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AFRICAN SISTERHOOD –CONCEPTUALIZING AFRICAN FEMINIST IDENTITY

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Tiivistelmä: This study focuses on the political identity of African feminism. The purpose is to understand the meaning and the origins of African sisterhood as a identity political project. The analyzing method is content analysis guided by theory. The theoretical framework consists of identity political theories from Harriet Bradley and Manuel Castells. As a supporting theoretical framework the concept of culture relativism and the concept of freedom has been used. The research material consists of publications from an organization called African Feminist Forum.

Aim of research is to study how African feminist forum builds and expresses its political identity in relation to traditional western feminist identity. The meaning of African feminism is to tell it apart from traditional western feminism and make theories and ways of activism that are more valid in the African context. In its rhetoric African feminist forum is trying to state what are the threads and ordeals in its near future and at African women's living surroundings. This is how the group makes itself distinctive and executes identity political project. Cultural relativism plays an important role in this because the cultural relativist though highlights the importance of respecting your own cultural heritage. This is especially present in a different kind of understanding related to the concept of freedom.

Avainsanat: Feminism, African feminism, identity politics, culture relativism, freedom.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The topic of this thesis is the political identity of African feminism. I became interested in this topic while I was studying in Ethiopia at the University of Addis Ababa. I studied gender studies there and a big part of my studies concentrated on post colonialist feminism and to be more exact African feminism. It caught my attention how African feminism as movement and also as a feminist theory is based on different kind of ideas and principals than its western traditional counterpart. I have studied gender studies as a minor study for my master's degree and because of this I was formerly aware of the basic theories and historical waves of traditional western kind of feminism. African feminist principles and their special nature made me curious on how this dichotomist nature of African feminist thinking has been expressed on the grass root/activist level. What took my attention was the basic concept of African feminism being the "other" feminism. The concept of African feminism and postcolonial feminism in the larger way echoes from the idea that traditional western feminism does not fully represent all the women, but it actually oppresses the women who don't yield in the form of traditional western feminism (Mohanty 1991).

African women who also want to pursue women's emancipation and better social status for women want to do this from their own point of view and they don't want to be judged by the "western standards". In the chapter 1.4 "Introduction to post-colonial and African feminism" I will explain the most crucial elements of African feminism and how African feminism has become known as a term. Also I will elaborate how diverse the term actually is in the use of many scholars and how the whole term includes various forms and ways to do African feminism. This thesis concentrates on studying how African feminist identity has been reasoned through the concept of cultural relativism and the concept of freedom.

In the field of political science identity and identity building has had a big role over the years. Because of this I felt that studying African feminist identity would be a relevant subject of analysis for political science. Identity has been studied a lot and in feminist/gender -studies identity and identity building also play an important role. Because of this I thought that there is still space for a study like mine where I wanted to further study the nature of the arguments concerning African feminist identity.

1.1 Outline of the study

The outline of the study is built in this thesis as follows. At the first chapter the ground and the premise of the thesis is presented. There is also an effort to conceptualize the background of the study in the terms of general relevance of the research subject and why I chose this topic and why it should be studied from the point of view of the identity politics. After this I introduce my thematic position and this is why I go through the history and the background of African feminism as a branch of postcolonial feminism. This is followed by research questions and the introduction of the research material. I have given information about the background and the structure of the research material so that it would help the reader in chapters 3 and 4 to understand the process of my analysis better. In the chapter number 2 the methodological and theoretical background of the thesis is opened. This chapter introduces the relevant concepts for my thesis such as identity politics and culture relativism. Special attention is paid to explain which identity politics theorists I have found most helpful and suitable for my research. Also the methodological decisions are explained in the second chapter. The chapter number 3 and 4 are the empirical part of the thesis and it entails the analysis and results of my research from the material of African feminist forum. The final chapter, which is chapter number 5, is a conclusion chapter. In this chapter I have summed up together the previous chapters and their insights and I have also made an effort to evaluate the whole process and the main findings of the thesis.

1.2 Research topic and the research questions

I wanted to research African feminism as a political movement and as a social identity that African feminist activists share. African feminism can also be seen as a branching feminist theory under the wide range of postcolonial feminism, but for my research I wanted to concentrate more on how African feminist identity has been expressed than the epistemological nature of African feminist theory. I will also go through the theoretical discussion concerning contemporary African feminist theorizing, but my research material and empirical data is a publication of an activist community and not an academic text. I really wanted to concentrate on how African feminist activists argument for their cause and how they speak to other women that identify themselves also as being a part of group called African feminists. African feminists feel that

traditional western feminism gets it strength and strong position form its academic background and theories, but African feminism is more about activism and personal experiences. (Oyewumi 1997.) My thesis originates from the assumption that African feminist activists feel that they share a political identity with each other. This assumption was crucial when I wanted to study the political nature of that identity. I assumed that by analyzing the connection of African feminist identity and its connection to culture relativism, I could discover the attitudes and stances that African feminist identity holds towards traditional western feminism and in that way favors the basic identity building procedure that is based on dichotomies and confrontations. The concept of otherness is tightly linked to African feminism from both sides. African feminism argues that western feminism is not adaptable for African women because traditional feminism sees these women as subjugated, uneducated and oppressed individuals. In a simplified way western feminism does not see third world women as "free", not while judged by their standards (Oyewumi 2002).

My primary research questions for this thesis were following:

1 .*What kind of political identity is linked to African feminist activism?*

2. *Is culture relativism part of African feminist identity*?

3. *How is freedom seen in the African feminism?*

The sub-questions present in my analysis are explained in the analyzing chapters. My material was divided in the different analytical folders whit the help of these. The detailed explanation of this can be found in the chapter 2.4. Because of my chosen line of research and because of this specific research question I chose to connect my research to the theories of political identity and utilize the culture relativism and the concept of freedom as supporting theoretical approaching methods. I was able to find answers to the question number one easily from research material. The question numbers two and three were in a way merged in the proses of my analysis. These theoretical approaches will be better explained in the chapter number 2.

1.3 Empirical data

My research material is material and publications from an organization called African feminist forum. It is a conference that is held every second year as a way to bring together African feminist activists from the hole continent and also from diaspora. The

conference was first held at year 2006 and after that at the years 2008 and 2010. On top of these the organization holds national forums and publishes publications. Examples of the materials that the organization has published are: Charter of feminist principles for African feminists, forum reports from every conference and other kind of small publications. For my thesis I chose four separate publications because I felt that those gave me a nice overview of the principles of the organization and also the time scale was appropriate as I chose materials that were published between years 2006-2011. This selection was made for practical reasons and because I found it to be enough for research of this size. These four documents form a reasonable and cohesive entity which helped me to achieve my object to find examples of African feminist identity political argumentation.

The four separate reports and other documents that I chose can be found from the official web page of African feminist forum (http://africanfeministforum.com/). The Material that I used is but up on the webpage to be used by researchers, the local actors, media and for anyone who might be interested in the actions and principles of African feminist forum. The publications are made also from an interest to have clear documentation of the forum meetings that the organization was having every two years. For this reason one of the most important audiences for these publications is the forum itself. The material is easily accessible and written in a manner that is easily comprehended by masses. By this I mean that it does not include hard theoretical discussion from the field of gender studies or other social studies. The terms that have been used may be a bit hard to understand for someone who has not familiarized him/herself on some basic terms of gender and women studies, but all in all I would say that the publications represent basic public relations information produced by organization of this sort. That is why I feel that the basic purpose of these publications is to make their organization and its ways of agency better known for both a broader public and also for the people who are working with and inside the organization.

The four publications that make up my research material are: Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, "Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum, Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 and African feminist forum conference report 2010. I had some concerns what publications I should choose because these were not the only ones that I could find. For example I was afraid that "Report of the first African feminist forum" from the year 2006 might be outdated.

While I went through all the publications I considered these to be the best because they are consistent with each other and time range of the publications works well for my research. The forum is of course also tied to its contemporary upheavals, but the basic message and the build charted of principles has not changed through the years that were relevant for my study. This has a lot to do with forums two year cycle with the big gatherings.

There are a couple of aspects which are necessary to address at this point. Firstly I have to give reasons why I chose African Feminist forum and its publications as my research data. There are also other organizations that might be considered to have similar kind of role in the African continent. The decision was made on the basis that this organization and forum was according to my research the best known and to my understanding the easiest to study because of the good quality of their publications and resources. These resources were also easily accessible for me. I was first skeptical if African feminist forum can be seen as a representative of African feminist activism in the way that would be helpful for me and my research. In my preliminary studies for the topic of African feminism and African feminist activism I continuously came across with the fact that African feminist activism is actually an incoherent and diverse collection of different type of feminist movements. After researching the organization I was convinced that their publications would be the right material for me and this was mainly because they themselves have chosen to openly call themselves African feminists. From the point of view of identity politics this was a key factor for my research. AFF (African feminist forum) in their webpage define the organization like this:

> A group of feminist activists decided that the time had come, for the development of an autonomous space for feminists from the continent to deliberate on these issues internally reflecting on the current architecture for the advancement of the rights of women, as well as assessing and developing strategies to address the external challenges on the movement. (http://www.africanfeministforum.com/.)

In the analysis chapters I will use both the real name of the organization and an abbreviation AFF to make the text easier to follow and to comprehend.

I feel that the argumentative strength and the extent of my research material is strong enough for the purpose of this particular study and it was enough to contribute to my

research results. In the text I use the headline of the material and page number when referring to the research material for example "(Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 11)". I will also refer to AFF when I want to claim something general that can be found in AFF publications repeatedly. I have chosen to do this that the text would be easy to follow and the references from my research material would be easily traceable. I chose to use many (one might even think too many) quotes from word to word to emphasize how AFF reasons its case. I chose to do this because I felt that it was important for the reader to see these and not only my interpretations of AFF`s aspirations for African feminist identity building. The reason for this is not that I would feel my interpretation to be weak or because I feel my analysis to be too fickle but because I felt that the wording and argumentation in the research material was actually very colorful and it was firmly supporting my presuppositions.

1.4 Introduction to post-colonial feminism and African feminism

 In this chapter I will elaborate the small history of post-colonial feminism and how African feminism has come to exist as an individual branch from that. I will attempt to introduce the various forms of African feminism and present the researchers and writers that I have found influential for the development of African feminism. This introduction is not all-encompassing, but I have chosen writings and researchers who also for example approach the issue of African feminism from the view point of identity. The most influential researchers that I have chosen are Chandra Mohanty, Signe Arnfred and Oyeronke Oyewumi.

The meaning of African feminism is not only to critique western feminism but to make theories and ways of activism that are more valid in the African context. Western feminism is seen as too white or as just too ignorant to understand black women's life and that is why many feminists in Africa actually want to call themselves rather womanists, black feminists, African feminists or postcolonial feminists. That is because just the word feminist has a connotation of being white and middle classed. Desiree Lewis defines African feminism as a group of women who call themselves African feminist and who share intellectual commitment to critique traditional gender norms and imperialism. Important part of this is also a shared focus to create continental identity that is molded by the historical relations of subordination. (Lewis 2008, 77-79.)

Signe Arnfred has written a lot about African feminism and in her article *Issues of African feminist thought* she argues that African feminism evolved from the need to critique western feminisms false universal nature. Simone de Beauvoir states in second sex that men are the norm and women are the other. This is highly recognized fact in the western world among feminists. Arnfred does not write that women's subordination and otherness does not take place also in Africa. She just argues that the ways of thinking and analyzing in western feminism may have been done in ways and from vantage points that are bias and uninformed about women's real experiences in Africa. (Arnfred 2001, 2.) Arnfreds key point is that to western feminism women of third world countries portray "otherness". They are seem as passive, weak and oppressed. Also many African nations are seen as traditional which means that they are seen as something that predates modernity. It is many times inaccurate how the culture, ideology and the socioeconomic circumstances of third world women have been portrayed. This is because the whole confrontation between the west and third world women must be situated within the bigger balance of power. Western feminism possesses the kind of hegemony where they have power to make definitions of other groups. For example this means that women are portrayed as a coherent group that has similar goals and interests. Those goals and interests bring identical gender differences that are valid all over the world. Women are assumed to be harmonious group that share the same problems and needs but are in the different stages of development. It is not noticed that for example class differences and the gender based division of labor is many times tightly linked to historical and cultural context. In the minds of traditional western feminist these traditional nations are incapable of providing the kind of ambiance that is capable of providing breeding ground for feminist thinking and activism. For western feminism modernity is the only way for development and to gender equality. From this point of view it is no wonder that black African women don't necessarily find themselves from western feminist theories or identify themselves with traditional white feminist theorists. For this void and need African feminism wants to present an option. (Arnfred 2001, 2-3.)

Chandra Mohanty is a postcolonial feminist who has written a lot about postcolonial feminist identity. Mohanty in her article *Under the western eyes* wants to challenge the ethnocentricity that western feminism can be found guilty of. Mohanty is not African feminist, but her writings are many times referred to by African feminist activists and the post-colonial tradition is tightly linked to African feminist struggles. Mohanty writes

that ethnocentricity follows when third world legal, economic, religious and familial structures are being judges by western standards. When words like "underdeveloped" or "developing" are being used they implicit an image of average third world woman. The common prejudice is that third world woman equals oppressed woman. When we define third world women as: religious, family oriented, illiterate and domestic we are actually giving them an identity. The words and adjectives mentioned may seem like value neutral words, but actually they have a strong undertone of being not progressive, traditional, ignorant and backward. Western women do this that they can feel themselves modern, equal and developed. This is because the western women need to have the mirror image of third world women. (Mohanty 1991, 333-334.) In this research the thought of mirror image is an important factor in the identity building. African feminism wants to reject the mirror image used by western feminism but still uses the same logic while defining their place and identity.

Postcolonial feminists and African feminists need their own epistemology to back up their activism. Feminism should try to correct itself by taking into better consideration challenges posed by race and variety of women. White, middle-class women have been studied in a great deal over last decades. Third world women have been left to the side. There are many studies about women in developing countries. However Mohanty have criticized that those studies do not engage feminist questions. The whole term feminism can be contested here as mentioned before. Many third world women don't feel that the term feminist represents them. African feminist activists rather use terms like womanism or motherism to better represent their feminism. (Mohanty 1991, 335.) Third world women make an "imagined community". It is imagined because it is not real in sense how we would understand traditional community to be, but it is real and most of all it can be studied because these women have a potential to alliances and to collaboration. This is the base for their political identity. (Mohanty 1991, 336-337.)

Mohanty writes that the history of white feminism is not very different from the history of feminism of third world women. It is the other difficulties that these women face in relation to their struggles as women that make the difference. From here the idea of shared history and identity is coming from. Idenity has been molded by these women's experiences concerning their gender, race and social class. It is the intersection of identitites (sexuality, gender, race, class, nationality) that positions them as women.

(Mohanty 1991, 343-344.) The term intersectionality and how it is being used and expressed by African feminist activists is better explained in the chapter 3.1.

Not all the feminist struggles in third world countries happen through organized movements. The common factor for third world women's engagement with feminism is in political consciousness and self-identity both at the level of organized movements and on grassroots level. When it comes to identity politics Mohanty states that she wants to challenge the idea that simply being a woman is a good enough reason to assume a politicized identity of some sort. Mohanty feels that identity is being produced for example by action of writing. African feminism lives though narratives of women who have chosen to call themselves African feminists. (Mohanty 1991, 333-334.) This is also how I chose to draw the line in who can be considered as an African feminist and also who I can study in this role. Political consciousness can be found through the practice of storytelling and from the act of writing.

According to Mohanty third world women are the most exploited people in the world because of the colonialist history. The effects of colonial policies and institutions have been a big influence in creating patriarchies and in making hegemonic middle-classed cultures in colonized areas. In the process of building colonial rule many racial, sexual and class ideologies were born (Mohanty 1991, 335.) Not all African countries were colonized nor it is possible to make a generalization of all colonial cultures, but this kind of history brings the base for postcolonial feminist thinking. (Mohanty 1991, 336-337.) I have addressed this theme better in the chapter 4.1. This chapter is about western influences in the development of African patriarchy.

The same point that I came across during my research many times is that Western feminism overlooks the colonialist tradition that has influenced the African continent in a profound manner. African feminists also argue that the western kind of critique to patriarchy is not suitable as such for Africa. This is because western feminism is working in alliance with liberalism. Good example of the fear for the traditional feminist liberalism is the fear of rejection of maternal roles. African feminists feel that western feminism is not accepting African traditions when they for example emphasize the importance of women's freedom of choice and at the same time are in the favor of rejection of marriage and motherhood. This in the worst case scenario might affect the societal relationships and kindship traditions profoundly in the African continent, and for example shape the identity of motherhood.

The whole point of African feminism is to be critical of the usual western gender concepts and not to take them as given, because many times they are male bias. The subject of motherhood and other kinship relations are the main argument points of many African feminists. In my research I have tightly linked this to the theme of cultural relativism. For example in the west motherhood is respected, but it also can be seen as a sacrifice and an obstacle in women's life. In Africa the position of the mother is a position of authority itself. Motherhood is actually empowering and not disempowering as it is seen in the west. (Arnfred 2002, 7-9.) How this is illustrated though combination of cultural relativism and feminism is better explained in the chapter number 4.3. Theorist like Oyeronke Oyewumi have criticized and questioned the differences between the role of motherhood, very notion of woman and the difference of kinship terminology between Africa and the west. The kinship terms in many African cultures are actually gender neutral and that is why gender equality by western standards is not consistent in Africa. As an example seniority is much more significant sign of hierarchy than gender in many African societies. In Africa in many cultures being mother is the most crucial position that a woman can have. Western feminism can be blamed to see motherhood as confiding factor as within the patriarchal system that affects the hierarchy of the society. The change in the tradition of motherhood is not the only fear, but actually the cultural critique fears that the whole foundational ideology of African women might change while motherhood and its meaning is being questioned. Question of liberal motherhood also has a potential to hypocrisy. While western women are able to enter the working life and begin to earn money for themselves, they need someone to take care of their children. This change is many times and in many societies made possible by the labor of poorly paid nonwhite women. So the escape from domesticity needs socioeconomic structures that are many times missing from the African continent. (Oyewumi 2003.)

The difficulty to bring and locate feminist theory within the context of African women has produced a conversation that could be simplified as a debate between the global standards and local values. Especially this conversation is relevant in the human rights discourse. At the same time the theoretical concerns are not relevant for the feminists in the African content, because women are facing live threading situations and living in economic difficulties. This is a misleading but an understandable prejudice among some African feminist actors. Reasons like this have brought mistrust among African feminist movement towards the western feminism. Western feminism is too privileged and

bourgeois to understand African feminist issues. Furthermore, according to African feminism western feminism has a utopian idea of homogenous sisterhood. This feminist north-south debate that I am basing my whole research to is about highlighting geography and economic development as well as factors like race and class as important intersections that truly impact black women's experiences of discrimination.

2.0 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter I will introduce my theoretical framework in the general level because I find it advisable to do before my analysis chapters (chapters 4 and 5). The basis of my theory is the theory of political identity and two of the main theorist whose outlooks on identity politics I have used are Harriet Bradley and Manuel Castells. On top of this I have combined into my theory the terms: culture relativism and the concept of freedom. My aim in my whole research is to study how African feminist forum builds and expresses its political identity in relation to traditional western feminist identity. Beside this big question I wanted to see how aware and conscious AFF is about the two other themes (that I have chosen to observe) in their identity.

2.1 identity politics

I made a presupposition as mentioned already that African feminist activists share a political identity. I tried to conceptualize this shared identity by trying to understand where it comes from. I was not that interested to know about the historical background of African feminism nor am I interested to know in a cultural anthropologist way where the "African sisterhood" is coming from. My interest was in the politics of that identity. I wanted to see how this shared identity is being produced and how is it used. By identity I mean the way how an individual or a group becomes distinctive (Bradley 1996, 24). Harriet Bradley in her book *Fractured identities* writes that it is highly important for people to feel that they are a part of a group which they have something in common with and also they have to be able to tell that group apart from other groups. Identity is at the same time your very own personal place in the universe and also how you interact with others in that universe through social connections. By understanding your own identity it is crucial to tell apart your identity from other identities. Identity

needs otherness. Bradley writes that identities become political when identity gives a strong base for a political activity and when individuals see themselves through this identity. (Bradley 1996, 25, 27.)

Political identity is also a collective identity. It is how certain group self-comprehend themselves as a way to do politics of a certain nature. (Bradley 1996, 25.) African feminist movement is not a traditional political movement that is trying to influence people by the means of traditional political actions like forming a party or taking part in representative democracy. The base of political action in African feminism comes from activism that is why I felt that political identity can be found from African feminist writings.

People's identities are formed by the social changes and as a result of those changes people find their sense of social belonging from various places. The defining factors can be race, gender, class, kinship, age or for example marital status. When identity is drawn from much broader range of sources it also gets fragmented. I wanted to study how African feminist identity is combination of all those roles and factors mentioned earlier. Gender and the race are the obvious factors but I presumed that kinship, marital status and for example class also have an important role in the identity building because of the strong cultural relativist influence. (Bradley 1996, 24.)

There is a clear distinction between personal identity and social identity. First of them is a study field for psychologists and the second more to the social sciences. Personal Identity according to Bradley refers to the construction of the self that is formed from all of your personal experiences. Social identity is a little more narrow way of seeing identity and it refers to the way that we as individuals and the people around us locate ourselves within the society where we live in. This social identity is formed by all the various relationships that we engage in during our lives. Those relationships form us for example through the dynamics of inequality. (Bradley 1996, 25.)

There is distinction between passive, active and politicized identity. (Bradley 1996, 24). I searched from my research material how African feminist identity is being politicized through activism and how that activism is being encouraged by AFF. Aini Linjakumpu in her book *Political Islam in the Global World* writes that it is more meaningful in her study to concentrate at what kind of processes there are behind the politicization of a certain identity/identities than for example on the power structures that are behind that

politicization. I used the same logic for my research because it would not have been meaningful to find a reason why African feminist identity exists as such. In her study Linjakumpu does not assume that there is Islamic identity as a given or that everyone in a Muslim-country would see Islam as source of an identity. In the same way I cannot make this kind of generalization in my research. Not every woman identifies herself as a feminist and certainly not an African feminist although she lives on the African continent and represents female sex. Linjakumpu sees that Islamic-identity is a result of processes, events and circumstances that varies from time to time and from a place to place. That is also how I see African feminist identity. (Linjakumpu 1999, 75.)

Politicized identity is formed when chosen identity provides a more solid and constant base for peoples actions and when people actively think of themselves in terms of that identity. Political identity needs a political action. At the passive level we have all our potential identities. Active identity comes from our consciousness and influences how we act. Through our active identity we also define ourselves as members of a certain croup. Politicized identity is the radical part of these three. This kind of identity influences how we act according to things that determine our identity. This kind of identity also defines how we act in long-term. For example an African feminist activist might have a passive identity of being female, mother, middle aged, social activist, African and so on. The politicized identity is the one that activates her. Different kind of levels of identity work simultaneously and they can exist at the same time without being exclusionary to each other. (Bradley 1996, 25-26.)

Political identity and collective identity are very close terms to each other, because collective self-understanding can be a factor behind political actions. So when people's passive identities get politicized (by an outside force) it is the base for their collective identity. (Linjakumpu 1999, 63.) Identity is always also formed by definition that comes from outside, not only from how we see ourselves. Unwanted identity that comes from outside can many times be denied or at least there is an effort to deny it, when it is seen unfit. (Linjakumpu 1999, 70-71.) In my research this unwanted identity is linked to the question of African culture and culture relativism. AFF tries to make stereotypically unfit identity to disappear by promoting the good influences of African culture heritage.

Manuel Castells definition of identity is similar to ones mentioned above. He understands identity as a process where meanings are being constructed on the basis of cultural attributes. Those meanings are somehow superior or more meaningful to other

meanings and this gives individual or collective actors their identity. People may have various identities and this can become a source of contradiction if the identity is not properly distinguished from "roles". Those roles according to Castells are for example: mother, father, employer, neighbor, football player and so on. (Castells 1997, 6) These roles are defined by social norms that come from institutions and organizations of society. How these roles influence people's behavior is based on arrangements between individuals and those institutions. Identity is easy to tell apart from a role according to Castells because identities are itself the sources of meaning for the actors themselves. There are exceptions. Identities are formed when they are being embraced by social actors and when these social actors internalize them and their new meanings. Roles sort out how we function and identities give meaning to those functions. (Castell 2010, 6-7)

According to Castells there are three ways how identities are born. Those three types of identities are: Legitimized identity, resistance identity and project identity. Of course these three types can evolve so that an identity that is born as a project identity may be turned into a legitimized identity, but at the ground level there are clear differences. According to Castells legitimizing identity is introduces by a dominant institution in a society. This means a civil society, consisting of organizations, institutions and social actors that reproduce the identity that rationalize the sources of structural domination. Resistance identity in the other hand comes from actors who find themselves from the position of being devalued or stigmatized by the logic of domination. This means that this kind of identity can find its strength and existence from the resistance and survival basis on principles that are either different from or even opposed to the ones of the dominant institutions of the society. (Castells 1997, 8.) Resistance identity comes from collective resistance against oppression. This oppression is usually based on identity defined by history, geography or biology, which makes the distinction easier to comprehend. The third form that is called project identity produces subjects. African feminist identity also bears similarity to the project identity at least in this study where I am studying the political identity of AFF. Castells explains project identity in a way that social actors with the help of various cultural materials construct a new identity that redefines their position in the society. This kind of identity can also be born basis of oppressed identity but the difference is the willingness to transform the whole social structure. (Castells 1997, 9-10.)

According to Jean-François Staszak otherness is a way to choose a criterion that divides humanity into two groups. One that considers itself to be a norm and the other that is defined by the groups faults and potentially discriminated against. (Staszak 2008, 1). The dominant group that has the power to make another groups seen as the others is in the position where it can impose the criterion. As an clear example of a apparent case is how during the colonatization westerners started calling and by thus stigmatizing residents of the colonized countries as the others, barbarians or people of colour. Otherness is a powerfull tool in making of politiziced identity. For the otherness to be born there is a need for divide between the ” in-group ” ant the “out-group”. In-group represents” Us” and ”the self” and the out-group is consisted of people who might be considered to be called “them” or the “other”. In-group makes a divide and wants to emphasize the difference between the groups in the base of real or imagined differences. When the out-group has been formed the in-group has composed itself an identity. Staszak argues that Idenity and otherness are two sides of a one coin. (Staszak 2008, 1-2.)

Othering (as the process is also called) is present everywhere in the world. All groups naturally value themselves and want to distinguesh themselves from the others (Staszak 2008, 4). African feminism sees that african women represent double minority. This is because they are seen as the other by men and the patriarchy but also by the western feminism (Arnfred 2001). While conducting a believebel poltical identity they also want to make it clear who are the others to them. For African feminist forum the otherness is two-folded. It is consisted of the need to vilanize the western feminism and western feminist standards and at the same time clearly stating the thread that is coming from within the society .

2.2 Culture relativism

Second key element in my research questions was the connection between African feminist identity and culture relativism. I wanted to study if culture relativist principles have real effect in African feminist activism. My aim was to study if cultural relativism plays a part in the “otherness” of African feminism which defines African feminism as a political identity. The subtle constraints of culture have to be taken into account. All the cultural norms, like language, customs and ethical norms are not just made by people so

that they can act and behave in a manner that they please. Cultural norms are the way how we define human identity. Feminists like to think that identity is a social construction that is many times gender-differentiated and those differenced contribute to women's subordination.

The term cultural relativism means that a culture should be understood in its own rights and in its own terms. It is the opposite of ethnocentrism that Chandra Mohanty criticizes (Mohanty 1991, 333). Ethnocentrism in its extreme means a belief where one's culture is superior or the best of all the possible cultures. That is what western feminism is accused to be doing by African feminists. Cultural relativism has an aim to understand cultures as products of the people who live within the culture. The relationship between the culture and people is dialogical, with people creating changes in the culture while simultaneously understanding their world through cultural definitions and symbols. (Renteln, 1988, 56-58.)

In history feminists and cultural relativists have not been able to get along. For example when it comes to questions about human rights these two groups often find themselves from the opposite sides of the argument. Question of "harmful cultural practices" is the most serious area of clash for feminists and cultural relativists and it is also the topic that interested me in this research. The term harmful cultural practices indicates practices performed in (non-western) cultures which to the outsiders eye, harm or disadvantage women, but which are meaningful for the culture. These kinds of practices are for example pre-natal sex selection, child marriage, polygamy or circumcision. (Brems 1997, 145-146.) By the standards of cultural relativism those practices are not harmful if people inside the culture don't criticize them. Or in the other hand if the harm is recognized it is justified or compensated in the wider cultural context. Traditional feminism has a legacy to refuse to accept these traditions because it is considered that the culture that produces these practices is male created and male dominated. Culture and religion is regarded by suspicion with feminists because those are seen as spheres of male dominance and female suppression. (Brems 1997, 147-148.)

Cultural relativists argue that human rights as a whole are a product of dominant western parts of the world. Especially culture relativism is known to recognize the fact that human rights historically and conceptually reflect western values. For example in many non-western cultures people don't define themselves as autonomous individuals, but instead they feel that they have a status of being members of larger group or a

community, such as family, tribe, class, nation or other group. In these cases the human rights for a specific individual are not significant when the greater good of the group is still fulfilled. Being a member of a family or a tribe is also many times tightly linked to gender relations. The contradictions is that being an autonomous individual is a big part of how people feel themselves free and one of the key aims of traditional feminist emancipation. (Brems 1997, 144-145.)

African feminists wish for a broader conception of feminism, one which would recognize on the one hand the African historical experience of imperialism combined with patriarchy and on the other hand the contemporary divergent cultural context within which feminism must be situated. This means that feminism should try to get rid of it stereotypical views of other cultures. For example when it comes to harmful cultural practices African feminism does not approve them all, but wants to speak about them and study them in a different and non-condescending way. (Brems 1997, 154-155.)

Jack Donnelly has divided cultural relativism into two extreme positions. These are called: radical cultural relativism and radical universalism. For cultural relativism culture is the only source of validity and moral right. For universalism culture is irrelevant when it comes to moral rights. This means that for strong culture relativism rights and values are culturally predetermined. For a weaker version of culture relativism culture maybe an important source for moral rights, but the idea of universality is weak. (Donnelly 2007, 401-402.) Donnelly argues that radical universalism is dangerous because of moral imperialism. In order to stick to the universality of moral rights universalism has to give priority to one higher moral community. In the case of my research this is the western world and western values. Universalists human rights are based on the assumption that all humans have universal nature. But the "human nature" is also a social product on top of being natural one. That is why Donnelly feels that the cultural variability of human nature requires variations in human rights when it comes to cross-cultural situations. (Donnelly 2007, 403.)

Donnelly argues that there are at least few cross culturally valid moral values. Like the need not to torture people and the basic idea of legal procedures before executing a punishment. Versions of these can be found almost in all the cultures. Of course the practices and meanings are various. Radical cultural relativism still can deny the existence of human rights and argue that the notion of human rights can make claims

against states and societies and threads their sovereignty and self-determination. (Donnelly 2007, 405) Few if any states make argument that they are not respecting human rights or that they have alternative mechanism to guarantee human dignity. This is the case also when the actions of the state speak a different story. Donnelly writes that the modernization or "westernization" has made changes in traditional communities and in traditional ways of guaranteeing human dignity. Traditional political power doesn't work as well in modern circumstances. For this reason some basic human rights for Donnelly seem necessary more than optional. African feminism argues that traditional African way and cultural customs actually do protect for example the rights of the women in many communities, but the disturbing influences (for example westernizations or religious fundamentalism) that have arrived to Africa through time have influenced this delegate balance of gender equality in some traditional African communities. (Donnelly 2007, 404-406.)

For feminism the biggest issues with foreign practices and for example the "harmful cultural practices" such as child marriage or female genital mutilation are the moral questions connected to them and the vagueness of those moral statements. Donnelly has his own scale how to evaluate those practices. Donnelly makes a divide to "internal" and "external" evaluations. Internal judgment means that a practice can be defended in the basic value framework of that specific community or society. This means that some practices can be defended against universalistic criticism. The external evaluation means that the evaluator has to take in the consideration if a certain practice can or should be defended, all things considered. Strong relativists have a strong reliance on internal evaluations. If one wants to respect autonomous moral communities the internal evaluation is according to Donnelly a better way to go, so even the choice between internal and external evaluation is an important moral choice. According to Donnelly we can make a generalization that more important the practice is within particular culture the more it is judged by internal standards. These standards can be questioned only by very strong external judgments. (Donnelly 2007, 408-410.) This is a huge generalization and cannot be implemented in all the cases but it made an interesting point for my study also. I have written how AFF speaks about internal judgment in its writing at the chapter number 4.2.

Donnelly sees a danger in a way that culture relativism can be used as a weapon to assure masses about the dualistic nature of the word for example in the third world

countries. This kind of reasoning and pleading to self-determination is a mighty tool against outside interfering. Donnelly uses an example where "some African leaders have even resorted to picking out certain elements of traditional African culture to assure the masses. Despite what is said this frequently has nothing to do with a return to positive authentic dimensions of African traditions" (Donnelly 2007, 412). This is a stance that I have not further studied in my research but it is tightly linked to the dynamics of identity building and how powerful tool culture relativism actually is in endorsing peoples politicized identities.

I chose to single out one topic out of my research material which is many times mentioned in the AFF publications and which has also special interest for me. This topic is FGM (female genital mutilation). Why I chose to give so much attention to this question is because I feel that this specific question and the arguments around it bring together all the aspects of my research. It is tightly linked to culture relativism and to the concepts of freedom. Article: *Searching for "Voices": Feminism, Anthropology, and the Global Debate over Female Genital Operations* written by Christine J. Walley elaborates how the issue of female genital manipulation is one of the things that strongly divides this world in the level of ideas to a first world and a third world. The question of Female genital operations (as this article calls them) is tightly linked to the question of universality of human rights. And the ways how these rights exclude or include women. The issue of naming female genital mutilation as a mutilation, torture, operation or circumcision is highly political on itself. I feel that FGM, the conversation around FGM and how African feminist forum itself talks about it is a key example of the ways of building the African feminist identity as something separate from traditional feminism. (Walley 1997, 406-407.)

The term "tradition" is many times linked to oppression. Walley links FGM with freedom and asks if a "tribal customs" like for example FGM make a person unfree, when the persons who have gone through FGM itself actually have answered to an anthropologist that they prefer to have the operation. The question is complex in many ways, but Walley feels that the problem is that collective culture is seen as less relevant than rights of an individual. Countries at north and sub-Saharan Africa are many times seen as tradition-bound societies that are oppressed by culture. As an opposite western institutions are seen as rational and culture-free which also have the western medicine on their side to back them up. This binary distinction between "rational west and the

cultural rest" is a strong paradigm. Walley does not want to dispute the serious health consequences of FGM but she sees a disconnection between how other health hazards that women in third world countries face like lack of clean water, the question of food safety or for example inadequate healthcare do not gather the same kind of attention from western feminism. Even though, same women may be suffering from all the previously mentioned problems on top of her challenges with female genital operations. (Walley 1997, 421-422.)

2.3 Concept of freedom

Reason for taking the concept of freedom as an assisting and supporting concept to complement my theoretical framework comes from postcolonial feminist critique that states that traditional feminism sees third world women as unfree. Freedom is seen as part of modernity and third world women are not seen as unmodern. In the chapter number 1.4 called "introduction to African feminism and postcolonial feminism" I have made an effort to specify this juxtaposition and to explain the contradiction inside the issue. In the chapter number 5.3 I have explained how AFF itself defines freedom in African women's life and how freedom is reasoned in the writing of African feminist forum.

 AFF writes that western women are oppressing them by telling them that they are unfree and subordinated. I wanted to study if freedom can be understood in various ways and if those ways would actually work as a reinforcing tool for identity building. Because of this presupposition I decided to use the thoughts on freedom borrowed from Michel Foucault. For him the question of freedom is linked to question of subject. He has written against views of an abstract freedom and free subject. As a basis for my theoretical framework concerning the concept of freedom and for my analysis I used examples from researchers from the field of gender studies that have made interpretations of Foucault's texts.

Susan Hekman has argued that Foucault's ideas about subjectivity are useful for feminist thinking and especially to postmodern feminist thinking. Hekman explains that this is because Foucault's way of seeing freedom is able to set aside the dichotomy between autonomous and active subject versus a subject that is determined by external circumstances. (Oksala 2002, 18-19.)This kind of thinking is fruitful for feminism

because it leaves open the questions of subject's capacity for resistance, self-reflection and criticism (Oksala 2002, 19).

Foucault's thoughts of freedom are linked to the theory of bio-power. For him in the development of capitalism bio-power has had a big role. Oksala explains that for Foucault the controlling of populations and their bodies was crucial so that the economic development and capitalism would work. I have no need to go too deep in the concept of bio-power in the framework of this thesis, because it is wide, fascinating and multifaceted entirety. For my research bio-power brings a valid approach in a manner that bio-power can be seen in action in that normalizing judgment that western feminism and African feminism are blaming for each other. For Foucault the biopower is a way of power to identify with the help of scientific criteria what is normal. These norms regulate women's life in how they behave as mothers, daughters, wives and for example how they see their bodies. These norms are very different when we compare western traditional feminism and the African feminism, which brings a contradiction. (Oksala 2002, 207-208.)

Foucault argues that biopower comes into being as the states begin to use new technologies and discourses of health, birth, mortality, and demography as mechanisms of regulatory power to exercise control over populations. Traditional feminist standards are one form of that power. It has been used in the macro level on the population and in the micro level to individuals and to their bodies. This power is used to regulate third world women. For Foucault power presupposes freedom in a way that a person is able to choose from a variety of possibilities. That freedom to choose means what it is to be free. So freedom is not an opposite of power, but it is in a way its precondition. According to Oksala Foucault has detached freedom from the subject and instead attached it with practices and to forms of experiences. (Oksala 2002, 258-259.) Feminism is not "transversal". The differences between women have been forgotten and the view point of traditional feminism belongs to a white, middle classed, and urban woman. This way western feminism makes other feminisms minorities. Foucauldian feminism makes an effort to see through these problems that have their origin in the enlightment. By this it is meant that there is no need to find general, all-encompassing principles which can be applied to everyone. At the same time principles for definition of freedom vary. This is exactly what is meant with the term transversal. (Macleod & Durrheim 2002.)

For Foucault the government is all around us in our daily lives and how we are governed also affects how we perceive our freedom. For a layman and in everyday life one would presume that government and the freedom are each other's opposites. Freedom is the liberation and one`s ability to do what he pleases without restrain. Why I then wanted to study how freedom is argued by AFF? It is because postcolonial feminism claims that for traditional western feminism only one kind of freedom is dominant and the ways to understand and exercise that freedom exclude other options. Traditional western kind of freedom has a history and that history still effects what we take for freedom these days.

2.4 Method

As a research method I used content analysis. I went about this by using the theory-based method and I analyzed my research material with the perspective that comes from the theory. This means that the theory strongly influenced, or actually even dictated, the angle which I took towards research data. I was planning to do this so that the theory would help me to form my research questions and my analytical units that I wanted to use. By using this method I was able to go through the material and find the topics that were interesting to my research by collecting and classifying them from the material by the help of the predetermined analytical units. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009.)

The reason why I chose the theory-based approach was that I felt that the material at itself did not give me clear answers but that the questions from the theory were actually governing my process of thought while I was choosing which questions I should ask from my material. For this reason I emerged the theory in the analysis already at the beginning of the process. I got help and advice to make this decision from the book *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi* by Tuomi and Sarajärvi. I felt that this was right and simple method for my research and for this kind of material that is easy to read and is written in a manner that wants to make the message clear and understandable to the reader. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2012, 115-118.)

The questions that I made to the material were: How does the material talk about identity? How is freedom explained in the material? And is culture relativism present in the African feminist thinking? These questions were at the same time simple and too broad. These three questions made up for the three basic analytical units for my

research. And the sentences or sentence groups that I had chosen to place inside of them made up my basic units for my analysis. In the second part of my analysis I divided the questions into smaller units or sub-units. These sub-units had their base in the sub-research questions. After making the rough division to analytical units the labelling of the subunits was much more effortless with the help of certain key words. Under the theme of political identity those key works were: Intersectionality, otherness, enemies, sisterhood, agency and activism. To the second chapter that was about cultural relativism key words were: western standards, universal human rights and culture as strength. As an extra I also made a third subunit called freedom. The last section had the key words: Freedom to, Freedom from patriarchy, subject, autonomy and emancipation as freedom. As the work progressed I decided to submerge the theme of freedom under the chapter of culture relativism because on its own I felt it was too narrow and a bit indifferent for the whole research. Sub-units in the end helped to me to divide the text into logical chapters and dictated the structure of the analysis chapters.

The method I used left me enough room for my interpretations but also guided my proses of though when I was struggling to link my observations to a bigger picture. Many times basic units were unambiguous and I had to make many fundamental but fickle decisions already at early on in the process. This was possible because some sentences could also have been placed in other analytical units than I have classified them. This was technical challenge for me which cannot have been avoided as a whole. I found a resolution to this issue by combining things to bigger analytical units that had basic units from different themes. Those kinds of "upper" analytical units ended up being for example "illustrations of intersectionality", "autonomous subject and human rights" and "double otherness". I feel that the process was done in the manner of admissible academic research analysis without forgetting the fact that the pursuit for total objectivity in a research of this kind would have been impossible and absurd. (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2012.)

3.0 SISTERHOOD AS A POLITICAL IDENTITY

My first argument how I started to perceive African feminist political identity was that African feminist thinking has a clear sense of cohesion among those women who are recognized as African feminists and who call themselves African feminist. On top of this I presumed that African feminists have a clear sense of who they are "up against" and different from. Theorists who have written about politicization of a certain identity many times concentrate on this division between the allies and the enemies. See (Bradley 1996), see also (Castell 2010). The whole concept of identity is more or less based on these distinctions. Key question is: Who we consider to be one of us and who is definitely not. I found illustrations of this kind of mentality from my research material. I divided the basic units from my material concerning political identity into three separate sub-units. From the firs unit I found a clear statement of intersectional nature of African feminism.

3.1 Intersectionality: Multiple identities are greater than the sum of its part.

Intersectionality is a concept used in gender studies to describe ways how many oppressive institutions like sexism, racism, xenophobia or for example homophobia are many times somehow interconnected. When one form of oppression is being studied the others cannot be forgotten. In the field of feminism intersectionality was produced by the third wave of feminism as a way to make feminism more inclusive to all women regardless of their various backgrounds. (Crenshaw 1989, 1241-1242.) In this chapter I claim that intersectionality is a big part of how African feminism tells itself apart from other groups. African feminism uses intersectionality as a way to explain how this unique form of activism has been born and what the base of their unique identity is. From my research material I noticed that it is highly important for African feminist not only to call themselves feminists but especially African feminists. It is also crucial to acknowledge all the identities that have an effect on the background of common African feminist identity.

The term intersectionality was first introduced to gender studies by Kimberlé Crenshaw at year 1989 in the article called: *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color*. Crenshaw criticized identity politics of ignoring differences inside a certain group. Identity politics according to Crenshaw are

way too much concentrated on how to find the differences and similarities that help to conceive a certain group. In the article Crenshaw concentrates on the thread of violence on women's life which works as a brilliant example of intersectionality. The odds for women to face violence at their lifetime are many times connected to their other identities like race and class etc. The problem is that these different identities are ignored as affecting reasons inside a certain group and because of this the analysis can be left void and superficial. (Crenshaw 1989, 1242-1243.)

In the case of African feminism this fear of superficial understanding of the struggles of African women can for example be seen in these quotations from my research material:

> Current struggles as African feminists are inextricably linked to our past as continents diverse pre-colonial contexts, slavery, colonization, liberation struggles, neo-colonialism, globalization, etc. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 7)

> African feminist theory has also been influenced by the socio-economic realities of the African continent and its historical marginalization and exclusion. This theory therefore recognizes the influence of factors such as race, colonialism, imperialism, religion, ethnicity, culture, class and globalization on African women's experiences. It follows that it considers the multiple and intersecting layers of marginalization that African women face. (African feminist forum conference report 2010, page 8).

In these examples the different kind of factors that influence African women's identities are named and listed. The historical reasons are as much present in African women's identities as for example socio-economic reasons. Without the understanding of these various reasons at the background of identity building African women might be seen only as for example through categories of female, black and for example Muslim. This has a huge potential of ending in inaccurate conclusion according to AFF.

Nira Yuval-Davis has written in her article *Intersectionality and Feminist politics* that the base for intersectional thinking comes from the thought that black women all over the world suffer from "triple oppression". By this Yuval-Davis means that black women are discriminated and exploited because they are black, women and many times members of the working class. In the case of Africa I want to add religion to this list. Yuval-Davis questions that people would simplistically suffer oppression "as a black person" or "as a woman". (Yuval-Davis 2006, 194.) All the social divisions have more diversity behind them and because of this, peoples identities when in combined are more than their parts. It is impossible to simplify blackness, womanhood or being a

member of a working class and by making this kind of assumptions about identity politics people often dismiss the marginal members of the specific social category. As if there would be a right way to be black or a woman. (Yuval-Davis 2006, 195.)

Intersectionality is theory/"trend" within identity politics and as such a useful tool in understanding the politics of African feminist identity.   But it is also a way to do identity politics. Here is a quote from my research material to illustrate that:

> As feminists who come from/work/live in Africa, we claim the right and the space to be feminist and African. We recognize that we do not have a homogenous identity as feminists – we acknowledge and celebrate our diversities and our shared commitment to a transformatory agenda for African societies and African women in particular. This is what gives us our common feminist identity. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 7)

In this quote the organization is trying to make it clear that the common factor that is bringing the organization together and the very reason of their existence is not the shared universal feminist identity. Last sentence states that there is a common feminist identity but the root of that is in the commitment to influence women's rights in Africa by taking part in trying to bring social change to African societies.

UN, many NGOs and for example UN Commission of Human Rights have embraced the term of intersectionality and use it in many occasions. Yuval-Davis feels that this has potential to go terribly wrong. For example when intersectionality has been used as method to explain the connection between racial discrimination and gender discrimination there is a thread that structural and political intersectionality might be mixed with each other. Kimberle Crenshaw explains the distinction:

> (Structural intersectionality is) the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experiences of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women (Crenshaw, 1993, 3).

> (Political intersectionality means that) both feminist and antiracist politics have functioned in tandem to marginalize the issue of violence against women of color" (Crenshaw 1993, 3).

These different levels of analysis should be separated (Yuval-Davis 2006, 196-197.) For AFF the structural intersectionality brings a base to their identity because especially the hardships of African women are many times emphasized as being so critically different from the issues and hardships of white women. (Charter of feminist principles for

African feminist, page 7, Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 12) Political intersectionality again is present in AFF`s critique to organizations like UN who use the term in a manner that marginalizes the specific issues of African women. I have written more about this topic in the chapter 4.1.

AFF emphasizes intersectionality because it is a way to highlight the special features of their political identity. Judith Butler has criticized intersectionality of its narrowness and she feels that the list of "identities" and social divisions is limitless. Butler disapproves the "etc" in the end of the list of the social divisions that are in general mentioned by feminists. (Butler 1990, 143-144.) There are situations in history where specific social divisions are more important in shaping peoples social status and positioning in the society. Simultaneously some social divisions mentioned like gender and class, tend to have an influence in shaping most of the peoples life's in most social situations. Then again social division like being a refugee or for example indigenous person has a huge impact on that person's life, but has very little meaning in the global scale. Still the recognition of these social divisions has a crucial political importance. The construction of these social divisions is made by people and without someone pointing out the specific analytical and political features, we would not be able to recognize and distinguish them. (Yuval-Davis 2006, 202-203.) The struggle for recognition has a political importance. This is also why AFF emphasizes the intersectionality in their text.

By stressing the variety of identities among African feminists AFF makes a political statement by specifying the nature of the group that they are representing. That statement is that African feminism is more tolerant and considerate than its western counterpart. By this I mean that the plurality is more "celebrated" and seen as strength of African feminism. This "live and let live"-ideology can especially be seen in the way how African feminism tries not to pass judgment in the various ways of doing feminism even if the conventions may be seen as patriarchal or submissive by western standards. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 13.) This makes it also more challenging to find those feminist principles that would be accepted by the whole African feminist community. One of the contradictions that illustrate this problematic nature is the problem of naming. From the point of view of identity politics the intersectionality of African feminism identity is a challenge for the organization. The challenge is at the same time to acknowledge the traditional feminist legacy that they

base many of their principles on and somehow make the differences between African feminism and traditional western feminism clearly visible.

> Women's experiences are often varied, contradictory and complex; and therefore impossible to general. A starting point is acknowledging the heterogeneity and diversity and noting that in spite of geographical, age, religious, class, ethnic and other differences they are collectively marginalized; they are collectively excluded and exploited as a social group. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 6.)

> The movement needs women of diverse identities (sexual, age, race, ethnic, disabilities etc.) to lead and to ensure that ultimately the movement becomes sustainable (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 18).

The pride of being not only a feminist, but an African feminist is present in AFF`s publications (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 7). The kind of Intersectionality that explains the multiple struggles faced by average African women is also part of greater narrative that explains why African feminists should feel proud and self-aware of themselves. Writer called Molara Oqundipe-Leslie (1994) portrays African woman as someone who metaphorically carry 6 mountains on their shoulders. The mountains represent the difficulties that these women have been forced to face because of their location and history. At the same time the metaphor has an upside because the mountains are tied to women's backs so they can move from a place to place with them. In this narrative African women want to define themselves as active players, and not passive. The important factor for the narrative is that African women possess agency that makes it possible for them to speak for themselves and have influence in the surrounding society. This kind of strengthening narrative is crucial for identity building of nation states, but it also plays a role in this kind of politicized identity like African feminist identity. (Gqola 2001, 11-13.)

3.2 Naming themselves feminists

> We have multiple and varied identities as African feminist. We are African women, we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, and our focus is on the lives of African women on this continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "ifs", "buts" or "however". We are feminist. Full stop. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 4).

> We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics… …work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminist places us in the clear ideological position (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 4).

For AFF the process of naming themselves has been political. As mentioned before, members of the group use various terms like feminism, womanism, black feminism and African feminism because of the different connotations of those names and the meaning that they bring. Still as a group they have chosen to use feminism, as is clearly stated in the quote above. In my research I still found some unwillingness inside the organization to use the word feminist. This is according to them because there has been no clear sense and understanding of what feminism means. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 18).

Naming themselves feminist binds the organization into a bigger global feminist group. This brings grief to the organization because AFF does not necessary want to identify itself entirely with that group. Naming that comes from the oppressor feels like a setback. An article called, *Ufanele Uqavile: Blackwomen, Feminisms and Postcoloniality in Africa* written by Pumla Dineo Gqola states that the process of being named from above has had generally damaging consequences in the history. For example names like "non-white", "ethnic", "native", "colored", "third world" or "colonies" are reality for many people of color. Those names bring controversy and have raised irritation by the named groups. These names make people of color outsiders. Gqola writes that language is a powerful tool and that naming can be subversive. This is the reason also why the term feminism with its bad connotations has had rivalries like for example womanism.

Womanism as a term was first used by an author and poet Alice walker. She first used the term "womanist" in her book, *In Search of our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. The main point of womanism is not gender inequality, but race and class-based oppression. The African womanism also claims that feminism will never be right frame of reference for black women due to the implications of prejudice and slavery. Alice Walker has self-explained that she came up with the term because she didn't just want to add color to term, like for example calling herself black feminist. She wanted to be seen without the straight reference to race in the name of the ideology. Walker did not want to critique existing names, but she feels that womanism as a name for the way of thinking is a better way to bring race and class issues heard (Alexander-Floyd & Simien

2006). Terms like postcolonial feminist, black feminist, womanist and African feminist as labels are ambiguous. Still self-naming is beneficial for the politics of the identity because it is helping to generate a new identity (Gqola 2001, 16-17).

Many of the African women writers have rejected the term "feminism" although on the western standards we would clearly like to see them as such. One example is Mariama Bâ and her famous semi-autobiographical novella called *So long a letter*. The book has appreciation of being an African feminist classic with a story that follows the life of a Senegalese Muslim widow and her struggle to come in terms with her identity as an individual but also with the collective identities of women inside and outside of her socio-cultural environment. The book is a good example of how feminist activism has a tradition being done through arts and writing. I wanted to bring up this book also in this study although it is a fictional book. This is because I came across with the opus during my studies in the University of Addis Ababa and I found out that it has been commented and contemplated over by several African feminist activists (see Edwin 2009). It is a good example of the politics of naming yourself feminist and why the African feminist identity searches to have its own specific features.

In the case of Mariama Bâ the biggest reason why she rejected feminism as a word and what that word represent is religion. Bâ feels that feminism is not in line with her Muslim identity because feminism stands for that kind of western modernity that has huge contradictions with Muslim way of living. The main character in the book finds it difficult to combine the idea of bringing up her children in an equal and tolerant manner without exposing them to all the things that are linked to a modern gender-equal lifestyle. Western understanding of women's positions in Muslim societies is many times based on the lack of information. (Habib Latha 2001, 34.) Bâ in her writing tries to make it heard how gender is actually articulated in her society and how the contradictions between religious practices should be clarified. She feels that religion in itself is not oppressing women but at the same time she does criticize some aspects that Muslim-faith brings to her life and for example the tradition of polygamy. Great example of characters struggle as mother in the book is when the main character is confronted with a problem of her teenage daughters acting out on grounds of new cultural dilemmas. The character states: "Does it mean that one can't have modernism without a lowering of moral standards". This is why Bâ writes that this specific position towards feminism should be comprehended. For the book intersectionality is a real

strength and a vital condition for characters own identity. (Habib Latha 2001, 35-36.) Habib Latha writes that generalizations that are not historically definite and able to response to multiple realities should not be made. The facts around women's disempowerment should be understood in a certain context and there should be culturally-specific comprehension of how women are positioned in the post-colonial societies. This means that we should also understand their position towards feminism. (Habib Latha 2001, 23-24.)

 The other big issue with western feminist paradigm is how it relays on liberalism. This brings problems to many African feminist thinkers like Bâ. One of the reasons is how public/private divide plays such an important role in the western feminist thinking. This divide is anything but clear and simple for African feminist agenda. More so the problem comes from the difficulty of defining the boundaries of state regulation in the private sphere (by this I refer to the issues of motherhood and religious customs, that are tightly linked to the people's lives on private sphere, but also regulated by the public sphere). Liberal strong belief on the concept of individuals own choice or voluntariness to define the boundaries of the private sphere many times leave moving ground to patriarchal power within the private sphere. In other words the freedom of choice is always linked to culture and context. It is not faire or politically neutral to make assumptions on behalf of others what are their experiences of inequality.

3.3 Otherness and enemies

> The effect of this is to impose on each other the accusation that we are outside this community or that we have this single identity defined for us from outside. There is a whole erosion of the legitimacy of the multiple identities that we all have. We may all belong to a particular ethnic or religious community. But we may also belong to a community that defines itself for example as the feminist community. The ways in which we construct our composite identities out of these multiple possibilities is increasingly being eroded by this growth on fundamentalism. We need to protect these multiple identities. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 22).

In this chapter I will go through the actors and operators that AFF sees as a thread and who represents otherness to the organization. I found three different kind of otherness from my material and in this chapter I will explain how that otherness is being reasoned

and what might be the reason why these parties are seen as enemies and why they are vilified.

Otherness is linked to the ability to define own negative features. As simplified this means that our stereotypes and ideas of the other groups have to have some attributes and features that we do not want for our own group. This is the social function of otherness. (Harle 1994, 232; Harle 2000, 4-5.) In my research those negative attributes are listed as a way to do feminism in a wrong way or as something that harms feminist agenda. Social function of otherness brings continuity to identity. It is easier and more secure to stick to one identity when you have a clear picture of what you are not representing and you can name your enemies. Giddens sees this function as a form of ontological safety. Ontological safety reassures us that the values that we live by and the world that we experience around us actually feel authentic. (Giddens 1990, 92 – 100.) This ontological safety helps to "gather the groups" or in this case to reassure the group that what their agenda is up against. The mental images of otherness can be very negative and stereotypically evil. It is useful for the identity building to think of the others as the bad and yourself and your group as good. The most negative images that we have of the others are called enemy images. In the case of AFF it is quite hard to draw straight lines when the others become enemies. This is because there are also "positive others". Those are clearly different from us but whose existence does not harm or threaten us in any way. I found both kind of otherness from my research material and this will be explained better later. The social function of otherness in identity building doesn't need the otherness to be based on strong enemy images, but enemy pictures are a strong and definitely an efficient tool for identity building. This is also the reason why they are so commonly used. (Harle 1994, 233.)

The first otherness that could be found and named from my research material is **1) traditional western feminism.** AFF wants to inform others how there is wrong kind of feminism for the African feminist purposes. The tension and the issues that African feminism has with traditional western feminism have been already shortly explained in the chapter number 1.4. Traditional feminism is seen as a thread because it is as an impediment for the African feminist cause. The principles and the issues have differences that AFF feels to be crucial. Those differences make African feminism "invisible" and as such undermine the AFF: s cause.

It is also vital to foreground working from a solid knowledge base. Whilst we recognize that much has been done, it is also true that it tends to be invisibilised, even to us, by the Eurocentric and patriarchal nature of the academy. Thus the need to reclaim the tools that African (and other) feminists have evolved to help us work with from a grounded, rigorous knowledge base is critical ("Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum 2006, page 7)

African women are also struggling to use their common history, to protest against a universal assumption of women's issues which negates their experiences and marginalizes them further by making them invisible as agents of change. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 10).

The invisibility that AFF claims African feminists to suffer from means that African feminism has been pushed into a marginal where it has hard time finding its footing. This kind of invisibility is an outcome from an evolution of feminism where the history and the experiences of African women have not been taken into consideration in the process of forming feminist theories. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 6). I understood from my research material that AFF insinuate that this is being done if not with an intention to dismiss African feminist efforts, but at least out of thoughtlessness. This is a strong claim and as such a good example of the otherness of the group. AFF argues that there is clear friction between these groups' intentions.

Enemies and hostility are an extreme form of otherness as mentioned before. In this case the otherness has a purpose to enhance the differences between these two strains of thought. The term enemy brings to our attention how we and them have an inoperative relationship and either a clear conflicts or continuous thread of a conflict. In the case of traditional western feminism the conflict is not a clear thread but the emphasis is on how inoperative the relationship between them is because of the inequalities. How we see our enemies tells a lot about how we see ourselves because many times we want to see the opposite characters. In the end our enemies and hostile images are there to justify that conflict. (Harle 2000, 15.)

The other named thread and otherness that African feminist forum is painting up to be the villain and impediment for African feminist cause, is the **2) religious fundamentalism** inside the African communities. By this they mean groups that are either openly in war or just causing other kind of turbulence in the African continent from the perspective of trying to strengthen the situation of their specific religious community by fundamental and extreme measures. The rise of many fundamentalist

groups has become a real issue in the African continent. These groups are a real thread for already gained women's rights and for gender equal development (Ruthven 2004). Religious fundamentalism can also be linked to the first mentioned form of otherness which was traditional western feminism. The difference is crucial in how these two very different kinds of enemies are encountered. Still the thread like religious fundamentalism can be seen as collaborator of traditional western feminist agenda. This is because they actually back up the condescending way to see third world women as oppressed and uncivilized. This is seen as a fault of western feminism in the eyes of African feminism. (Mohanty 1991, 335-337.)

Religious fundamentalism is a broad term and various kinds of groups and organizations have been described as such. As a concept, religious fundamentalism has been in the general knowledge since the 1970s, peculiarly by the mass media, to describe numerous, diverse, religious and political movements around the globe. The term many times is used to describe groups or movements that try to object modernity and in same time strongly feel that their religions most sacred morals and laws are in danger to become compromised. (Caplan 1987.)

AFF writes that religious fundamentalist groups genuinely fear that their religious way of life is at risk. The fundamentalist groups consider for example African feminist agenda as an enemy because they are under an attack of influences that tries to undermine important religious doctrines that the groups are trying to live by. Harsh views about sex and gender and the willingness to control women's sexuality is many times used by religious fundamentalist (Ruthven 2004, 101-103). Groups like for example Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia are afraid that the change to modernization is agitated by feminist movements with the help of the secularized governments. This kind of situation is tricky in many ways and not at least because organizations like AFF are openly trying to influence social movement by lobbing the governments (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 20). Religious fundamentalists are afraid of the modernization and the negative influences that modernization might have on their own community. This is why they try to lobby for laws, social norms and morality that is more traditionally-orientated and clearly less modernized. This means in many cases that the groups are trying to influence for example education conventions and gender relations by restricting girls and women's rights. (Ruthven 2004, 101-103.)

There is an increase in conservatism, right wing nationalism and in religious fundamentalisms based on notions of ethnic, racial and religious community identity which has conferred enormous power on the religious right. These fundamentalists have served to cement the already vulnerable positions of women with a continued emphasis on controlling sexuality and other critical aspects of women's lives. The issue of identity and the erosion of multiple identities has also been a byproduct of the growth in fundamentalism. The fact that otherwise progressive forces have also accepted the appropriation of human rights discourse by fundamentalists and enable them to continue making their claims to speak on behalf of their communities has had the impact of de-legitimizing women and other progressive forces from within the community form establishing different ways of understanding community identity (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 20)

There has been a tendency for many people to get closer to ethnic, national, religious and racial identities. This nestling with a known identity has been seen as a form of seeking certainty and belonging in a world in which political social and economic boundaries has been challenged and eroded… … the definition of collective identity has framed approaches to gender. There for example notions of what Muslim or Christian should look like, behave which are seen as integral to belonging. It explains in part, the continued emphasis on controlling sexuality and other critical aspects of women's lives" (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 21).

In both examples above the problem is that religious fundamentalism promotes morals and ideals that are not suitable for African feminist movement's agenda. Their goals are seen as harmful. Religious fundamentalism wants to monopolize how African women (Muslim or Christian) should look and act like. This is in a contradiction to the basic principle of African feminism where the multitude of identities is strength. AFF makes a point that religious identity is a corner stone of African women's identities and it does for example affect the ethics of African women, but it does not define them as a whole. Religious identity is many times based on the idea that the others and the nonconformist thinkers are responsible for the bad and evil things happening around us. This goes also for the things that happen inside our own group or society. (Connolly 1991, 1-8.) Ethical principles are truly a big part of identity and in the case of my research this works both ways. This is why AFF feels that the actions of fundamentalist groups are unjust or immoral and the true ethical ways can only be found inside of a certain group. (Norton 1993, 21).

Fundamentalism is seen by AFF as a protest to promote patriarchal principles in all the spheres of women's lives like: political involvement, economy and the family-life

(Ruthven 2004, 104). The traditional enemy of any feminist movement is patriarchy and fundamentalism is clearly seen as a one branch of that tree. In this example from my research material the connection between historical patriarchal subjugation of women and threads of religious fundamentalism is explained by AFF.

> In Africa we have many forms of fundamentalism… …These are constructed out of 3 types of patriarchy. The first is pre-colonial, indigenous patriarchy, patriarchy in established religion, particularly monotheistic religions. To that we add the patriarchy that came from with our colonizers. The intermingling of the forces of these 3 forms of patriarchy is what we contend with today. With the tradition, pre-colonial construct, we have a form of patriarchy that thrives on selecting particular cultural norms and institutions (and ignoring those that for example valorized women's autonomy, mobilizing the concept of ethnicity and resistance to western hegemony to impose them to us) (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 18).

 In the example above the blame for this kind of process and development falls to the history of colonialism and the western cultural hegemony. This conveniently brings us to the otherness number three, which is the organizations like the United Nations as an imposer of **3)western standards**. At below are two examples from my research material how the role of United Nations as an authority and a strong actor in the international community is also seen as a harmful factor when the struggles of African feminist forum are being weighted. This third kind of otherness is in a way a combination of the two that I mentioned before, because it is influencing and hindering African feminist cause by both trying to impose superior and condescending criteria to third world women, but it is also blamed for not paying attention to them. So at the same time it has features of positive and negative otherness. AFF sees that UN works from the standpoint of universal human rights that represent the western ethical standards and totally dismisses African feminist presence in the planning and implementation of new programs and operational models for the development of women's issues in the African continent.

> **"**Human rights within the UN system are highly contested. Just as the feminist movement worked within the UN system using human rights as a framework for analysis and advocacy, so too have others with needs that may often run counter to the needs of the feminist movement. The UN is also a site for resistance by weaker states". (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 24)
>
> "The question is: have they really worked (UN mandate)? There are some achievements that we can celebrate (CEDAW and resolution 1325)…. We need to engage this process to

ensure that our interests as African women are not overlooked... ...I am very concerned that African feminists continue to have very little presence and voice in the process of the UN reform which will have profound implications for our organizing in the future. It is not only about our identity as African feminists. It is also to do with how we are positioning ourselves on the issue of the right to development". (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 25).

United Nations agenda represents more or less the traditional western feminism which was already mentioned as an otherness to AFF. Why I then wanted to separate these two forms of otherness's and why I wanted to introduce them in this order? I felt based on my research that AFF separates these two clearly. The criticism goes to the academic feminism and this contradiction is explained above, but the other outcome of the invisibility that African feminism feels it is suffering from is that African feminism is not for example represented in the development cooperation and other endeavors of such sort to improve women's status in Africa. The actors are very different in the field of academia and then again in an inter-governmental organization like UN whose goals and programs are many times a compromise between the member states. This is also why they represent a different kind of villains to AFF. AFF criticizes that development cooperation projects are many times done from the stand point of western women's needs and experiences. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 25). The kind of feminism that cannot meet the needs and hopes of the women of exploited developing countries would not be able to improve these women's lives in a way that truly has an effect (Arnfred 2001, 2).

In the examples from my research material above the standards like the western concept of human rights are being contested by the AFF. I will elaborate this issue more clearly in the chapter number 4.2, in which I will try to open up more the conflict between feminism and culture relativism. What was interesting to me is that AFF is not only doubtful of the principles of the United Nations but also the execution of the United Nations mandate. This brings a stronger base for the accusations that African feminist agenda has been forgotten by the UN. The concern is that African women are not present in the meetings and conferences where United Nations mandate is being molded. The examples of successful activities that UN has implemented mentioned by African feminist forum are CEDAW and resolution 1325 (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 25).

CEDAW is The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which was adopted in the year 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is described as an international declaration of right to women. CEDAW defines the inequity of women as "...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 (United Nations, 1979). This is a rational declaration and one of those that would be easy for any feminist movement to endorse. Still it also includes the words like human rights and fundamental freedoms which are seen as a part of traditional western feminist jargon. The convention is an important tool for forwarding women's rights and getting governments involved in this process.

The other mentioned action to improve women's issues done by UN was resolution 1325. This is a resolution which goal it is to: "emphasize the role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security (United Nations 2000.) Resolution 1325 has had an important role for example in raising awareness in the African continent of how sexual violence can also be considered as a war crime. This is current and ongoing problem in the African continent that unfortunately has suffered and suffers still from many wars and armed conflicts. Why this resolution has been picked up as a good example of the positive actions that UN is implementing is according to my research because this kind of work for peace and gender equality can be easily pieced together with the postcolonial feminist agenda. The otherness of western feminism is present but the actual content of the resolution encourages to local activity which is crucial for AFF.

One example of this kind of female influenced peacekeeping phenomenon comes from Somalia. In Somalia women have been able to take a stronger role in the peacekeeping process with the help of their own cultural traditions that give women a leverage in a difficult situation. As a result of ongoing war in Somalia many people are in the position of a refugee either inside the Somalian borders or abroad. Bad security

situation influences the whole civilian population but especially women and children. One of the biggest daily problems for women are the widely spread rapes and unfortunately the cases are not reported and the victims are not helped in any way. (Report of the Secretary-General on Somalia S/2011.) Rape has a strong stigma in Somalia, because of cultural and religious reasons. Many times the women are shunned by their family and husband. Raping is a powerful tool in the wartime because it creates an atmosphere of thread and shame and in this way aspires to dissolve communities. Women and girls are many times identified as presenters of a culture-identity and this is why they are also chosen to be the victims of these horrific crimes. (Gardner & El Bushra 2004.)

The consequences of the war are then very much women's issues and women want to be part of the peace negotiations and to help forward the security situation. What is interesting is that women have been part of those negotiations through the history. One of the important reasons for this is that women have had the role of being between two separate clans. Woman is a member of her own clan where she is born in but also at the same time she has close relationship with his husband's clan through the settled marriage. Clans function as traditional communities that bring shelter and peace to its members. In a time of war and conflict this role gets even bigger. (Timmons 2004.) The traditional clan identity comes from father's bloodline. This is why women keep contact with their own clan through their father, brothers and other male relatives. In the other hand women want to make connections also to the clan that their children are part of from their father's bloodline. This is why women's ability to works as mediators between clans in the questions of war and peace is a great asset. This is a great example of how local perspective and cultural characteristic (Which are important to AFF) can be seen as empowering features for third world women. Not backwards, unmodern and submissive. (Gardner & El Bushra 2004.)

3.4 "Sisterhood" and activism

"We are the ones we have been waiting for" (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 14)

Previously I have argued that African feminist forum is building its identity with a help of tools such as highlighting the otherness and emphasizing the importance of

intersectionality in the African feminist identity. In this chapter I am arguing that the third way for identity building is done by searching similarities between these women who represent many nationalities, religions and various cultural backgrounds. Simply this mean that AFF is trying to enforce coherent African feminist thinking that would potentially unite all the African women. This is done by enforcing the idea of African sisterhood and highlighting the meaning of African feminist activisms

I spotted from my research material that AFF uses the term of sisterhood several times (see for example: Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum, page 4). The word sisterhood is there to highlight the social cohesion of African women. Sisterhood is a word that has been used by feminist for decades already and it explains the common experiences and connections of women who are not biologically related to each other but who share something with each other on the basis of their shared experiences as being oppressed by the patriarchy. Especially sisterhood refers to women who openly call themselves feminists, are aware of the ongoing gender imbalances and who want to actively take part in changing those imbalances. (Oyewumi 2003, 15-16.) The interesting fact is that the term sisterhood has also been criticized by especially black feminists in the US, who have found it irritating that the term is so closely linked to white middle classed women's struggles and does not take into consideration the life experiences of black African American women who constantly suffer from double oppression because of their skin color and their sex. (Oyewumi 2003.)

Although African feminist forum gives tribute to the history and tradition that it shares with other feminist movements around the globe, the more visible way for AFF to strengthen the identity is an aspiration to find a continental sisterhood.

> Aim of the conference was to craft an African feminist epistemology. This will be made by: Identifying the specificities of African feminist thought (sources, tension, strengths), understanding sisterhood and building solidarity ("Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum, page 4),

> We commit to protecting the legacy of our feminist ancestors who made numerous sacrifices, in order that we can exercise greater autonomy (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 2)

> As we craft new African states… …we also craft new identities for African women (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 7)

In the research material sisterhood is many times linked to activism, or at least it is suggested that sisterhood is the gathering strength that inspires African women to act on behalf of feminist agenda (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 2). As mentioned before in the chapter 1.4 African feminist forum holds activism as one of its key elements in what defines the movement's character. Activism and straight forward working on the grass root level is an important part of African feminism and activism is portrayed as an important instrument to question male power and male privileged position.

> Feminism has a history of activism which puts me face to face with male power which quietly takes up its privileged position and dares to challenge it, even as my society uses culture to explain gender equality"(Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 10).

Gabriela Griffin writes that many women's groups want to give themselves titles and names that define the specific nature of their identities. This identification also gives momentum for the activism of the group (Griffin 1995, 4).

> We henceforth claim the right to theorize for ourselves, write for ourselves, strategize for ourselves and speak for ourselves as African feminists (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 9),

> For here at last, was a space in which African women could celebrate their feminist identity without recourse to apology, qualification or compromise. At the same time, it highlighted the level of personal and collective commitment and courage required to propel the movement forward in the face of increasingly reactionary and hostile responses on several fronts to the issues that the movement in Africa is trying to address ("Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum 2006, page 2).

African culture heritage is considered so unique and special by AFF that it has to be taken into consideration while forming new kind of epistemology for African feminist theorizing, but at the same time the multiple problems and hostile responses for African feminist agenda are enough of a reason for the African women to unite and come together. This is a way to build we-spirit.

Specific culture heritage, oppressed past by European colonizers and the strong will to preserve all the local specialties of certain cultural customs and activities has made the role of a feminist extremely hard in Africa. Members, collaborators and participants of African feminist forum call for peer support and justification for their struggles. Peer support and finding of the common ground is seen as emancipating experience and

hence important for identity building. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 11)

> Living and working in Africa with the label of a feminist means being confronted with a permanent polemic of self - Justification even before undertaking reflection (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 9).

> Aspects of cultural ideology that are widely shared among Africans (for example the communitarian, solidaritarian and Ubuntu ethos), and politically to call attention to the common historical legacies inscribed in cultures within Africa by forces such as colonialism, capitalism, imperialism, racism and globalization. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 11.)

Questions of agency have been in the focus of feminist social theories for long. (Mcnay 2000, 1). According to Lois Mcnay this is because of the changing nature of the action and actors in today's society. Conversations and debates about modernization, globalization and postmodernity have changed the perspective of feminist theory. Researchers are more eager to know about the position of an actor in a certain situation and the transformation of women's social statuses. Agency as a term is a way to comprehend women's capacity for individual choices and actions. The feminist theory of agency tries to explain how it is possible for women to live and impress themselves in male-dominated societies when their actions and thought have been molded by that male-dominated patriarchal reality. Especially it is interesting how women can develop that kind of agency where they are able to critique the surroundings sexist society, the political institutions and to form ways of resistance. This kind of consciousness rising and the ability to gather authentic agency is best done when women become face to face with women's solidarity and female protesters. (Mcnay 2000, 2-3.) Activism is a way to promote feminist knowledge and a way to raise awareness of inequalities between men and women in Africa.

Mcnay writes that face-to-face connection between women and the shared solidarity between women is possibly the most effective way to gather authentic agency (Mcnay 2000, 3). African feminist forum tries to do this by raising the spirits and by bringing feminist movement and agency into women's everyday life and for example to the popular culture. Popular culture and ways to express you in a creative way are considered an important tool in ways of bringing forth feminist knowledge. This is explained in a way that popular culture is a way to create locally adapted cultural interpretations of resistance (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 19).

The potential of this kind of African feminist agency is well understood but the challenge is to channel this creativity and originality into a political project.

Popular culture has a huge potential of being politicized and African feminist forum wants to use this potential and to empower African women this way in the context of social transformation. In my research material I noticed that African feminist forum especially values the process of writing and sees any kind of feminist writing as an esteem tool. This consists of academic articles, journalism and many forms of prose like: poems, short novels and biographies

> There is no split between art and propaganda. It is possible to translate and popularize the issue in so many creative ways. African stories were always passed on using artistic means, no matter how political the subject. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 41.)

> Writing is an important form of engagement and a critical skill for feminist knowledge production. Writing is a powerful means for African women to give voice to their own issues. This includes accurately documenting and depicting the realities and experiences of African women. (African feminist forum conference report, 2010, page 14.)

Agency through writing comes mainly from the feeling of emancipation and the ability to express yourself in harmony with your cultural heritage. With this I refer to the example from the last quote that mentions the strong tradition of oral and written African story telling. Popular culture and different forms of writing can be women´s acts of subversion. In this way they are rioting, being disobedient and defying their authorities in an acceptable way. AFF tries to generate an atmosphere were fellow women are seen as a part of the same group that finally forms their own epistemology and African feminist principles that would have the ability to change women's social realities.

4. AFRICAN CULTUR AS A DOUBLE EDGED SWORD

I was preliminary interested to study how cultural relativism is connected to African feminist identity. I decided to explore this topic from three separate points of view:

Those were: how cultural relativism is trying to fight of the western standards, how human rights are displayed as universal within the traditional western feminism and how "culture relativism" is used and argued by African feminist forum as a tool for identity building. The second question concerning the universal human rights is more looked at from the point of view of AFF.

One good example of the difficult relationship between feminism and culture relativism was found from an article called: *Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Other.* This article is about how the position of oppressed afghan women was used as a way to do war propaganda during the U.S war in Afghanistan. The salvation of afghan women was a tool in the war on terrorism where Taliban was portrayed as the evil and the afghan women as helpless victims that needed to be saved by western power. The article is written by Lila Abu-Lughod. She makes a point how feminism and culture relativism have always had a difficult relationship. Abu-Lughod wants to argue that feminism should be aware of differences and be respectful to other paths of female emancipation and a way to makes women's lives better. Abu-Lughod asks if there can be a liberation that is Islamic. And is liberation even the ultimate goal for all the women? (Abu-Lughod 2013, 785-786). This same kind of discourse can also be found from the materials of AFF as I will elaborate in this chapter.

The words" emancipation", "liberation" and " rights" are a vital part of the used universal language while we talk about feminism and women's living conditions. From the view point of freedom this is interesting. "The desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in lights of other desires, aspirations and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject" (Abu-Lughod 2013, 787 (ref. Mahmood 2001,).). This means that other kind of desires are maybe more meaningful for other societies and other cultures. It is deeply problematic to see afghan women in need of saving. This means that we would have to know what we are saving them from and to what are we taking them to? These kinds of projects easily bring to mind the superiority of westerners. (Abu-Lughod 2013, 787-789)

AFF and African feminism want to in general challenge universality of human rights discourse, but the African feminism also wants to be the answer to the question how things could be done better. Researcher Rhoda Howard has mentioned that there could be a compromise strategy to the battle between universal human rights and culture relativism. What this battle ultimately comes down to is how "harmful cultural practices" are seen by feminists. Howard means that there can be a combination of moral grounds against a full ban of harmful cultural practices (like child betrothal and widow inheritance as an example). At the same time practices should not be banned but people should be helped in "opting out" of these cultural practices. In this way the choice is left to individuals if they choose to participate in their traditional cultures. (Donnelly 2007, 418-419) This would be the middle ground that AFF is promoting.

4.1 Western standards

From my research material I found and isolated parts that mentioned and problematized the western standards in African societies. Traditional western feminist values come from the legacy of European enlightenment and in simple terms these values presuppose a western liberal democracy as a form of government. (Parekh 1992.) More exactly put a western liberal democracy that has a high respect for universal human rights. This is of course a simplification of things but still important to mention because those kinds of values are not dominant in all African states, nor are they always wished upon (Leslie 2006, 7-8).

One of the explanations that AFF is giving to the question why they don't feel that western standards are so easily transferred to African societies and African feminism is the huge influence of religion in many parts of Africa. I mentioned already before in chapter number 3.3 how religious fundamentalism is prone to opposing women's emancipations and social equality in many cases. This is also true in the religious communities and groups that would not be subscribed as fundamentalist.

Religion is at the core of people's lives, communities and societies, and thus for many it is sacrosanct and difficult to criticize or interrogate" (African feminist forum conference report, 2010 page 23).

The quote above encapsulates the idea. This is seen as a big challenge for African feminist struggle against religious fundamentalism. In their own words if this issue could be addressed in the proper manner and the religious communities could be confronted and also challenged in the issues of gender equality on a neutral territory the outcome might be encouraging and the feminist issues might get a lot better response. African feminist forum wants to emphasize that the problem is not only the vide spread of religions like Christianity and Islam but the traditional religions has to be also studied upon and questioned. AFF hopes for an open dialogue.

> There are gaps in our analyses of African traditional religions and practices, and their points of convergence with organized religions from the global north and east. It is important to situate and interrogate the oppression of African women that derives from traditional religions, not only Christianity and Islam (African feminist forum conference report, 2010 page 23)

By this the organization likes to point out that issues of oppression in the African continent are unique and in the name of the postcolonial feminist heritage one must be able to study these issues from a vantage point of an insider. This also demands not to make assumptions and judgments with the authority of an oppressor based on western traditional feminist standards. As an example of a practice that can be used as an example and that has its roots both in Islamic fate and in old tribal traditions is female genital mutilation (FGM). The reasons why for example this cultural tradition is still performed varies hugely in different areas around the continent. Everyone trying to fight this problem would be powerless in making precautionary measures or in trying to provide education and enlightenment without understanding the underlying reasons and the importance of the tradition in various areas. The tradition is tightly linked to gender rights and is obviously a women's issue. That is why AFF feels that this analysis should be made by African feminist researchers and activists.

According to AFF the western standards are imposed on Africa by many actors. Those are for example The United Nations, WHO, various development cooperation organizations and other NGO`s. AFF is not condemning the presence of those actors in Africa because their influence is also valuable to the development of the whole continent and especially to the social position of women in the African continent. AFF wants to state in their material how problematic it is when cultural hegemony is taking

off breeding ground from cultural relativism that has a big role in the African feminist identity. The issue of female genital mutilation is one of the examples where this kind of thinking can be detected. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 12-13.) Western standards easily condemn cultural practices as "harmful".

The question of FGM is difficult and multilateral in many ways. The practice is widely condemned with all of its health risks and other serious outcomes that girls and women who go through the operation have to endure. The problem for AFF is in naming of the tradition and how the tradition is medically labeled by the actors like WHO. Naming is highly political. (Walley 1997, 407).The term "circumcision" for the operation feels like an understatement to many when it is that way compared to male circumcision where boys loose a part of their foreskin. The difference is quite radical when girls actually may permanently lose all sexual sensation. The terms torture and mutilation on the other hand suggest that for example parents deliberately want to hurt their children when they perform this procedure. This is coherent with Signe Arnfreds idea (Arnfred 2001) how first world women need third world women as mirror images so that they can feel superiority to uneducated and oppressed third world women. The term mutilation is just enough repulsive to emphasize the horrific consequences of the tradition. From the view point of the women who get educated about the disadvantages of these procedures the term may feel extremely judgmental. Walley recaps this by saying that the term circumcision refers to relativistic tolerance and mutilation implies moral outrage. (Walley 1997, 407-408)

> Example of cultural labia of African women. WHO defines the practice of elongating the labia minora among the Banda and other bantu speaking communities in eastern and southern Africa as female genital mutilation. The WHO classifies and condemns this practice as type IV FGM. It lumps this procedure together with FGM procedures that pose health risks to women. WHO disregards that these practices have enhanced sexual pleasure for women, and expanded their perceptions of themselves as sexual beings. … … WHO in essence wrote this African practice of sexual enhancement into the broad negative rubric of "harmful cultural practices". (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 13.)

 The practice that is mentioned in the quote is called "elongating the labia minora". It is also called labia stretching or labia pulling. The purpose of this practice is to enhance the size of women's labia minora and this is widely believed to be a sexual enhancement for both partners, but especially to women. The practice does not involve

offensive physical violence against women and according to AFF it is really contradictory to label it as mutilation as WHO has done. In cases like this western standards are not only seen as foreign and unfitting for African feminist agenda, but also misguided and uninformed. (Mwenda 2006, 341-357.)

One of the reasons why western standards then are so present and have such a big influence in Africa are all the development aid cooperation's and development funding that is focused to African continent at these present years. Africa is one of the largest recipients of development cooperation resource flows (OECD, 2014). African feminism criticizes development programs, because they accusingly exclude women because by reinforcing women's dependency and hindering their autonomy. Development issues are relevant and important to the African continent for the obvious reasons. In Arica women are impacted by the unequal distribution of material resources. Especially rural women need the help that development cooperation is able to provide them such as a possibility to own land and education. The whole development enterprise (either done from the Marxist or liberal point of view) has its root in the enlightenment thought. The approach came from an idea that after the first and second world wars development of least developed countries could be achieved through adoption of western economic and political systems. (Marchand & Parpart 1995, 11.) The Marxist who criticized the big role of capitalist economy and the international capital in this process still saw the process of development in quite similar way as a linear process. First countries are underdeveloped but by time and with the help of certain measures they become developed through a logical and consistent process. Developed countries were and are seen as modern, industrialized and rational actors. This kind of simplified approach to development has of course been criticized and challenged many times after its golden era and new ways of theorizing development have emerged (in the academic field and also among actual operators in the field of development), but still this kind of thinking precedes in some cases. (Marchand & Parpart 1995 11-12.) The outcome and the reason why AFF sees this as a bad thing is that for many years the whole discourse and all the practical ways of doing development cooperation have been made from the vantage point of western knowledge claims. This sadly means also according to AFF that the knowledge from the south has been dismissed and silenced.

When the operating NGO`s and other organizations have their origin in the west and developed countries, the actions and ethics behind the policies of those organizations also come from the west. The people working in the organizations have to commit to those ethics and values. This according to AFF in the worst case scenario makes them unable to sympathize or connect whit local actors who might also have a feminist agenda. This is because western feminist agenda is seen as negative thing inside certain communities and this hinders the co-operation. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 22.)

> The left in the Europe and the US in general and donors in particular, have accepted the appropriation of human rights discourse by fundamentalists and enabled them to continue making their claims to speak on behalf of their communities. In so doing they de-legitimize women and other progressive forces from within the communities from establishing different ways of understanding community identity. Thus accusation such as: "you are feminist and therefore western and not part of this community", often go unchallenged. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 22.)

Culture is comprehended in today's Africa according to AFF as a product of habits and reinterpretations of historical colonial authorities and western powers. The statement is that those habits have intertwined with the practices and code of conducts of African male patriarchs and the outcome is African "culture". According to the AFF the huge influence of orthodox religions like Christianity and Islam have made African people reject their original values and customs. This is because they were forced to become more modern and civilized and try to adopt the habits of their colonial masters. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 11-12.)

The African culture is understood as a hard thing to combine with the attempts to promote human rights in African societies. AFF wants to see culture as an important part of African feminist identity and because of this there is a clear contradiction. African feminist forum sees this contradiction also in its own actions. The plurality of different kind of backgrounds might be the biggest challenge.

> In feminist legal studies, culture is often viewed as a deviation from the path of human rights. Scholars from south have demonstrated effectively how "first world"feminists have represented them as women as helpless victims of culture, devoid of any agency. Many of us from middle class background in the south have adopted that frame of reference to our rural sisters. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 11-12.)

We should mobilize and organize with a clear understanding of the contestation about or diversities from, in particular, cultural and religious perspectives. This does not come without challenges. The notion of African feminism itself brings us to the slippery slope in which the notions of culture and religion are negotiated and mediated of ten by agents other than ourselves. "Culture is a double edged sword". ("Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum, page 6.)

4.2 Human rights as universal

The discourse that sees human rights as universal has a lot to do with problems that African feminist forum has with the identification to the global feminist movement. The issue is not only the content of the human rights legislation but also how it was drawn up. African feminist forum feel that the right kind of representatives and participants were not present during the process.

> The universal declaration of human rights (UDHR) has become part of internationally grounded customary law and is binding on all countries… …when UDHR was drafted, only handful of women and no sub-Saharan African sat on the floor of the UN general assembly. Even the broader character of the rights articulated in the UDHR frame reflects normative values, inspirations and interests of western culture of specific stage historical evolution. Many scholars have critiqued the overall culture and approach of the UDHR as narrowly focusing on the individuals relationship to the state; rooted in a western liberal philosophy; echoing male values; and built on heterosexual perspectives of the human being. Hence it is clear that human rights discourse emanates from a specific historical context, like all other cultures, that culture cannot lay claim to common values nor to universalism. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 11.)

As it is mentioned in the previous quote the issue that AFF has with universal declaration of human rights is not only the universal and culture hegemonic nature of it but they also see it as a thread because it is built on heterosexual perspectives and it echoes male values. So the UDHR is according to AFF not only harmful from the point of view it being oppressive and because it repeats the harmful colonial structures, but because they feel that it is also harmful for the feminist agenda. AFF even states that the blunt tool of human rights has had only very small and limited effect on real lives of African women.

> While the top-down constitutional and legal framework is necessary as foundational touchstone of women's rights, our activism must begin from the assumption that bottom-up

approaches anchored in local cultures and traditions are more likely to succeed than those working from outside. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 13.)

The cultural and historical experiences are the things that AFF wants to highlight and bring the actual human experiences of African women heard. This is clearly a way to make a distinction between the women of the south and the women of the north. AFF tries to speak from and act upon those kinds of perspectives (both cultural and religious) that would make the plurality perspectives among the women in African continent apparent and clear. Those perspectives are needed and seen as an inseparable part of African feminist identity. This also brings about questions that are hard to approach from this perspective like the issue of African lesbian activism. This is mentioned in the reports of AFF because in many African cultures lesbian and gays are not seen as justified members of the society while they openly live the gay lifestyle. AFF has a clear agenda to try to inform itself also about African lesbian agenda and acknowledge the politics that are embodied in that activism. ("Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum, page 6.)

4.3 Tool for identity: culture as strength

Many African women will face oppressive and discriminatory practices and laws in their local communities. These women will take part in habits and customs that actually clearly repeat the subordinate status of women inside the hierarchy of a certain group. This group might be based on tribal, ethnic or religious identity. Still many women are more than content with this because their group identity plays the most important role in their life and it has the most meaning in the everyday life. This is a challenge for the traditional feminist movement also because it has always tried to promote the recognition of personal choice. That personal choice and individual freedom might be sometimes promoted on the expense of group. The approach of postcolonial feminism is opposite. The cherishing of cultural environment is also a way to strengthen and nurture your identity. The subjective African feminist identity that is the main object of my study is a group identity and as such it more or less determines the social place and the political position of the women who call themselves African feminist. Group-based identity as a term many times explains how we think about ourselves in the everyday life. (Bradley 1996, 24). For traditional feminism collective identities have been seen as

withdrawal to homes and to safe domestic spheres. Collective identities can only hinder ones freedom in the eyes of western feminism. (Weir 2013, 3-6.)

Culture can be an asset and fight for women's equal rights don't have to be colored by prejudice and the northern attitudes towards the southern countries. (Coomaraswamy 2002, 483-484). AFF writes that feminists should interact actively with other cultures and religions and by so doing try to identify the positive aspects of these social systems that might actually be used to women's advantage, rather than totally dismissing them as harmful. (African feminist forum conference report, 2010 page 24.)

> Despite dominant patriarchal interpretations, religion has also been an invaluable resource for Africans struggling for equality, freedom and liberty. The struggles against colonialism, slavery, apartheid and racial discrimination were often based on religious principles. Therefore feminists can also tap into and take advantage of, the potentially liberatory aspects of religion for women. Sylvia tamale noted that "African feminists should therefore focus on reconstructing religion in a manner that makes it more egalitarian and relevant to women. This would inevitably require leading a process of un-learning the dominant, hegemonic religious culture and re-learning a new, liberating one. (African feminist forum conference report, 2010 page 22)

 In this quote it is stated that culture (in this case the religious culture) should be seen as a positive thing. AFF writes that this should be done by process of trying to influence the religious culture and trying to make it more female-friendly in a way that the most evidently discriminatory habits and customs might be abandoned. The history also plays an important role for African feminist identity narrative. As mentioned in the example above religion and culture has played a part in the struggle against colonialism and other kind of discrimination that has also benefitted women. It is important according to AFF to recognize that African women have in fact resisted patriarchy for centuries. This work has been done by women in the grassroots level and this is also an important part of many African cultures. AFF encourages African women to recognize and study their own history and cultural heritage where many feminist struggles have been fought when women have been forced to make up their own practical responses to various forms of cultural, economic and political oppression. (African feminist forum conference report, 2010, page 8.) AFF finds inspiration for their feminist activity from the actions of the ancestors who according to AFF have fought many battles for the good of African women. Those women cannot be found from the history books nor are they recognized in anyway as "feminists". The rich and varied tradition of African women's resistance

to patriarchy has been in many cases silenced. This is why AFF proclaims that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the west. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist page 8.)

Culture in this context and how the AFF speaks of it is understood to be various ways that social interactions are conducted and mediated with the help of symbols, rituals, traditions and of course the language. Those things are more or less molded and influenced by issues like race, religion and ethnic background. This is a wide arena of influencing factors and AFF feels that some of the aspects of the African culture do in fact reinforce and fortify woman's rights. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006 page 11). This is more or less because AFF feels that the concept of gender is molded inside a certain culture and things are closely intertwined.

> When one recognizes that the institution of gender is constructed within the context of "culture" and that the two are closely linked, one begins to appreciate the potential for the harmony of the chanting of the war cries. Indeed the close connection between gender, sexuality, culture and identity requires that African feminists work within the specificities of culture to realize their goals. We need to creatively discard the oppressive aspects of culture and embrace the laboratory ones. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 12.)

AFF reasons how not seeing culture and culture relativism as an important building block in the African feminist identity is harmful and leads to unfavorable situations for the whole women's rights cause in the African continent. This is because feminist researchers outside and also within Africa tend to see culture as an impediment for beneficial development and for social transformation. This kind of beliefs might have the effect of obscuring the potential that culture may have as an emancipatory tool. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 11.)

> The same individuals speak of "rights" as if they are "culture-less" at best or at worst borne of "superior culture". The potential that culture hold for emancipating women in Africa is often buried in the avalanche of literature many feminists scholars devote to the "barbaric" cultural practices such as female genital mutilation. Not only is there an acute lack of sensitivity to and recognition of grassroots and local initiatives undertaken by indigenous activists, but the missionary zeal applied to the enterprise often produces a negative backlash. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 11.)

The debate between universalism/culture relativism is an old and frequently present in many writings that are about postcolonial feminism and African feminism. In Report of

the first African feminist forum from year 2006 the forum actually took a stand that they would like to stay away from that hornets' nest and purely try to actively find the emancipatory potential of African culture. The key word here for African feminist identity is the active pursuit of finding those aspect that might enhance equality in the African societies and also rethink the concept of culture so that the whole continent might benefit from this. In a quote below this divide is formulated in a way that clearly emphasizes the dualistic nature of Universalist thinking.

> Sisters, usually when we talk about feminism and African culture, the tendency is to view them in opposition to each other. Indeed mainstream feminists often present the two concepts of "culture" and "rights" as distinct. Invariably opposed and antagonist. We are persuaded to believe that the concepts "culture" and "rights" are polar opposites with no possibility for constructing any conceptual bridges to connect the two. This is especially true in the case of theorists of African women's rights where culture is viewed as being essentially hostile to women. Narrow interpretations of culture that collapse it with "custom" or "tradition" and assume these to be natural and unchangeable exacerbate the problem. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 10.)

One of the examples of how culture should be understood also through its emancipating aspects is how patriarchy (or should I say the many forms of patriarchy) should be understood. AFF writes that patriarchy varies in different situations and changes through time. By this they mean that there is not only one form of patriarchy that oppresses women around the world, but that patriarchy is understood differently in various race-, culture- or religious surroundings. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 5). For example part of the blame of how patriarchy is oppressing women in African continent goes to patriarchal religions which cause the inequalities in the surrounding society. Other instances that should take responsibly are the states that allow and legitimize the kind of legislation that secures the kind of development where religious patriarchal traditions are not being questioned. As an example of this kind of traditions AFF mentions that many African cultures have actually been matrilineal in a way that they have allowed and encouraged the transfer of power and property to the women. These matrilineal traditions were changed through the spreading of big monotheistic religions. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 10.)

AFF wants to locate itself as a clear counterpart to fundamentalism and to deliberately challenge the voices that are the loudest and that get the most attention in the western

world. AFF writes that in this dominant discourse culture has been seen presented selectively, when AFF would like to emphasize that cultures are in many cases a reflection of the power dynamics in a certain society. The culture might actually have many aspects that do promote women's equality and rights but those aspects are not being heard or appreciated. At the same time the oppressive aspects should be firmly abandoned. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 6.)

> If feminists start from a premise that culture is a double edged sword that can be wielded creatively and resourcefully to enhance women's access to justice: the social legitimacy that culture enjoys around the African continent is an indicator to all feminist activists of its importance and possibilities. It is critical that in social justice efforts, a balance is struck between the tools of human rights and truly bottom-up approaches anchored in local cultures and traditions. (Report of the first African feminist forum 2006, page 6.)

African feminist identity is in a way a combination of respecting and highlighting the historical ancestors and the feminism that can be found in their actions and teachings but at the same time it has a need to find a new way to talk about feminist issues and gender equality problems. AFF sees that this way is not dominant in the African continent right now. Not at least in the scale that the AFF would want it to be. The goal is to craft new identity that can combine both aspects.

4.4 Freedom in the African feminist identity

> Feminists enjoy the liberation from the falsehood of patriarchal values which get reinforced by religions and culture. Being free is pleasurable I can assure you! Again, being a feminist and hence a political actor is a supportive space and that's pleasure. (Report of the first African feminist forum 200,6 page 8.)

This chapter is about the concept of freedom in the publications of African Feminist Forum. The word freedom is mentioned many times in the releases of AFF as an important part of women's liberation and feminist agenda. One example of this can be found above. In my analysis I used the ideas of concept of freedom from Michel Foucault. I can't claim that AFF makes a point that is similar to Foucault's thoughts, but it helped me greatly to conceptualize the difference between freedom, emancipation and autonomy.

What is different in Foucault's and other post-structuralist thinker's thought about freedom is the fact that he criticizes the existence of autonomous subject. In a simple

way this means that Foucault believes that there is no subject in itself before it is molded by the normalizing cultural coding. In this case a person does not have an idea how to be free before it is told how. The critics of Foucault have said that the denial of autonomous subject is also a denial of freedom. They base this on the idea that without authentic subjectivity freedom becomes meaningless. The opposite way of seeing things comes from the post-structuralist thinking. Johanna Oksala writes that the post-structuralist thinking and ways of understanding subject problematizes many of our traditional ways of understanding freedom. Freedom is not a characteristic or something that person is born with. According to Foucault it is also questionable if freedom can be linked to emancipation, which is a key element in traditional feminist thinking. Emancipation is also a recurrent term in the AFF publications ("Reclaiming our spaces" executive summary of the 1st African feminist forum, page 9). Feminist emancipation is historically and theoretically connected to enlightment and how it defines freedom. The autonomy of subjects plays an important role. (Oksala 2002, 14-15, 17.) This brings us to our problem.

AFF in its writing don't want freedom to be linked only to traditional feminist definition of emancipation, but emphasizes what freedom means for an African woman. That in the level of concreteness means for example freedom of choice and autonomy regarding bodily integrity issues such as abortion, sexual identity and sexual orientation. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist page 11.) These are examples of the challenges that women in the Africa are battling with and witch are recognized by the AFF. The religious fundamentalism has taken as one of its main agenda an attack on women's bodily autonomy, integrity and dignity. There are cases in almost every African country about this. (African feminist forum conference report, 2010, page 22). So one might say that freedom for African women is a freedom to have an autonomy over one's body and life choices even thou those life choices don't meet the standards of traditional western feminism. Freedom for African feminist is to be recognized as a subject, not an object. The recognition and presentation of African women as an object is not only a sin of patriarchy but also of the traditional western feminism. African women want to be seen as subject of their work, and as strong agents in their lives and societies. (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 11.)

Why is freedom then important? Especially in the case when ones freedom can be disputed. In this case traditional western feminism has power over the definition of

freedom (at least in the context of feminism). Power and domination doesn´t exclude freedom, although freedom is more limited under states of domination. For AFF that domination comes from Patriarchy. AFF defines patriarchy as a system of male authority which legitimizes the oppression of women through political, social, economic, legal cultural, religious and military institutions (Charter of feminist principles for African feminist, page 5). The differences according to AFF is that oppressing nature of patriarchy in Africa is more severe because of the historical, ethnic and social reasons that complicate African women's life's. The options are more limited in the state of dominations, but resistance is still possible.

5. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter is to give answers to my research questions and to review the statements that I have made in previous chapters. My purpose is not to bring any new information at this point, but to contemplate my main argument with the help of the theorists that I have already introduced in the previous chapters. My research questions were: What kind of political identity is linked to African feminist activism? Is culture relativism part of African feminist identity? And how is freedom linked to that?

As an answer to the first question I have to highlight that because I was studying how African feminist identity is being produces by AFF and I used its own publications as a material, I was forced to consider the variety of identities of the individuals who have written these publications. In some parts of my material it was clearly stated who the writer was and in other parts not. For me it was enough that the AFF had decided to publish them. The collective identity has to be more than combined identities of the individual African feminist activist. I found that in its rhetoric African feminist forum is clearly trying to state what are the threads and ordeals in its near future and at African women's living surroundings. AFF is also clearly trying to emphasize those threads as imminent threads for the whole African continent and all of its societies. This is important because AFF is trying to highlight its own role in this development. AFF is also trying to influence people by trying to wake up peoples passive African feminist identities with its rhetoric. The political identity that I have studied is a combination of how African feminist forum speaks of itself but also what it says about the otherness. This distinction between difference and similarity is crucial for identity. It is hard to

define something if you cannot say what it is not. Vilho Harle states that definition always starts with the negative and the actual meaning comes through the binary connection to the other (Harle 1994, 232). This is also helpful so that we can say when things are identical. It is a process of bringing an identity to life by naming it something (like in this case African feminism) and making the distinction between the differences.

African feminism represents postcolonial feminism and local feminist activism and as such also wants to only represent the fragmented portion of women who can relate to its agenda. Griffin writes that in one way any kind of feminist activism that is based on identity politics leads to fragmentation. This is seen as a needed counterbalance to the homogeneity and to feminist liberation movements that are suitable for masses. Feminist agenda that has a global audience is only a myth and a retrospective view from the times that might have not actually even existed. Single issue and single identity feminist organizations have more luck in getting a better impact in specific arena. (Griffin 1995, 4-5.) . Black women or women in general are not feminists just because they care about gender issues. One many times heard critique against western feminist theories is also that these theories don't take into appreciation the material deprivation that African women struggle with. This leads to a conclusion that Africa's ongoing situation has no place for feminist luxury. The claim has some truth in it if we for example look at the lower educational levels of African women or how women in Africa are dominating the lower income jobs. Western feminism is blamed to be working only with the intellectual abstraction of gender issues, which leads to inability to see the real lives of women in the third world countries. Africans view gender issues in the context of other conjunctions, like political, cultural social and economic question. Simplification of things is that who cares about gender equality while you are living in a ghetto.

The second question was about the importance of culture relativism in African feminism. I came to conclusion that it plays a big part in African feminist identity building because the cultural relativist though highlights the importance of respecting your own cultural heritage. I would like to mention that although my intention was to illustrate how AFF sees African culture as strength, it also criticizes many aspects of it. Anyhow that critique is beyond the point that culture is more or less seen by AFF something that has an evolution and that evolution can and should be influenced. This is the whole point why AFF wants to create new kind of African feminist identity and why

it thinks this can be made through activism. I also see difficulties in this kind of identity building. This was present in many writing of African feminist activists that I came across during my research. African feminists argue that women's socially inscribed identities in Africa take very different forms than the women's gender identities in the west. One good example of this that I already mentioned in the introduction chapter is the glorified motherhood. There is even an idea of "motherism" for alternative to feminism in Africa which displays mothers as iconic superwomen. There can be a harmful side in this. Although there is a clear distinction between wests and Africa's ideas about feminist identities, that doesn't mean that there can´t be visible gender hierarchies that affect both of them. These different identities just tell us a different kind of story and in the case of African feminism those contextually-specific roles of African women are also linked to gender hierarchies. Desire Lewis states that it is disturbing to assume that only the identities that are historically determined, in many ways oppressive and coercively policed are the identities that actually bring considerable alternative to western feminism (Lewis 2008.) By this Desiree Lewis wants to question if the exclusiveness of western feminist identity is enough reason to choose and promote another kind of feminist identity.

Many times in my readings while I made myself familiar with the topic of African feminism I noticed that local African feminist writers are frustrated to hear that change and progress is being opposed because "It is not African tradition" Or "it is not part of African culture". This excuse is made while talking about gay rights, family planning or for example reproductive rights. Same African feminist writers also understand why this is so common. Africa has been colonized by Europeans for decades and tradition is an important tool for cultural consciousness. Tradition in the end is just a way for humans to act in a way that brings meaning and togetherness for the group that they are part of. May that group be a family, institution, ethnic group or a country? Tradition and culture is a way to highlight uniqueness, dignity and cultural memory.

As an answer to the question about freedom in African feminism I want to connect my results to the Ideas of Allison Weir. AFF mentions freedom as their goal, but wants to tell it apart from the way how traditional feminism conceptualizes freedom. Allison Weir connects freedom to identity. Weirs definition of identity does not come from the feeling of sameness, but from the question to whom and to what I am importantly connected. No identity is born only from subjugation. For example race, gender and

sexual orientation make up a complex mixture of factors that influence people's identities. Identity, freedom and culture relativism are linked because the whole idea of identity has developed in modern western cultures and the liberal ideal of freedom brings the possibility of self-made individual identity. This individual identity differs from African feminist identity. Social identity has social power and through that power identities are both sources and the ends of freedom. (Weir 2013, 2-3.)

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