedom. Yet a number of questions persist. Why should the dignity of every human being be acknowledged? Who has ordained that humans should have (equal) dignity? Why is such dignity considered to be “inalienable”? Where do we get such dignity from? From the constitution? From society? From the very nature of things (natural law)? From a particular worldview (based on the notion of ubuntu)? From God? From being created in the image of God? There are obviously a number of deeply rooted convictions about human personhood at stake in a discussion of such questions.

Such questions may sound somewhat esoteric but they are crucial in order to guard against various aberrations of human rights discourse. Some regard human rights primarily in an egocentric way, i.e. in terms of the demand that

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3 Josef Pieper (1966, p 47) notes that: “The concept of ‘being due to,’ of ‘right’ is such a primordial idea that it cannot be traced back to a prior, subordinating concept.”

4 Moltmann (1999, p 119) answers this question concisely: “Human rights exist in the plural, but human dignity is simply and solely singular. Human dignity is one and indivisible. There is never a greater or a lesser degree of human dignity. It exists only entirely or not at all.”

5 See Huber (1996, pp 113–149) on the rootedness of an affirmation of human dignity in the Jewish-Christian notion that every human being is created in the image of God. Huber suggests that the revolutionary significance of the affirmation of human dignity in the Jewish-Christian tradition is precisely this emphasis on equality. Human dignity assumes the equality of God’s children – irrespective of official positions or duties, social status, talent or wealth, gender or nationality (1996, p 115).
their own rights have to be conceded. Human rights discourse is also a handy weapon that may be used to accuse others of violating certain rights. In such cases, discourse on human rights may play into the hands of the notorious culture of entitlement and the widespread culture of consumerism in South Africa. “Life owes me something.” “I have a right to this, that and the other thing.”

Such a view of human rights would miss the relational roots of the concept of “rights”. I only have rights because of the dignity attributed to me (externally). Moreover, within the context of basic scarcity on a finite planet, one’s rights cannot be separated from the rights of others. If distributive justice demands that everyone should receive what is due to her or him, I have to ensure that others receive what is due to them at the same time as I demand whatever is due to me. This also indicates the conceptual relatedness of discourse on human rights and human responsibilities.

b) Humans and humus

The distinction between so-called first, second and third generation of human rights is well known.6 In addition to the classic individual rights to freedom7 and the economic, social and cultural rights to housing, health care, food, water, social security and education,8 the South African constitution also acknowledges the rights of each citizen to a clean and healthy environment. Section 24 of the Bill of Rights in South Africa’s constitution reads:

Everyone has the right –

a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health and well-being; and

b) to have the environment protected for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that –

i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation;

ii) promote conservation; and

iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

6 I find Moltmann’s distinctions in this regard illuminating too. He says: “In the wake of the crimes of the Fascist dictators, and after the Second World War, the North Atlantic states formulated individual human rights, over against the powers of state and society. In the struggle against capitalism and class rule, the socialist states emphasized economic and social human rights. And the wretched and impoverished people of the Third World are demanding the right to existence, the right to live and survive.” (Moltmann 1999, p 119). He also distinguishes between protective rights, rights of freedom, social rights and rights of participation.


8 See sections 26, 27, 29 of the South Africa constitution (1996).
It is pertinent to note that the stipulation of the right of human beings to a clean and healthy environment focuses on a concern for the well-being of human beings. The reason why environmental degradation should be prevented is the risk that this poses to other human beings. This formulation remains anthropocentric in orientation. It is one of the weaknesses of a human rights approach to environmental concerns that humans are placed at the centre whereas the interdependence of all life requires a more decentred approach. This may create the impression that everything on earth is there for the sake of human beings. Only human beings are there for their own sake. To counter such anthropocentrism, some environmental ethicists have argued that nature has an intrinsic value. This requires a different moral vision, a vision that dreams of a world in which people want to save the rose coloured periwinkle of Madagascar for its own sake, not because it happens to contain a cure for cancer in people. On this basis, some have argued for the acknowledgement of animal rights, biotic rights and the rights of nature and have subsequently also affirmed the moral significance of inanimate forms of nature upon which all forms of life ultimately rely.

This raises numerous further questions: How could the rights of nature be legally accounted for? How should the rights of humans be balanced with the rights of other living beings, also in the context of predator-prey relations, the expansive nature of basic human needs and biotic threats to human health? Does the malaria-carrying mosquito have a right to flourish too? And the HI-virus? Moreover, is it not equally problematic to assign “human” rights to other living beings on human terms? If we acknowledge that all discourse on rights is necessarily human discourse, does this not imply that a certain anthropocentrism is hermeneutically inevitable? Can rights language really be used to describe the responsibilities that human beings have in relation to animals and plants?

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9 See also Moltmann & Giesser (1999, p 120). “But to base human rights on human dignity also shows the limits and dangers of their anthropocentrism. Human rights must be brought in conformity with the rights of nature, from which, with which and in which human beings live.”


11 See especially the many contributions by Holmes Rolston (e.g. 1988, 1994) in this regard.

12 Within the context of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, see the contribution by Vischer (1990) on the rights of future generations and the rights of nature.
These questions may again be somewhat facetious but they do point towards the need to clarify the anthropological presuppositions of human rights discourse. How should the inalienable dignity of human beings be understood? To what extent is human dignity derived from a secularised version of the Jewish-Christian notion that human beings have been created “in the image of God”? May human dignity be rooted in an African sense of ubuntu too? What is the relation between human dignity and the dignity of the other animals?  
What is the link between humans and humus? How can human activity enrich the fertility of the topsoil? Or are we ourselves nothing but dry dust? This begs the more pivotal anthropological question: What is the particular place of the human species within the earth community? Discourse on human rights that fails to address this question will remain vulnerable to the suspicion of anthropocentrism.

c) Universal, global or common rights?

The rise of modernity is associated with the search for a reliable foundation upon which society may be built. After several decades of religious wars it became clear that religion could no longer provide such a foundation. It was no longer clear what all people could have in common. Where in a world that has lost its cosmological and religious foundations can a basis for the construction of society be found? In the Cartesian cogito? In the humanist discovery of selfhood? In the neat Newtonian cosmology? In the social contract of Hobbes? In the ethos of freedom, equality and brotherhood of the French revolution? In the will of kings or in the will of the people? In the Kantian categories of universal reason and the categorical imperative?

If these proposals were at first characterised by a sense of urgency, a “Cartesian anxiety” and a hypothetical tentativeness, the (universal) legitimacy of the pillars of modernity was soon assumed with a sense of self-assurance.

13 Frits De Lange (1997, p 170) suggests that human dignity is not denigrated by an emphasis on the continuity between the human species and other animals (e.g. in the observation that humans are “nothing but animals”). Instead, an emphasis on human dignity calls for an appreciation of the dignity of all other animals too. Thus there is no need for special pleading regarding human uniqueness in order to secure human dignity. See also Moltmann (1999, p 120): “Human dignity is not something that elevates men and women above all other things. It is merely a special instance of the dignity of all natural life.”

14 My current research project on an ecological anthropology, entitled ”The earth is not our home yet!” uses this question as a point of departure for theological reflection.
However, the reliability of these foundations is now steadily being eroded due to a range of postmodern suspicions. After a century dominated by two world wars, the Holocaust, the nuclear bomb, the collapse of old-style colonialism and the failure of “development”, there is a broad recognition of the moral ambiguity of the roots of Western civilization. Following the rise of a historical consciousness, the hermeneutical turn, the linguistic turn and the sociological turn, there is now an acknowledgement that our most basic presuppositions are influenced by our contexts, by the categories of gender, race, class, culture, language and religion.

It also became clear that human rights could hardly be called “universal”. If anything, such rights could apply only to this planet and more specifically to one very recent species on this planet. The question is therefore whether human rights discourse can (or should) escape from its Kantian roots. On what basis can we maintain that all human beings have an inalienable dignity and that all human beings therefore have certain human rights? Any philosophical investigation into the connotations of specific human rights would reveal a thoroughly contextual description of the connotations of such rights, different listings of such rights and different interpretations of the relationship between various rights. Even when we use common words to articulate basic human rights, we can hardly assume that we have a common understanding of the meaning of such words. The meaning of moral discourse depends on the context of such discourse. The meaning of a word is constituted by its use in a particular context. The tentativeness of human rights discourse therefore has to be acknowledged – which is, quite surprisingly, not often the case. In fact, the legitimacy of various rights is often affirmed (in South Africa) with a sense of extreme urgency, if not quasi-religious zeal. That we are quite desperate to identify rights that are common to all people is certainly understandable given the legacy of colonialism, apartheid, racism, patriarchy and poverty in this country. Moreover, it is highly desirable to find a way of enforcing such rights legally in an international context through acceptable international institu-

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15 See Toulmin (1990) for a description of the historical context in which Descartes’ anxiety has to be understood.

16 See the distinction by Juergensmeyer (in Hodes & Hays 1995, pp 46f) between universalist and comparativist positions on the search for common values. Universalists argue that you could conceive of a universalist ethics based upon categories of analysis developed under the Western philosophical tradition (especially Kant), while comparativists argue that you had to start at the other extreme, i.e. where people are in their living traditions in order to build up some sense of a collectivity of shared values.
tions. An awareness of contextual diversity need not lead to an ethical relativism but should encourage a more careful, cautious and responsible search for what may indeed by common despite such diversity.17

The same sense of urgency characterise attempts to formulate a global ethos (and to which I will return below).18 Again this is understandable given the well-known litany of woes that dominate international agendas: violent conflict of various kinds, economic injustices and deprivation, and environmental destruction. There can be little doubt that a global ethos is urgently needed. However, any attempt to formulate such a global ethos is bound to meet with postmodern suspicions. There can be no doubt that we now live in a “global era” where whatever happens in Sweden will have repercussions in South Africa and vice versa. However, any description of the new global dispensation will be fiercely contested as long as the current forces of economic globalisation continue to reign supreme.

d) Human rights and right humans

Human rights discourse is dominated by an interest in the values that we have in common and that may be used as a point of departure for a global ethos and for the protection of each person’s human rights. However, the formulation of a bill of human rights does not guarantee that a society will be established in which such rights will be respected. This is not so much the result of the tentativeness of any description of common values. The formulation of a bill of rights has to be supported by a human rights culture, that is by the moral will of citizens to live by the vision and values articulated in the bill of rights.

The contours of a human rights culture in South Africa were moulded by the years of struggle against apartheid and for a non-racist, non-sexist democracy. Although the exact shape that “democracy” should take in South Africa remains fiercely contested, a culture of participatory decision-making is by now deeply

17 See also Huber’s suggestion of a “relative universalism” (i.e. historically impermanent ethical insights, transcending religion and culture, that are so basic that they can also attain legally binding form) instead of a radical universalism or radical relativism (Huber 1996, 144, pp 144–149).

18 Sissela Bok suggests that the search for shared values need to identify, as a starting point, some minimalist values that are shared across all cultural, religious and other boundaries. She mentions as examples of such minimalist values the responsibility to care for children and certain moral constraints on killing, lying and breaking promises. At the same time, every community, family, country and religion also needs to work out a set of maximalist values that could govern its particular ethos. Bok notes that many international documents trying to arrive at a common statement of values fail to distinguish between the search for minimalist and maximalist values. See Bok’s panel presentation in Hodes & Hays (1995, pp 27–35).
embedded in numerous spheres of civil society. Nevertheless, if we may have liked to believe that we could occupy the moral high ground in this regard in the early 1990’s, almost all South Africans have by now become deeply disillusioned about the quality of the fabric of civil society. This comes as no surprise given the many destructive forces of violent crime, corruption, murder, rape, social fragmentation, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, consumerist greed and environmental destruction that continue to torment the South African society. The prisons in South Africa are nowadays always too full.

This has stimulated numerous calls to rebuild the moral and religious foundations of society. In the words of Nelson Mandela: We not only need a Reconstruction and Development Programme, we also need, as a matter of urgency, “an RDP of the soul”. Political, business and religious leaders have reiterated calls for moral regeneration.  

Although many remain sceptical about the impact of such movements, it is abundantly clear that talk about a human rights culture and not only about human rights is needed. This shifts the focus to issues of moral formation. To reiterate what was said in the introduction: We do have a new South Africa and an excellent new constitution. What we now need are new South Africans, communities of people that embody and practise the vision articulated in the constitution. We do not only need human rights; we also need right humans, citizens of moral character and integrity. The discourse about common values underlying human rights therefore has to be supplemented by discourse about appropriate virtues. Moral discourse has to attend to the full range of moral concepts, including the quest for an alternative vision of the good society (given the failure of socialist experiments, the injustices of the current global economic order and the hegemony of the American dream), the quest for virtuous people, citizens of moral character and the quest for appropriate values that could guide responsible decision making within the domestic, national and planetary households.

19 See Neville Richardson’s paper on ”Not another moral summit! Problems and possibilities for moral regeneration” (Scriptura, forthcoming) for a critical review of various recent South African initiatives towards moral regeneration.

20 A foundation course on Ethics that is offered at the University of the Western Cape for students from various faculties is structured on the basis of this distinction between three ethical quests. See also Larry Rasmussen and Charles Birch (1989) for a similar mapping of the landscape of moral concepts.
**Two contributions towards a global ethos**

a) The project towards a global ethos

In several contributions, Catholic theologian Hans Küng has argued that a new global ethos is necessary to address the global challenges that the earth community is faced with. The globalisation of the economy, technology and the media has brought a globalisation of problems such as poverty, organised crime and environmental degradation. These problems now require global solutions and a globalisation of ethics (Küng in Küng & Schmidt 1998, p 105). This does not call for a uniform ethical system but a minimum of shared ethical principles on which all people can agree. The global society cannot be held together by a random pluralism that promotes indifferentism, consumerism and hedonism (Küng in Küng & Schmidt 1998, p 108). Although any modern democracy allows for a diversity of worldviews and ideologies, some basic ethical consensus, some minimum of common values, norms and attitudes, is required for peaceful co-existence.

It should be noted though that the project towards a global ethos is nevertheless often criticised because it does not take the ethical plurality (that is not only the religious, cultural and ethnic plurality) in today’s world seriously enough (see, for example Huber, 1996, p. 135). Huber (1996, p. 136) therefore suggests that:

> the demand for agreement on a planetary ethos must concentrate on the minimal conditions necessary for the survival of humanity, the preservation of nature, and the rights of future generations to live.

He concludes:

> Only where variety is alive can an insight into the basic conditions of coexistence of different people grow. Only where people display their difference can they learn that there are minimum standards for coexistence, and that coexistence is endangered or destroyed if these are not obeyed. (Huber 1996, p. 149).

Such a global ethic is not possible without taking into account both the liberating possibilities and the authoritarian, tyrannical and reactionary dangers that are inherent to the world’s religious traditions. For Küng, a global ethic does not imply a uniform religion or ideology. At the level of religious visions of the ultimate, there should be room for differences among the world’s religious traditions. However, it should be possible (at a penultimate level) to formulate a global ethos to which adherents of different religious traditions can
subscribe to. Küng’s argument is simple and persuasive: There is no survival possible without a global ethos and a global sense of responsibility. There is no world peace without peace between the religions (with ample examples). And there is no peace between religions without dialogue between the religions (see Küng 1991).

In his work on Global responsibility Küng identified various aspects of a global ethos that all religious traditions have in common, despite many other differences on matters of doctrine, rituals and prescriptions. These include a commitment to human well-being, especially five maxims of basic humanity (Do not kill; Do not lie; Do not steal; Do not practise immorality; Respect parents and love children), a “reasonable” middle way between libertinism and legalism, between hedonism and ascetism, and some form of the “golden rule” (Küng 1991, pp 56–60). Küng argues that there are indeed universal ethical criteria that may be used to judge religions, i.e. the common commitment to human dignity (the humanum). At the same time, religions also offer a powerful grounding for the humanum, i.e. in the divinum (Küng 1991, pp 84f, 89f). Religious traditions can therefore not be reduced to the ethos that they may share with one another.

At the 1993 meeting of the Parliament of World Religions, Küng was instrumental in formulating a Declaration toward a global ethic that was endorsed by a significant number of representatives at that meeting. Küng (in Küng & Kuschel 1995, p 53) notes that there were no prior historical models that could be used to draft this declaration: “... for the first time in the history of religions a declaration on an ethic was to be worked out which was to be acceptable to the adherents of all religions.” This document does not express a single unified ideology (which people have become rightly weary of) but a certain minimum consensus of what the religions of the world already have in common in terms of binding values, standards and personal attitudes (Küng & Kuschel 1995, p 8). This document expresses a sense of urgency and is born from the conviction that there can be no new global order without a global ethic that supports it.

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21 Juergensmeyer (in Hodes & Hays 1995, p 48) notes that this statement “… was in a large part to counteract the public sentiment that religion is a problem for human rights and for social order.” This observation is born from “the vicious spiral of violence that has emerged between religious communities and secular political orders.” Juergensmeyer furthermore argues that the signatories of the document represent the liberalist wings of their own religious traditions and that there is an increasing polarisation between liberals and fundamentalists in each religious tradition. He then raises the following important question: “As much as anything else, this was a parliament of liberal spokespersons for religious traditions. Sadly, they have more in common with liberals of other religions than most of them have with their compatriots at the fundamentalist extreme of their own religious traditions. So for us the questions are: What do the liberal
(Küng & Kuschel 1995, pp 18f). The heart of this document is the conviction that every human possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity and the demand that every human being must therefore be treated humanely (Küng & Kuschel 1995, p 23). This leads to four directives and a commitment to a culture of: 1) non-violence and respect for life, 2) solidarity and a just economic order, 3) tolerance and a life of truthfulness, 4) equal rights and partnership between men and women (Küng & Kuschel 1995, pp 24–34). These four directives follow the four elementary imperatives for humanity that Küng finds in all religious traditions, i.e. not to kill, steal, lie or to commit adultery (Küng & Kuschel 1995, pp 24–34).

The intuition behind this document is that a declaration towards a global ethic has to be more than a reiteration of human rights (e.g. as expressed in the UN Declaration on Human Rights), although it could render much needed support for human rights. What is at stake is not only what can be legally prescribed or politically imposed but also the inner convictions, the binding values and basic attitudes that shape people’s lives (Küng in Küng & Kuschel 1995, p 58). Küng (1998, p 115) also notes that the English word responsibility emphasises the inner responsibility rather than the external law. By contrast, the German “Pflicht” in the sense of duty has been shamefully abused to legitimise presumed duties towards superiors, to the Führer, the Volk and the party. This indicates that an emphasis on responsibilities can be misused, but so can an emphasis on rights, i.e. when rights are constantly and exclusively used for one’s own advantage.

Subsequently, Küng was also instrumental in the drafting on a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities (1997). This document was produced

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wings of religions have in common in supporting human rights, and what do the fundamentalist wings have in common in opposing human rights? And how can we discover resources within religious traditions for uniting people who are of the same faith but at polar ends of the spectrum on issues that are so important for so many of us?” (Juergensmeyer 1995, p 48–49).

This raises the classic debate on the universal and the particular. Can one assume the existence of universals or should one work from the particular in search of the common? Should particular religious traditions be understood as particular expressions of underlying (supposedly universal) moral values based on human dignity? Or should religious traditions be understood in terms of their own particularity – in which case one may search for (but not assume) shared (not universal) values? This paper supports the latter position. My argument is that the moral codes in any particular religious tradition have to be understood within the context of the particular construction/perception of ultimate reality (to use one possible term) in that particular religious tradition. For most religious traditions what is penultimate (morality) has to be understood within the context of what is ultimate (e.g. God). The ultimate cannot be reduced to a particular expression of what is penultimate. This does not diminish the importance of the quest for shared values but it does question universalist assumptions on what the content of such values would be.
by the InterAction Council, a distinguished body of elder statesmen and other leading public figures. The intuition behind this initiative is that a concern with human rights is important but insufficient. If all pursue their own rights exclusively and do not accept any kind of obligations and responsibilities, the result can be hostilities, conflicts and ultimately chaos (Küng in Küng & Schmidt 1998, p 75). A society in which people insist on their rights against others without recognising the responsibilities that they have towards others cannot be conducive to the formation of a human rights culture (Küng in Küng & Schmidt 1998, p 110). Küng’s views here are influenced by the situation in Germany. He notes that:

... in many spheres of our society the responsibility of every individual is hardly taught and therefore hardly perceived either. Many politicians, many business executives, do not meet their obligations, nor do many universities or television channels. A largely permissive education is orientated all too one-sidedly on basic rights, and there is virtually no mention of basic obligations. Heedless egotistical ‘personal fulfilment’ appears as an ideal, while the common good is an empty phrase (Küng 1998, p 80).

It is therefore necessary to balance a concern for human rights with a recognition of human responsibilities – for individual conduct and for political authorities. The first article of this declaration states the fundamental principle for humanity:

> Every person, regardless of gender, ethnic origin, social status, political opinion, language, age, nationality, or religion, has a responsibility to treat all people in a humane way (quoted in Küng & Schmidt 1998, p 12).

This is followed by four principles that correlate with the four directives of the Declaration of the Parliament of the World’s religions. These responsibilities describe the global ethos that is required while human rights stipulate the legal responsibilities of both the state and individual citizens. The law cannot prescribe such an ethos but depends on it for its proper functioning: Quid legis sine moribus! Where there is a gap between law and ethics, the law cannot function either (Küng in Küng & Schmidt 1998, p 120). A better world cannot be created with laws, conventions and ordinances alone. No codification of rights will make any long-term difference if the values of societies do not reflect those rights.22

22 Huber (1996, p. 140) notes that the very stimulus for including human rights in international law historically came out of the experience that a total separation of law and morality can only lead towards a destruction of law. It was born out of an attempt to find agreement in legal terms on what obligations are
Although the formulation of the *Declaration toward a global ethic* was the result of a consultative process too, it may be criticised for a certain aristocratic elitism. The dominant role of Hans Küng begs the question whether it does not remain Hans Küng’s global ethic?! What is required is not the formulation of a global ethos by a small commission of people but a widespread discussion of the responsibilities facing humanity (see Huber 1996, p. 148). This is precisely the significance of the Earth Charter process to which we now turn.

b) The Earth Charter process

The *Earth Charter* is perhaps the most significant contribution within the context of civil society around the world to foster a global ethos. The Earth Charter is the product of a decade long, worldwide, cross-cultural conversation about common goals and shared values. It was born from the recognition that civil society needs an inspiring and shared ethical vision of fundamental values that can guide planning, policy-making and action. This leads to the realisation that effective policy-making and problem-solving in an interdependent world require partnerships and cooperation including all nations and peoples in all sectors of society.

The Earth Charter process followed a 1987 call from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development for the creation of a charter that would set forth fundamental principles for sustainable development. It builds on more than 50 international declarations and treaties and more than 150 non-governmental declarations, charters and treaties adopted since the UN conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972. These declarations include the World Charter for Nature (1982) and many

due to every human person, despite the immense differences in basic ethical convictions on earth. Huber suggests that although a planetary ethos is certainly required it will not be possible to stipulate individual obligations (in the form of responsibilities) for such a common ethos since such obligations will not be able to take the immense differences in basic ethical convictions into account. In other words: human rights discourse already formulates the required minimum consensus in legal terms. To stipulate more than that (e.g. individual responsibilities that are required for a global ethos) will scarcely be able to take ethical diversity into account. Moreover, the expansion of human rights discourse to include all the goals that should be given ethical priority may actually weaken or erode the legally binding character of human rights. The tendency to declare everything that is ethically desirable “human rights” hollows out the legal character of human rights. Not everything can be described in law (see Huber 1996, p. 144).

Representatives from government and non-government organisations worked to secure the adoption of an Earth Charter during the UNCED “Earth Summit” in Rio in 1992. This was intended to serve as the ethical framework for Agenda 21. However, this did not materialise. In 1994 a new Earth Charter initiative was launched by the Earth Council (led by Maurice Strong) and Green Cross International (led by Mikhail Gorbachev). An Earth Council was subsequently formed to pursue the unfinished business of UNCED and to promote the implementation of Agenda 21. In 1997 An Earth Charter Commission was formed to oversee the drafting of the Charter and the participation of people from different continents and diverse religious traditions in the process.\(^{24}\) The drafting process was spearheaded by Steven Rockefeller. After several drafts and contributions from thousands of individuals and hundreds of organisations from different regions, cultures and sectors of society all over the world, the final version of the Earth Charter was issued on 24 March 2000.\(^{25}\) The Earth Charter initiative has now entered a new phase that focuses on the implementation of its principles into action.\(^{26}\) The objectives are to disseminate the Earth Charter as widely as possible, to promote its educational use, and to encourage the use and endorsement of the Earth Charter by civil society, businesses and governments. The Earth Charter Handbook (2000, p 7) suggests that the Earth Charter can be used in the following ways: a) as an educational tool to develop an understanding of the critical choices facing humanity, b) as an invitation for internal reflection on fundamental attitudes and ethical values, c) as a catalyst for dialogue on global ethics and globalisation, d) as a call to action and a guide to sustainability, e) as an integrated ethical framework for policies and plans towards sustainable development, f) as a framework for designing professional codes of conduct and accountability systems, and g) as a soft law instrument that provides an ethical foundation for ongoing developments in the field of environmental law.

This remarkable document notes in its preamble that:

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\(^{24}\) The brochure available on the Earth Charter claims that: “The Earth Charter initiative has involved the most open and participatory consultation process ever conducted in the drafting of an international agreement.” Indeed, the drafting process was as important as the final product (Rockefeller 2001, p 107).

\(^{25}\) The Earth Charter Council has reserved the right to make adjustments to the text, if after four or five years there are very compelling reasons to do so (Rockefeller 2001, p 107).

\(^{26}\) See the two documents on the dissemination of the Earth Charter that are available on the Earther Charter website, i.e. *The Earth Charter Initiative Handbook* and *The Earth Charter in Action 2000*. 
We stand at a critical moment in Earth's history, a time when humanity must choose its future. As the world becomes increasingly interdependent and fragile, the future at once holds great peril and promise. To move forward we must recognize that in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny. We must join together to bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice and a culture of peace. [my emphasis].

The expanded sense of a community of life and an inclusive moral vision lie at the heart of the document. In a paragraph on influences shaping the Earth Charter, the *Earth Charter in Action 2000* (2000, pp 46–47) notes the following:

In addition to international law instruments and NGO declarations, the ideas and principles in the Earth Charter are drawn from a variety of sources. The document Charter is influenced by the new scientific worldview, including the discoveries of contemporary cosmology, physics, evolutionary biology, and ecology. It draws on the wisdom of the world's religions and philosophical traditions. It also reflects the social movements associated with human rights, democracy, gender equality, civil society, disarmament, and peace. It builds on the seven UN summit conferences on children, the environment, human rights, population, women, social development and food security, held during the 1990s.

The Earth Charter then articulates 16 principles, grouped in four categories, for building a just, sustainable and peaceful global society. These principles are based on respect and care for the community of life (the first group of principles that serve as a statement of the Earth Charter’s moral vision). This is concretised in three further sections on ecological integrity, social and economic justice, and democracy, non-violence and peace. In this way the Earth

27 Rockefeller (2001, p 113) notes that the nonhuman world is commonly treated in a utilitarian way as an object to be used. He suggests that the most fundamental cause of the environmental problems that afflict the planet is the lack of respect for nature that pervades modern industrialised countries. If understood within the context of solidarity within the community of life, such respect for otherness correlates with a Christian ethics of love in which the bonds of community and an appreciation for the possibilities of an enriching diversity is acknowledged. In this way the fundamental importance of love and compassion for the healing of Earth and social renewal is acknowledged.

28 Rockefeller (1998, pp 24f) notes that the Earth Charter is not organised around human rights as a dominant theme. It is concerned with the moral significance of the whole community of life and all its members, human and non-human. It calls for respect of all individual living beings. Although the issues addressed by the Earth Charter is closely related to human rights law it does not use human rights language. It also does not adopt rights language with reference to non-human species (the rights of animals or the rights of nature). Rockefeller (2001, p 119) also notes that the concept of the rights of nature has not won broad international acceptance. Instead, the Earth Charter recognises the moral thrust of the idea of the rights of nature in that it holds that human relations with non-human species and individual living beings involve moral responsibilities.
Charter seeks to inspire in all peoples a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the human family and the larger earth community. It serves as a vehicle for addressing the issues facing the global community and for stimulating change. It calls on all people to search for common ground in the midst of diversity and to embrace a new moral vision.

One of the expressed aims of the Earth Charter initiative is to seek endorsement of the Earth Charter by the United Nations General Assembly, although it should primarily be considered as a people’s treaty more than as an intergovernmental instrument (for example a soft law document such as *Agenda 21*). This will enhance its status as a soft law document and increase its influence on governments and international law. Steve Rockefeller (2001, p 233, note 4) explains:

> Unlike a hard law treaty, a soft law document such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is regarded as a statement of intentions and aspirations and it is not considered to be legally binding. Soft law documents ... frequently evolve over time into hard law. In addition, any declaration of fundamental ethical principles that gains wide acceptance can function as a soft law document that influences the development of international law even if it has not been formally endorsed by the United Nations."29

**The specific contribution of religious traditions towards a global ethos**

These initiatives indicate the sustained need in a global era to identify common values. After the historical, hermeneutical, linguistic and sociological turns we can no longer simply assume the universal validity of such values. However, there remains a sense of urgency in the search for a global ethos, precisely as a result of the conflicting plurality within which the global community finds itself.

A few comments on the possible role of religion and specifically of Christianity with regard to such initiatives to foster a global ethos may be noted here:

a) The media regularly feed us with information and stories about the many well-known problems on the global agenda: violent conflict (including ethnic and religious violence, domestic violence and violence against women and children), poverty, crime and corruption, diseases such as malaria and HIV/
AIDS and various environmental disasters. We are, for example, confronted with daunting statistics about deforestation, the extinction of species, global warming, population growth, the virtual collapse of fishing industries and insurmountable waste dumps. Despite this huge effort and although the global community has made some progress on issues such as acid rain and ozone depletion, we have not been able to turn the tide of consumption, pollution, increasing population, deforestation, over-fishing and the exploitation of non-renewable resources. Why is this the case?

The problem is that even those who have become thoroughly conscientised often find it difficult to translate an awareness of ecological concerns into appropriate praxis. One may take some modest steps such as recycling, reducing the use of electricity, water, transport, chemicals, re-using resources, etc. Such steps would be highly appropriate to challenge the consumerist habits of the middle class. However, a guilty conscience and a 10% reduction in the use of resources would not be enough. As Patricia Mische (2000, p 592) comments:

... most people now know that we have serious ecological problems. But there is a lingering gap between knowing that we face serious ecological problems and acting on this knowledge in our personal, political and social choices. While more people have taken some modest steps, such as recycling, changes in people’s worldviews, attitudes and behaviour have not been commensurate to the gravity and global scale of the problems. Moreover, when in conflict, economic concerns and desires usually trump environmental ones.

The problem has clearly not been simply a lack of information or planning. It is a liberal fallacy to suppose that information and education is enough to ensure moral action. The problem is not merely one of ignorance but also of the moral will to change our consumerist lifestyles. Solving the environmental crisis will therefore demand much more than what science and new technologies may offer. It is less a problem of know-what or know-how than of know-why and know-wherefore (Rasmussen 1996, p 74). The problem cannot be addressed only through legislation and government policies either. The crisis that we have to face is not primarily an ecological crisis but a cultural crisis. The problem lies not outside but inside ourselves, not in the ecosystem but in the human heart, in the collective psyche. What is required is a fundamental change of orientation. In their series foreword to the edited volume on Christianity and ecology, Tucker and Grim (2000, p xix) articulates a similar concern:
It is becoming increasingly evident that abundant scientific knowledge of the crisis is available and numerous political and economic statements have been formulated. Yet we seem to lack the political, economic, and scientific leadership to make necessary changes. Moreover, what is still lacking is the religious commitment, moral imagination, and ethical engagement to transform the environmental crisis from an issue on paper to one of effective policy, from rhetoric in print to realism in action.

Patricia Mische (2000, p 592–3) adds the following:

Science and technology alone cannot resolve ecological threats. Nor can governments or the laws they promulgate. ... Sustaining the integrity of creation thus requires not only the external laws governments enact to deal with belligerent behavior, but also inner governance, laws internalised in our hearts and minds and the will to live by them. The need for inner governance is relevant not only to personal behavior, but also collective behavior through the economic, social and political systems we create and help maintain. Church praxis has special relevance for the development of inner governance and a culture of ecological responsibility. Religions carry the archetypes, symbols, meanings, values and moral codes around which people coalesce and define themselves, their sense of the sacred, and their relationships with each other and the natural world.

The problem therefore seems to be one of a lack of moral vision, imagination, will and leadership. The problem is one that has to be addressed through moral formation and not merely through more information. It is not simply a matter of agreeing with a memorandum spelling out some common values either. This will remain the limited value of initiatives such as the Earth Charter campaign. Since moral formation typically takes place within faith communities, this implies that the ecological transformation of religious traditions is critical to the emergence of an ecological ethos.

b) Larry Rasmussen (1996, p 10) argues that all religious and moral impulses of whatever sort must now be matters of unqualified earthbound loyalty and care. Each faith has to become an earth-centred faith. Steve Rockefeller (2001, p 103) notes that the aim is not the creation of a new religion. Instead,

The hope is that each of the religions will adopt a planetary consciousness that involves awareness of global interdependence, acceptance of religious diversity, and commitment to promotion of shared values and interreligious cooperation in pursuit of world community.

Paul Knitter suggests that there is a need for a “deep ecumenicity”, i.e. the need for religious traditions to find common ground on a common earth. Such a “deep ecumenicity” implies that
the more the religions of the world can ground themselves in this earth and the more deeply they can connect with nature and the needs of this planet, the more they will find themselves interconnected. (Knitter 2000, p 365).

Knitter suggests that such a common ground between religious traditions will probably be primarily of an ethical nature. The ecological problems that the world is faced with are indeed common problems. We can therefore speak of the need for and possibility of a universal environmental ethic. In terms of Hans Küng’s motto “No world peace without peace between the religions,” Knitter adds that there is “No peace with the earth without peace between the religions.” (Knitter 2000, p 372).

Where such inter-religious dialogue will lead, is not quite clear yet. Whether the history of the earth (as described by modern science) would provide a context for religious unity (as Thomas Berry suggests) remains doubtful. To explore possibilities for inter-religious dialogue will remain both crucial and controversial in the decades ahead. Whether the earth can become the focus of inter-religious dialogue will obviously be shaped by different assessments (including different theological assessments) of such inter-religious dialogue. The emerging ecological consciousness has, at the very least, lead to a new awareness of the one earth community to which all species, cultures, nations and religions belong. In fact, the picture emerging from the sciences and environmental movements alike is that everything in the cosmos is interrelated, that everything is radically kin. Everything, including human beings, are genetically related. We are all made from the ashes of dead stars (see McFague 1993, p 44). As Brian Swimme puts it: “No tribal myth, no matter how wild, ever imagined a more profound relationship connecting all things in an internal way right from the beginning of time. All thinking must begin with this cosmic genetic relatedness.” (quoted in McFague 1993, p 106). This sense of relatedness and community may still have a profound effect on inter-faith dialogue and the self-understanding of particular religious traditions. This is well captured in the title of Knitter’s book One earth, many religions (1995). Sean McDonagh (1990, p 192–3) expresses the same sentiment:

There are no Catholic lakes, Protestant rivers or Muslim forests. We all share a common earth and in the face of a threat to the survival of the planet we should unite our efforts and forget which institutions should have precedence, and other ecclesial niceties.
Remarkably, this sense of relatedness and community does not imply a levelling of differences and particularity or a lack of individuation. The history of the cosmos has been yielding an incredibly complex, highly individuated variety of things. No two specimens from the same species are, or have ever been, exactly the same (McFague 1993, p 105). In fact,

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\text{nature depends on diversity, thrives on differences, and perishes in the imbalance of uniformity. Healthy systems are highly varied and specific to time and place. Nature is not mass-produced (quoted in Rasmussen 1996, p 114).}
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c) Perhaps this comment also indicates a way forward. The common earth, which all human beings and all other forms of life share with one another, is something that transcends all our particularities; it is something that is bigger than ourselves. The one earth community also unites people from different bioregions (from Sweden to South Africa) who share a concern for the well-being of the whole. A concern for the environment is also a place where, in a still divided country, all South Africans (i.e. those who love the land and its topography, the soil, the air, the waters, the plants, the animals, the people) can meet one another and commit themselves to something which is bigger than ourselves: the well-being of the land itself. In this way it can become a point of convergence for all other social agendas – the numerous struggles for political peace, economic justice, gender equality and civil society.

The earth that we share as our common home is indeed something that transcends ourselves, but only in a penultimate way. Religious traditions have tried to express that which transcends the cosmos itself. The claim of the Christian tradition is that the best clue to the ultimate meaning of the world (and whatever may transcend the world) may be found in the story of Jesus Christ. This particularist claim should be the focus of a Christian contribution to a dialogue with people of other living faiths on an appropriate ethos for an “earth community”.

**Conclusion**

This essay fathomed the roots of human rights discourse in modernity. The quest of modernity was to find a new foundation for society given the political turmoil associated with the Protestant reformation. The Cartesian anxiety that initially characterised the modern quest soon made way for a self-assured confidence in the human subject and the universality of human reason. A humane
society could be built on the basis of a common humanum. Human rights discourse is typically based on these assumptions of modernity. These assumptions have been questioned by the postmodern suspicion that the formulation of any such “universal” truths are deeply influenced and often distorted by allegiances of race, gender, class, language, culture and religion. Nevertheless, the fervour of human rights discourse, especially in South Africa, demonstrates that the modern quest has lost nothing of its urgency. The need for common values in a globalised but fragmented and deeply divided world, the need for a global ethos for the endangered earth community, is evident more than ever before. What the global community have in common cannot be simply assumed though. Consensus will have to be continuously constructed anew. Moreover, it is now also clear that human rights discourse has to be supported with a commitment to a human rights culture. The rule of law is only possible where moral formation takes place. This can only take place within the context of civil society and in local communities. Religion and, in South Africa, more specifically Christianity, will continue to play a crucial role in this regard. However, any religious community can contribute to moral formation only on its own terms. Religion cannot merely serve as an instrument for moral formation. The fallacy of modernity and much of political rhetoric is that religious traditions may at best be regarded as particular expressions of a universal ethos. In this way religion is reduced to morality. Religion is tolerated only when it expounds the virtue of tolerance and when it refrains from making particular truth claims. By contrast, it has to be emphasised that common values can only be identified through an ongoing dialogue between different cultures, different language groups and different religious traditions.
References


What societal processes contribute to a human rights culture? What violations are actually taking place? How can gender, ecological and global economic perspectives enlighten these issues? These and other questions are discussed in this interdisciplinary collection of texts by sixteen scholars from South Africa and Sweden.