Chapter 5
Identity as Ideology:
Trajectories of Feminist Identity Construction

Introduction

A key theoretical underpinning of this study (See Exploring Conceptions of Identity in Chapter 1), pivots on the understanding that there exists polyphony of feminisms, which leave in disarray the notion of a transcendent global sisterhood. Guided by this premise, in preparing the questions for both the autobiographical essays and the interviews, I did not pre-dictate or pre-empt a definition of feminism. The participants were at liberty to construct and trace the development of their feminist identity consciousness based on individual conceptions of what the concept feminism/feminist consciousness meant to them. Each woman therefore, defined feminism for herself. Aware of the debates on identity politics, I was sensitive to the differences that existed among the research participants not only in relation to their race, culture, age, gender and language backgrounds, but also in terms of their subscription to different strands of feminist thinking. This chapter explores the cluster of experiences that led the five research participants, in my study, to identify themselves as feminists, by exploring whether there is a discernible pattern to the development of a feminist consciousness. It highlights commonalities and differences among the participants’ experiences of coming to feminist consciousness by virtue of variations in individual social, political, racial, cultural and age specificities.

In responding to the questions posed in the semi-structured interview and the autobiographical narratives, the participants identified specific experiences, episodes and influences that led to their adoption of the label ‘feminist’. Clark & Gaston (1995), report that Women’s Studies Programmes in the U.S. have developed a large body of empirical research and theory that explore women’s multi-faceted experiences in a patriarchal society. Clark & Gaston argue, however, that less is known about exactly how women embrace the ideology and values of the Women's Movement, and elect to identify themselves as feminists. They point out that convictional identity or value-aligning identity (See also Cascardi in Calhoun 1994), in which a woman links herself to a particular body of beliefs and values is studied less often, despite the fact that this also contributes to the development of a feminist identity.

Research conducted by, for example, Josselson (1987), and Zweig (1990), show that identity issues for women are located broadly within female identity development studies. Banks (1986), studied the group of first-wave feminists in Britain, and identified various factors that led to the development of a feminist consciousness, which include: confronting the
frustration with the social restrictions placed on women, and reacting against attempts to quell their interest in socio-political change. Similarly, research on consciousness-raising groups popular in the late 1960s and 1970s offer important insights into a group process of identity development. Bartky (1977), examined the nature of the transformation that gives rise to a feminist consciousness, and concluded that both behaviour and understanding are dramatically altered for these women, who as feminists engage and interpret their life experiences differently.

In examining the accounts of the five participants in my study, I found that their development of a feminist consciousness was similar to findings in studies conducted by Bargad & Hyde (1991), Clark & Gaston (1995), and Hart (1991).

Bargad & Hyde (1991), employed the Downing-Roush model to design a feminist identity development scale. Focusing on theory development, Downing & Roush (1985), proposed a model, which traces the development of a feminist identity. Their model postulates that a woman comes to recognize that she is the object of discrimination, and then gradually begins to associate herself with like-minded women and commits herself to feminist values, thereby solidifying a feminist identity. Bargad & Hyde in turn used the model to argue that Women's Studies Courses help women develop a feminist consciousness.

Clark & Gaston (1995), identified two patterns in feminist identity development. The first, they argue, involves a transformation of the personal world from a more traditional perspective of female roles and identity to a feminist perspective of herself and the world. They describe the second pattern of feminist identity development as the pattern of continuity: a discovery of fit, in which they posit that while raised in accordance with traditionally scripted values, girls/women are critical of their socialisation, and resist patriarchal restrictions/prescriptions for gendered behaviour from an early age.

Hart (1991), describes a process of developing feminist consciousness as having three movements. Movement One begins with the everyday experience of women; Movement Two, drawing on those experiences, proceeds outward to illuminate the nature of female oppression in society; and Movement Three, seeks to develop new theory to explain this oppression. The ensuing discussion draws discursively from the Bargad & Hyde, Clark & Gaston, and Hart studies to explore the movements and patterns in coming to feminist consciousness as described by the five participants in my study. These include:

- **Movement One**: introspective gaze: sensing and experiencing the dailiness of patriarchy;
- **Movement Two**: outward gaze: naming patriarchy and coming to feminist consciousness; and
• **Movement Three:** enacting a transformed identity: theorising and teaching emancipation.

**Movements and Patterns in Coming to Feminist Consciousness**

**Movement One: introspective gaze: sensing and experiencing the dailiness of patriarchy**

In accordance with Hart's (1991), observation, the initial stirrings of a feminist consciousness may be traced to internal tensions women wrestle with in their everyday experiences. In their narrative accounts most research participants in my study confirm Hart’s observation. They expressed either a frustration or uneasiness with the social restrictions placed upon them. Although during this pre-feminist consciousness stage they lacked the discourse (vocabulary, language) to name their feelings, feminist theorising attributes their psychological tensions to the taken-for-granted social arrangements that are communicated through religious, ethnic and educational organs. (See Chapter 4, which explores episodes, experiences and influences that shape early identity formation). These legitimising identity social organs prescribe certain roles, behaviours, personal aspirations, etc. that women and girls are expected to fulfil in societies premised on patriarchal models. Both Thembi and Carol provide the following summation of their experiences of female socialisation based on expectations proposed by the patriarchal formula:

**Thembi:** As a young woman who during Botswana’s first year of Independence completed Form V and immediately married a young black South African … I cherished the freedom from both my colonial and parental rule. What was paramount in my mind then … was a marriage certificate and a family of my own …

During the early years of our marriage our duties as husband and wife were distinct. My husband went to school to teach, and I remained at home to cook and clean the house. I was quite satisfied with the arrangement. After all I had my marriage and would soon have babies. I never thought seriously about what the implications of this situation were; that because I did not have formal employment I would not be looked at in the same light as my husband; he the successful one, and I less so.

When our first baby did not come as early as we thought it would, I got bored, worried, irritable and miserable. The only solution our female family doctor recommended was that I “get out there” and do something different. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 9, 10, 11 & 12).

**Carol:** After matriculating I spent six months at a secretarial college, became a secretary, married at 21, had a daughter at 25, and returned, aged 28, to part-time secretarial work while our three-year old
Much has been written about the public/private split that has carved as natural women’s participation in house and home maintenance, marriage and child-rearing activities. This fairytale script, which propagates the gospel that female self-actualisation, and fulfilment reside in, and emanate from preoccupation with domesticity, has been exposed as fallacious in testimonies by many women who believed this patriarchal myth. As in the case of Thembi and Carol, this is expressed in their questioning their existential validity. The much-celebrated quote from Betty Friedan’s, *Feminine Mystique* (1965:13), eloquently captures the internal conflict and frustration with social restrictions that Thembi and Carol describe:

> It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered … Each suburban wife struggled with it alone. As she made the beds, shopped for groceries, matched slipover material, ate peanut butter sandwiches with her children … lay beside her husband at night-she was afraid to ask even the silent question-'Is this all?'

Friedan expresses the internal conflict that married women experience as they try to come to terms with their domestic roles and responsibilities. Both Thembi and Carol echo the dissatisfaction and yearning highlighted in the Friedan extract. Both opted for the love, marriage and children plot, and both testify to it being anti-climatic. They experienced a void that could not be filled exclusively by entering into the marriage contract.

Despite slight variations in the life experiences of Carol and Thembi prior to their entering into the social contract of marriage, both reflect on an ingrained sense of unhappiness—a lack of fulfilment. Thembi recalls: *I got bored, worried, irritable and miserable,* while Carol confides: *By now I had everything that, according to my upbringing, a woman could want. I was unhappy and my unhappiness made me deeply anxious. I felt both mad and wicked.* In examining Thembi and Carol’s experiences, it would be reductive to attribute the psychological discomfort they experienced exclusively to discovering that happiness and personal validation is not a by-product of marriage. The unmarried participants in the study also recount experiences of dissatisfaction, unease and internal conflict. Vijay, Jennifer, and Phumzile testify to experiencing internal frustrations, which resulted in their questioning the social roles and expectations prescribed for females in patriarchal societies. Although in their narratives neither Carol nor Thembi attribute their mounting unhappiness, anxieties, misery or boredom to socialisation processes that confined them to scripted gender roles and aspirations, Jennifer, Phumzile and Vijay (the ‘single’ participants) trace their unhappiness to gender differentiation, in which female experiences were undermined, misrepresented or trivialised, while males in their immediate families or wider society enjoyed preferential
treatment. They came to recognise that, as females, they were objects of discrimination. Vijay writes:

**Vijay:** My feminist consciousness developed when I was quite young, out of observing that our mother over-valued my brothers and tended to undermine me and somehow never supported me when there was a clash. I thought this was just something personal and fought it as such but at ten I realised that this was how our grandmother behaved, in addition to discriminating between the children of her sons and daughters … Mum’s behaviour made me resent being a girl … Perhaps in over-reaction to mum I tended to be critical of the behaviour of other women (including my peers) and tended to prefer male friends and teachers. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 20).

Vijay recalls coming to feminist consciousness at an early age, largely through experiencing a distinctively gendered response from her mum. While her brothers found favour, won the worship in her mum’s eyes and were *over-valued* and enjoyed her support in conflict situations, Vijay describes feeling, *undermined*. Vijay ascribes her mother’s behaviour to a learned performance—a genealogical patriarchal legacy inherited from her grandmother. This engendered a self-loathing about her gender, and Vijay admits that her mother’s behaviour made her resent being a girl, and she sought male company as a way of distancing herself from the inferior female socialisation and self-image her mother and grandmother tried to replicate. It may be surmised that these older women were unwittingly, but nonetheless faithfully, perpetuating a naturalised system of behaviour and belief on which their own female socialisation was founded.

Chernin’s (1985 in Grumet 1988:26), study of mother/daughter relationships, suggests a possible motive for a daughter’s emigration to the father’s world. Chernin explores the daughter’s identification with her mother’s experience of stasis, frustration and disappointment. She sees daughters struggling with a sense of their mother’s unrealised ambitions, and unexpressed talents. So the daughter who flees may be attempting to escape her memory of maternal domination as she simultaneously attempts to compensate her mother for her disappointments by achieving what was denied to her.

While Jennifer does not make any specific comment about personally experiencing gender discrimination in her home, she does make reference to the stereotypical gendered division of household roles and responsibilities that prevailed. She recalls:

**Jennifer:** My childhood home was thoroughly conventional in terms of gender divisions. My mother took complete responsibility for the kitchen, clothing and child-rearing … My father … provided the household income and the intellectual input into our family interactions.
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The formative narrative about gender relationships is a story about a princess that I first encountered at the age of three or four … This story, which is an amalgamation of a number of culturally embedded narratives and bears very little relation to reality, contains a number of features that have shaped my thinking about love, romance and domestic relationships. First, there is the passivity of the heroine; second, her propensity for getting into distress; third, the need to be rescued by a man or other suitable hero … fourth, the value placed on sexual and romantic union with another person as the culmination of one’s adventures and tribulations. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 8 & 9).

Apart from the distinct gendering of roles in her childhood home, Jennifer’s exposure to children’s literature summarised the cultural scripts that she was expected to internalise as a norm (both in terms of gender appropriate behaviour and compulsory heteronormativity). This is the pervasive foundational narrative, which is presented as a template for women’s destiny. It may also account for the disillusionment that Thembi and Carol experienced upon entering the love ‘n marriage plot.

Neither Phumzile nor Jennifer relate discriminatory home front experiences similar to those of Vijay, however, both detect sexist behaviour in their external environments, through everyday language usage and sexual/textual portrayal in literature, and in the case of Phumzile, through the rituals performed at school.

In tracing her early suspicions of patriarchal discrimination, Phumzile attributes it to the way language as a social construct is employed and deployed to socialise females differently from males. She writes:

**Phumzile:** All this time I was attending Catholic mass in English … Mass intrigued me as one who was brought up speaking predominantly isiXhosa, where the infamous ‘generic male’ is absent. I was very aware, as I was learning to speak English, that girls and women were never mentioned in mass. There was constant talk of men, sons of God, heirs to the Kingdom, and so forth. When women featured at all it was in very specific, named instances: they were Mary the virgin mother, Magdalene and so forth but there did not seem to exist a category which encompassed women outside of these. … This was in sharp contrast with the daily assemblies at my Protestant school, which were in isiXhosa and therefore spoken in gender-neutral language. Our teachers spent a considerable time explaining the ‘generic male’ rule to our class of children who spoke isiXhosa and I found the entire exercise lacking in logic.

However, the absence of a generic male and gender differentiated third person pronouns in many indigenous languages does not translate into an absence of sexist language and regulation of female behaviour therein … Various prescriptions on female behaviour meant that negative labels were used to describe girls who deviated. Sexism was both explicit and clandestine. We were aware of gender difference and accepted it as normal or rebelled against specific limiting manifestations of it. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 10 & 11).
In her reference to indigenous African languages, for example, Phumzile points out that the absence of generic male pronouns does not eradicate prescriptions of gender bias and stereotyping of male/female behaviour, instead it actually perpetuates the absence of women from social discourses and social validation. Penelope (1990:103), supports this observation. She points out that the magnanimity of the oppressiveness of sexist language is compounded when we observe how semantic violation becomes semantic exclusion, and how semantic exclusion eventuates in social exclusion. Much has been written on the subject of language as a social construct, and its potential to serve as a conduit for the expression of social attitudes and values. In this regard, language has been critiqued for servicing the inferior socialisation and devaluation of girls and women in patriarchal societies. I explore this issue more substantively and analytically in Movement Three, in relation to the curriculum intervention efforts that the research participants embark on in their attempts to interrogate and expose the non-neutrality, and sexually pejorative strains in the English language. (See also Chapter One, section titled: Feminist Critique of Language).

Living in patriarchal societies, all five participants comment on experiencing the dailiness, normalcy and naturalness of gendered differentiation and stereotyping. All participants express the unhappiness that emanates from this social practice; however, Carol and Thembi, the two older participants in the study, accepted the status quo as natural. Vijay, Phumzile and Jennifer, the younger participants, testify to being suspicious of this social arrangement. Despite lacking the vocabulary to name their dissatisfaction, they nonetheless attempt to fight/rebel against it in different ways. This is evident in the words: ‘fought’, ‘reacted’, ‘rebelled’ in the following sentence fragments from Vijay and Thembi’s extracts. In her extract Vijay mentions I thought this was just something personal and fought it as such … Perhaps in [over]-reaction to mum I tended to be critical of the behaviour of other women. Phumzile also says that she rebelled against specific limiting manifestations of [sexism].

Through an introspective gaze these women report sensing and experiencing the dailiness of patriarchy. They wrestled with the psychological and existential tensions in their performance of public and private female roles, responsibilities and behaviours, which elevated, valued and validated maleness above femaleness. Male privilege was not only evident in sexist behaviour in their external environment, but some of them also detected it in the everyday language usage, and sexual/textual portrayal of males and females in the literature they were exposed to.
**Movement Two: Outward Gaze: naming patriarchy and coming to feminist consciousness**

According to Hart’s (1991), study, Movement Two in the development of a feminist identity is characterised by a trajectory that proceeds outward, that is, the internal conflict and dissatisfaction that the women experience finds parallels and makes comparison with phenomena in the outside world. This psycho-social articulation acts as a catalyst in the illumination of the nature of oppressive female socialisation. An important distinction to make at this juncture is the difference between having ‘gender consciousness’ and having ‘feminist consciousness’. Hogeland (1994), argues that gender consciousness refers to our self-awareness as women, and is a necessary precondition for feminist consciousness, but they are not the same. The difference resides in the connection between gender and politics. Feminism politicises gender consciousness by locating it into a systematic analysis of histories and structures of domination and privilege. For the participants, sensing the differences in male and female privilege brings them to the recognition that they are objects of discrimination, and this becomes a crucial epiphany in their initiation into feminist consciousness. In addition, the women recognise that they are not alone in their quest for emancipation from social strictures.

Given the variations in terms of when, and how women come to feminist consciousness, an analysis of the interviews and the autobiographical narratives in my study, share parallels with the findings that emerged from Clark & Gaston’s (1995), study. Clark & Gaston identified two patterns in feminist identity development. The first involves a transformation of conceptual and personal worlds from a more traditional perspective of female roles and identity to a feminist perspective of herself and the world. In this pattern of development, the women undergo a transformation that impacts both their personal and public life worlds. The second pattern can be described as the pattern of continuity: a discovery of fit, that is, the participants, while raised in accordance with traditionally scripted gender roles are critical of their socialisation. Their critique of the status quo is reflected in permutations of self-questioning, questioning those in authority, and often resisting gender-based discrimination. Essentially, they display sensitivity to gender discrimination at an early age. Key experiences enable them to recognize that their beliefs and values are feminist; hence they adopt the label as an identity and identification marker. Clark & Gaston describe this as a pattern of continuity: discovery of fit rather than an experience of transformation, which results in their assuming the label ‘feminist’.

With minimum variation, all the participants in my study appear to come from households modelled on a patriarchal template. This emerges through either their overt or
oblique references to the gender divisions in their families. This is most apparent in the
gendered distribution of household and public labour, which is modelled on patriarchal norms
and expectations. With the exception of Thembi’s mother who defied both race and gender
prescriptions in running the village store, and Jennifer’s mother who would have assumed dual
parenting roles after her father’s death, Vijay, Phumzile and Jennifer’s mothers pursued
traditionally female dominated careers (Jennifer’s mother was a librarian at a primary school,
and is said to have a love for children, Vijay’s mother was a schoolteacher who earned a
smaller salary than her father who was also a teacher, and Phumzile’s mother was a
registered nursing sister). Emanating from predominantly patriarchal backgrounds the
participants, however, display two distinctly different responses to their socialisation. Thembi
and Carol’s trajectory of feminist identity formation parallels Clark & Gaston’s pattern of
change: transformation of conceptual and personal worlds, whereas Phumzile, Vijay and
Jennifer’s trajectory of feminist identity development parallels the pattern of continuity:
discovery of fit pattern.

The Pattern of Change: transformation of conceptual and personal worlds

For both Carol and Thembi, the two more senior women in the study, the development of a
feminist consciousness follows Clark & Gaston’s pattern of change trajectory. For most of their
early lives we discern conformity to a legitimising identity, during which time they accepted as
normal the social prescriptions and regulations stipulated for males and females. Thus, they
come to feminist consciousness much later. Having gone through the scripts of marriage,
child-rearing and socially sanctioned female public careers, a cluster of episodes and emotions
trigger a search for a more challenging and stimulating life. This precipitates the development
of a feminist perspective. Clark & Gaston also observe that a central element of this
developmental change pattern is entry into a new world, either by physically moving to a more
liberal environment or by experiencing a conceptual change of their worldview; either way
these women are dramatically changed, and they begin to identify themselves as feminists.

Carol and Thembi recount their exposure to feminism as follows:

\begin{quote}
Carol: ... However, a new friend and a book, both feminist, were to change this.

... Jenny would bring her three children to the local park then sit with her nose buried in the
Times Literary Supplement. This is what drew me to her. Once I persuaded her to lower the TLS and
listen to me, I found that, instead of condemning my unhappiness, she encouraged me to acknowledge
and act upon my desires, and she lent me a book. Betty Friedan’s, The Feminine Mystique enabled me
to relate my personal experience to that of other women, and to accept as valid my dissatisfaction with
domicity and the paid work I was doing. Through the influence of my new friend and Friedan, I would
\end{quote}
extend the boundaries of my learned definitions of femininity to include a desire … to find out more about the world, to discover and explore areas of knowledge, and to do this in a structured way through tertiary studies. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 6 & 7).

**Thembi:** In Canada my interest in literature pushed me further into exploring other course offerings such as the one titled “Sexual Colonialism”. I recall that colonialism in this context was used as a metaphor for domination, control, restriction and oppression especially with regard to the subjection of the less privileged persons to permanent servitude. Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* were some of the texts chosen to demonstrate the oppression of the female protagonists and ways of freeing themselves from sexual oppression … In short, for these female characters education was a precondition for authentic female autonomy.

… The practical dimensions of my feminist consciousness can be traced to the 1990’s when I was a participant at the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU). At this conference focus was on sensitizing female academics to the dire consequences of placing power, decision-making and control in the hands of male academics. I am forever grateful to the ACU and also glad that my subsequent teaching of ‘Gender Issues’ (though my interest in it came late in life), eventually forced me to incorporate gender/feminist criticism in my literary studies.

… The more I explored feminist theories the more my own political consciousness with regard to Botswana’s patriarchal culture was raised. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 20, 21, 25 & 26).

In the case of Carol, she had gone through the motions of wifehood, motherhood and an unstimulating career as a secretary and was seeking something more challenging. She attributes her awakening to a feminist consciousness to her friend who introduced her to Friedan’s *Feminine Mystique*, who listened sensitively and non-judgementally to her, and encouraged her to pursue her desires for education. Carol embarked on formal academic studies, which strengthened her knowledge in both feminist and other academic discourses and helped her see that she was not alone in feeling dissatisfied and unhappy at the restrictive nature of normative female socialisation.

It was in Canada while she was studying a course titled: Sexual Colonialism that the first whispers of feminism came to Thembi. The quest of the protagonists in Bronte’s, *Jane Eyre* and Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm*, sensitised her to these women’s struggle to gain autonomy through education. For Botswana-born Thembi the word colonialism denoted domination, control, subjugation and restrictions. Not being politicised to the wider implications of their social connotations meant that it took her longer to make the association between colonial domination and patriarchal domination. It was only after her exposure to the course on Sexual Colonialism and her participation in an academic conference, which specifically addressed patriarchal authority in academia that the analytical dimension of
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feminism sensitised Thembi to the pervasive nature of institutional and cultural gender discrimination.

Moving both literally and metaphorically to new geographic and conceptual spaces (especially via education), is what awakened Carol and Thembi to the shackles of patriarchy. Thus, we see that Carol and Thembi’s coming to feminist consciousness parallels Clark & Gaston’s description in which the women undergo a transformation that impacts both their personal and public life worlds. In this pattern of change: transformation of conceptual and personal worlds the women undergo a transformation from enacting normative female roles and identity to a rearticulated feminist perspective of themselves and the world.

The Pattern of Continuity: discovery of fit

Clark & Gaston identified a second pattern of feminist identity development, which they refer to as ‘a pattern of continuity or a discovery of fit’. The central theme in this pattern of development is a strong sense of self, coupled with a sense of justice. The women in this category experience no major changes as far as their suspicion regarding gender-based differentiation is concerned; instead their views develop along a single trajectory. Much like Thembi and Carol, who admit to coming to a feminist conscious later, Jennifer, Phumzile and Vijay were also raised in families with traditional values, however, unlike Thembi and Carol, whose coming to feminist consciousness followed a pattern of change trajectory, Jennifer, Vijay and Phumzile display characteristics that parallel a pattern of continuity feminist identity development. They did not buy unquestioningly into the social scripts and value system offered for female socialisation. They either openly resisted, or wrestled internally with the gendered status quo. For them, becoming feminists was a matter of adopting a belief system that matched the one they already had. Jennifer writes:

Jennifer: I am a feminist … I feel that I have ‘always’ been a feminist, just as I have always been gay. I do not know whether a feminist affiliation has to do with one’s genetic make-up or one’s socialization (including education); but I have always been politically and socially woman-identified.

(Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 13).

Jennifer maintains that she has always been a feminist and it can be assumed that her continued identification politically and socially with women (and probably also the fact that she was reared in an all-female household), strengthened her affiliation to women’s issues.

In contrast to Jennifer who recalls being both politically and socially women-identified, Vijay experienced a self-loathing about her gender and preferred the company and
conversation of men: a socialisation into the boys’ club, where she could engage in discussions on world affairs and politics. In this regard, Leach (1992), observes:

Since human personal identity is essentially relational, a personal identification with one’s gender is an essential characteristic of personal identity. Men and women, define themselves in relation to different social norms learned in childhood. Since a man or woman’s sense of self (and self-worth) is essentially connected to success or failure in meeting gender-related standards, women’s sense of self or self-worth cannot be ultimately achieved by imitating men or by adopting masculine capacities or goals. Rather, women must find collective ways to socially revalorize feminine-identified values and skills in order that women can reclaim a sense of self-worth denied by a male-dominated system.

However, for Vijay, during her unlabelled, formal pre-feminist consciousness, she admits to unwittingly buying into patriarchal stereotypes about the shallowness of women’s ways of being in reaction to her mother’s discrimination of her. Sensing that she was the object of gender bias provoked a critical questioning, confrontation and challenge to her mother’s interaction with her. Although it is not clear when the confrontation with her mother about the gender bias occurred, Vijay attributes her formal conscientization and exposure to feminist discourses, as follows:

**Vijay:** When the municipal libraries in Durban were opened to all races in 1983 I came across *Ms Magazine*, which made a huge impression on me. I discovered a whole new discourse and began to understand that my concerns about male privilege were about the system of patriarchy. I began to get a better sense of the complicity of men and women with the system. My perception that things were a little complicated in our home, because the more obvious bearer of patriarchy was our mum, rather than our dad (who had seemed quite benign and open to being challenged), became more complex.

*(Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 15).*

*Ms Magazine,* a mentor, and a circle of friends helped Vijay find a label and a vocabulary for her nagging suspicion that preferential male treatment was part of a cluster of interlocking systems of oppression. The process of her naming patriarchy resonates with the following quote from Freidan’s, *Feminine Mystique* (1965:13):

It was a demoralising problem—‘a problem with no name: The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of ... women. It was a strange stirring, a sense of dissatisfaction, a yearning that women suffered ...

The problem has since been named, and Vijay learnt that patriarchy, which is the law of the father, perpetuates male supremacy. This is a contagion cultivated in the political economy of unequal gender relations, which systematically disprivileges females. In elaborating on the
nameless, yet demoralising problem, that Vijay described, in the following extract, Phumzile also eloquently captures her sensing and identification of patriarchy:

**Phumzile:** It is with great difficulty that I came to understand later that this was not something that was obvious to many girls; that many women claim to only have come to feminism through reading ... I am also aware of many others for whom the language of feminism only helped name what had long been identified through their own experiential location. Thus while I was to later call myself feminist, Black feminist and womanist/postcolonial feminist, the insight into the key regulatory role of gender in society had far preceded the naming of the observation and refusal to submit to prescriptions on female behaviour ... I remember it is also here (at All Saints) that I encountered the label 'feminist' for the first time and started to use it to describe myself. I was not the only self-defined feminist here. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 11 & 15).

From Jennifer, Vijay and Phumzile’s accounts of their feminist identity development, the pattern they describe involves continuity rather than a change in their sense of Self. The participants learn/hear about feminism and adopt the label because it matches the value systems they believed should be in existence.

Clark & Gaston’s differentiation between the two patterns of feminist identity development is useful in understanding that different people come to feminist consciousness through different circumstances, however, what remains to be discussed is that the cliché ‘coming to feminist consciousness’, often masks the non-linearity of the process of feminist identity formation, and the non-unitariness of the strands of feminist consciousness.

Still continuing the exploration into Movement Two, which is defined by an outward gaze, and the naming of patriarchy, in the ensuing discussion, I examine the various strands of feminist thinking that the participants subscribe to, and the influence people, places, and publications have on the process of their coming to feminist consciousness.

*Strands in Feminist Thinking*

Emanating from the premise that the discourse on identity is founded on a politics defined by multiplicity and difference renders it reductive to talk about the category 'woman'. The different positionalities of social actors, and the theoretical variations that frame feminist discourses give substance to this premise. In commenting on the fractured face of feminism, Spender (1983:367), explains that each feminist strand provides a partial and tentative resolution to the woman question(s) by offering a fresh perspective with its own methodological and theoretical merits and de-merits. Against this backdrop, in reading through both the interview transcripts,
and the autobiographical essays, I encountered as many espousals to different feminist discourses, as there were participants. The following extracts provide a cursory overview of the various theoretical orientations and affiliations the participants acknowledge subscribing to:

**Thembi:** Let me define myself, and then you can label me. Because I really don’t know; when it comes to these “post-post-post”, it comes to a point where I get so confused. Post-structuralism; post-feminism; postmodernism … … the only thing I can say is, since we are talking about centering oneself, moving from the margin to the centre –that movement from the margin to the centre is a movement from a certain identity to assume another identity … maybe I’m a postmodernist? … I think it’s all about connectedness – of these ideologies, and experiences – to the extent where you cannot say they are mutually exclusive. There are different types of feminisms … so it depends on your own ideology … it’s a contested terrain. (Interview).

**Carol:** My orientation is materialist rather than psychoanalytic, (thus I will focus on what social practices are in existence, as well as what fiction is saying). … In line with the requirements of informed academic work that follows on post-colonial, deconstructionist, and post-structural theories, I attempt to establish general tendencies, to work comparatively, and at the same time, establish specific characteristics. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 18 & 24).

**Vijay:** From work that I’ve done in Development Studies there’s some wonderful theories related to WID (Women in Development), WAD (Women and Development), and GAD (Gender and Development). … I am more a GAD than anything else. A GAD theorist is interested in gender and development … It is difficult to talk about the essence of woman-ness or male-ness and so the GAD theorists … are saying that these are not homogenous groups and they are not mutually exclusive. (Interview).

**Jennifer:** My thoughts about feminism are very eclectic … I have read and been influenced by a wide range of feminist theorists. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 16). At one stage in my doctorate, when I was looking at nature, I was influenced by eco-feminism and bio-feminism, Mary Daly, etc. These days I am more interested in psychoanalysis. At the moment I am also interested in the representation of women’s bodies in science fiction film. (Interview).

**Phumzile:** Thus while I was to later call myself feminist, Black feminist and womanist/postcolonial feminist, the insight into the key regulatory role of gender in society had far preceded the naming of the observation … (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 11).
The extracts provide a glimpse at the expanse of feminist discourses the participants espouse. These include combinations of materialist concerns, gender and development issues, postmodernism, poststructuralist, psychoanalytical theorisings, and identification with Black/womanist ideologies. From these extracts, the following two significant points emerge:

First, Thembi and Vijay highlight the difficulty in sifting through the essentialist and non-essentialist features of feminist thinking. Thembi refers to the connectedness of these ideologies and experience; and says: ... you cannot say they are mutually exclusive. Vijay too points out that both the strands in feminist thinking and the constituents they serve ... are not mutually exclusive. Thembi and Vijay forward the shared view that feminist discourses are not mutually exclusive, they bleed into each other challenging, changing, refuting, assimilating and winnowing wisps of ideologies, experiences and value systems, thus illustrating the interconnectivity of the web of feminist thought. It is this interconnectivity that makes it difficult to essentialise the various strands in feminist thought, and to single out exclusively and definitively the participants’ feminist ideological leanings. For example, Jennifer admits: ... my thoughts of feminism are very eclectic, and Carol, while espousing materialist leanings, comments that in her teaching she attempts to work comparatively among feminist discourses seeking out specificities (that which is particular and peculiar within a feminist strand), and coagulating general (universalistic) characteristics. Her statement shows that despite differences among the various strands of feminist thinking, there are also underlying commonalities. This does not translate into conflictual fragmentation, but to the recognition that different feminist strands address different aspects of the woman question, and cumulatively contribute towards agitating for women’s emancipation. For Thembi it takes the form of rescuing women from the marginalized fringes of society so as to make their status, experiences and multiple identities visible in mainstream society. This is evident in her comment: movement from the margin to the centre. For Carol it is about understanding the materiality of women’s condition in literature and showing her students its relevance by focusing on what social practices are in existence. For Vijay it is about the interconnectivity, and interdependence of men and women and their joint development for holistic social renewal, thus GAD theorists interest in gender and development. For Jennifer it is about interrogating the representation of women’s bodies in cultural media. Despite the vast fissures characterizing feminist discourses, the unifying feature remains the redress agenda linked to social development and women’s empowerment, encapsulated in what Phumzile describes as confronting the regulatory role of gender in society.

In addition, since social transformation remains paramount, the different foci of these strands of feminist thought brings to mind Laden's (2001), observation that it is difficult to see what divides contemporary positions in the discourse on identity politics. The vagaries and
difficulty for differentiation among the strands of feminist thought owes largely to the proliferation of feminist discourses, and this is perhaps best articulated by a bewildered Thembi, when she says: *Let me define myself, and then you can label me. Because I really don’t know; when it comes to these “post-post-post”, it comes to a point where I get so confused.*

The second point emerges from Phumzile’s statement: *I was to later call myself feminist, Black feminist and womanist/postcolonial feminist.* Her statement confirms that feminist consciousness is not a static state of being, that is, as identities-in-process, it is possible for an individual to go through different feminist ideological, and experiential dispensations. In this regard Phumzile recalls traversing various strands of feminist thinking changing the label and probably expanding and reconfiguring her notions of feminist discourses. The trajectories of her ideological affiliations signal the evolution in her understanding and experiences of these various discourses. For example, in her essay, she reflects: *It was at All Saints that I encountered the label ‘feminist’ for the first time and started to use it to describe myself.* But, like so many women of colour before her, Phumzile also recognised the universalising/normative tendencies of mainstream feminism, and its attempt at a coherence of effect, which fails to acknowledge the multiple fissures of identity across race, class, sexual orientation, etc. Thus, like other women of colour, who criticised feminism for its racist bias because they equated feminism exclusively with White, middle class preoccupations, Phumzile, too as a Black South African teenager, experienced the disjuncture between her Black female identities in relation to the Victorian morals that dominated gender decorum at the school she attended. This precipitated the need for her to differentiate between feminism and Black feminism, and may explain her subsequent affiliation with Black feminism as more relevant to her material and theoretical realities. Later, her embracing of Womanist ideologies appears to provide her with an avenue to foster stronger relationships with both Black women and Black men, given Womanism’s commitment to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Mobilising with Black males, however, engendered its unique set of oppressions. Phumzile expresses her sense of betrayal when her Black male colleagues, whom she considered *fellow comrades,* reacted with hostility to Mamphela Ramphele’s sexual harassment policy.

Finally, her espousal of postcolonial discourses may be read as an attempt to redress the brevity, lies and misrepresentation of the experiences of the *Other* that she experienced in her undergraduate studies. Thus, currently as an educator she includes in a Masters Course on African Literature a component on slave narratives and writings by Africans from the 18th century. In the English 225 Course, she teaches writings by Southern African, Caribbean and Indian women novelists in which she deconstructs colonial representations of the Other, and
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the power of the colonised (See Chapter 3, section titled: Overview of Course Taught, Classroom Activities & Reflections, for more details of the courses Phumzile teaches, as well as Movement Three in this chapter, which explores issues she theorises and teaches).

While it was largely contextual and ‘experiential’ variables that sensitised Phumzile to the various strands in feminist thinking and the various tiers of women’s oppression, at the hands of both men and fellow women, Jennifer attributes her exploration of different strands in feminisms to her changing scholarly interests. For example, her early research interests introduced her to eco- and bio-feminisms, and her current research interests are located in psychoanalytical feminist discourses, and cultural studies.

The multiplicities within feminist thinking evident in Phumzile’s account, as well as in the other participants’ reflections, support Calhoun’s observation regarding the lack of internal homogeneity of the individual, and the real possibility that individuals affiliate to different social interests and ideologies. The internal heterogeneity of individuals also hints at the internal and external dialogicality that such heterogeneity engenders.

The multiplicities, fissures and fractures in the feminist discourse has, expectedly, invited criticism from anti-feminists for being a house divided among itself. Tong (1989:7), suggests that in order to weather the scoff and scorn of anti-feminists, contemporary feminists: … need a home in which everyone has a room of her own, but one in which the walls are thin enough to permit a conversation, a community of friends in virtue, and partners in action.

Identification with various feminist strands supports di Stefano’s (1990:73), prediction that prevailing trends point to new feminisms emerging, which are more reflective of the different cultural, psychological, research interests and material concerns of new generation of women. This is certain to impact and reconfigure the theoretical identifications of those already subscribing to feminisms. McLaren & Lankshear (1993:9), suggest that: ‘we must abandon the outmoded and dangerous idea that we possess as social agents a timeless essence or a consciousness that places us beyond historical and political practices. Rather, we should understand our ‘working identities’ as an effect of such practices’.

What emerges in Movement Two is that, notwithstanding the different stages and variations in the initial patterns, which the development of a feminist identity take, once the women come to feminist consciousness, they share a number of similarities in the way they interpret their life experiences. Thus, irrespective of the age, stage or pattern of feminist identity development, most of the research participants attribute the development of their feminist consciousness to people, places and publications. This three-fold influence relates to the theory forwarded in the Downing & Roush (1985), study which showed that once women
identified and named their discrimination they begin to associate with 'like-minded' women and to commit themselves to feminist values.

**People:** association with ‘like-minded’ women

In discussing the influence association with ‘like-minded’ people has on feminist identity formation, an important qualification to be made at the outset is that the adjective ‘like-minded’ is employed in the sense of unifying feminists on the basis of principled and strategic coalitions based on shared values and vision. It does not suggest cognitive or social cohesion that suppresses, erases or masks differences among the women.

Feminist friendships, collaboration in networks, and involvement in activist movements have been the hallmark of feminism. Association in these networks tends to be both social and intellectual. The network of friends and colleagues, the formation of strategic coalitions, the values and ideologies they subscribe to, and their responses to socio-political phenomena suggest a complex process of feminist identity development. This is what emerges from the following extracts, which capture the various organizations and sites of resistance the research participants have become associated with, and involved in over the years. The extracts also draw attention to the multiple tiers of oppression ranging from class, race, gender, health, to linguistic issues that these women expanded their ambit of influence on. Their accounts also highlight the pervasive nature of gender discrimination.

In recounting the development of their feminist consciousness through social and intellectual networks, Carol, Phumzile, Vijay and Thembi present the following accounts:

**Carol:** In my mind and that of the feminists who became friends and associates—we were not all white and middle-class—the battle was always against apartheid as well as sexism … the South African social context meant that white feminists like me could not retreat into protest only against the plight of women like me. I joined the Women’s Movement, a multi-racial grouping, who demonstrated, submitted petitions, and organized relief action (for instance, during winter floods). I participated for three years in a ‘rap’ (discussion) group whose members I met through the Women’s Centre in Rondebosch, and I joined the Black Sash. Growing up in the late Forties and the Fifties, I had taken for granted the restrictions attached to race, class, and gender; now, the foundations of my childhood training were shaken to the core, my circle of friends was enlarging and changing, and the basis of my identity became linked to South African, indeed global, phenomena and experiences. The women I met in these groupings were often articulate, intelligent, and efficient organizers of public meetings and protests; they were also more confident and more informed about public affairs than the women I had encountered so far. For the first time, I had black friends. Like the intellectual world I stepped into when I registered with
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UNISA in 1974, this world of women activists allowed me access to new areas of thinking and experience. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 9).

**Vijay:** On reflection, the reason I react strongly to class-arrogance and racism against other people and myself may be the result of my experiences of gender inequity at home and in the broader family.

... I wrote UDW's Social Redress Policy (to correct the racial, gender and class inequities in student and staff representation) and piloted it through the union and the university structures ... I also began the move to integrate the cleaning staff (who were subcontracted under miserable conditions) into the union, and started a literacy programme (ongoing).

... there is an enormous interest in gender among students taking Sociolinguistics and this growing discipline would do well to develop the area, particularly as it is an important way of addressing issues such as civil rights, domestic violence, HIV/AIDS and social movements. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 3, 11 & 25).

**Thembi:** Beijing. This is the identity this group of Batswana women had assumed. This was indeed an indication of our underlying struggle for social change. It had become obvious to those few women that though we live in contemporary times, many of the traditional structures ... still hamper our lives today; hence the women's hint at their struggle for gender equality. Having been part of this body of women connected by an invisible cord of common experience, I was more convinced than ever before that the female voice, individually or as part of a bigger collective, has to be heard and acknowledged.

The fact that this approach embraces not only questions of class but also of race and gender further makes one critical of the extent to which power is constructed and constituted even in language. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 22 & 24).

**Phumzile:** This was an exciting time to be at university and I participated in organisations, which espoused anti-racist and feminist politics ... It is at UCT where I learned to integrate my race and gender politics since the ‘everyday’ challenged my ability to keep them separate. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 17).

The extracts highlight the role feminist social networks and webs of friendship have played in consciousness-raising. It has encouraged women to establish a new covenant with themselves, by seeking emancipation from both internal and external oppressions, repressions and tyrannies. The participants testify to expanding the circle of their affiliations and entering into coalitions with a wide array of political and social groups which were not solely concerned with agitating for personal and women’s liberation, but for wider social justice and recognition.

First, Carol offers rich insight into the politics of difference. She mentions that the organisations she joined were not all white and middle-class, they were *multiracial groupings*, and for the first time she had *Black friends*. Given the divisiveness of Apartheid, it is understandable that Carol should draw more attention to the racial integration of the
organisations; however, she also refers to forming networks across class barriers. In doing so, she points to the existence of multiple tiers, and interlocking systems of oppression such as racial, gender and class inequities, which Thembi, Vijay and Phumzile also mention in their extracts. The participants’ affiliations to various activist movements confirms the contention that essentialising identity in terms of gender, race, class, ethnicity, etc. is restricting because the struggle for equality, which may vary in intensity and complexity, nonetheless is the same struggle for everyone. It also shows that failure to recognise the nature of shared oppression acts as a disciplinary function because in its sectarianism it mobilises people who are like you, rather than who share your political values. In addition, reference to the diversity in the group composition by race and class points to the nature of strategic coalitions, which does not aim to eradicate or suppress difference among group members, but acknowledges and accepts that people occupy different positionalities and multiple identities, but come together based on principled solidarities.

Second, Carol and Vijay’s agitating for racial and gender emancipation exemplifies the narrativist nature of identity, which combines studies of action, and identity as they are linked to relational, spatial and temporal dimensionalities. As discussed in Chapter 4, the impact of Apartheid on temporal and spatial relations created both race and class divisions among South Africans. In their respective essays, both Carol and Vijay’s micro-narratives describe the result of such social policies on them as individuals and collective society. Carol’s retrospective gaze alerted her to the fact that: she had taken for granted the restrictions attached to race, class, and gender; but on joining these women’s networks, the foundations of [her] childhood training were shaken to the core, [her] circle of friends was enlarging and changing. Vijay too attributes her political and social retaliation against class arrogance and racism to experiences of gender inequity at home and in her broader family. Linking the relational micro-narratives of their personal experiences, either as victims of oppression or as benefactors of privilege, has served as an impetus for Carol and Vijay to act so as to stem the tide of further racial and class-based oppressions.

Third, we note that the nature of political and social activism assumed various forms, linked to the moral content, ideals and aspirations of the participants’ identities and ideological affiliations. For example, for Carol, in line with her concrete materialist leanings she participated in demonstrations and discussion groups, submitted petitions, and organized relief action for flood victims. In line with her GAD alignment, Vijay wrote and piloted the university’s Social Redress Policy to correct the racial, gender and class inequities affecting students and staff. She agitated for the unionisation of the cleaning staff, and also started a literacy programme for them.
Fourth, despite the numeric leanness of women’s networks, Thembi alludes to the power women have to enact social transformation against the pervasive of patriarchal oppression. Employing the familiar feminist metaphor of ‘female voice’, Thembi reiterates the call to make visible women’s oppression at the hands of patriarchy, both in one’s individual capacity, as well as part of a larger collective. This is consistent with feminist attempts to provide both a place and the power for women to speak, by challenging patriarchal definitions of women and overcoming their voicelessness by naming their experiences of oppression. The impact and transformation at both the individual and broader social level is also supported by Carol, who, in reflecting on her personal transformation by virtue of joining anti-oppression social groups, testifies that she began to see herself as part of a national and international collective. This is evident in her statement: the basis of my identity became linked to South African, indeed global, phenomena and experiences. For Carol, who for most of her early years denied her South African identity, association with feminist networks, solidified her reconceptualisation and the basis of her national identity. In addition, she began to conceive of her identity as linked to global phenomenon. Both Thembi and Carol’s sense of the interconnectivity between the individual and collective, the national and international, confirms Brah’s (1991), views on the nature of coalitions, which is based on a politics of identification rather than a politics of identity. Brah writes:

We develop our first sense of community within a neighbourhood but we soon learn to see ourselves as part of many other ‘imagined’ communities—imagined in so far as we may never actually meet those people face to face, but we learn to identify with these groups, their experiences, and their struggles. These processes of political identification, and formation of communities of struggle do not erase the diversity of human experiences rather they enable us to appreciate the particular within the universal, and the universal within the particular.

The fourth point elaborates on the interconnectivity between the particular and the universal, the public and personal, by linking these to social transformation networks. In this regard, Phumzile was also able to connect her personal everyday experiences by integrating race and gender politics since the ‘everyday’ challenged [her] ability to keep them separate. By seeing that the personal of the everyday is fused to the political, the personal automatically becomes political for Phumzile. Carol also reflects on the impact association with her activist friends had on her in terms of her personal and public identities. When she began to associate with women who were articulate, confident and intelligent, this made her more informed about public affairs. It also provided her with a sound model on which to access and expand her thinking and experience.
Fifth, in describing the women activists as articulate, intelligent, and confident, Carol addresses Appiah’s (2000), critique of the shortcomings of contemporary discourses on identity politics. Appiah draws attention to the tendency to focus almost exclusively on broad collective categories of race, class gender, etc. whereas individual identity categories like intelligence, wit, charm, confidence, etc. are ignored as socially relevant categories.

The cumulative effect of affiliation to feminism is summarised by Cherniss (1972), who studied women active in consciousness-raising groups and identified their major characteristics as: a valuing of autonomy and self-control; an orientation towards achievement, and an aspiring to high self-esteem. For most women in the study a pre-feminist consciousness was characterised by feelings of boredom, misery, lack of self-confidence, etc. Vijay says that her exposure to, and identification and involvement with feminist discourses has been ‘reaffirming’. This is significant in the light of the diminished self-esteem she experienced as a child, when because of her mother over-valuing her brothers she felt undermined and resentful about being a girl.

In also recounting the positive impact feminist thinking has had on her concept of self, Thembi writes:

| Thembi: Indeed, feminism has had a fundamental change on my self-perception. I see myself as a multiplicity of identities - of being an individual, a female, a wife, a mother, an intellectual and an educator. But I also have a sense of being part of a bigger collective, part of a body of both women and men connected by an invisible umbilical cord of humanity. These multiple identities feed on each other constantly and their synergy pushes me towards a stronger sense of self. Much of feminism is about self-acceptance, and this has spilled to other aspects of my life. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 35). |

For Thembi, feminism changed her perception of herself. Prior to her exposure to feminist discourses, her understanding of herself was confined to accepting the hegemonic roles and identities of wife and mother. Now, she celebrates the multiplicity of her identities that situate her on the move within the fluid spaces of public and private domains. Perhaps, most strikingly is her overwhelming sense of self-acceptance which is poignantly captured in Maya Angelou’s poem: *Phenomenal Woman*, which Thembi offered as a piece of literature that most succinctly describes the way she sees herself. In addition, the women also report a critical maturation as a result of exposure, engagement and contribution to feminist discourses. As is endemic in most patriarchal societies where educational and social rites, rituals, etc. present a myopic gaze which elevates and make visible male theories, perspectives, etc. these women report to feeling doubly empowered in that they have a broader, multi-perspectival interpretation of social phenomena, as a result of feminist influences on their lives.
The preoccupation of the research participants with socio-political transformation is glaringly evident. Ranging from grassroots political protest activism, benevolent relief action, attending academic conferences, to formulating redress policy, all these activities demonstrate their widespread participation and intervention in effecting social transformation across race, class, gender, language, civic, etc. enclaves. It supports Gilmore's (1994:4-5), observation that:

... for many women, the community into which they are born is not ultimately, the community to which they belong. Women who join convents, who cross classes and regions, who politicise female identity, locate themselves in complex relation to their communities or homes of origin and to the communities they join.

It is perhaps in the light of affiliation and commitment to these feminist values that Castells' (1997:8), conceptualization of project identity becomes meaningful. According to Castells project identity refers to the process in which social actors, on the basis of the diverse cultural materials available to them, build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, in so doing seek transformation of overall social structures. This is the case, for instance, when feminism moves out of the trenches of resistance of women's identity and women's rights to challenge patriarchalism as it manifests within the family, sexual relations, the labour market and the entire structure of production, reproduction, etc. on which societies have been historically based.

Places: in search of a room of one's own

Tamboukou (1999), observed that, 'Go out, get out, be out, spread my wings, run away, leave, are but some of the verbs that can be frequently traced in women teachers' autobiographical writings, and out as a participle often accompanies these verbs of movement. Women's self-writings present selves on the move, always attempting to cross the boundaries of their family, their locality, their town or city, and in some cases their country. Confinement emerges as a highly frustrating theme in women's accounts of their lives and has been used in feminist theory to describe oppression. Their frustration is articulated in desires of discursive, imaginary and sometimes physical escape, and in their attempts to cross both real and metaphorically imposed spatial boundaries. It is significant that many of the women in Tamboukou's (ibid.), study refer to the role that both education through travel and geographical change played in conscientizing them to the structuring of gender relations and the formation of subjectivities.

Inextricable to conceptual and ideological transformation, for the majority of the participants in my study, the first step for a new life seemed bound to distancing themselves
from familiar ideological and geographical locales. Irrespective of whether these new spaces meant attending university or going abroad, the participants make reference to the role ‘travel’ played in deepening their understandings of feminist discourses, as they moved towards new/different geographical, metaphorical or ideological places. Carol writes: *Like the intellectual world I stepped into when I registered with UNISA in 1974, this world of women activists allowed me access to new areas of thinking and experience.* Thembi refers to her study stint in Canada where she heard the first whispers of feminism. She also makes mention of the Beijing Conference, which alerted her to the global phenomenon of women’s oppression, and the Association of Commonwealth Universities conference conscientized her to institutional patriarchy. Vijay alludes to the estrangement she felt from her immediate surrounding, and the sense of belonging she experienced during her overseas visit. She recalls:

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**Vijay:** I was in the States for a few months in the early 90s and attended a conference towards the end of my stay. I never thought I was going to learn so much from African American women. I saw that it was African American women from the Caribbean who were teaching everybody else. Every African American woman I met was so amazing. They are just uncannily powerful. They made literature for me. They gave me a home. (Interview).

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Two significant issues emerge from Vijay’s extract. The first, relates to space and the exercise of power. She comments that these women were *just uncannily powerful.* She hints that the conference became a space for female self-assertion, and obliquely alludes to the fact that space is fundamental in any exercise of power, especially when structuring gender relations. While there is increasing analyses related to women’s exclusion from public spaces, little attention has been paid to the ways women experience lack of space (sometimes no space at all). Second, Vijay celebrates the literary and ideological genius of the Caribbean women she met, and whose work she engaged. It seems that they gave her an ideological home. She says: *They made literature for me. They gave me a home,* which metaphorically signifies for her a space for imagination and the development of her creative literary interests.

Tamboukou’s (ibid.), study which explored women’s autobiographical travel writing, echoes the sentiments of my research participants, and further confirms that:

… travelling offered [women] possibilities of escaping their prescribed places and roles. Finding themselves in different places, far away from their home, women underwent rare experiences, acquired knowledges that had the possibility of transforming their lives, and constructed quite novel personal relations to the new and unknown world.
Apart from the role people and places played in the development of feminist consciousness, many of the research participants attribute their feminist and wider social conscientization being achieved through exposure to literature and feminist publications. The intellectual association often assumed the form of reading the publications of other feminist writers, and in some cases engaging the critique of anti-feminist scholars, and feminists of varying theoretical and methodological persuasions.

In their essays, the participants reflect at length on the various literatures, theories and theorists have played, and continue to play, in shaping their feminist thinking. Beginning with feminist consciousness raising texts like Friedan’s, *Feminine Mystique*, to Jennifer’s fascination with science fiction, the other participants also catalogue lists of poetry and prose publications that provide them with continued intellectual stimulation, which deepens their social consciousness and provokes them to activism.

Carol and Thembi, in particular, allude to the shortcomings of their previous scholarship. In their retrospective critique of it, they believe that their doctoral studies would have been richer had they been investigated through the added lens of feminist theoretical frameworks.

To illustrate the wide-ranging texts that inform their feminist understandings, Vijay’s comprehensive list serves as an excellent example of the varied issues that these texts typically address:

**Vijay:** Among the theorists who have laid the ground for my thinking about feminism and multilingual teaching are Audre Lorde on the power of utterance, Carole Boyce Davies on how gender and race contribute to silencing, Trinh Minh-ha on third world representation and intellectual marginalisation, Gayatri Spivak on intellectual representation and pedagogical practices, Amina Mama on African feminism, Desiree Lewis on South African feminist intellectual practices, Obioma Nnaemeka on building gender networks to address the challenges of modernity, Judith Butler on the limitations of heterosexist constructions of gender, Chandra Talpade Mohanty on questioning the limits of white middle class feminism, Mary Eagleton on teaching gender, Paulo Freire on popular education, Ngugi wa Thiong’o on committed writers and the limitations of writing in English, Terry Eagleton on deconstructing the power of institutionalised English studies, Noam Chomsky on the public responsibilities of intellectuals, Edward Said on challenging eurocentrism and neoliberal globalisation, and Jacques Derrida on deconstructing power. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 25).
The list of theorists and writers illustrate the widespread influence of feminist thinking. They incorporate studies of literature, psychology, sociology, education, anthropology, and other disciplines, as well as publications by Third World authors who have traditionally been mapped on the blindspot of mainstream scholarship. In this regard, Mansbridge (in Castells 1997:175-176), writes:

… Today, feminist identities are created and reinforced when feminists get together, act together, and read what other feminists have written. Talking and acting creates street theory and gives it meaning. Reading keeps one in touch and continues to make one think.

Finally, the participants do not just turn to these texts for their personal growth, but many also prescribe or recommend them as course readings to their students. This is a discussion I take up in Movement Three, which explores feminist educators’ theorising and teaching emancipation from social oppression.

**Movement Three: Enacting a Transformed Identity: Theorising and Teaching Emancipation**

According to Hart (1991), in Movement Three of coming to feminist consciousness, the women enact an empowered and emancipated social identity. What emerges from the participants’ narratives is that as their commitment to feminist values intensifies they become more active in feminist causes, to the extent that working for justice also becomes ingrained in their careers. There is thus, a consolidation of their project identities, as they seek to promote the transformation of social structures through their feminist teacher identities. Given also that teaching is laden with ideological values, these feminist educators use their teaching space as a forum to enact their identities as ideology. Following Laditka’s (1990), contention that generally, ‘the logic of consciousness is the logic of ideological communication’ they teach English literature and language from a feminist perspective thereby promoting ideologies and values that counter patriarchal oppression. As a multiplier effect, these feminist teachers compose identities as ideology both for themselves and their students by attempting to conscientize their students to prevailing discriminatory practices that grounds a world of racism, linguicism, misogyny, cultural bias, violence and a host of other social injustices. This is evident in the following two extracts from Thembi and Jennifer’s essays, respectively:

**Thembi:** Having gone through the traditional approach to reading literature, and now being aware of its limitations, I now try to introduce literature differently to my students. I am, clearly, more convinced than ever before that culture places different behavioural expectations on men and women, and that those expectations affect individuals’ reactions to issues of gender.
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…” My teaching of ‘Gender Issues in African Literature’ especially from a feminist perspective, has not only been a consciousness-raising exercise for my students but has also been, for me, a continuous process of intellectual growth. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 26 & 32).

Jennifer: While my feminist views form the foundation for all the research and teaching I do … The clearest and most current expression of my approach is to be found in the study material that I write for the Honours course in Contemporary Women’s Writing (CONTEM-A), of which I am the team leader and which I helped to design. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 22).

Thus, we notice that both Thembi and Jennifer’s ideological views regarding emancipation from gender discrimination is communicated through their teaching. This is evident in Thembi’s attempts to conscientize her students to gender issues, which simultaneously serves as a source of personal intellectual growth. Jennifer expresses her feminist views via her teaching and publication of course materials. In addition, her designing and writing of study material, illustrates how the educators activate/realise their identities as invention within the teaching profession.

Given that the participants are teachers of English, they conscientize their students primarily by exposing them to the ways in which language is used in the domination, subjugation, and denigration of people, in general, and women in particular. While not discounting the importance of teaching the linguistic components of language (grammatical rules), they focus sharply on its more inclusive realm, which is concerned with its use in social, political, cultural and psychological domains. By examining language-related issues of class, culture, power and domination they attempt to provoke students to an understanding that language is not an asocial, apolitical, neutral or value-free construct, but a powerful conduit for socio-linguistic ideological communication. Carol and Jennifer make reference to this dimension of the nature of language in the following extracts:

Carol: … This has meant … the analysis of sexism, frequently normalised and unrecognised in terminology.

… Our conditioning by family, and often by teachers … can have the effect of normalising, rendering ‘innocent’, the ideological. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 16 & 22).

Jennifer: I believe students should, above all, not regard language as value-free or transparent, but must, instead, develop sensitivity to its use in buttressing power interests (including those of race, class and gender). (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 22).

Recurring words and phrases in the extracts emphasise the need to interrupt thinking about the apparent normalcy, innocence, value-free, and transparency of language ideologies.
Recognising the insidious power of language, Carol identifies the role culture, family conditioning and socialisation play in naturalising and anaesthetizing people to the normalcy of language usage, to the extent that discriminatory linguistic practices masquerade as natural and go by unrecognised and unchallenged. Unmasking the way language as a cultural construct has been, and continues to be used as a vehicle to perpetuate unequal social relations, Jennifer suggests that language needs to be thoroughly investigated with students in order to expose and challenge the inherent sexism, racism, classism, that results in the denigration and subordination of females, and marginalized Other. In doing so, she articulates a declaration that all the participants in this study strive to achieve through their theorising and teaching performances, which aim at denaturalising the taken-for-granted assumptions about the innocence of language.

In order to explore Movement Three, which is characterised by the enactment of a transformed identity through the theorising and teaching of emancipation from oppression, I draw on three recurrent themes that generally frame discussions on the feminist critique of language. I do so by examining the language and gender issues that the participants theorise and teach about in relation to:

- dominance and difference: power and culture in women’s linguistic behaviour;
- naming and representation: a constructed and contested domain in gender relations; and
- finding a voice: overcoming women’s silencing and exclusion in language.

I then extend the above thematic frame to argue that sensitivity to language and gender issues have the potential to promote sensitivity to bilingual and multilingual concerns. Given that both language and gender, and multilingual discourses are committed to entrenching egalitarian ideals, I extrapolate illustrative examples from the participants’ essays and interviews to explore these in relation to:

- dominance and difference: power and culture in English and Other languages;
- naming and representation: a constructed and contested domain of the Other in English Language and Literature Studies; and
- finding a voice: overcoming silencing and exclusion of the Other in English Language and Literature Studies.

*Dominance and Difference: power and culture in women’s linguistic behaviour*

The distinction between dominance and difference relates to the erroneous tendency to equate difference with deficit, and is widely subscribed to as a rationale for the enactment of power
performances in male and female interactions. The feminist critique of language argues that language, as a patriarchal construct has been crucial in maintaining male supremacy, and ensuring the inferior social status of women and girls. In this regard, Thembi points out:

**Thembi:** Quite often students come to the classroom already socialized to believe that inequality of the sexes is natural and therefore unchallengeable. Such students easily buy into theories, which legitimise male domination over females. Exposing these same students, however, to other opposing views … sensitises them to the differences between the biologically determined and the culturally constructed. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 27).

Thembi refers to students' conditioning and socialisation into the naturalness of gender inequality, which results in male dominance and female subordination. The generalised allegations that Thembi alludes to regarding the naturalness of inequality between the sexes, is given substance to in the following extract from Carol’s essay:

**Carol:** Xhosa students at UWC will make the connection between words and gendered social status in relation to the practice of *hlonipha,* a special variety of the Xhosa language that married women **must use** to show their deference to their husband and his family, while they are **forbidden** to use terms **permitted** to other persons. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 16). (emphasis added).

There are three important points that emerge from Carol’s extract. First, there is a suggestion that while the English language has been charged for being sexist and for promoting misogynist ideologies; such discriminatory charges may also be laid against other ‘marginalised’ languages, notably isiXhosa, in this instance. Second, Carol’s reference to the Xhosa linguistic practice of *hlonipha* (which means ‘respect’), is an excellent illustration of a way in which women (in this instance married Xhosa women) are forced to learn a weak, trivial, and deferential linguistic register. This is essentially training in how to be ‘respectful’, which, in turn is essentially, a euphemism for being, subordinate/obedient. Third, sentence fragments like: *married women **must use, they are forbidden to use terms permitted to other persons,* suggest that, as with the practice of *hlonipha,* other linguistic practices impose imperatives that regulate, circumscribe and prescribe gender-appropriate behaviour for women. This illustrates the way language operates as a mechanism for the inferior-socio-linguistic status of women, and points to practices that ensure women’s relative powerlessness in patriarchal societies. Carol’s interrogation of the practice of *hlonipha* exemplifies one way in which her teaching becomes a consciousness-raising process to alert students to discriminatory linguistic practices likely to be prevalent in their societies.
Enacting feminisms in academia

**Naming and Representation: a constructed and contested domain in gender relations**

The perpetuation of dominance and difference in language is perhaps best illustrated in naming and representation practices. Language has been identified as key in engendering two separate but unequal worlds for males and females. Feminist linguistic scholars, who have specifically concerned themselves with analysing naming and representation conventions, concur that generally our languages, as transmitters of cultural beliefs, are sexist: they represent or name the world from a masculine perspective in accordance with stereotypical beliefs about the sexes. For example, linguistic gendering that focuses mainly on vocabulary (the use of individual words) to define gender roles and statuses, repeatedly cite the use of the *he/man* generic to refer to both male and female subjects. In this regard, Jennifer maintains:

Jennifer: … there is no gender-free language … this means that the entire literary canon has to be re-evaluated in terms of gender as there is a long literary tradition of representing masculinity as prototypically human. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 20).

While, on the one hand, the *he/man* generic has succeeded in constructing an androcentric world view, and has for a long time rendered women invisible or insignificant in social discourse, on the other hand, in instances where women are named, such naming is fraught with stereotypical representations that dichotomise and prescribe gender-appropriate behaviour. It thus, becomes necessary for Carol and Jennifer, who also refer to this tendency in the following extracts, to conscientise students to how lexical gaps service the social exclusion of women. Carol writes:

Carol: I always begin a course, by examining some basic binary terms that expose the dualistic, and sexist worldview underlying Christian culture (examples are man/woman, male/female, gender/sex, masculine/feminine), and will explore with students whether or not such binaries are present in the other cultures represented in the classroom (Muslim, Hindu, African, Christian, Buddhist). (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 16).

Jennifer: I am continually amazed at the force of the dichotomies that give men dominance over women, so that they associate themselves with the mind, rationality, insight, strength and achievement, relegating women to the denigrated spheres of the body, emotion (hysteria), the trivial, weakness and the domestic realm. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 14).
Words like: *binaries, dualistic, dichotomies* are used to suggest that language has been identified as key in engendering two separate but unequal worlds for males and females. As a way to explore the implications and repercussions of functioning in accordance with binary logic, the feminist educators in this study employ deconstructionist techniques to analyse gendered binaries in phallogocentrism. By appropriating deconstructionist sensibilities, which involve the identification of particular dualisms, they attempt to conscientize their students to how social identities are defined through the binary logic of language, which encodes or establishes hierarchical dichotomies. Carol and Jennifer refer to the culturally determined conceptual coupling of masculine/feminine; rational/emotional; mind/body, male/female, which are some of the classic dominant/subordinate dualisms, that have been used to establish meanings that are arbitrarily related to gender or the body. Thus, for example, stringing together the corresponding sides of the binary from Carol and Jennifer’s extracts, results in the equation:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{dominant} &= \text{masculine/male = rational/mind = insight/strength/achievement} \\
\text{subordinate} &= \text{feminine/female = emotional(hysteria)/body = trivial/weakness}.
\end{align*}
\]

By employing deconstructionist techniques, these educators attempt first, to show how the marginalized/subordinate 'side' of the binary coupling can be reconceptualised, for example, femininity can be many different things to different people, in different contexts. Thus, rather than endorse an either/or logic, they teach that it is preferable to view social identities as operating along a continuum. In this regard deconstruction techniques are used to sensitise students to how dualities operate as a regulatory linguistic mechanism to fix the types of people we ought to be in relation to our gender. For example, Carol explores the concept of matrophobia with her students, and how the fear of the maternal engenders stereotypical portrayals of mothering in society; she also teaches varieties of Black masculinities. Having personally experienced discrimination around sexual orientation, Jennifer writes: *I find the heteronormativity of our society, which cannot tolerate same-sex attraction and marginal gender identities … thoroughly repugnant*. Hence, in the seminar *Heterosexuality and its Alternatives*, Jennifer follows what Coffey & Delamont (2000), refer to as the ‘queering’ of the curriculum by taking into account marginalized sexualities, epistemologies, perspectives, literatures and stories.

Equally significant in Carol’s extract is her reference to the role culture and religion play in sanctioning gendered dichotomies. By exploring with students whether binaries like man/women are present in the other cultures represented in the classroom (*Muslim, Hindu, African, Christian, Buddhist*), Carol recognises the often difficult task of provoking students to engage critically with religious and cultural teachings. The tendency to approach religious and cultural phenomena as divinely ordained and/or ancestrally sanctioned, hence closed to
interrogation, calcifies binary thinking that elevates men over women, and further separates the good woman from the bad. The logic of binarism is also transmitted through narrative form and structure in literature through stereotypical gender characterizations. Carol refers to this narrative tendency as follows:

Carol: The study of words per se was augmented by the study of the gender implications of aspects of narrative form and structure. An example of form would be the stereotypical characterization of female personages in fiction by male writers as either saintly Madonna or sinful vamp, of structure would be the phenomenon that the endings of stories by nineteenth-century women writers tended to postulate death as the way out of a unhappy marriage. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 17).

Carol points to how this literary practice feeds into stereotypical portrayals of women, and suggests that sexist language should not be dismissed as just operating at the level of vocabulary (individual words); but is better understood as occurring in a number of quite complex systems of representation, embedded in historical traditions. Jennifer, in her essay, also refers to the image of the passive, delicate, and moral female, which is held up as the ideal demeanour for girls and women, and which is reinforced in traditional literary portrayals. Jennifer critiques the stereotypical depiction of gender roles in children’s literature, which scaffold and perpetuate socio-cultural expectations of girls and women. She identifies the following recurrent motifs used to depict women and girls in literature:

- their passivity (which is inevitably tied to waiting for their destiny to be determined and defined by the male. Females occupy themselves in personal physical adornment activities that are intended to accrue commodity value to themselves. For example, traditional portrayal in children’s literature present girls as delicate, pretty princesses, incapable of self-care and protection).
- their propensity for getting into distress, and the need to be rescued by a male: this thematic emplotment of the destitute damsel proliferates in Western narratives.
- the value placed on romantic union (the heterosexual love ’n marriage happily ever after plot, on which the gendered roles of the nuclear family is founded is presented as an archetype).

Finding a Voice: overcoming women’s silencing and exclusion in language

Smith-Rosenberg (1986:32), observes that women’s contributions have been systematically and incessantly excluded from social stories. As a redress measure struggles about gaining a women’s voice in public life are associated with the clichéd and influential metaphors of
‘women's language,’ ‘women's voice,’ ‘women's consciousness' and/or ‘women's words’. Rather than accept patriarchal representations, these metaphors are generally used to denote both the everyday talk and the public expression of a particular perspective on women’s self and social life. It is in this broader sense that feminist historians have rediscovered women's words, and have urged for the redistribution of the narrative field to recover herstories, craft new meanings to re-form social memory, and to narrate women's stories with fresh insight.

In line with their project identities and identities as ideology, the feminist educators in my study also endeavour to shatter women’s silence, and to make their voices audible within social discourses. Their attempts at achieving this are reflected in their courses offerings. For example, Carol teaches an English Honours Course titled, Some Women Writers in Africa and a Masters course titled: Topics in Gender and Cultural Studies. In her interview she explained that she chose to teach women writers because the voices of women are still underrepresented in Africa; and values like democracy and human rights should include women, who constitute half the population of the world. To achieve this educative goal, Carol also employs deconstruction techniques: where the critic reads for gaps, silences, sub-texts, and might seek to illuminate some of the narrative “strategies” adopted by women to “find a voice”.

Many women feel constrained to keep silent about specifically female experiences and concerns. Thus, studies of ‘women’s voice’ have focused on ascertaining whether women have cultural conceptions concerning self, morality, or social reality different from those of the dominant discourse. As a way of overcoming women’s silence, Vijay was (at the time of my conducting this study) supervising a student researching: how rural women are dealing with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and another student who was researching: how women break the silence of poverty and patriarchy to tell their life stories.

Jennifer taught an English Honours class on Contemporary Women's Writing, explaining that although in the eighteenth century the novel was the province of woman, they were not supposed to be subversive, whereas contemporary twentieth century, American and British novels written by women have become more subversive (a form of writing back to patriarchy and patriarchal ideology). In addition, as a way of encouraging student voice, she uses autobiographical writing to encourage students to make audible their experiences.

In ENG 702, which is a Masters course on African Literature, Phumzile teaches a section which deals predominantly with women's writings. She observes that: often people who teach African literature neglect the writings of women ... as if all these women didn't write. Thembi encapsulates how patriarchal conditioning results in the constant self-regulation, self-censorship and self-sanctioning that has accrued from the legacy of living in a world that attempts to silence the female voice. Thus, the above course offerings show some of the ways
in which, through their curriculum intervention, the participants make visible the experiences of women, and in so doing, conscientize their students to in-roads that could be made to break women’s silence about their experiences.

In the preceding discussion I explored how difference and dominance; naming and representation; and women’s voice are recurrent themes that frame debates on women’s inferior socio-linguistic status. In her essay, Jennifer suggests that language and gender education can counter discriminatory linguistic practices by:

- promoting student self-actualisation;
- teaching students suspicion about the representations of gender that they encounter in literature (for example, use of the male generic pronoun, sentence structure, characterisation, and wider plot);
- developing a critical attitude towards received ideas of gender in writing;
- presenting students with alternative gender depictions; and
- encouraging students to write their own creative pieces.

I provided examples from participants’ essays and interviews to illustrate how these feminist educators sensitise their students to the way language is used to ensure women’s subordinate status in society. In the following discussion, I argue that in the same way that sensitivity to gender issues is intended to educate students to be more responsible and critical users of language, of equal importance is sensitivity to the dominant role and status of English in bilingual and multilingual classrooms. I argue that if not used judiciously and critically, the English language can continue to engender inferior socio-linguistic complexes among students whose mother-tongue is not English.

**Dominance and Difference: power and culture in English and ‘Other’ Languages**

In addition to alerting students to the way language is used to engender male supremacy, the theme of domination and difference is also useful in exposing the hegemony of English, especially in multilingual and bilingual societies, such as South Africa and Botswana, respectively. This study is concerned with tertiary educators who teach English from a feminist perspective; in which English is both the target language of learning, as well as the medium of instruction. This poses the challenge of teaching English as a target language while simultaneously exposing it as a language of colonial domination and exploitation. For example, in reflecting on the British colonial domination of Botswana, in her essay, Thembi pointed out that: *Colonial Botswana, like all colonial countries was gripped in a mentality that denied our ability, our intellect, our beauty as a people, and thus instilled in us a lack of pride in*
our traditional culture. Thembi refers to a familiar strategy that colonising Britain used to entrench its supremacy over its conquests. Through the devaluation of indigenous cultures, traditions, languages and symbols of the colonised nation, Britain succeeded in engendering a colonial attitude by elevating its culture, language and national symbols. It is arguably in the domain of linguistic colonisation that English domination continues to be most visible. This is attested to by Webb (1998), who observes that linguistic domination engenders a colonial attitude, which supports the belief that some languages are better or more effective than others. As a way of illustrating how a colonial attitude has impacted on Botswana and the status of English in relation to other indigenous languages, Thembi writes:

Thembi: … one could also cite the use of the English language versus that of the Setswana language in a multilingual class … In the case of the University of Botswana for example, African Literature written in English, and African literature written either in Setswana or other indigenous languages, are all taught in English as the language while other indigenous languages are subordinated. It is this situation that shows that English, the colonizer’s language, has become the dominant language in Botswana. It seems this historically dominant culture with its language has long determined its own status and marginalized the status of other indigenous cultures to the extent that English in Botswana is the official language while Setswana remains the national language … Setswana as a language of wider communication within the country is used largely as a symbol of nationhood while other languages, spoken in Botswana, such as Kalanga and Seyeyi, etc. do not have their role appropriately defined in the country’s national policy. The unequal and different roles that these two ‘major’ languages play in the country shows that multilingualism is more symbolic than functional. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 30).

Thembi comments on the subordinate/marginalized status of indigenous languages, such as Kalanga and Seyeyi, in relation to the dominant/colonising status of English. The dominance of English is so widely accepted in Botswana, to the extent that it enjoys national status. In addition, it is the medium of instruction at the University of Botswana, (this irrespective of whether the texts being taught are authored in indigenous languages). The dominant status of English is foregrounded by Thembi’s emphasis that it is regarded as the language, rather than one among many other indigenous languages. The apparent resignation that English has long determined its own dominant status at the expense of subordinating indigenous languages, owes to the perception that English is the gateway to attaining self-sufficiency and worthiness. Colonial devaluation of indigenous languages as resulted in many people developing inferiority complexes about their languages, thus alienating many speakers of indigenous languages from their languages and cultures as they aspire towards an improved quality of life. The dominant status of English in relation to indigenous languages in Botswana is also discernible in South Africa. Thus, the attitude towards among speakers of indigenous South African
languages parallels Thembi’s reference to the dissonance between symbolic and functional multilingualism in Botswana. Luckett (1995), confirms that South African speech communities seem to also appreciate the symbolic value of multilingualism but not its functional value, because proficiency in indigenous languages does not secure employment and access to the global community. Speakers of African indigenous languages believe that they have been denied proper access to English, yet it is proficiency in English as the language of power, that promotes upward social mobility, access to the global community, access to learning, employment, and an improved quality of life.

It is against this backdrop that the importance for educators of English to be sensitive to multilingual and bilingual issues in their demographically diverse classes, emerges. Reflecting on her own colonial attitude about the superiority of the English language, Carol addresses the issue of linguistic imperialism, and its implications for teaching the English language in multilingual classrooms. She writes:

**Carol:** I began to understand how ‘colonial’ my views were on the superiority of English, and of a particular version of English … it was only with my move to UWC in 1986 that I was forced, in my daily teaching practice, to alter my assumptions, especially concerning ‘correctness’. At UWC I encountered a body of students who were multilingual … We have moved from demanding ‘correct’ grammar and spelling, to acceptance of variations of English. We have constantly identified the kinds of ‘transfers’ from other languages that occur … How important are ‘correct’ prepositions? How formal does the language of an academic essay have to be? We have had to distinguish between rules and conventions, recognizing that language conventions are just that, a matter of what is socially acceptable, rather than a fixed rule of the language. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 20).

Carol highlights the importance of recognising the ‘colonial’ ideological biases that are likely to influence what, why and how educators teach. In her essay, she reflects on her early socialisation that instilled in her the belief that the English language could act as a moral force capable of redeeming the world. Acknowledging, understanding, and revising her colonial attitude about the superior status of English resulted in her accepting that ‘standard English’ is a linguistic myth. This is an observation Penelope (1990:17), supports when she points out that for centuries prescriptive grammar has served men’s agenda for ‘linguistic colonisation’. She writes:

Like the cars and boats that men possess, English is referred to as if it were female-the ‘mother-tongue’. Men will tolerate only proper women and proper English. Linguistic deviance, like social deviance must be suppressed or forced into conformity. Mother-tongue is seen as a damsel in distress and men must rescue her from contamination to maintain linguistic purity.

Enacting feminisms in academia
While Penelope links the maintenance of linguistic purity to androcentric agendas, Carol points to how linguistic purity is linked to cultural domination and hegemony. Thus, as an educator who teaches multilingual students she has become less demanding about ‘correct’ grammar and spelling, and more accommodating of transfers from different languages. She has also reconciled herself to the reality that despite attempts to preserve the ‘purity’ of English, the globalisation of English has resulted in variation in pronunciations, accents, spellings and expressions, and this has altered the way the English language is used. Thus, rather than cling to colonial ideologies of linguistic purity and the standardisation of English, Carol describes her attempts at accepting its flexibility and viewing differences in her students’ use of English not as a problem to be solved, but as an expression of the evolutionary nature of language, and the multiplicities of Englishes in existence. This, according to Webb (1998), is consistent with the spirit of multilingualism, which accommodates differences in accents, pronunciations, the use of ‘interlanguages,’ and the legitimacy of local standards, etc.

In addition, the importance for teachers of English in multilingual classrooms to be sensitive to the psycho-social comfort of their students relates directly to the observation that the dominant status of English and its colonial baggage, is likely to impact negatively on students’ confidence and self-esteem. This is supported by Krashan (in Ellis 1990:56-60), who points out that acquiring proficiency in the target language is contingent on an affective filter characterised by low anxiety, high self-confidence, and positive feelings about one’s status. Diaz-Rico & Weed (1995), also maintain that students adapt patterns of behaviour in the language of learning based on the status of their own language(s) in relation to English, their own community’s views of the English language, the dialect of English they are hearing and learning and its relationship to standard English. These are issues that Vijay addresses in the following extract:

**Vijay:** … I have taught my students, since my first year of teaching, that they should get over their complexes regarding the status of their mother tongue and understand the history (of colonialism and apartheid). What I have done, since about the mid-1990s, was to encourage students to use the language in which they felt most competent to brainstorm and develop ideas. This was particularly well received by tutorial classes (and students’ independent study groups) … So the affirmation of indigenous languages served principally as a technique to enhance students’ capacity to ultimately produce writing in the medium of English, for assignments, tests and examinations.

… My graduate students have also expressed great surprise that their mother tongue and the voices of ordinary people are being affirmed in the English department. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 22 & 23).
Engendering a multilingual attitude that creates spaces for people rightfully to be different and to receive recognition for their full humanity is what Vijay attempts to achieve. This is of particular relevance in her classes, which comprise predominantly Black and Indian students (See Profile of Research Participants in Chapter 3). Vijay is aware of the inferior complexes students are likely to carry regarding the status of their mother tongues. Sensitive to the possibility that the devaluation of African and Indian languages could have negative repercussions on her students’ self-identity, Vijay attempts to address the possible psychological damage of colonialism, which generally engenders inferiority complexes in non-native speakers of English. By encouraging students to brainstorm and develop ideas in a language they feel most competent and comfortable with, she shows sensitivity to the socio-psychological attachment people may have to their languages, a respect for its speakers, and an acceptance of the value of all languages. Such an attitude according to Akinnaso (1989:139), demonstrates respect for linguistic and cultural diversity and accepts language-as-a-learning resource, rather than a problem to be overcome. This is in stark contrast to Phumzile’s reflections about the punitive measures that were meted out to students in the ‘English-only’ school rule, when in writing about Inanda Seminary she recalls: I was ambivalent about the ways in which our lives were shaped at this institution for many years, as I was about the language rule, which meant that we were punished for speaking anything but English. The use of languages other than English in an English language classroom, displays an understanding of the difficulties people have in acquiring and using a foreign language. However, an important qualification to be made in regard to respecting linguistic diversity in a university class where the target language is English, is the instances and degree to which interlanguages, code-switching and deviation from the ‘standard’ is accommodated. Carol makes an important distinction between language conventions and fixed language rules, and Vijay distinguishes between using non-English languages for brainstorming (oral discussion), with the ultimate aim of producing writing in English. Central to what Carol and Vijay allude to is the sense that certain aspects of English language usage need to be adhered to in order to ensure that communication is clear, coherent and logical. This is especially so given that students who register to study English as a target language, would be expected to graduate out of these classes with high levels of competence in the English language.

Finally, while recognising multilingualism as a resource in linguistically diverse classrooms, Vijay suggests that: implementing multilingual policies in higher education institutions does not just mean proposing the inclusion of as many languages as possible but must address the … sexism (and other oppressions) in all of the languages. Central to Vijay’s suggestion is that multilingualism not be viewed or implemented in a quantitative way. Thus,
while it is necessary to be sensitive to students' diverse linguistic repertoires, it is equally important to be critical of the inherent discriminatory elements not just in English, but all other languages used in the classroom.

*Naming and Representation: a constructed and contested domain of the ‘Other’ in English Language and Literature Studies*

Much has already been said about the dominance of English. Its supremacy has been secured through the devaluation of *Other* languages, first, through the elevated representation of itself and its associated cultural symbols; and second, in the way other languages, its speakers and their realities are (mis)represented or under-represented. Thus, in ways that parallel the use of language to promote an androcentric worldview, the dominance of English has also served to present a Eurocentric (predominantly) English worldview, with its attendant stereotypes. This is a phenomenon that Phumzile refers to in her essay, when she critiques her undergraduate studies both for its numeric leanness in the representation of the realities of the *Other*, as well as the lies and misrepresentation of the *Other*. She writes:

**Phumzile:** In keeping with the contradictions which plague liberalism, I did not see myself in much of the undergraduate work I studied at UCT. For example, after a BA with English and History as my majors, my knowledge of literature … or feminist subjectivity was very limited. I was well versed in the canon, but could only read African American, Chicana, Native American, South American and Asian writing in my spare time. I had read so few texts by continental Africans within the course that I could name only a few African writers at the end of that degree. Within the UCT curriculum I often saw lies about myself, was infuriated by the suggestion that Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* presented only refreshing and dynamic representations of the Other. Sometimes the curriculum angered me though its omissions as well as through the brevity of the material, which did engage, race, history and gender meaningfully. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 19).

In light of the language learning experiences she describes in the above extract, Phumzile, as an educator of English uses her teaching space as a forum from which to redress the misrepresentation and under-representation of the *Other*. For example, in the ENG 225 Course, Phumzile teaches a literature section, which specifically interrogates colonial (mis)representations of the *Other*. At the time of my visit she was teaching the text, *Journey to Ithaca*. She read the following extract from the text, which poignantly illustrates the denigration of the *Other* in colonial representations:
No, I did not leave India and all its superstitions and rituals to come here and submit to the tribal rites of Europe. You talk of Indians as if they're barbarians because they cremate the dead and toss them in the river, but what about you? You believe a baby should be dumped in a basin of water by a priest and some mumbo jumbo said over its head or it won't go to heaven.

Drawing on this extract, as well as other episodes from the text Phumzile covered a variety of issues, which interrogated the (mis)representations of India, and how this novel in particular, could be seen in conversation with other colonalist novels, for example Passage to India, that deconstruct travel into India. Phumzile contrasted Journey to Ithaca to other novels, which denigrate journeying towards the Orient. She also explored with her students the relationship between Europe and India, and the relationship between Europe and all Europe's Others. Desai’s novel, in particular, problematises simplistic assumptions of India based on representations/colonial constructs that the European travellers would have been exposed to in their home countries, and how their travel to India exposes them to experiences different from their expectations and the discursive images they had prior to their visiting India.

*Finding a Voice: overcoming silencing and exclusion of the Other in English Language Studies*

Accepting that the experiences of the Other has been marginalized in relation to the dominance of the English canon, attention to post-colonial discourses recognises the need to be responsible to the Other, by including subjugated narratives both of women and marginalized Other. This is a move consistent with the ethical responsibility to make visible marginalized realities. In the following extract, Carol refers to attempts at the institution she teaches at to redistribute the narrative field by including literary texts marginalized by the English canon. She writes:

Carol: … Post-colonial feminist practice in the English Department at UWC has been assisted by the fact that for years now we have felt free to incorporate into our courses both texts translated from other languages, e.g. Arabic, French, Xhosa, Afrikaans and texts not usually included under the term “literature”: such texts as popular forms (romances), travel writing, and diaries.

… The main focus is on South Africa, its literature, autobiography, media and its popular culture, but my reading and teaching of South African fiction and autobiography is always contextualised within writing from Africa, and often also within the context of diasporic writing, Indian writing, as well as developments among ‘western’ feminist writers. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraphs 17, 18 & 24).

The significant point Carol makes is that while English remains the target language, students’ literary experiences are not confined to literary genres produced by English authors. Studying
texts that have been translated into English from various other languages helps achieve several objectives. First, incorporating translated texts from local languages, such as isiXhosa, Afrikaans, etc. exposes students to experiences they are familiar with from their immediate social realities. Second, students are able to locate themselves not just within the South African context, but to see their location within the broader African continent, and western contexts. In this way they are introduced to perspectives beyond their immediate contextual social realities and are made aware of cultural, political and religious convergences and divergences. One potential spin-off from exposing students to literary experiences translated from other languages is that it confirms Carrington’s (1988 in Bryan 1994), contention that speakers of marginalized languages can maintain their ‘cultural identity’ while learning English. This is one way of infusing English language teaching with indigenous sensibilities, thus uncoupling English from its associations exclusively with colonialism, domination, exploitation and slavery. Other ways in which these educators attempt to make students aware of the realities of the Other, is evident in for example, Phumzile’s, ENG 702: a Masters course on African Literature in which she teaches slave narratives, and writings by Africans from the 18th Century. Through the employment of deconstruction techniques, educators like Carol and Phumzile, attempt to increase their students’ critical engagement with canonical English texts, colonial representations of the Other, while also exposing them to alternative marginalized literatures.

One way in which Carol introduces her students to alternative marginalized genres, is by exposing them to popular forms [such] (romances), travel writing, and diaries. In her Language and Power Course, Vijay achieved this by including a component, which required students to conduct ethnographic research for an assignment on AIDS. Through interviews, students researched the topic: HIV/AIDS Prevention: an analysis of people’s awareness and attitudes. In motivating for the use of this research genre, in her interview, Vijay pointed out that unfortunately within English and Language Studies the focus has tended to be on elite forms rather than on what ordinary people had to say. Thus, Vijay got her students to: construct a research question for the AIDS Assignment that was going to accommodate listening to the voices of one’s peers, friends, people one knows: those one lives with, whose voices are not so well heard. By including marginalized genres and voices that have often been silent or silenced, these educators cumulatively stress the importance of blurring the boundaries between high and low culture. This is important in the light that the cultural links between speech and power show that some linguistic strategies and genres are decorated with greater value and authority than others. This is an important distinction to be demolished, especially since social actors who generally generate these marginalized forms have not been granted currency in mainstream discourses. Making audible their voices/contributions as
socially significant discourses translates to emancipatory and empowerment work; a commitment which features high on the feminist redress agenda.

In the foregoing discussion, I attempted to show that by making students aware of how language is used as a means to oppress women, parallels could be made for exploring how English language domination serves to subordinate the colonised Other. Through both explicit and implicit teaching content and methodologies, the feminist language educators attempt to conscientise students to how language can, and has been used to divide the world into two unequal parts; one that privileges androcentric dominance and English imperialism and the other that marginalizes women and minority languages. The links among the various tiers of social oppression, such as colonialism/Apartheid and patriarchy is perhaps succinctly captured in the following extract from Thembi’s essay:

| Thembi: Interestingly, those who stubbornly cling to the belief that the roles women and men perform is biologically determined are quick to adopt a different position when parallels between racism/colonialism and sexism are drawn. …They begin to understand that just as colonialism is lopsided in favour of the colonial ‘masters’ so is patriarchy slanted in favour of men. Sensitizing students to these parallels and distinctions between the dominant and the subordinate, the powerful and the powerless, the superior and the inferior, the major and the minor which set apart categories of people in any societies becomes crucial in any course syllabus that mainstreams gender. (Autobiographical Essay: paragraph 29). |

In summarising the key concerns in Movement Three, we note that it is characterised by the enactment of a transformed identity. We see the feminist educators activating their project identities through their teaching and theorising to create awareness among their students to the social injustices that plague women, in particular, and broader society, in general. Accepting the mandate that part of the feminist teacher’s responsibility is to share the energy for personal and social change, these educators attempt through their theorising and teaching to impress upon their students the recognition of their personal oppression, as well as those in broader society. It is hoped that through such recognition students would be inspired to join forces in reducing inequality, changing discriminatory values and attitudes, and agitating for social justice.

Conclusion

Discussion in this chapter was framed in relation to Hart’s (1991), description of three discernible movements of coming to feminist consciousness. Movement One showed that through an introspective gaze participants report sensing and experiencing the dailiness of
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patriarchy. They wrestled with the psychological and existential tensions in their performance of public and private female roles, responsibilities and behaviours, which elevated, and validated maleness above femaleness. They identified male privilege in sexist behaviour in their environment, and some also detected it in everyday language usage, and sexual/textual depiction of males and females in the literature they were exposed to. In Movement One, Carol and Thembi display legitimising identities, which saw them conform to socially scripted gender-appropriate behaviour. Jennifer, Phumzile and Vijay, on the other hand, displayed suspicion about and/or resisted gender discrimination from an early age.

In Movement Two, there is an important transition from having gender-consciousness to having feminist consciousness. Coming to feminist consciousness politicises gender-differentiated behaviour as discriminatory, and is characterised by subscription to different ideological, theoretical and methodological feminist positions. In accordance with Castells’ (1997), theory regarding identity-building processes, we note that on becoming conscientized to patriarchal oppression, Carol and Thembi move from largely legitimising identities in relation to gender roles and responsibilities, to transgressive/resistance identities. This is consistent with a pattern of change: transformation of conceptual and personal worlds, which heralds a turning point marked by resistance to patriarchal strictures. For Jennifer, Vijay and Phumzile who discerned gender discrimination at an early age, Movement Two: outward gaze: naming patriarchy and coming to feminist consciousness, signals a consolidation of their resistance identities, and is consistent with a pattern of continuity: a discovery of fit. These women merely encounter the label ‘feminist’ and adopt it because its ideologies resonate with a value system they have always endorsed. In Movement Two, which sees participants either adopting resistance identities or consolidating them, their enactment of resistance identities is characterised predominantly by seeking personal emancipation from oppression. The women thus, form strategic and principled coalitions with other social actors to agitate not just for personal emancipation but also for broader social transformation. The influences of people, places and publications play a defining role in this regard, and give substance to Krall’s (1998:505), theorising about ‘self transcendence,’ which entails the appropriation of new identities and entrance into new spaces. It also confirms that the process of self-transcendence is not an individualistic experience, but constitutes an important trait in much feminist autobiography; this being the recognition that a ‘spotlight’ approach to a single individual is inappropriate. It also echoes Kuzwayo’s (1985), articulations on the importance of social communities, and suggests that no one is an island unto herself; her views of both herself and that of others are populated with the influences, confluences and experiences of others. Significant points emerging from an outward gaze, the naming of patriarchy, and the participation in coalitions is the confirmation that feminist consciousness is marked by
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heterogeneity and non-essentiality. However, despite the differences in the ideologies these feminist educators espouse, they congregate around a shared vision for women’s emancipation and broader social transformation. Thus, their commitment and identification with feminist values generally encompass an amalgamation of concerns historically associated with the feminist movement.¹ These include:

- **an orientation toward social transformation, social activism and consciousness-raising aimed at improving women’s lives:** The participants report on their affiliation and participation in various social transformation groups. Their activisms assume different forms linked to their personal interests and affiliations in various social causes (for example, offering relief in areas of material want, participating in political protest campaigns, writing redress policies, etc). They are also involved on an ongoing basis in consciousness-raising through their theorising and teaching of emancipation from oppression. Cumulatively, their social activism and consciousness-raising is aimed at dismantling patriarchal rule, and improving women’s lives. They testify to how their own self-esteem, confidence and conceptualisation of their multiples identities have been enlarged.

- **an exploration into the complex and frequently ignored interactions of race, class, gender, nationality, etc.** In acknowledging the interlocking and pervasive nature of oppression, the participants show that a politics of difference does not have to erase or suppress heterogeneity among and within themselves. It confirms that they in fact belong to multiple communities, hence, their occupation of various positionalities by virtue of belonging to different race, class, ethnic, etc. groupings point to the reductive and factionalising potentiality of mobilising around a single axis of identity.

- **an emphasis on subjective and communal relations of knowing and being; the interconnectivity between the national and international; personal and public, private and political:** This points to understanding the matrix of human relations. It suggests that social oppression is not an individualistic private matter; therefore emancipation, out of moral and ethical social obligation, should be agitated for on both a personal and broader public stage.

Movement Three of coming to feminist consciousness is characterised by the enactment of a transformed identity, which manifests in the theorising and teaching of emancipation from

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¹ Cott (1987:16), distinguishes three areas of effort in the women’s movement, acknowledging that variations existed within each. One which commenced early in the century, lay in service and social action motivated by altruist intent, this included benevolent social welfare and civic reforms. The second comprised campaigns for woman’s rights equivalent to those that men enjoyed on legal, political, economic and civic grounds. The third includes broad ranging pronouncements and activities towards self-determination via emancipation from structures, conventions, and attitudes enforced by law and custom.
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oppression. Displaying features consistent with project identities, which seek transformation in broader social structures, for the women exposure to feminism impacts both their professional and personal identities. In this regard, their convictional identities influence the curriculum interventions that they espouse and enact. This is inextricably linked to their vision to eradicate social oppression on a broader social scale. As teachers of the English language, they employ their teaching space to conscientize their students to the ill effects of discriminatory socio-linguistic practices (in the form of phallogocentrism and language imperialism). In so doing, they attempt to teach students that language is not a neutral, or value-free phenomenon, but a powerful conduit for the transmission of cultural values and attitudes. To date it has been successful in engendering in women, girls and marginalized Others an inferior social status. However, recognising language as a human construct, which can be deconstructed and reconstructed for more responsible usage, they provoke students to viewing language as critical restraint and release.

Important points emerging from the exploration of the three movements in coming to feminist consciousness, include:

First, the three movements provide a useful framework for tracking processes of identity formation, affiliation to feminist ideology, and subsequent feminist identificatory trajectories. However, the process of coming to feminist consciousness should not be viewed in a linear way. For example, Movement Two for Jennifer, Vijay and Phumzile does not mark the beginning of their coming to feminist consciousness, only a point at which they find the appropriate vocabulary/language to name patriarchy. In their essays, each testifies to being suspicious about female oppression from an early age, with Phumzile and Vijay openly resisting social prescriptions for gender-appropriate behaviour. In addition, there comes a point when Movement Two, which is characterised by an outward gaze and the naming of patriarchy, operates on a parallel trajectory to Movement Three. In Movement Three, the women enact a transformed identity that sees them engaging in consciousness-raising through their theorising and teaching of emancipation from social oppression. Thus, rather than Movement Two coming to a culmination, the women continue to be sensitive to new/different ways in which patriarchal oppression manifests itself. They continue to name patriarchy, they continue being involved in anti-oppression social networks, and people, places and publications continue to influence them. In other words, Movement Two does not eventuate in Movement Three, but operates in tandem/concurrently with it.

Second, there is not a coherence of effect in coming to feminist consciousness, that is feminist consciousness is not a static state of being. In this regard, Phumzile reflects on her espousal to different feminist ideologies, for example, feminism, Black feminism, Womanism/postcolonial feminism. These trajectories in her identification with different feminist ideologies
are reflective of different experiences of oppression. Jennifer reports that her espousal to
different feminist ideologies was largely as a result of her changing research interests.

Third, in reviewing the exploration into the trajectories of feminist identity development, it is
insightful to attend to Laplanche & Pontalis’ (in Pitt 1997:132), postulation that in the
relationship between identity and identification the following two key formulations emerge, viz.
that:

- identification precedes identity, and
- identification constitutes the grounds of possibility for the emergence of identity.

The formulation suggests that the process of identifying with feminist knowledge produces
feminist identity. This implies that engagement with feminist textual knowledge activates the
possibility for the crafting of a new identification, and a new sense of self and agency. In
psychological terms Laplanche & Pontalis (in ibid.), postulate that:

… an ego-ideal identification with feminism, in the form of a person, people, or a body of writing,
suspends the ego-ideal’s existing prohibitions, [and] permits different thinking … when the ego
identifies its ego-ideal with a social other, it is permeable to the wish, will or ideas of that other.

This captures the crux of the discussion presented in Movement Two, that identification with
feminism is often precipitated through exposure to, and association with people, places and
publications. I argued that once the participants recognised and acknowledged the internal and
external structures of patriarchal oppression, their coming to feminist consciousness
proceeded to an outward gaze, which inspired them into political action. In summarising this
trajectory of events, Pitt (1997:133), maintains that there are two discernible narratives
consonant with feminist knowledge production, viz.: (1) victimization and (2) resistance to
victimization. This narrative formulation is certainly applicable to the five participants in my
study. However, cognisance must be given to the erroneous supposition that knowledge of
phenomena necessarily leads to identification with the phenomena, and eventuates as an
identity marker. Therefore, it is important for attention to be paid to a significant distinction that
occurs at this juncture, which often results in a feminist subject position being differentiated
from a female subject position. This invariably produces two ambivalent categories of women:
viz. (1) women and (2) feminists. In elaborating the discussion Pitt (ibid.:134), contends:

For radical feminism, the distinction between women and feminists is secured through the
mechanism of ‘consciousness-raising’. Consciousness-raising promises to reveal the hidden
truth about women’s lives and experiences and, in so doing to reinstall ontology (who women
are) precisely at the moment when politics (what women want) become possible. The method
of consciousness-raising, regarded as the quintessential feminist method imagines
consciousness as something to be possessed rather than as a relation to be made.
Furthermore, the notion of feminist consciousness (the desired result of consciousness-raising) entails the notion of false consciousness.

While feminist discourse acknowledges that it is difficult to be feminist in a sexist society, even more difficulties emerge when women are divided by whether or not they possess feminist gender consciousness as opposed to [false?] gender consciousness. The point that Pitt is making relates to the presumption that knowledge or consciousness of feminist discourses by extension implies automatic identification with feminist sensibilities resulting in the production of a feminist identity. Pitt suggests that, ‘self-identity, is an effect of the illusion that there exists a mimetic relationship between knowledge and identity, between what one knows and what one is’. This implies that consciousness or knowledge does not necessarily eventuate in the adoption of the label ‘feminist’. Knowledge does not dictate or shape identity. Social actors may have exposure to feminist discourses, but this does not necessarily mean that they will automatically identify with feminist sensibilities and assume the identity of a feminist.

Identification with feminist discourses may result in laying claim to a feminist subject position by adopting the label feminist. There is no guarantee that it will result in the adoption of the label ‘feminist’. By extension a decision to refuse the label does not translate to having false gender consciousness.

In an attempt to illustrate the complexity in debates on feminist identity, feminist identification, and feminist consciousness, Castells (1997:200), adds yet another dimension by introducing the controversial term, practical feminists. The term refers to the widest and deepest stream of women’s struggles in today’s world, particularly in the developing world, but also among working-class women and community organisations in industrialised countries. He argues that:

Of course all feminists are practical, in the sense that they all undermine everyday, in many different ways, the foundations of patriarchalism, be it by fighting for women’s rights or by demystifying patriarchal discourses. But it may also be that many women are feminists in practice, while not acknowledging the label or even having a clear conscious or opposing patriarchalism. Thus, the question arises: can feminism exist without feminist consciousness? Aren’t the struggles and organisations of women throughout the world, for their families (meaning, mainly, their children), their lives, their work, their shelter, their health, their dignity, feminism in practice?

While admitting that he is ambivalent on this point, Castells hints at the factionalising potential of a feminist politics coached in assuming the label feminist or even claims to having feminist consciousness. hooks (1984:29), also refers to this potential for factionalisation, and suggests a reconceived feminist politics that replaces the statement ‘I am a feminist’ with ‘I advocate
feminism’. hooks argues that this invites discussion and dialogue rather than tapping into people's assumptions about what `a feminist' is. She contends that advocating feminism defines it as `a movement to end sexist oppression', and is critical of the tendency for feminism to be understood as an expression of one's identity, or as a matter of one's lifestyle. Such a construction, she contends is exclusionary and confuses the creation of `safe', `supportive' feminist environments with political praxis aimed at eradicating sexist and other oppression from all people's lives. In this way, hooks provides a way of responding to the, `I'm not a feminist, but ...' syndrome, because she suggests that feminist politics rather than derived from women's gender identity, should challenge everyone to participate fully in social change. Such a stance, she argues, does not sanction certain identities while condemning others.

Both Castells and hooks’ critique of identificatory labels associated with feminist consciousness, and feminist identity constructions highlight important points for consideration in this study. This is especially so given that identity constructions and perceptions influence the spectrum of options and understandings which teachers and students select from in order to choreograph classroom discourses and relations. More importantly, if there is no value-neutral pedagogy, it would be interesting to explore how educators who assume the label feminist, enact their personal, political and pedagogical identities in classrooms comprising students emanating from diverse ideological backgrounds. This certainly merits serious consideration in the ensuing chapter, which explores the complexity of feminist teacher identities and the dynamics of teaching English from a feminist perspective. This is a discussion I explore in Chapter 6, which examines feminist teacher identity, and student responses and resistance to feminist ideologies in the feminist multilingual classroom.