

Mosupyoe, Boatamo, *Mediation of Patriarchy and Sexism by Women in South Africa*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies Inc., 2010, reviewed by Sujatha Moni.

This is a comprehensive interdisciplinary book on South Africa which makes valuable contributions not only to contemporary Anthropological research on South Africa, but also to the fields of religion in politics, Women's and Gender Studies, and postcolonial studies. Mosupyoe's work, which is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in South Africa over two decades, focuses on two main issues: the role of the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) during the political upheavals of the 1990s which culminated in the overthrow of the apartheid regime in South Africa; and, on the status of women within the order of the ZCC. The author examines how changes introduced in the South African constitution in the post-apartheid period, with respect to elimination of all forms of racial and sexist hierarchies from society, impact and impede religious institutions like the ZCC, which continue to operate along patriarchal and sexist lines.

There are two interesting questions that the book immediately raises: firstly, to what extent do systems left behind by extant colonial administrations, as they are reproduced by various social institutions continuing into the postcolonial period, put-up stumbling blocks for the success of the reform measures put forward by the new government in South Africa? Secondly, how are these institutions themselves affected by the change in political authority and its accompanying efforts to institutionalize the elimination of racial hierarchies and sexism? Significantly, Mosupyoe locates women's empowerment within the spaces of negotiation that she identifies between state agenda of institutional and social reforms, and the reinforcement of patriarchal structures by religious institutions like the ZCC. A central focus of her research is:

how the women interpreted the ZCC [sic.] differential treatment of men and women with regards to education in general and education initiatives within the church; [...] how they mediated the conflict created by the education they obtained from structures outside the church with education they received within the church; [...] and how they reconciled the dictates and teachings of their church with those of the call to non-sexism. (3)

Chapter 2 provides the historical background to the rise of the ZCC. It locates ZCC's origins within the African tradition of Bapedi, while simultaneously recognizing the influence of the colonial and missionary systems in the rise of the ZCC. Members who at the time constituted the lowest economic sector of South Africa were attracted to the church because of its retention of the traditional African practices. Mosupyoe eloquently relates how the perpetuation of the traditional elements in the ZCC contributed to its numerical strength to make it the largest church in Southern Africa. Chapter 3 discusses gender relations within the ZCC. The chapter traces the paradoxical continuity of pre-colonial practices as they converge and conflict with other new influences. The Bapedi traditional patriarchal structures parallel patriarchy and sexism in the church as expressed through nomenclature, ideology, and liturgy.

Mosupyoe gives examples of idioms used to effectively prove the impact of the phrases as they translate into concrete actions. For example phrases like *"If led by a woman it falls into a pit," "there are never two bulls in a kraal"* reflect attitudes towards the role of women both in the traditional Bapedi structures and in the ZCC before the end of apartheid.

Chapters 4 & 5, in my opinion, make the most valuable contribution to gender development and agency. Chapter 4 discusses how South African women within the ZCC negotiate between the patriarchal structures they encounter within the church, and the discourses of gender egalitarianism they encounter in the broader society. Their responses differed on the bases of age, economic status, level of education, and urban/rural residency. Mosupyoe's account gives an in depth comparison of women's responses to the concept of a non-sexist society. The reader gets a full understanding of the difficulty of negotiating tradition to fit the ever dynamic social structure. While older, less school educated and rural women seem to want to employ the guidance of the bishop of the church, himself a man, the younger, more school educated, and urban women feel competent in carrying out the task manages without the help of the bishop. The reader emerges from this chapter with an appreciation of how multiple theories inform the women's construction of sexism and patriarchy, as Mosupyoe succinctly puts it: "the women's varied responses defy and de-naturalize any one theory as sufficient in the comprehension of how Zion Christian Church women construct and mediate factors that make up their world. Their conception and process of articulation of the concepts cannot be represented as a neat unitary formation, but rather it is a set of complex conceptual order motivated by a variety of factors" (Mosupyoe 63).

Chapter 5 explores how these church women empower themselves as minorities in the larger society of equipping themselves with "models and strategies" gathered through negotiations between the ZCC schools and their lived experiences outside the church. Because of its support of the apartheid regime, the church created the perception of its members as enemies of the larger anti-apartheid movement and the masses of black South Africans who fought the oppressive system. Mosupyoe efficiently examines how on one hand these women's positions in the white employment sector enjoyed favoritism over other black South Africans, who opposed the oppressive white minority rule. On the other hand their children represented an anomaly in the school systems because of their lack of activism against apartheid and suffered exclusion and became targets for attack. Through a remarkably informative analysis Mosupyoe shows how women negotiated these structural uncertainties to inject logic into their decisions. More powerful is her ability to demonstrate the saliency of the ZCC teachings in these women's decision making processes. Indeed, in her first edition Mosupyoe recognized the church's influential role and predicted that a post apartheid South Africa will have to engage the bishop and the church in promoting and achieving a non-sexist society. The last chapter proves correct Mosupyoe's prediction. The new post apartheid government established a new relationship with its former enemy to promote programs and legislations that enhances non-sexism in the society.

Finally, by identifying the Church as a dynamic social space which reflects historical continuity with established African traditions, as well as transformations in social relations brought on by changing social structures, the book makes an invaluable contribution to academic scholarship on Anthropology of religion. It examines specific possibilities for women's empowerment within the gaps and interstices, which the author identifies, between multiple discourses mediated within the rapidly transforming social life of contemporary South Africa. This study is therefore crucial for studies within the emerging field of Gender and Development, especially in the context of South Africa.