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Ignorant or Instinctive? Images of African Mothers in Academia and Media

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Abstract

Images and stereotypes seem to be the one and same phenomenon and they are used repeatedly in both media and academia. This thesis examines images of African women and mothers in academia and media. The goal is to see how their images are portrayed in both places. This will be accomplished by carrying out a literature research on academic literature as well as close reading of Icelandic news paper articles, gathered from one online database of the newspaper *Morgunblaðið*. In academic literature, women are sometimes portrayed as victims although representations of the hard-working, efficient women can also be found. The literature sometimes links women to marriage and the domestic sphere and some resources discuss mothers' stoicism during childbirth. Overall, motherhood is represented in the academic texts dealing with Africa as something glorious and something that gives women higher status. In the media, health related discussions are most common and women's victimization is often described. In most cases, the same articles also focused on them being hard-working and therefore conclusions are made that similar themes can be found in the media as well as in the literature.

Keywords: Women, motherhood, images, Africa, academic literature, media, victims, ignorant, heroes, instinctive.

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Acknowledgments

Introduction

When sitting down and thinking about images of African mothers, what pops up in one's mind? A black woman is walking in the desert, carrying a child on her back and a large water container on her head. The child is underfed and the woman is tired and riven with poverty. She has to walk tens of kilometres to fetch the water and is exhausted and in desperate need of help. This is probably what many think when picturing African women and perhaps even Africa in general. This image is the author's reason for choosing this subject for the thesis mainly because how common it is in media coverage of Africa. What would be interesting to find out is if this image is persistent with the academic literature.

This thesis looks at how images of African mothers have been expressed by the standards of Western sciences. Images of the heroic, victimised, ignorant or instinctive mother are expected to be found. The main focus will be on what images really are and how they link to 'othering', what images can be identified of African women and mothers as well as how they are portrayed in the media. This will be answered by doing a literature research on scholarly written books and journals regarding anthropology, history, gender studies etc. as well as newspaper articles in one Icelandic online media.

There is no one single method for studying images but many are based on 'close reading' and a search for the subtext. This also entails reading what is not there, i.e. looking for the omissions. This project uses "close reading" to examine the images because the author believes it is the best way to get a holistic view of them. This thesis is divided into three chapters; the first chapter deals with theories regarding the divide between 'us' and the 'others' as well as gender theories concerning women as oppressed or as the 'the second sex'. The second chapter takes a closer look at images of African women and mothers in the academic literature and is the main chapter and finally, the third chapter deals with images of African mothers in one Icelandic online news database which the author hopes will give us an idea of how African women are portrayed in the media. At the end of the thesis there will be conclusions of the thesis and results.

Chapter 1 – Images, 'the Other' and Women

1.1. Images, Orientalism and Otherness

"One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." (Beauvoir, 1989 [1949]: 267).

It is appropriate to take a closer look at the concept of 'image' which seems to be a fashionable word in today's social sciences. Michael Pickering (2001) starts his preface in the book *Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation* by claiming that stereotyping is a problem that simply refuses to go away and is a central issue when dealing with representations. He simultaneously speaks about stereotypes and images, therefore, assuming these two concepts are the one and same. He argues:

> Stereotypes are usually considered inaccurate because of the way they portray a social group or category as homogenous. Certain forms of behaviour, disposition or propensity are isolated, taken out of context and attributed to everyone associated with a particular group or category. Stereotypes render uniform everyone associated with a particular feature, such as being a woman who is blonde-haired or a man who is black-skinned; they are reduced to the characteristic isolated by the stereotype in its designation of what being blonde or black means. (p. 4)

Pickering claims they who are stereotyped are fixed into marginal position or subordinate status and judged accordingly regardless of the inaccuracies that are involved in the stereotypical description given of them. Consequently, he argues that stereotypes are bad because their main role is to homogenize about people and generalize. However, Sander Gilman (1985) does not totally agree with Pickering when he describes in his book, *Difference and Pathology*, Western discourses on sexuality, race and madness from the eighteenth century and onwards. He points out that all human beings create stereotypes and that none of us can function in the world without them. According to Gilman, it all starts in childhood and the child grows into an individual only through articulating a sense of difference between him and the rest of the world. Furthermore, he argues that stereotypes are crude representations of the world because their function is to perpetuate an artificial sense of difference between 'self' and 'other' and to

preserve the illusion of control over the self and the world. The need for stereotyping are found in the group as well as within individuals. The need for control, and a constant threat of loss of that control, necessitates the projection of difference on to some 'other', and all images of the 'other', he argues, derive from the same deep structure. Gilman maintains that blackness and sexuality becomes this 'other' for the Western eyes and are deeply inextricably intertwined.

Mai Palmberg (2001) analyzes images and she maintains images and stereotyping are at least as old as the relations between Europeans and Africans. The claim that images are the mirror of society are, according to her, an over simplified view although she notes that images relate to the thinking of 'us' against 'others'. Palmberg believes that images relate to stereotyping and claims that in order to understand how images are formed, one has to look at how relationships have developed and changed. Images of 'others' has a function in this relationship but she advises us not to fall into the trap of believing that images are simply mirrors of current dominance and legitimacy need. Pickering (2001) agrees and also connects stereotypes with 'othering' and says that "stereotypes are one-sided characterisations of others, and as a general process, stereotyping is a unilinear mode of representing them" (p. 47). Moreover, he suggests that 'othering' has recently replaced stereotyping which, according to him, is seen as outworn and old.

Let's take a closer look at the 'us' against 'others' discussion. Since the 1980s, scholars have extensively focused on how colonial and imperialistic subjects were made into 'others' in European discourses, based upon the structural opposition of 'us' and the 'other.' Many scholars place the beginning of postcolonial studies in history, literature, philosophy, anthropology, and the arts at the publication of Said's *Orientalism*, published in 1978 (Ashcroft and Ahluwalia, 2003). The book demonstrates how European discourses of the 'Orient' tend to represent the 'Oriental others' as foreign and exotic and simultaneously claiming European superiority. Said (1978) focuses his attention in this work on the interplay between the 'Occident' and the 'Orient'. The Occident is his term for the West (England, France, and the United States), and the Orient is the term for the romantic and misunderstood Middle East and Far East. The 'Orient' can very well be Africa as well. The 'orient': "is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest

and old colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other" (p. 1). According to Said, the West has created a dichotomy, between the reality of the East and the romantic notion of the 'Orient'. The Middle East and Asia (as well as Africa) are viewed with prejudice and racism. They are backward and unaware of their own history and culture. To fill this void the West has created a culture, history, and future promise for them. On this framework rests not only the study of the 'Orient', but also the political imperialism of Europe in the East. Michel Foucault's notion of discourse constitutes one of Said's main inspirations for the book *Orientalism*, along with Antonio Gramsci's insights into hegemony where consent becomes a key to understanding power and domination (Said, 1978). Peter Rigby (1996) points out that in current discussions of multi-culturalism in the United States and Europe; this 'other' is seldom or even never the white, European or North-American male. It is only "minorities" (Africans, African Americans, Black Englishmen, Asians, and Native Americans) who constitute the 'other'. This is contradictory to what Simone de Beauvoir (1989 [1949]) argues where the white *woman* is the other.

In her book *The Second* Sex, Beauvoir closely examines the mythical operations of stereotypes that men have historically constructed about women. The main thesis of the groundbreaking book, revolves around the idea that woman has been held in a relationship of long-standing oppression to man through her relegation to being man's 'Other'. What Beauvoir (1989 [1949]) discovers in her multifaceted investigation into woman's situation, is that women are consistently defined as the 'other' by man who takes on the role of the 'self'. As she explains in her introduction, woman "is the incidental, the inessential, as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute–she is the Other" (p. xxii). Black people could be seen as merry, childlike and submissive or more happy, free and unstrained than white people while the 'true woman' could likewise be seen as frivolous, infantile and irresponsible, or as caring, dutiful and as 'the better half' of men. The black or female have been both denigrated and idealised as 'other' by white men in comparison with themselves (Pickering, 2001). The *Second Sex* was controversial when first published in 1949 and even got banned in some countries.

However, it was not until around 1970 that feminism gained a new push both in feminist studies as well as within anthropology.

1.2. Feminism in Anthropology

In 1974 the book *Woman, Culture, and Society* was published which laid the foundation for what would come in feminism within anthropology. The three leading articles in the book provide a framework for examining sexual asymmetry, which defines women's culturally articulated role as 'mother' as the ultimate source of women's subordination. In the book, Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere (1974) draw our attention to what they call a fact; that scholars have taken for granted a view of women as passive, sexual objects. Therefore women are seen as devoted mothers and dutiful wives. Preceding anthropologists have followed their own "culture's ideological bias in treating women as relatively invisible and describing what are largely the activities and interests of men" (p. 2). Currently, it seems today clear that to fully understand the human society, goals, thoughts and activities of 'the second sex' must be included. Rosaldo and Lamphere, furthermore, point out that the evolutionary thinkers of the nineteenth century suggested that in an earlier stage of human development, the social world was organized by a principle called matriarchy, in which women had power over men. Most academic anthropologists have dismissed that idea and come to the conclusion that most, if not all, human societies are in some way male dominated. Rosaldo and Lampehere argued that: "As a myth or a utopian vision, the idea of matriarchy has currency today as a source of hope for women" (p. 4). They believe that everywhere women are excluded from certain economic or political activities and their roles as mothers and wives are associated with lesser power.

In other two key articles in this book, Rosaldo and Sherry B. Ortner both try to explain women's status. Rosaldo (1974) argues that an emphasis on women's maternal role leads to a universal opposition between 'domestic' and 'public' roles that are necessarily asymmetrical. Additionally, she claims that women confined to the domestic sphere do not have access to the sorts of authority, prestige and cultural values that are the privilege of men. Likewise, she disputes that given this imbalance, women exercising power are often seen as illegitimate

and the avenues by which women gain prestige and a sense of value ore often shaped and limited by their association with the domestic world. Ortner (1974) on the other hand describes how the female biology, woman's domestic role and what she calls "feminine personality" intertwine to encourage cultural definitions of the female that tend to be degrading. Women are excluded from cultural projects of transcendence and limited to an existence largely dictated by their biology and therefore seen more as 'natural' and less 'cultural' than men. She argues that women's biology, social role and personality encourages cultures to define them as closer to nature than men and consequently subordinated, controlled and manipulated. Overall, many feminists agree that women's role in child care and reproduction and their domestic responsibilities combine to make women universally 'the second sex' although there are also some who disagree.

The question of women's subordination as well as women's status were central issues in feminist anthropological studies in the 1970s[1]. Women's relative status or power was estimated through cross-cultural comparisons and their subordination was mainly taken for granted. According to Sandra Morgen (1989), feminist critiques of anthropology had been exposed the pervasiveness of both androcentric (male bias) and eurocentric assumptions and representations of women in anthropology. She claims that:

> Before the 1970s, discussion of women and women's lives in ethnography was most commonly found in chapters on personality or sex roles, and on marriage, family, and kinship. There were not many studies that focused primarily on women. (p. 9)

In 1977 Naomi Quinn questioned the advisability of searching for one 'key variable' to explain women's status in society, recommending that future studies "treat women's status as a composite of many different variables, often causally independent from one another" (p. 183). Furthermore, Mukhopadhyay and Higgens (1988) argue that the concept of homogenous 'woman' must give way to the diversity of 'women'. The same year, Henrietta Moore published *Feminism and Anthropology*, an argument for a feminist anthropology conscious of the way

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[1] see for example: MacCormack and Strathern, 1980; Ortner and Whitehead, 1981; Reiter, 1975 and Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974.

gender difference relates to other markers of social difference, including class, ethnicity, and race. Moore contends that anthropology, even when carried out by women, tends to order the world into a male idiom. The reason for that, she says, is because researchers are either men or women trained in a male oriented discipline. Anthropology's theoretical architecture and practical methods, Moore argued, are so overwhelmingly influenced by sexist ideology (anthropology was commonly termed the 'study of man' for much of the twentieth century) that without serious self-examination and a conscious effort to counter this bias, anthropology can not meaningfully represent female experience. Moore (1988) also maintains that there was nothing self-evident or determinant about gender and that anthropology - with its capacity to understand how differently cultures around the world conceive of gender and sex - can not treat the idea of womanhood as straightforward and unproblematic. The focus will now shift to Africa.

1.3. African Women Past and Present

African women and mothers in the academic literature and how they are represented by Western sciences is the subject of this section. Still, the main focus will be on Western scholars, but African scholars like the influential feminist Oyeronke Oyewumi will not be left out.

The feminist scholar, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988) analysed the production of the 'third world woman' which she claims to be apparent in Western feminist texts and she notes that in these texts the group 'women of Africa' was introduced. Andrea Cornwall (2005) identifies two contradictory images in the literature on gender and women in Africa. The former being the voiceless victim and the latter the self-reliant hero. She argued that during the last decade there has been growing critique of these images mainly originating from Western feminists. According to Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997) a veteran African scholar, the image of African women is stereotyped; "from the fertile and nurturing Earth Mother to the lazy, debauched young beauty" (p. 1).

Oyewumi (2003) is highly critical about this kind of stereotyping and claims that the dominance of the West in production of knowledge plays a special role in how African women are perceived and that Western feminism has played a

significant role in perpetuating certain myths about Africa. Western writings about Africa have been characterised by 'othering' of Africa and she asserts that scholarships today are dominated by white women, many whom have not managed to avoid racism and ethnocentrism that have characterized Western writings on Africa in general. Moreover, scholars have simply assumed that if gender is salient in the West, it must be so in all societies across time and space. European women were seen at the top of civilization and, therefore, researches that focus on African women often portray their sad state and the assumption that African men oppress their women. Universal subordination of women is thought of as the truth and the agency of African women are denied. Moreover, she adds that "stereotyping of Africans in Western writings as a servile, childlike people who need to be rescued and protected by one Western group or another is an enduring practice" (p. 34-5). The Africanist, Nkuzi Nnam (2007) agrees with Oyewumi about stereotyped images and says that:

> Some of the greatest misconceptions in the Western world regarding African women are: they are subservient to males; they never had as many leadership positions as males; they are economically dependent on males; their place is in the kitchen; they inherit nothing from their families... (p. 40)

And Nnam keeps on enumerating:

> ... through dowries men buy them like cows; women have no rights; a single man can marry many women at the same time (polyandry); sexism was much worse in Africa before, rather than after, the European colonization of Africa; Western feminists need to liberate African women from their barbaric, primitive, and oppressive patriarchal customs; men's wishes are their command; African men are so arrogant that they are trained to believe from childhood that they are God's gift to women. (p. 40)

Therefore, Oyewumi argues for a changed perspective on African women and suggests that the comparison of Europe and Africa should seize since it is simple impossible.

Now let us take a closer look at the history and assert if discussions of African women in the academic literature has changed. By exploring the historical images of African women, interesting factors emerge. According to the sociologist, Josephine Beoku-Betts (2005), early missionary travellers were not

interested in women. Life among Europe's nineteenth century's ruling classes was considerably constrained; women were confined to domestic duties in the home and meanwhile, men were the breadwinners. This is the view these early ethnographers took with them into the field but they tended to overlook women as a group since they regarded them as an unworthy subject. Additionally, Beoku-Betts reasons that much of the early descriptions of women portray their contrasting physical and social characteristics in terms of beauty, facial markings, hair styles and clothing. Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997) asserts that women's condition in ancient times is hardly known and often unfairly generalized because research resources are lacking. The daily lives of women, in African history, and elsewhere, have been of little interest to foreign or native observers. When African women are spoken of, they are done so unfairly as '*the* African woman'. Moreover, she adds that authors of written sources have been for centuries men – merchants, explorers, political men, – coming from male dominated societies and mainly concerned with men's affairs. Women in these same sources appeared as stereotypes, princesses, chief's mothers or slaves and mistresses. These travellers mainly experienced the ruling classes and scarcely looked at women except to manipulate them. This did not change until after the 1930s when women's and children's health also became of concern.

E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1965) discusses 'primitive' people and highlights that the early anthropologists writing about 'primitive' people were usually males from middle class homes and often with an evangelical background. They judged the status of women not as agricultural and labourer's wife and daughter but their own mothers and sisters. This could have resulted in their ethnocentricity where women were often simplified or simply left out. He then says:

> However, to as weather woman's position in primitive societies is higher or lower than in our own is perhaps not to ask the most profitable question. If we ask rather in what features they may be said to differ it is more likely that we shall learn something interesting, not only about primitive societies, but also about our own. (p. 43)

But how was women's status during the colonial period? According to Oyewumi (2003), the social mission during the nineteenth century "entailed rescuing the exploited, helpless, brutalized, and downtrodden African women from the

savagery of the African male and from a primitive culture symbolized by barbaric customs" (p. 28). Nnam (2007) takes a look at the role of women in comparison with the colonial period. He argues that women in pre-colonial Africa achieved recognition and distinction. They were independent queens, elders, priestesses and titles elites. Nnam claims that it all started to fall apart with Western colonization of Africa. Europeans were patriarchal; hence they cancelled out the female institution and replaced female leaders with males. Men were sent to Western institutions from where they returned as lawyers, doctors, political scientists etc. Women, on the other hand, were expected and encouraged to stay at home, cook, sew, bear and raise children. Women did not take this silently and fought back and the most famous of those wars was the Igbo Women War of 1929 where thousands of women from the Bende District of Nigeria travelled to Oloko to protest against the Warrant Chiefs, who they accused of restricting the role of women in government. Nnam argues that post-colonial and independent Africans decided to 'westernize' themselves instead of going back to the way things were before the colonial period. Consequently, currently very few African nations are governed by females. The European administrations that came to Africa were almost all administered by sexist males. Beoku-Betts (2005) maintains that the end of the nineteenth century did not bring any significant change to the Western image of African women. She claims they still continued to be subject of limited interest to Western observers. The domains of African women lied within the household without any influence in the formal authority structure of their societies.

Chapter 2 – African Women and Mothers in Academia

2.1. Marriage and Polygamy

The Woman I Share With My Husband
I won't deny
I am a bit jealous
Lying is no good
We all suffer
From touch of jealousy
Jealousy seizes us
And makes us feverish
(Okot p'Bitek, an East African poet) (Cutrufelli, 1983: 52-3)

The African women's role in marriage is a subject that has previously often been debated. This is a fact that cannot be ignored. Olagoke Ariwoola (1965) starts his chapter with a generalization in a book called *The African Wife*:

> The African wife is a very useful constituent of a community. Her services are indispensible and are much needed. She devotes much of her time to the building up of a community. She helps in its reshaping to meet the modern times. She works night and day for peace and happiness of the community to which she belongs ... it must be accepted that women are better qualified to do certain kinds of jobs than men. ... In cleaning the house, women have an edge over men because they are more patient than men. (p. 80)

In 1960 a book on women in Africa was published that caused a breakthrough. The reason for this was that the work, *Women of Tropical Africa* edited by Denise Paulme (1960), was the first book written only by women on women. Each chapter deals with women in their everyday life and with problems that particularly concern them. This offered something different since before, ethnographic research had almost exclusively been carried out by males. Therefore, the picture that had been portrayed was the image man had of society. Paulme (1960) asserts that Western writers, who disapprove of marriage customs in Africa, also mention the heavy burden laid on women by the division of labour and the submissive attitude a wife must adopt towards her husband in addition to the fact that marriage gives rise to little intimacy between spouses. Moreover, she adds that the usual conclusion drawn is that women are oppressed and exploited,

have no freedom of action, and are held in low esteem. Paulme notes that this judgement from the outsider lurks a hidden assumption; that any divergence from the Western ideal necessary implies a lower status for women. The status of women in Africa is somewhat higher than in Western societies where the husband is the sole provider and the woman stays at home and looks after the household and children[2]. Paulme demonstrates that women's involvement in the household in Africa is direct and indispensable and her husband is just as much in need of her as she of him. Furthermore, she argues it is a common misbelieve that women spend their whole lives under male dominance, submitting first under the authority of their father or their mother's brother (according to the kinship system that prevails) and later to that of their husband. Paulme (1960) believes it "merely expresses a fondly entertained masculine ideal which does not tally with the realities of everyday life" (p. 5).

According to Paulme (1960), African marriage customs have often been condemned on the grounds that they debase women and polygamy is portrayed as one example of that. Western writers are often negative in the discussion on polygamy and are perhaps even ethnocentric. What is more, they often suggest that polygamy is to be found in all African countries. The feminist, Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (1983) gives us an example of a tribe in Zambia, the Bantu people, where polygamy is almost unheard of. Therefore, it is fair to say that polygamy is not practiced everywhere in Africa. This misconception can, for example, be noticeable in her chapter when Cutrufelli maintains that: "Polygamy is an almost universal institution in Africa" (p. 53). Polygamy is not always thought of as something positive since, for instance, the relations between co-wives are usually bad. Paulme (1960) also believes that polygamy is something negative for African women as it tends to encourage adultery because if a wife insists on remaining faithful to her husband, she might risk going childless. Ariwoola (1965) agrees. He argues if a wife was sterile, the husband might decide to marry another woman. Aissia Ngadaya (1991) discusses the negative aspects of polygamy and argues:

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[2] But we have to keep in mind that this book was published in 1960 so a lot has changed.

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The role of woman as a wife cannot be changed, but it could at least be made less frustrating by a man marrying one wife and devoting all his attention to her. Polygamous marriage allows a man to marry several wives and divide his love "equally" among the wives (up to 4 in Moslem societies in Tanzania.) Experience has shown that it is not possible to love all of them equally. (p. 53)

Anthropologist and novelist, Sarah LeVine (1979) claims that African women bear a subsistence burden unique among women in the world. She did a research in Kenya where the purpose was to understand in-depth what childbearing meant to Gusii mothers. The Gusii are polygamists where each wife has its own house with its own yard and a field where she is responsible for cultivating. According to LeVine (1979) "the traditional social order of the Gusii put women in a distinctly inferior position but also accorded them significant measures of autonomy and respect" (p. 8).

Jónína Einarsdóttir (2004) notes that opinions in Biombo, Guinea-Bissau vary on polygamy. Some people find it unacceptable under any circumstances but others acknowledge it depends on the situation. Still, others say it is the only way because of the man's nature to have many wives. Many women see it as desirable because it limits their burden of domestic work. Ideally co-wives treat each others as sisters or friends and support each other. Therefore polygamy might have some positive sides to it. Paulme (1960) shows that polygamy does not ultimately lower the status of women because it is usually no more than the required manner of displaying wealth. Ariwoola (1965) notes that tribal wars were common in the past which caused a considerable loss of men and resulted in women greatly outnumbering men. People then thought this would cause an outbreak in prostitution but that was not the case. Polygamy was, according to Ariwoola, an inevitable consequence. He adds that the idea of living with other wives is not strange to 'an African wife'. Arowoola says the woman knows, from the moment she marries, that one day she is going to have a rival who may challenge her authority in her husband's home. She always regards living among other wives as a general routine and is ready to put up with it. As soon as couples are married, the responsibility of childbearing follows.

2.2. Childbirth

Look, woman, at the barren woman
Alas, alas!
The childless woman
Look, oh, look
At the childless woman
He who knew you once
No longer knows you
You, a barren woman
Look, oh, look
At the childless woman

Ah, this womb of mine
Is the cause of my fall
And brought dishonour on me
Yes, this womb of mine
Is the cause of my fall
(Two popular songs from Ghana) (Cutrufelli, 1983: 133)

African stoicism during childbirth is another factor related to women and it is prevalent in the literature but before focusing on African societies, Western societies will be looked at. According to Tess Cosslett (1994), before the introduction of anaesthesia in Western societies, pain was thought of as natural and unavoidable part of giving birth. Control of pain in childbirth with the application of technology and extensive use of medicines spread rapidly with the introduction of hospital beds and when it was considered a woman's right to give birth, pain free, it became virtuous for a Western mother to give birth naturally with all the pain that comes with it. Let us have a closer look at African societies.

Allen (2004) says that Tanzanian archival documents reveal that native mothers were constituted in the category of dangerous women. Furthermore, the overall stoicism of women giving birth caught her attention and she describes how these women are admired telling the reader about how a woman described her birth with her voice filled with pride: "I gave birth like an *African* woman!" (p. 188). To scream or cry during labour is thought of as shameful. According to Cosslett (1994) there are two opposite views of childbirths regarding pain and natural births. On the one hand, it is considered normal to suffer during birth and therefore it is a virtue to bear the pain that comes with it. On the other hand,

natural births are thought of as pain-free and the primitive African women are described giving birth in such a manner. During a long-term fieldwork in Guinea-Bissau, Jónína Einarsdóttir (2004, 2007) noticed interesting things regarding childbirths. Women recognized the pain during childbirths and had experienced it, but those who did not scream or show signs of pain, during it were thought of as brave. It is viewed in a positive manner not to show any signs of that pain although this is hardly true in reality. Moreover, the ultimate heroic efforts for women were to give birth alone. Dupire (1960) speaks on bravery and cowardice:

> The birth takes place in her father's camp under the direction of the midwives there, and the young mother is given free rein to cry out when the labour pains come on, although at later confinements this would be considered a sign of cowardice. (p. 63)

The anthropologist, Marjorie Shostak (1981) speaks about this stoicism too. She maintains that the overall death rate during childbirths are fairly low among the !Kung. She notes that: "It has been suggested that this incidence might be higher were it not for !Kung women's rather stoical attitude toward childbirth: by striving to give birth alone or with minimal assistance, they lower the risk of infection" (p. 179). It is thought of as cowardice if a woman screams during child delivery. To be afraid during it is thought to have fatal consequences for the woman. Additionally, Turnbull (1960) adds that often, in Africa, a child is born without any fuss at all, maybe with one friend or relative acting as midwife. Women frequently continue working in the fields, or at whatever their normal work is, until the very day of birth. Then a few hours after giving birth they are back at work again.

Nzegwu (2001) argues in Igboland, Nigeria, women are involved in five key socio-cultural roles; spiritual, economic, political, educational, and in their role as mothers. To the vast majority of African women, womanhood is bound with marriage and child bearing. Motherhood, "remains the essentially the ultimate fulfilment/manifestation of being female in Africa" (p. 22). Moreover, she notes that motherhood does not only include a woman's capacity to conceive and have a child „but an overall philosophical thrust that clearly incorporates a familial and communal responsibility" (p. 22). Embedded in mothering is this collective responsibility of women to steer society's growth during its youth and through

this process they gain tremendous power. When analyzing her text it might be assumed that she thinks the main, and even the only role of *all* African women, is to give birth and nurture. According to Leshabari (1994), mothers are expected to be role models for their growing girls since they are supposed to learn their gender roles through the works of the mother. She notes that the goal of the society is *only* prosperous motherhood. Women must marry and stay with their husbands only to procreate or as Adday-Yeboah (1994) puts it: "African women crave and want children. From childhood a girl is socialised to know that it is important to marry and have children. A woman who can not bear children is not a fully woman" (p. 67).

According to Shostak (1981), the ideal for !Kung women is to have as many children as possible. E.E. Evans-Pritchard (1965) has similar sentiments about 'primitive people' but furthermore asserts that no woman in Africa is willingly childless since that is the "worst misfortune that can befall her..." (p. 46). Marguerite Dupire (1960), an anthropologist studying in Niger, claims that women there, since fourteen years of age, have been preparing for the role as "mistress of the house" (p. 47). The birth of the first child is waited with eagerness because having a child is what Dupire maintains gives a married woman her purpose in life. Nzegwu (2001) notes that the role of women in Igboland's society is very crucial and important in regards to the continuation of lineage and society as a whole. African women do not feel resentful of their role in the society but rather feel it is something just natural.

2.3. Domestic Labour

Now let's move to another factor in the existence of women. Since motherhood is often linked to women's labour, it is of relevance to take a closer look at African women from that perspective. Women's role is often seen as in the home or the private space like Rosaldo (1974) suggested. This seems to be especially evident in Western writing about women in Africa. Audrey Smedley (2004) is an anthropologist who has been working in West-Africa. She believes that all African societies maintain some kind of sexual division of labour but the contents of such customs vary widely. To explain that further one can look at the division of labour with the Birom people in West-Africa which is very rigid. The men do

all the heavy work while the women do the more "softer" work, like taking care of children and the household. The women feel this kind of division is fair for them and would not like to change places. According to Smedley, they even count themselves as lucky on the outset. The sexual division of labour is a division of unequals, but she argues this is not necessary bad for the women. Men become dependent on their wives because they cannot themselves cook the food. This division balance thus appears to at the advantage of women. According to Smedley, women are at the core of the domestic unit and the most essential function of it is the preparation of food. Without a woman, no domestic unit can perpetuate itself from two standpoints: the provision of food and the reproduction of its members. In Tanzania, among the Chagga tribe, Leshabari (1994) describes labour:

> Work is divided according to gender, and women are expected to cook, clean the house, wash clothes, care for children and sick and old people, care for cows, goats sheep and sometimes pigs, and care for the farms, including the one inherited from the ancestors ("Kihamba"). These jobs are never ending, monotonous and repetitious. (p. 35)

Dupire (1960) agrees with Leshabari and argues that women can only do jobs that fit motherhood. Therefore, difficult physical work outside the household is out of the question.

Picture 1: The common image of 'the heroic' mother
(Hansson, 1996)

A common image in the literature of an African woman is she carrying water and other heavy things on her head while also carrying children. These women are often portrayed as heroic supposedly they know and can do it all or like Beoku-Betts (2005) suggest:

> Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of women's lives which came to the attention of almost every traveller to West Africa in the nineteenth century was their drudgery and physical endurance. They were almost exclusively responsible for fetching and

carrying water and fuel, rearing children as well as performing a variety of productive activities such as farming, petty trading, long distance trading, porterage and specialist crafts like house-building, wall plastering, hair dressing and surgery. (p. 21)

Moreover, Coquery-Vidrovitch (1997) adds that African women's domain is the domestic life in the broadest sense. Not just the house, as in the West, but the whole household's subsistence–the household being the basic unit of production and consumption. In eastern and southern Africa, where human settlements were widely scattered, the household usually consisted of a woman and her children, possibly including her dependents and slaves; the husband came to visit each of his wives in turn. Nzegwu (2001) takes a closer look at Igboland in Nigeria in regards to gender roles and says that:

The role of cooking is closely associated with that of mothering and nurturing, a necessary prerequisite of which is the ability to provide for, and support dependents – food being one crucial element. This 'natural' tendency for woman/nurturer also to be preparer of food is then rationalised by society as female 'role'. Males assuming this cook/nurturer role are therefore seen, in this respect, as assuming a female role. (p. 10)

In her famous book about a !Kung woman, Shostak (1981) tells readers about the everyday life of Nisa. The !Kung people are hunterers and gatherers and the women are portrayed somewhat heroic because they provide most of their families food, care for the children also fulfil the roles as lifelong wives. Women contribute to approximately 60-80% of the total food consumed and are responsible for most of the gathering. They also care for children and perform a variety of daily household chores. Because of their great influence on society, their status is also high. And when it comes to the decision-making they have got a great deal of power. In her book, Shostak points out that: "women may, in fact, be nearly equal to men, but the culture seems to *define* them as less powerful. In other words, their influence may be greater than the !Kung-of either sex-like to admit" (p. 13). This heroic picture is similar to what can be found in other resources. Monique Gessain (1960) who is an anthropologist claims that among the Coniagui women in Guinea, women's domain is the house, the fields and the well. The widespread portrait of the heroic mother walking tens of kilometres carrying a heavy load on her head and a child on her back wrapped in cloth is to

be found in many resources (see for example Gessain, 1960: 37; Turnbull, 1966: 57 and Shostak, 1981: 68). Paulme (1960) moreover maintains African women have the monotonous task of preparing meals all year round as well as spending several hours each day fetching water, searching for firewood, pounding grain and cooking. But that is not all, they also have to work on the fields and buy food from the market. In order to complete these tasks they often have to travel a great distance on foot with a load carried on the head and not to mention the baby astride its mother's back

This is coherent with what Mara Mabilia (2005) found in the society among the Gogo in Tanzania where it sees women as producers of food for the family together with other daily tasks they are responsible for such as getting firewood, collecting water and taking care of the family. It was clear to her that women were directed right from infancy, towards an image of themselves as adults, where feeding and caring for their children were tasks entrusted to them. Motherhood becomes embedded in the personality of the woman and she portrays the image of a survivor. Through poverty and harsh times, Gogo women manage to take good care of their family and offsprings. At the same time, you can see the image of the dependent mother when Mabilia describes how the community watches over mothers to see if they are doing good enough job in their mothering.

2.4. Motherhood as a Status

Becoming a mother in Africa has often been linked to gaining a higher status in the society and according to the sociologist, Gurli Hansson (1996) example of this can be found in Zimbabwe. Motherhood is seen as a religious role, a gift from God. He explains that:

> Motherhood also gives the woman a new individual role, status and position. As a mother the woman becomes somebody, a mother to somebody, and her status as a woman is confirmed as she has proved that she is able to create and given the responsibility to nurture a child. (p. 6)

By this it can be interpreted that a woman is nobody until she has a baby; then she becomes somebody, a mother. Sebalda Leshabari (1994) agrees and says:

> "Motherhood" is the traditional way of defining a woman's status: a woman is seen as a woman only if she is a mother. Maternity is the biological, psychological and social fact that marks and determines a woman's personality. "Motherhood" is the point around which all other problems of women's history to date centre. (Leshabari, 1994: 34)

It is common to come across generalizations that say that all African women want to have children; that it is their main role by choice (see for example Smedley, 2004; Soiri, 1996; Paulme, 1960 and Adday-Yeboah, 1994). Smedley (2004) says that women's reproductive role gives them a special status and rights and for the most part, women see the activities of men as complementing and supporting their essential role as mothers. According to LeVine (1979), women gain higher status after childbirth as the child grows older and if they have many children. The woman gains her own homestead and there she is expected to raise her children, obey her husband, respect and help her mother-in-law, and cooperate with her sister in-laws. However, Iina Soiri (1996), an Africanist, reasons that in Namibia, especially in the Ovambo society, the presence of a woman in the house is believed to contribute to the well-being of the family. Furthermore, she claims that:

> A woman was seen and regarded as a mother of the family, clan and nation. She was the vehicle of values. She was the one who transmitted information and knowledge to the children and therefore she must possess the qualities to form, guide and educate to a greater degree than most men. Women upheld cultural and social values. (p. 22)

Leshabari (1994) points out that motherhood is in Africa often seen as something glorious and as such, something to be proud of but she feels it is something that only creates more work for the African woman. Women's contribution is neither recognized nor rewarded even though women plough most of the land and also bear children. They are also allegedly seen as inferior objects in the community. According to Soiri (1996), the difference in gender roles in the traditional Namibian society does not necessarily give women an inferior position. Women simply played the parts which they were supposed to by virtue of being defined as women. They accepted the system which also gave them respect from everybody in the society. But they again knew that the community was dependent on them

and their contribution and therefore, the women felt themselves equal to men. Lashabari (1994) takes an example from a case study in Tanzania among the Chagga tribe. In their society, every woman is called a "mother" and they act as care providers for everybody and everything in the society. Furthermore, since motherhood is seen as this glorious thing, women have come to enjoy this role "without questioning its oppressive side" (p. 34).

Oyewumi (2003) gives us another perspective and she claims that dominant Western feminists' account of motherhood reduces it only to a gender category. Therefore, women are represented as females first and foremost which is a category perceived as subordinated, disadvantaged and oppressed because women are inferior to males who are the privileged group. Powerlessness and lack of agency is, thus, attached by definition to motherhood. She furthermore argues:

> From an African perspective, what is most troubling in many feminist theories of motherhood is that the mother's god-like power over the infant is not recognized as such. Instead the mother is seen as trapped by her role as primary caregiver; her god-like power over the child, and the authority this gives her within society are not acknowledged. (p. 3)

Oyewumi therefore believes that Western feminist scholars universalize motherhood and attach to African motherhood the same meanings as can be found in Western ones, something she forcefully criticizes.

2.5. The Victimized Mother

It is informative to take a look at books about African women because many of those books highlight their desperation and see them as victims. The image of the victim is to be found all over and stereotyped images have been and continue to be used in policy making. The anthropologist, Denise Roth Allen (2004) tells us the story of Mrs. X:

> She was 39 years old with seven previous pregnancies and five living children. She has never used contraceptives and the last pregnancy was unwanted. In addition to that, she was poor, illiterate and lived in a rural area. (p. 1)

Allen points out that this image of African women is very common in international discourses of the subject. It has been presented in many journals, conferences and in the media. In the story we were not told which country she was from but those key phrases 'poor, illiterate, rural area, seven previous pregnancies, five living children' suggests that this is a women living in a developing country, perhaps somewhere in Africa. This is a story that conceals more than it reveals. It can be said that stories like this homogenize human experience and portray an image of victimization. Allen suggests that this homogenization has its practical consequences and she says it can lead to "the development of generic policies and programs in the belief that what works in one third world locale will surely work in another" (p. 6).

Picture 2: The image
of Mrs. X
(Allen, 2004)

Images of African mothers can also be found in development studies. According to Everjoice J. Win (2007), an African feminist, the development industry has portrait the image of the poor, powerless, pregnant woman, burdened with children and carrying something heavy on her back or head. Most recognize this image because development agencies around the world use it repeatedly. The reason they use it, she says, is to sell the image to gain funding because people feel sympathetic towards that woman. However, this picture does not show the diversity of African women. Win (2007) criticizes this image and asserts that:

> A new African woman has recently appeared on the margins of the development stage ... The new woman is mostly middle to upper middle class – such as there is in sub-Saharan Africa. She is not very poor, nor can she be called rich. Although she is relatively comfortable, in comparison to the majority of women in her communities, the new woman's comforts tend to be wiped out by the reality of her existence. For example, she is the one most likely shouldering the burden of HIV/AIDS; paying fees for orphans; buying anti-retrovirals for the infected and generally stepping in when governments and others fail. (Win, 2007: 80-81)

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Win says that this woman is completely silenced in the discourse and erased from the images of development. In their discussion of Kenyan society, Pala, Awori and Krystal (1978) say that:

> Society sees the care of children as the responsibility of the woman. Although many women may be quite willing to assume this responsibility, it is obvious that they are always overburdened and not able to enjoy any part of their lives. (p. 204).

From these texts, we can learn that African mothers are repeatedly over generalized as a homogenous group and these women are often lacking an agency in the same texts.

Chapter 3 – African Women and Mothers in the Media

3.1. Images in the Media

When talking about images of Africa and the rest of the 'Third world', one invariably thinks of negative images of catastrophe, scandals and misery, which is what is perceived through the mass media. There have not been carried out many studies on images in the media and there is definite need for more media research on the images of Africa. But what is the best way to study images in the media? Nancy Mwendamseke (1990) says there are two ways to study images of women in the media; the first approach is from the woman's perspective of themselves, how they view themselves in the society. The second is from other's people point of view, which would look at women's portrayal in the media and how the media view women and relate them to society. The latter one is the approach that will be used in this chapter but it starts by taking a closer look on other people's findings.

Garth Andrew Myers (2001) says that images of African mothers and child suffering in the media are common. The use of photographs and drawings that make helpless child victims and their mothers stand the plight of the continent as a whole. Mwendamseke (1990) furthermore notes that those who control economically, politically and socially in a society, also control the social relations of the people. These relations then tend to influence the views expressed in the media. Images of women are often negative, not because they reflect the reality but because their aim is to portray women as inferior and dependent. Kamla Bhasin (1987) points out the valid note that the influence of media is very subtle and highly insidious at the same time as it is equally invisible. She claims that:

> We seem to get used to this slow poisoning without realising its cumulative effect on us. There is very little protest and the poison gradually settles in our bodies. Similarly, the poison of media settles in our minds and slowly affects everything else. (p. 133)

Bhasin (1987) finds the indirect effects of media very troubling because of the great deal of power that it has. Additionally, she says that there have been several studies of media in regards of women and the results are clear. They are guilty of sexism, distortion of the image of women and propagation of sex stereotypes as mothers, housewives, dependent, passive, etc. She criticizes also the fact that a

woman is seldom shown as working but rather as a "self-sacrificing housewife" (p. 135). Bhasin argues that in the development communication media, the same can be seen. Women are portrayed as mothers and housewives and repeatedly shown as the eternal sufferers in desperate need of help. Women's role is to be mothers and housewives but not a provider.

3.2. The Icelandic Newspaper Morgunblaðið

The aim of this subchapter is to see if African women and mothers are portrayed the same way in the media as in academic literature. Fifteen articles were analyzed from an online database of the Icelandic newspaper *Morgunblaðið*. The keywords that were used to find these articles were *mothers* and *Africa*. The fifteen chosen articles were all randomly picked from hundreds of results. The objective is to see if African mothers are portrayed either as victims or heroes like in the literature or if they are portrayed in a completely different way.

When reading the articles, one thing can be noticed right away; in almost all of the articles that were analysed, a strong focus is on health related issues like high infant or child mortality rates in Africa (Mæður og börn á Norðurlöndunum..., 2006, 9. May; Neyðin þekkir engin landamæri, 2005, 6. November; Aðstæður fyrir mæður og börn verstar í Afríku, 2005, 3. May and Mikill barnadauði í Afríku, 2006, 23. November) and it is suggested that it could easily be rectified with Western plans. Additionally, even more striking is the heavy focus on HIV/AIDS, 53% of the articles dealt with the issue (Aðstoð við konur skilar sér til allra, 2005, 5. May; Konur og börn í meiri hættu, 2004, 10. December; Ekkjurnar í Kiteka, 2000, 6.

Picture 3: Picture used in discussions about child mortality rate
(Neyðin þekkir engin landamæri, 2005, 6. November).

February; Vilja hindra HIV sýkingu nýbura, 1998, 30. June; Gunnar Hersvein, 2004, 19. September; Skelfilegur faraldur, 2003, 5. January; Afríka er þjökuð af völdum alnæmis, 2002, 19. September and Gunnar Hersvein, 2004, 11. January).

When reading the AIDS articles, one gets the feeling that it is an isolated African problem and that all of Africa is anguished with it like the title of one article suggests; *"Africa is burdened by the AIDS epidemic"*[3] (Afríka er þjökuð af völdum alnæmis, 2002, 19. September). Many of the articles focus on the danger of HIV/AIDS in Africa but only one discusses a plan to prevent the spread in babies. In that article it is though noted that the treatment is too expensive for African countries (Vilja hindra HIV sýkingu nýbura, 1998, 30. June).

Some articles dealt with the importance of women's education (Aðstoð við konur skilar sér til allra, 2005, 5. May; Menntun mæðra mjög mikilvæg, 2005, 8. May) viewing it as great as can be concluded from the following:

> If a girl gets the opportunity to go to school, even though it is only for five years, everything changes in her life. She becomes more qualified mother, teacher and leader of the family. The chances of her catching the HIV- infection reduces by half. She gives birth to her first child twenty years old but not twelve. She gives birth to two to three children, not eight to ten. (Aðstoð við konur skilar sér til allra, 2005, 5. May)[4]

Almost all of the 15 articles discuss development issues in way or another, either in an obvious or a subtle manner like an article where the reporter is trying to woo people to give money to UNICEF by portraying children and mothers in a desperate need of help (Vantar sárlega fjármagn til að sinna neyðaraðstoð, 2007, 1. February). Mothers and children are said to be in more danger than men regarding health related

Picture 4: Picture used when wooing for more funding for UNICEF
(Aðstæður fyrir mæður og börn verstar í Afríku, 2005, 3. May).

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[3] *Afríka er þjökuð af völdum alnæmis.*

[4] *En ef að stúlka fær að ganga í skóla, þó ekki sé nema í fimm ár, þá breytist allt í lífi hennar. Hún verður hæfari móðir, kennari og leiðtogi fjölskyldunnar. Líkurnar á því að hún smitist af HIV-veirunni verða helmingi minni. Hún eignast fyrsta barnið sitt tuttugu ára en ekki tólf ára. Hún eignast tvö til þrjú börn, en ekki átta til tíu.*

issues. Women and mothers are the target group of AID to Africa. It seems like women and children are often put in the same category perhaps because women are supposed to nurture children or because it is easier to fund projects by using women and children and their misery instead of men's. It seems to be easier for people in the West to feel sorry for the poor women and children. The undertone in most of the texts also suggests the superiority of the West and the need of 'us' to save 'them' because 'we' are leading in everything. It is suggested that Icelanders or the West should use their knowledge to 'save Africa'. In one article it is even suggested that mothers in Africa are not capable of taking care of their children and they are lacking an agency. Additionally, it is suggested that these mothers are the cause of their children's health problems (Neyðin þekkir engin landamæri, 2005, 6. November). Another article argues that women are subordinate and doubly burdened:

> A girl that is born in South-Asia or sub-Saharan Africa is born with a cruel, double burden. She will be raised in a corner where poverty, diseases, war or hunger reigns. She will also have to deal with these problems with the additional burden of being a woman. (Konur og þróun, 2008, 1. June)[5]

Gunnar Hersvein (2004, 11. January) describes his expression when arriving to Zimbabwe. He says:

> I saw in many places on the highroads in Zimbabwe, women with a child tied up on her back and supplies to carry on the head. I also saw them in cities with their children – selling vegetables or art on the street. They are quiet and it is like they glide around in spite of their burden. Their faces are proud – but their experiences of life has also marked them. Their manner impresses, but the beauty of some are marked with shocks. You suspect that some of them are ill even though they present oneself well. One has pneumonia, another has

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[5] *Stúlka sem kemur í heiminn í Suður-Asíu eða Afríku sunnan Sahara fæðist með grimmilega, tvöfalda byrði. Hún mun alast upp í heimshluta þar sem ríkir fátækt, sjúkdómar, stríð eða hungursneyð. Hún mun í þokkabót þurfa að takast á við þessi vandamál með því umframbyrði að vera kona.*

tuberculosis, and the third has hepatitis. (Gunnar Hersvein, 2004, 11. January) [6]

In this text cited, women are portrayed as both heroes and victims. Heroes because of this idea of the woman burdened with children and who can really do it all, marked with how life has treated her and victims because he says he suggests that some of them are ill. In another article similar issue is discussed in an interview with James Morris, the executive of the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP). He argues that WFP should try to get the food to women because they are the ones that ultimately deliver it to people. By saying this it is suggested that the woman's place is in the home and it is also like he thinks big of them. You get the feeling women are the ones that can be trusted for this big responsibility of food distribution and therefore he might think of them as some kinds of heroes. He furthermore says:

> The burden that is put on women is incredible and something that we, normal people, can't understand. It isn't unusual that a woman walks ten kilometres, then takes a fifty kilo bag of grain or wheat and puts it on her head and then walks ten kilometres back. And even with five to six children tagging along. (Aðstoð við konur skilar sér til allra, 2005, 5. May) [7]

This seems to be the most common image and perhaps the reason for that is to sell and to gain assistance for the poor in Africa or maybe because these authors regard the women as hard-working. It is almost as they have an utmost admiration for the achievements these women have made.

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[6] *Ég sá víða konur á þjóðvegunum í Zimbabve með barn bundið á bakið og birgðir til að bera á höfðinu. Einnig sá ég þær í borgunum með börnin sín - að selja grænmeti eða listmuni á götum úti. Þær eru hljóðlátar og líkt og þær líði um þrátt fyrir burðinn. Andlitin eru stolt - en reynslan af lífinu er líka rist í þau. Fas þeirra vekur aðdáun, en fegurð sumra er merkt áföllum. Mann rennir grun í að sumar hverjar séu veikar þótt þær beri sig vel. Ein er með lungnabólgu, önnur með berkla, sú þriðja með lifrarbólgu.*

[7] *Byrðin sem lögð er á konur er með ólíkindum, og nokkuð sem við venjulegt fólk getum ekki skilið. Það er ekki óvenjulegt að kona gangi tíu kílómetra, taki síðan fimmtíu kílóa poka af korni eða hveiti og setji hann á höfuðið, og gangi aftur tíu kílómetra leið. Og það með fimm eða sex lítil börn í eftirdragi.*

A common theme in these articles is desperation and victimization of African mothers. It can be argued that Western viewers and readers feed of other people's misery. That being said, the first impression was quite shocking because of the negative angle some of them displayed. All of these negative impressions kindles some questions. Is the media an extended arm of development agencies? Does the media function do help the development agencies to fund themselves or are those victimized news articles on women and children something that the Western eyes want to see? Why do we almost never get positive news from Africa? Research on this subject is needed to be able to answer these questions. When taking a closer look at the articles and reading between the lines it is possible to see that although they are often dealing with depressing subjects like diseases, an utmost admiration of the women is found as they are thought to be hard-working. However, it should be kept in mind that some of these articles are written by individuals travelling to Africa for the first time. Therefore, some of the descriptions might be explained by cultural shock and the authors could also be influenced by the images that are portrayed of African women repeatedly.

Discussions

An attempt has been made to examine images of African mothers in academic literature as well as in media. The main focus has been on what images really are found and how they link to 'othering', what images can be identified of African women and mothers as well as how they are portrayed in the media.

When thinking about images, it is fair to say they relate to the thinking of 'us' against 'others' and they often portray a social group or category as homogenous. They who are stereotyped are fixed into marginal position or subordinate status and judged accordingly regardless of the inaccuracies that are involved in the stereotypical description given of them. This is true to descriptions of African women in the academic literature. One creates an image of the 'other' even though it does not represent the reality and, therefore, it is thought impossible to view images only as the mirror of society. In his famous book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) argues that European discourses of the 'orient' (or Africa) tended to represent the 'oriental others' (the Africans) as foreign and exotic while in simultaneously claiming European superiority. Rigby (1996) agrees when he argues that this other is seldom or never the white European or North American male. Simone de Beauvoir (1989 [1949]) maintains however that the white woman has been labelled as the other by men throughout history. This gets the author to think if this is not just natural. Most people probably label what is different from them as the other so this should be of no surprise. However, it is interesting when connecting this to African women, then it becomes clear they have been doubly labelled as the other by their Western counterparts since they are not white nor male. This exotic imaging of them therefore hardly comes as any surprise.

Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) argue that scholars have taken for granted what they call a fact; the view of women as passive, subordinated, sexual objects and therefore they are seen as devoted mothers and dutiful wives. This subordination of women in the West has been criticised and when seeing how motherhood has been thought of as something glorious in many parts of Africa, it looks like some authors have thought they must be oppressed as well. Rosaldo and Lamphere believe that everywhere women are excluded from certain economic or

political activities and their roles as mothers and wives are associated with lesser power. This seems to be the case in the descriptions of African women in the academic literature. Them being mothers appears to give them even lesser power than they could else have. It is interesting though to wonder about this in the light of the discussion of how African societies were before the colonial period. One could assume African women were also mothers then but scholars believe their status was higher and they were more powerful. This brings up the question if the West is responsible for their lower status or even if their status is low today. Perhaps the West is just stuck in this thinking of them as subordinate. Anthropology was male dominated in its early days and therefore, not many resources are on women from that time. This might be the reason for a lack of writings on women in Africa. Women were subordinate in their own society so they assumed that the same would be in Africa.

Before gathering resources for this thesis, the speculation was that binary images would be found; women portrayed either as voiceless victims or as self-reliant heroes. The results were not this distinct. These images were found but they were not as overstated as thought in the beginning. But have the images of African women changed? Early travellers to Africa were not interested in women (the travellers were almost all male) and, consequently, they rarely mention women in their writings. Furthermore, some scholars argue that the Europeans took with them their own view of how women should behave and what their role and status in the society should be and that they changed the status of African women dramatically to the worse.

It is noteworthy that African women are often written about in relation to marriage and polygamy. Many scholars argue polygamy is bad for women but others assert women disagree on the matter. Some say it is indispensible while others do not want anything to do with it. After marriage, women most often give birth. When discussing African women giving birth, their stoicism is sometimes mentioned. Some resources suggest that African women do not feel any pain during childbirth although other resources note that women of course feel this pain but it is thought of as an act of bravery not to show signs of pain during childbirth. It is clear that African women do not give birth pain free no more than women in Western societies do. This is one angle of romanticising about Africa as

something natural and pure. The author agrees with Jónína Einarsdóttir (2004) when she mocks this idea in a book chapter on childbirths in Guinea-Bissau. According to her, stoicism during childbirth has often been linked to primitive people and scholars have believed those women can give birth pain free. She refuses this belief and maintains that women in Biombo, Guinea-Bissau certainly feel pain during childbirth like any other women in the world. The author maintains this romantic idea of a pain free childbirth is something that can be found in the Icelandic society in some degree as well. Like Elva Björg Einarsdóttir (2007) points out in her masters thesis, giving birth without any anaesthesia is thought of as something most desirable since it gives women a closer relationship to nature and is ultimately thought of as something brave. It is thought of as virtuous of Western women to give birth pain free, without anaesthesia.

African women are also often regarded as closely linked to the domestic sphere. Everywhere, the most common image pops up of the overburdened woman, carrying her child on the back and a heavy-load of water on her head. Some resources note that women's role is in the home and that it is something not so uncommon here in Western societies not so long ago. Furthermore, women's main roles in some texts cited are also as mothers but it is not their only role; it gives them also a certain advantageous status. Being a mother in Africa is thought of as something glorious and they seem to gain higher status after giving birth. That appears to be the opposite of what we find in Western societies where it is thought to lower women's status to have many children. The author wonders if it is maybe not so different but Western people do not want to admit how glorious motherhood really is. Moreover, in policy making as well as at development institutes, women are often used to sell for funding and therefore they are portrayed as victims who are in desperate need of help.

When thinking about media images of Africa, the negative news and images, poverty and misery stick in mind. This area is in need of research because few have studied it. Kristín Loftsdóttir (2007) has examined images of Africa in Iceland and one angle of her research covers media images. According to her, news that cover Africa in Iceland are often negative, portraying the continent in light of diseases, catastrophes, war, poverty and hunger. This is also the results of

this thesis. Kristín Loftsdóttir furthermore adds that Africa is by her opinion silent in the media in Iceland. However large the continent is, little is written about it and almost never anything positive. Taking a closer look at media images in one Icelandic online news database (Morgunblaðið) and analysing 15 articles on mothers in Africa, the author found similar themes as Kristín Loftsdóttir mentioned. Most of the articles are kind of negative but the author came to another conclusion when reading them again and reading between the lines. At the first impression, women are seen as victims and in desperate need of help and a big focus is on health related matters and diseases like HIV/AIDS. The common image of the overburdened woman, with a child on her back and carrying a heavy load on her head was also very apparent. Therefore, it is suggested that images found in the media were simpler and more repetitious than the academic literature. The articles often portrayed an utmost admiration for African women. While women were seen as hard-working and efficient, most articles portrayed images of victimization as well as instinctive heroes. The victimization portrayed may be caused by the authors' cultural shock of the author as some of them seemed to have arrived in Africa for the first time and, therefore, wrote about their individual experiences.

The images in the media emphasized health related matters which is something the author did not find as much in the academic literature. Discussions of HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases are common. Perhaps, the media is the extended arm of development agencies, portraying what is in need of better funding or maybe these are simply the most important issues from day to day.

Conclusions

Stereotypes and images often portray a social group or category as homogenous. They who are stereotyped are fixed into marginal position or subordinate status and judged accordingly. African women are a group that has been stereotyped about. Scholars have argued the exotic south to be 'the other' while others maintain white women have been labelled as this 'other'. It is fair to say then that African women have been doubly labelled because they are neither white nor male. This probably affects how they are represented in both academia and media.

Results show that images of African women and mothers in academia and media are much more complicated than the author anticipated. The academia does not portray women only as voiceless victims or self-reliant heroes but rather as a diverse group of people. It should be noted though that some resources do represent women as those polarized images suggest and in those few resources, they are homogenized about as a group. In many resources their subordination is taken for granted and that is something that is similar to what feminists have argued. In many of the resources, the women are seen as powerless figures but scholars have mentioned that this was not the case before the colonial period. This suggests that their subordination was the making of European travellers. Images of African women in the Icelandic online database of the newspaper Morgunblaðið were also more complicated then the author had expected. Perhaps that is because much of the discussions of images tend to be homogeneous and it is often focused on one particular image which causes other images to disappear. Victimization was found in the articles but also an outmost admiration by the authors of those articles for African women. It is apparent they think women are hard-working, efficient and capable of a lot of things.

Images of African women and mothers in both academic literature and media are complicated, like images of any other groups in the world. Discussions of images often lose sight of the diversity and therefore can be found to be generalizing. Victimization can be found in both places but also an admiration of their hard-working and consequently, caution most be made when generalizing about any group of people.

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