The influence of feminist communication in creating social transformation: an analysis of the films *Moolaadé* (Ousmane Sembène) and *Water* (Deepa Mehta)

By

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In accordance with Rule G4.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise/dissertation/thesis is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment to another University or for another qualification.

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

In many societies in developing countries, women are not given a chance to communicate their issues. The organisation within these societies places men at the top, giving them the opportunity to make all the important decisions. This situation is reflected in the two films which fall under this study, namely, Water and Moolaadé both of which are fictional representations of the oppression of women.

In this study, an attempt is made to explain communication struggles in the two films: Water, reflecting Indian society and Moolaadé, reflecting African society. To understand the outcome of these struggles against patriarchy, the study looks at two types of feminism: Indian feminism and African feminism and attempts to find the sense that characters in the film can be understood.

The analysis also looks at what the women, who act as feminists in the films have achieved out of their struggles to break the silence and how their voices have influenced or sensitised the silenced majority of women in their societies. Feminist communication theories have been used to analyse the female voice in the films.

In the conclusion, I have argued that in both films women have managed to transform their respective societies. However more potential to social transformation are revealed by women depicted in Moolaadé than in Water, where there is very slow pace of change.
Key words

• Western feminism
• Indian feminism
• African feminism
• Voice
• Social change
• Sati
• Dowry murder
• Female circumcision
Definition of concepts

1. **Voice**, according to Rakow & Wackwitz (2004:95) is “the means and ability to speak and to have one’s speech heard and be taken into account in social and political life.”

2. **(Western) feminism;** as defined by Evans (1995:02) is the movement of women that “seek the same opportunities and privileges the society gives to men.”

3. **Radical feminism**, according to Saulnier (1996:29) is the movement which “emerged from the political activism and analysis of the civil rights and social change movements of the 1950s and 1960s, and women’s movement of the 1960s and 1970s.”

4. **Social change** is a disruption of the order or hegemony within societies. McQuail (2005: 91) explains this kind of change within society in two ways. These are a shift in: “Social structure and institutional arrangements”.

5. **African feminism:** The movement which believes in social, economic and political equality but according to The Rosa-factsheets. Nr. 34. July 2004, “it is attached to the reproductive role of women and the tendency to put the community before the individual.”

6. **Indian feminism.** There is no specific theory which explains ‘Indian feminism’ as different from western Radical feminism (civil rights and social change) apart from a few special features. Kumar (1989) names these features which range from “protesting wife murder (usually called Bride-burning or dowry deaths), police rape, unionising women workers, domestics and slum-dwellers” (1989:22).

7. **Dowry deaths/bride burning.** Killing of women in India. According to Kumar (1989: 22) the practice refers to the dearth of young brides who were being harassed by their in-laws for more dowries.
8. **Sati.** Killing of widows in India. Sen (2000) describes it as “burning widows alive on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands” (Sen 2000: 06).

9. **Female circumcision.** It is a complete excision of the clitoris (Obermeyer 1999: 82).

10. **Culture imperialism.** Ryan Dunch (2002:302) defines the term as a situation whereby certain cultural products (for example, socially-accepted beliefs, ideologies, and entertainment commodities) have attained a position of dominance in a foreign culture through a process of coercive imposition.

11. **Popular culture.** Stuart Hall, 1981 (cited from McGuigan 1995:375) defines the term as one of the sites where struggle for and against culture of the powerful is engaged: it is a stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises, and where it is secured.
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1. Introduction

1.1. A background on the oppression of women in developing countries

Women in developing countries have for a long time been suffering from the dominant patriarchal system and they have, to a large extent, been refused the right to actively participate in public discourse. Their efforts to challenge the system have, in many societies, been discouraged by men who wish to remain in control of all resources available in a community. Women’s contributions in decision-making and any development activities, as Petty (1996: 67) puts it, “are often viewed as supplementary.”

However, many film makers from developing countries, like Ousmane Sembène and Deepa Mehta, recognise the important role that women can play in their community. In their films, the two directors give voice to women so as to show their diverse abilities within the society. They believe that women should also be included in all issues concerning society. For instance, Sembène insists that “there can not be any development if women are left out of the account” (Petty 1996:67).

The oppression of women depicted in the two films, by Mehta and Sembène, is also prevalent in many developing countries. The customary laws in several African countries, for instance in Zambia, create an unfavourable environment for widows upon their husband’s death. Himonga (1993: 161) writes that “women have no right to inherit from their husbands and to administer their estates.”

Although the two films are not based on any specific historical events, they are formulated from anecdotal stories that have in recent years circulated in Indian and African societies about female oppression. This has been done for the purpose of exposing the negative characteristics of patriarchal systems existing within their societies and attempt to make the
voices of women heard. Sembène reveals his critical intention in an interview with Olende and Kimber (2004) as he says, “I think I would be a very bad artist if I refused to see and highlight the negative aspect in my own culture.”

Though the two films might have been affected by the creative depiction of events that may occur in the respective societies, they might still present evidence of social realities they portray. According to Michèle Mattelart:

“Fictional […] films] are the places where the feelings of ideas of the ‘silent majority’ are confirmed, where accepted wisdom on the hierarchy of roles and values is reiterated and repermuted in such a way as to reinforce the beliefs and practices of the greatest number. There are also the places where disruptive elements are digested, and non-conformist ideas are absorbed. This zone of mass-culture is the privileged space where authority does not need to speak politically in order to act politically” (Mattelart 1995:481).

In other words, the films might be used to mirror a historical reality that is currently customary in Africa and India.

1.2. Background on the films for analysis

1.2.1 The film directors

The directors, Ousmane Sembène and Deepa Mehta, belong to the respective societies depicted in their films and have lived in such societies for a number of years.

Ousmane Sembène

Sembène was born in 1924 in Ziguinchor in the rural southern region of Senegal. Sembène’s life in his youth, as traced by Perry and McGilligan (1973:36), paralleled the story of the
French recruitment of unwilling native Africans told in Emitai: he fought in the French army during World War II as a forced enlistee. Afterwards, he remained in France for an extended period, employed as a dockworker and union organizer in Marseilles while training himself to be a writer.

He attended film vocation training for only three years. According to Perry and McGilligan (1973:37), he was trained in the Soviet Union before turning his talents to film in the early sixties. Sembène is rated as “one of those rare talents who make film production seems an absolutely natural act” (Ibid).

Before he started working as a film maker, Sembène authored a number of books. Perry and McGilligan (ibid) explain that Sembène published a number of novels and a collection of short stories, “a body of work so impressive as to place him at the forefront of African writers” (Ibid). They name some of his most famous novels; Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu (translated into English as God's Bits of Wood) which documents, in semi-fictional form, the historic Dakar-Niger railroad strike of October 1947, which was a major step toward Senegalese independence from the French. His last novel, Le Mandat (1966), was the basis for his film, Mandaabi.

Sembène died on June 9, 2007 at the age of 84. According to New York film critic Roger Ebert (2007), Sembène’s work usually dealt with his society from the inside, with sympathy and insight. His political films were not overtly political, and comedies in fact reflected upon very serious social issues. Ebert explains that Sembène’s regret was that many of his films, including Moolaadé, the last film before his death, were not welcomed in Africa. However, Moolaadé won first place in the ‘Un Certain Regard’ section at Cannes in 2004. He also won a number of awards at different important festivals (Sun Times, July 1, 2007). Moolaadé was
chosen as a primary film text because its theme not only mirrors West African society but society in many African countries where female circumcision takes place.

**Deepa Mehta**

Deepa Mehta, a Canadian-based filmmaker, was born in Amritsar, India, in 1949. According to Morli Desai (2001), Mehta received a bachelors and masters degree in philosophy from the University of New Delhi, where she met her former husband, Canadian filmmaker and producer Paul Saltzman (Ibid).

In an interview with Morli Desai (2001), Mehta gives a brief description of her motivation to enter film-making after she had finished her master’s degree in philosophy:

“I was going to do my dissertation for my PhD, and I met a friend who said they needed someone to work part time in a place called Cinematic Workshop, a small place that made documentary film in Delhi. I learned how to do sound first, and then I learned camera work. I learned to edit and then finally I made my own documentary and discovered how much I loved it” (Desai 2001).

Mehta’s work in film production, as Desai (ibid) writes, started in 1991, when she produced and directed her first feature film, *Sam & Me*, a story about an unlikely friendship between two outcasts who form a deep bond despite the fact that neither is welcome in the other's world. The following year, Mehta directed her second feature film, *Camilla*, starring the late Jessica Tandy and Bridget Fonda, which was released worldwide in 1995. Mehta also directed the final episode of Lucas's *Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* in 1994 (Desai 2001).

Mehta's other works include a trilogy of feature films composed of *Fire*, which is about the politics of sexuality; *Earth*, which is about the politics of nationalism; and *Water*, which explore the situation of the oppression of women based on religion in 1930’s India (Ibid). It is
for the stark depiction of the plight of these marginalized women that this film was chosen for analysis in this treatise.

1.2.2 The position of the directors on Feminist ideology

Ousmane Sembène

Eustace Palmer (1979) explains why women characters are important in Sembène’s film production. Palmer says, “One of the hallmarks of Ousmane's [...] films] is the great importance of women. One can say, in fact, that his world is one in which women seem to be supreme. They are always much more powerfully ... portrayed and demonstrate much greater moral courage than the men” (Cf. Kamara 2001: 223).

Although Sembène is a man, the ideology behind most of his works, for example Emitai and Moolaadé, is based on feminism. Through his work and public statements he can be considered as a feminist; given Harold Weaver’s (1989) statement that feminism entails “a deeply feminist - not always female - commitment to equal rights of both genders” (Cf. Petty1996:185).

In an interview with Perry and McGilligan (1973), Sembène reveals his feminist ideology by explaining the importance of women in a society:

“Women have played a very important part in our history. They have been guardians of our traditions and culture even when certain men were alienated during the colonial period. The little that we do know of our history we owe to our women, our grand-mothers. The African women are more liberated than elsewhere. In certain African countries, it is the women who control the market economy. There are villages where all authority rests with the women. And whether African men like it or not, they can't do anything without the women's
consent; whether it be marriage, divorce, or baptism” (Perry and McGilligan 1973:41).

He further elaborates on his feminist ideology by giving an example of what women have done in West African society, giving a reason why they should be included in different campaigns:

“In 1963, the women left the indigenous quarter called the Medina to overthrow Senghor… The fact is that the African culture has been preserved by the women, and thanks to them what has been saved has been saved. The women are less alienated than the men and much more independent than the men. All of that indicates that in the struggle we must not neglect the participation of the women” (Weaver 1980:15).

Sembène’s films bear witness to his commitment to this cause. From the servant woman’s suicide in La Noire de ..., through the disparate trio of three generations of women in Xala, to his powerful lead characters in Faat kine and Moolaadé, Sembène not only emphasises female decision making but presents the audience with increasingly independent and competent female protagonists.

Deepa Mehta

Deep Mehta, in her own words, outlines the reason for her feminist ideology by admitting that her films are influenced by her life and her experiences. She says, “… when I wanted a divorce [from the former husband] it took me two years to do it, even though I considered myself a liberal woman. It was during those two years I wrote Fire” (Desai 2001). According to Desai, Mehta believes that film is a powerful critique of the rigid norms of a patriarchal, post-colonial society.
Mehta’s feminist ideology is revealed throughout her trilogy, *Fire, Earth* and *Water*. *Fire* follows the story of two sisters-in-law living in a joint family, who enter into an intimate and sexual relationship with one another which is not permitted in their culture. *Earth* is a love story involving three people. In the film, Mehta uses women characters to convey messages about mistrust, racism, religious intolerance and violence. The last film in this trilogy is *Water*, which depicts the oppression of women based on religion.

When she released two of the films in the trilogy, *Fire* and *Water*, Mehta was harassed by Hindu protesters for making films that targeted aspects of the Hindu religion and culture. For example, when *Fire* was released, they protested because “… the presentation of lesbian relationships is antithetical to Indian culture values” (Kapur 2000:56). Again, when *Water* was released, they argued that “a foreign-based director, with a westernised approach, was trying to spread calumny against Indian traditions, particularly against the status of Hindu widows” (Bhattacharya 2001:75). The demonstration, the participants believed, was held to uphold the honour of the Hindu community, and to mobilise opinion to close the ranks on what was described as patriotism (Ibid).

According to Jasmine Yuen-Carrucan (2000), the feminist ideology in Mehta’s films, particularly in *Water*, is driven by her background; she is both a Hindu and an Indian woman, therefore what she portrays in her film are the experiences of women that she is familiar with or has personally experienced.

**1.2.3 The basis for social comment in the films**

Both films theorize oppression, differences and the representation of women in their respective societies: Indian society in *Water* and African society in general in *Moolaadé*.
**Moolaadé**

The society depicted in *Moolaadé* understands an African woman as unclean and believes that she must undergo a purification ritual to be recognised by a respectable society which only grants respect to men and purified women. In this society, as depicted in the film, a woman achieves her social identity when she is purified, a ritual which is normally performed shortly before marriage. Film critic, Roger Ebert (2007) explains (to his western audience), “women support the removal of the clitoris because no man will marry a bride who has not been cut.”

However, the practice of female genital mutilation regularly causes a number of deaths of the initiates and sometimes women experience complications at the time of giving birth (Shaw 1985:687). As the character of Colle reveals to the Salindana: “When my Amsatou was being born, the woman doctor open me up… to let her out” (*Moolaadé*). This tells us why Colle, in the film, wages a campaign to end this oppression based on circumcision. The film’s discourse suggests that it is unjust and can be explained as the excessive use of power that men apply to oppress women, because they use the practise to control women, an action that Sembène considers as a denial of women’s freedom (Olende and Kimber 2004).

In *Moolaadé*, the practice of genital mutilation creates social differences between men and women because the custom forces women to be purified as a condition to get married, and therefore, recognised as an adult. However, the same custom is not applicable to men who appear to be considered clean. There is probably also a form of initiation for the men in the society, but it if not referred to in the plot of the film. In other words, this social difference suggests two different images of the same society; the clean society of men and unclean society of women.
**Water**

*Water* is a film about Indian widows in the 1930’s. Many women, whose husbands have died, are forced to enter widow houses. Labelled as worthless without a husband to be measured by, they struggle to survive by begging and often turn to prostitution (Yuen-Carrucan 2000). The new life that the widows, as depicted in the film, have to live, separates them from the rest of the society. They are represented to their own society as unclean, to the extent that any contact with the clean persons might cause “contamination”.

In the film, the house in which widows are forced to live is an environment which according to Vargas (2006), reduces them to “poverty life, incommunicado with the outside world and maltreated by the rest of the community.” These forms of oppression that widows experience, are driven by the conventional interpretation of the sacred Hindu religious text, the Law of Manu which is the most authoritative of the various Hindu law books compiled between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D (Kolenda 1965:470): “A widow should be long-suffering until death, live in isolation and be chaste” (*Water*). To some extent widows depicted in the film seem to comply with the law because it is part of their religious customs but they don’t know exactly the reason of their sufferings or why they should live in the ashram.

In the film, the holy texts are also given as the reason why gender differences between Indian males and females exist. The texts have been “used to assert a ‘natural order of things’ that often has included an understanding of women as naturally sinful or less worthy than men in the eyes of a god” (Wackwitz and Rakow 2004:18).

Widows and widowers are treated differently before this religious law. For example, when a woman becomes a widow she has to move to a widow house for the rest of her life, but the
same law does not apply when a man becomes a widower. He is allowed to live his normal life, enjoying all the social benefits which are restricted for women.

1.2.4 Contextualization of the films

The two films depict the plight of women from two different societies and in two different historical times; *Water* depicts the period of the 1930’s in India, a situation which still continues to exist in some of the low castes of India. *Moolaadé* on the other hand depicts aspects of culture which are still practised in many African countries.

**Moolaadé**

*Moolaadé* portrays female genital mutilation, a custom that is practised not only in the fictional village in West Africa where all actions take place, but in many places throughout Africa. According to Sembène, the story relates to different parts of Africa: “The architecture of the mosque in that village… could be set anywhere. Of course, I don’t approve of the way the surgery is done across all of Africa” (Pride 2004).

Although there was an influence drawn from oral storytelling which contributed to the filming of *Moolaadé*, Sembène says, “My aim, my purpose, is to have it be an atemporal film because excision - female genital mutilation - remains a reality. Even today it continues. We are doing everything we can to put an end to it. But it is very hard to accomplish” (Ibid).

According to Sembène, children in all countries in the world are afraid of blood. In Africa, this fear leads many of them to desert circumcision ceremonies. “Each year, there are many little girls who run away from the operation, who sometimes end up in the cities. Some of them also wind up being prostitutes, because they have left their families behind” (ibid). This explains why he decided to make the film *Moolaadé* which exposes what he calls ‘butchery’.
He is involved in such a topic in order to attempt to save African female children from such a reality.

**Water**

Deepa Mehta explains that her main point in making films is to challenge blind tradition in India: “It was important to set [...] in India because the story takes place there. It is a microcosm of India, the challenging of traditions. I seriously wanted to break the stereotypes of India” (Desai 2001).

The film is set in 1938 colonial India, against the political background of Mahatma Gandhi’s rise to power, and elaborates on the oppressed life of Indian widows. One reason for setting the film during the era of nationalist struggles was because from that time on, women were given increasingly more space for expression and the period thus constitutes a point of departure for women.

It may even be argued that “Mahatma Gandhi extended the logic of “feminine” modes of protest to the whole of the nationalist movement. It is argued, credibly, that Gandhi “feminised” nationalist politics by emphasizing … passive resistance and creating a special space for women…” (Sen 2000:18). This political leader thus engendered a shift in the traditional and colonial hierarchies in terms of cast and gender.

It was also during this period that the Child Marriage Act was passed, following the nationwide campaign organised by Indian women. According to Sen (2000:16), the new minimum age of marriage was set at 14 and 18 for women and men respectively. Mehta hence uses the same background of 1930’s women’s campaigns to challenge the traditional culture which still exists in some forms in modern India. However, she bridges the historical interval and ends the film by citing the 2001 census of widows in India:
“There are over 34 million widows in India according to the 2001 census. Many continue to live in conditions of social, economic and cultural deprivation as prescribed 2000 years ago by the Sacred Text of Manu” (*Water*).

With this final statement as a full screen text, Mehta thus links the historical fictional plot to present-day social phenomena and provokes a critical reflection on the continued suffering of marginalized lower-caste women. The furious crowds demonstrating against the film are an indication that this film certainly raises a sensitive topic of cultural interest in a society that is modern in many respects.

**1.3. The aim of the study**

The aim of this study is to investigate whether feminist communication is one of the factors that influence changes in society as depicted in fiction films. More specifically, the study investigates the influence of women’s communication within two films: *Moolaadé* and *Water*.

**1.4. Rationale**

In an interview that Olende and Kimber (2004) conducted with Ousmane Sembène, he says, “[t]he future liberation of Africa will never happen without the liberation of women.” The statement was delivered some years ago, but it is still relevant to common practices in most African countries to date, where women are still silenced. There are several feminist organisations which wage campaigns to make women’s voices heard, but cultural systems are still powerful enough to oppress them. Hence, Logones and Spelnam (1983) observe that “being silenced is a kind of amputation that signals oppression” (cited in Rakow & Wackwitz 2004: 96).
The same problems that are revealed in Moolaadé are also found in other parts of Africa, such as Kenya and Tanzania. For example, in some regions in central and lake zones of Tanzania, female circumcision is still practiced to a large extent. Sembène evidently had a sound understanding of these widespread practices. He observed that the way circumcision is done in West Africa is less severe than the way it is practiced in East Africa. He says, “In [East Africa], in addition to just cutting the clitoris, they cut the clitoris, and then they sew everything together” (Pride 2004).

From what is presented in the two films for analysis, there is a possibility that women can contribute great change to society if given the chance to communicate their voice. The reason for my interest in this study was firstly the fact that the films represent realities in social life but most importantly, I intend to establish, by analysing the two films, whether the women’s voices, despite the male efforts to silence them, do in fact contribute to social change.

1.5. The research question

To what extent does communication among women characters bring change and produce new social relations that may lead to a more just society within the films’ plot?

Sub question

What types of changes (if any) have women in the two films achieved within the depicted society?

1.6. Research Objective

To attempt to define changes that happen, within the two films, as a result of women’s voices.
1.7. Significance of the study

Since the study aims to explain feminist communication in films, the findings can contribute to future research on communication, film studies and gender issues.

The study highlights certain trends in non-western societies as depicted in the films.

1.8. Hypothesis

Feminists’ voices lead to the change of social structures and relations within societies depicted in the films. For example, Colle’s verbal and non-verbal communication in Moolaadé inspired other women to support the fight against female mutilation, when they realize that it may be possible to change things. However, this change is very slow and only gradual, since women have been disempowered to the extent that they can often not verbalize their oppression. The very slow pace of change is highlighted in Water, where the marginalized group of widows is in an extreme outsider position, and remains there at the end of the film.

1.9. Primary film texts

Two films, namely, Water and Moolaadé, were analysed in this study. The films were selected because both expose the problems experienced by female children within these societies and both demonstrate the female struggle against the patriarchal system. The data that was investigated consisted of women-communicated messages aiming at empowerment, in the dialogue of the films.

Sheila Radford-Hill (1998:158) argues that “the central task of any movement for social change is empowerment.” Therefore, the focus of this analysis is an assessment of all the women’s statements within the films against the exploitation, victimization, marginality,
powerlessness and degradation that characterize both the reality of oppression and the experience of being oppressed.

**1.10. Delimitation of the research**

The study focused only on two films: *Water* and *Moolaadé*, because female characters in both films are essential to the plot development. Both films depict oppression based on gender. Although the films are set on different continents, Asia and Africa, disempowerment is a key topic in both societies.

The communication of the few male characters who sympathise with the oppressed female characters was also included in this analysis since in some situations, males have been very supportive to women’s struggles, particularly where women had failed to access the means of expression or a channel to communicate their voice. For instance, in both societies depicted in the films, women are often denied their rights to participate in public discourses. In such a situation, some men play an important part to represent women’s voices.

**1.11. Research Method**

In an attempt to answer the research question in this treatise, I consider two films which portray women’s oppression in two different aspects: *Moolaadé* portrays the oppression of women based on female genital mutilation while *Water* portrays the oppression of women based on religious faith. Significant statements from all twelve chapters of each of the two films, as provided by 20th Century Fox and Mongrel media in English subtitles, were recorded in a table (see appendix in pages 92 – 118), and in each chapter, the focus was on those situations where women showed some kind of struggle or communication that aimed at social transformation.
In each situation selected, the conversation that drives the story was recorded to establish the social setting and the importance of that particular situation to the plot. The conversations recorded were correlated to either, African or Indian feminism respectively, and Western feminism. Then, an argument about the conversation was developed in relation to the feminist communication theories which are used as a framework in this study. Most conversations that were identified show women struggling to transform social structure. However, in situations were male communication sympathizes with women, their dialogue was also included.

Another focus of the analysis was to record the similarities between the roles played by four main characters in each film, since there are certain similarities in the two films across national and cultural boundaries; in their main theme of women oppression and in the provocative role that their main characters play. For example, the role played by Madhumati, the perpetrator of exploitation in Water, is to some extent similar to the role played by Salindana in Moolaadé, who gains an income from his profession of initiating the girls.

Two leitmotif themes, one in each film, were also recorded for analysis, since the patriarchal system uses them to legitimise the oppression. For example, in Water, Hindu religious text and Indian tradition have been used to lock widows into the ashrams because the system has made them believe that their plight is their religious duty. Thus to some extent it is the widows’ faith which gives the men power to control the women within this society. In Moolaadé, African culture based on traditions and customs makes women think that circumcision is one of their rights which gives them social recognition as future mothers. They don’t want to accept that the practice is a means used by men to control them.
2. Literature Review

Radford-Hill (1998: 161) argues that the power of feminist movements to produce change within society depends on several factors. One of these factors is “the correctness of [the movement’s] analysis of the social, historical, and experiential forces that produce and constitute oppression” (Ibid). Both Sembène and Mehta, as people of international standing and experience who recognise the power of feminist movements, have come to an accurate analysis of their societies, their histories and have indirectly experienced forces that produce and constitute oppression.

Mehta made the film, *Water*, because she knew the history of the widows in India. As an Indian woman she also experienced, though indirectly, the forces that produce and constitute the oppression of women; the idea to produce the film came after being exposed to the ashram for widows (Phillips 2006). On the other hand, Sembène made the film *Moolaadé* because he feels that circumcision is a bad practice performed on children. He adds that “[…] it is not adults who have the operation: it is children. For me […circumcision] is criminal, the cruellest aspect” (Pride 2004). Both Sembène and Mehta are concerned about the oppression of women and they chose to expose these unjust behaviours through making a film because “[…] cinema is an evening school, it’s an instrument for education, and [directors…] have to provide people with food for thought” (Ibid).

Voice as an important tool for social transformation needs a channel through which it can reach the public. Different groups of people, such as academics and politicians, to mention just two, have been striving to get a channel for their voice to reach the public. Sembène recognises the importance of the channel and that is why “he gives voice to African women’s concerns in his films, and these concerns are depicted through female characters in the film’s narratives” (Petty 1996:67). This means that “voice [… should be a fundamental concern of
feminists […] seeking to produce change for women by enabling social and political participation and efficacy of all” (Rakow & Wackwitz 2004:96).

From a historical point of view, all feminist movements throughout the world emerged after women had experienced oppression. The success of these movements depended on a critical analysis or an understanding of their societies and the knowledge of forces that produce and constitute oppression. For instance, radical feminists in America (Saulnier 1996:32) exposed oppression based on sexual harassment, pornography, women battering and rape, because they realised that patriarchal oppression based on psychological and biological factors [are] enforced through violence against women (Saulnier 1996:35).

The movements of Indian and African feminists to transform social structures might be considered as a reflection of current realities and as a message to their respective societies that change is necessary. Petty argues that “[c]hange, a catalyst for all human inquiry, is often documented through observations of women’s positions in society” (Petty 1996:67).

Both Indian and African feminists have managed to bring about change through their movements. The current female position in their respective societies has changed considerably over the past twenty years. A modern Indian woman is usually not experiencing dowry death or sati. Likewise, a modern African woman is no longer locked in the home, taking care of children and performing only home duties.

2.1. The male patriarchal approach to FGM make

The African film industry has passed through several stages, reflecting changing ideologies over time. For instance, in the first decade of African cinema production, as Ukadike (1993:47) argues, African cinema re-assessed African history with the focus of a direct attack against (former) colonial powers. During this era, most African cinema “provoked thought
and instigated action” (Ukadike 1993:51). Sembène, as one of the early African film directors, says that his goal in making Emitai was to cast it as a school of history (Weaver 1980:14).

According to Ukadike (1993:50), in the 1980s the African film industries moved to another discursive level, aiming to accommodate western consumers. Ukadike interprets the change as a move to seek more profit through subsidies from rich countries of the western world. From his argument, this move not only changed the structure of African film industry but also the ideology of African directors. Consequently, African film industries failed to present a revised, distinctly African image, as defined by Ukadike;

“In a sincere, deep felt respect towards treatment of theme, characters and situations, and particularly towards spectators, African cinemas construct provocative, authentic, and reflective analyses of Africa beyond social culture parameters. Hence, rather than positing a single African cinema (as misconstrued by western analysis) African cinema embodies a plurality of works as diverse as the people and culture federation it represent” (1993:50).

Ukadike uses his argument for two reasons; to criticize African film directors for approaching African topics from an imperialistic or ethnographic perspective as was the practice of European cinema in the past, for using western principles of film-making (Ukadike 1993:51) and as a playground to present his (still somewhat traditional, male) view on female genital mutilation. Like many other authors, for example Sembène, he also accepts that female genital mutilation is a controversial subject because of its diversity of approaches form both African and western societies; but he criticizes westerners and those who oppose these traditional practices;
“Perhaps the westerners learned from the African women who understood the ramifications of their opposing perspectives. Sometimes antagonistic, the issue was discussed without condescending to reductionist diatribe, insult and degradation in a word ethnocentrism. I make it clear that I am not here advocating the continuation of this practice, rather making it known that the issue is not to be simplified because of its complexity and controversial nature” (1993:51).

This modern male patriarchal approach to female genital mutilation, as presented by Ukadike, critically denies some humanitarian claims presented by those who oppose the practices. For example, he argues,

“I am not sure if cutting out the clitoris means taking away a women’s sexuality or pressure or if it has ever attained the intended objectives since African woman who have performed this ritual are also known to be sexually active, sometimes promiscuous and needless to say experience sex as pleasurable activity” (Ukadike 1993: 52).

Ukadike seems to remain with masculine stereotype, ignoring all social and psychological problems that women who undergo this traditional practice have been facing. For example, women experience urinary tract infections during pregnancy and infibulation scars torn during childbirth (Shaw 1985:686). From Ukadike’s view, all these can be grouped as mere justifications of western ideologies to legitimize the claim that woman circumcision is a bad practice among African societies.

This African patriarchal position revealed by Ukadike also ignores the problems of female genital mutilation that have been pointed out by a number of African film directors. For
example, Sembène points out the implicit dangers of the practice as he argues, “each year, there are many little girls who run away from the operation, who sometimes end up in the cities. Some of them also wind up being prostitutes, because they have left their families behind” (Pride 2004).

Although Ukadike is established as an academic film critic, he appears unwilling to negotiate the social reality where he could reveal a number of problems caused by the practice. The facts provided by a number of authors, Sembène and Shaw to mention just two, underline that female genital mutilation is a bad practice.

**Feminist film theory**

“Feminists psychoanalytic theorists have claimed that the primary function of women […] in cinema] is to bring into play and signify male desire” (Mulvey 1975, cited from Shrage 1990:141). This situation, Shrage adds, conforms to patriarchal logic in which there is no space for active female thought, looking or desiring.

The claim of the ‘patriarchal logic’ in film acquires the appearance of reality by a number of questions pegged on culture;

> “If all knowledge and seeing is structured by culture and language, and culture and language are male, and furthermore, ‘women’ are the products of culture and language, then how is feminist knowledge and seeing possible?” (Shrage 1990:142).

Any critical film theory, Shrage argues, should confront the truth of life by respecting set of principles and beliefs which is deeply ingrained in the thinking habits of member of a particular society and which structure the perception and social interaction of that society. Feminist film theory particularly in African and Indian cinema is affected by this thinking
habit of member of the society. Presentation of women reflects the culture setting to avoid contradiction of what Shrage (1990:138) calls ‘cultural common sense’.

This type of theory, which sidelines feminist’s knowledge by placing male perspectives as determinants of cinema production, representing ideological meaning and values, is applicable to Classical Hollywood film, African film and Indian film, to mention just three. However, the feminist experience differs from one place to another, depending on the culture of that particular society.

In Africa, for example, local cinema takes definitive stance where “the battle for ideas and values must be waged through the intensification of complementary critical and analytical cultural interaction that links the film makers, the audiences/community and activist/critic” (Gerima ___, cited from Ukadike 1993:54). African cinema also adopts the same cultural stance to make a film understood to African audience because “our own beliefs about the world and about the film are helpful to us in understanding a particular film” (Wilson 1979, cited from Shrage 1990:141).

Because of cultural setting, Shrage argues, many film productions tend to over – emphasize the role of signifying practices in the construction of gender differences, and often ignore how the category “women” for instance is shaped by process of social interaction other than production principles and reception (1990: 140).

In this regard, women’s voice or images of women in most African films are first of all presented as typical, or close to reality, whenever women fulfil motherhood roles which are still their predominant role in conventional African culture. Secondly, however, in some films women are featured as social heroes, struggling to redefine roles or change social structures, for instance, Colle in Moolaadé. This also applies to Indian films, particularly Water, in
which women try to redefine their social identity. This study, thus, is opposed to Ukadike’s
terpretation of female genital mutilation and his interpretation of the significance of this
traditional practice to the social standing of women.

2.2. Women’s oppression – an overview

A number of cases from different parts of the world were reviewed to give an overview of
typical aspects of the oppression of women. However, for this study, a few cases from the
Western World were selected to show the origin of women’s oppression as well as examples
from Africa and India because the two films analysed here portray two key events common in
those areas: female circumcision in Africa and widowhood in India.

The Western World

Being at the epicentre of the feminist movement in the world, women in the Western World
were also the first to challenge their position and still experience some oppression based on
gender. One proof of such oppression is revealed in a speech by the European Union
commissioner responsible for employment and social affairs. She states that “a Finnish study
showed that over half of adult women have been victims of violence or physical or sexual
threats. Behind these figures lie the tragic realities of beatings, rape, prostitution, threats,
verbal abuse, relationships destroyed, families shattered and lives broken.” (Diamantopoulou,
2002-18 – 02).

Developing countries: Africa and India

In developing countries, ongoing social change has not excluded the continued existence of
women’s oppression. For example, In October 2006, according to BBC News, Sierra Leone’s
information minister, Septimus Kaikoi, condemned the British House of Lords ruling to grant
a teenager, Zainab Fornah (18), asylum because she feared female circumcision. The minister
argued that “what we oppose is the deliberate and conscious and premeditated attempt by individuals to malign and besmear the reputation, integrity and character of a government and its people” (BBC News, 2006-10-19).

Another example that reveals women’s oppression is the one based on land ownership. This is a major problem in most parts of Africa where society has denied women the right to own land, based on traditional culture. For instance, in some parts of Tanzania, especially among the Chagga tribe, women do not even have the theoretical right to own land. “If her husband dies, a woman is supposed to work under the husband’s male relatives (the in-laws), who will look after her and the deceased man’s property themselves. If she has no son, the widow is supposed to be looked after until she dies. Then all the property is taken over by the husband’s relatives, since any surviving daughters are supposed to be married” (Shirima 1991:31).

Moreover, some women in India were facing severe family resistance when they attempted to demand their rights such as education. Rassundari Devi was one of them, as she confesses in her bibliography written by Tharu and Lalitha (1991):

“I was so immersed in a sea of housework that I was not conscious of what I was going through day and night. After some time the desire to learn how to read properly grew very strong in me. I was angry with myself for wanting to read books. Girls did not read…people used to despise women of learning…In fact, older women used to show a great deal of displeasure if they saw a piece of paper in the hand of a woman. But somehow I could not accept this”. (Sen 2000:08)
2.2.1. Women’s voice

“Experience is a key component in feminist assertions about the value of the women’s voice” (Rakow and Wackwitz 2004: 97). Women in both the Western World and Third World countries have been raising their voice through different means: public discourses, demonstrations as well as meetings and seminars, to mention just a few. Most of these women, who want their voice to be heard, have in one way or another experienced the unfairness of a patriarchal system. The experience of their plight which, according to Autar Bra, is “the site of subject formation”, has given them enough strength to demand their rights (ibid).

Voice in the Western World

From the Western World, one of the significant voices recognised because of its strong demands was the first Women’s Liberation Conference held in February 1970, at Ruskin College, Oxford. With more than 500 participants, the conference formulated four demands (Thornham 2000:47): “equal play, equal education and opportunity, 24 hours nurseries, and free contraception and abortion on demand” (ibid). The demands signal the double focus which marked the second wave of feminism. However, before this liberation conference, there were many initiatives partaken in the first wave feminism between the 18th and the early 20th centuries. For example, between 1759 and 1797, there were significant voices like the right of women to have sex and work, to mention two (Thornham 2000: 17).

Voice in Africa and India

In Africa, many women are also part of feminist movements which aim to change the dominant social structure. For example, Heba Saleh reports in BBC News that more than 120 women participants from 28 African and Arab countries met in Egypt at a high-profile
conference on female genital mutilation and formulated a call for efforts to get the practice banned. The meeting’s declaration states that “[t]he practice should be prohibited by law wherever this is politically feasible, but it urges government in civil society to work together to change attitudes to women in order to eradicate circumcision” (Saleh, 2003).

Another event in which the voice of African women is heard, is found in an incident where a young Cameroonian, Cycil Ebie, won the BBC World Service’s Outlook programme’s “stand-up-for-your-rights” competition in June 2007, after he had succeeded in getting the practice of female genital mutilation in his village discontinued. Explaining his road to success against the patriarchal system, Ebie says he faced many challenges: “[…society] cursed my approach and refused my every word, I was desperate and restless because my dad assured me they would soon mutilate my kid sister for she’s come of age” (BBC News, 2007-06-08).

From India, one of the touching examples of voice is when Rukhmabai, married as a child, was sentenced to prison because she refused to live with her old husband. Explaining her feelings about this event, Pandita Ramabai, a woman believed to be the most scathing critic of Hindu patriarchy and the caste system states:

“Our only wonder is that a defenceless woman like Rukhmabai dared to raise her voice in the face of the powerful Hindu law, the mighty British Government, the 129,000,000 men, the 330,000,000 gods of Hindus; all theses have conspired together to crush her into nothingness. We cannot blame the English Government for not defending a helpless woman; it is only fulfilling its agreement made with the male population of India” (Sen 2000:11).
2.2.2. Social changes

These few individual experiences that I have reviewed give evidence that in some societies, women’s experience of oppression led them to air their voice through different ways and their voices managed to change or transform the structures, which existed for many years. These few cases from the Western World, Africa and India show how societies have changed following the access of women’s voices into public discourses.

The Western World

One of the notable social changes resulting from Western women’s feminist movements came from Michigan students who organized the Black Action Movement (BAM) in 1960s, which led to major changes in the number of Black students admitted to the university (Cole et al. 1998: 360). According to Cole et al., such student activism, which took place on campuses across the United States, was in part responsible for bringing about sweeping social changes that increased opportunities for those women in America who had historically been disempowered.

Developing countries: Africa and India

The voice of women in Third World countries has also contributed in the transformation of social structures. For instance, in August 2004, BBC News reported that police in the West African state of Burkina Faso arrested 14 people for carrying out female genital mutilation on young girls. One of the members of the National Committee for the Fight against Excision, Holtense Palm, stated that “This time there will be no leniency. She and her accomplices should get the maximum sanction, so that we are sure such act won’t happen again” (BBC News, 2004-18-17).
In India, one of the events which is also considered as the turning point of the patriarchal system in the history of Indian women was revealed in the Shao Bano case in 1985, which provoked furious opposition. According to Semita Sen (2000:34) the chief justice, C. J. Chandrachud, of the Supreme Court delivered judgement in favour of a divorced Shao Bano who had sued her husband for financial support. “The court granted Bano support under a provision in secular criminal law (section 125)” (Ibid).

2.3. Theoretical framework of this analysis

The study is informed by feminist communication theory with particular reference to the issue of ‘voice’, which means that “what is [communicated] has an effect,” (Rakow & Wackwitz 2004: 95). The theory highlights three elements: “gender, communication and social change” (Rakow & Wackwitz 2004:05), which are also the key elements in this study because it engages with gender based on women’s issues and the way communication has facilitated them to transform social structures. However, the aim of the study is to examine how the feminist’s voice has been communicated and the effects it has produced in a given context. In other words, the study focuses on how women’s communicated voice has contributed in bringing social changes.

In most cases, feminists who actively struggle to bring change in society are not victims themselves and have enough power to make public statements. Through their inputs, they empower the disempowered by giving “voice to those who have not been heard in public discourse” (Rakow & Wackwitz 2004:94). The directors of the two films studied in this treatise employ this method to make the voice of the voiceless heard.

For example, Sembène in Moolaadé uses Colle (the main character) as a feminist who is socialized in traditional settings, to give voice to female children who undergo circumcision.
In the film, Colle is determined to make the voice of the circumcised girls heard. She once says, “I will make their case public.” This corresponds to the argument by Rakow and Wackwitz (2004:95) that “a corollary to the assumption that voice is good is the assumption that silence is bad.” Colle’s determination provides some evidence that when voice is communicated to the public, it can contribute to changes, hence the director uses her voice to channel information about the girls, to be heard in public discourses both within the film and in a public response to it.

In her study of feminist communication, Radford-Hill (1988:161) proposes that social change should be an open question that can not be closed by debate but [through] tension [created by] women centered-social interventions. The theorist suggests changes to the image of any society dominated by patriarchs, which to her seems unjust. The two directors of the films in this study, *Moolaadé* and *Water*, appear to view their respective societies in a similar way. For example, Deepa Mehta, the director of *Water*, says in an interview that in her first exposure to the widows’ houses she was shocked to see an 80–year old widow who was blind and still forced to live in the Ashram. She adds, “I promised myself that at some point in my life I would do a film about their plight” (Phillips 2006).

### 2.3.1. Western feminism

From the historical perspective, the Western feminists’ voice can be traced back to the idea of an “economic independence of women” which was initiated by the early women thinkers and activists as [back as] the 1790’s” (Saulnier 1996:29). The first woman who is accredited as a thinker and an activist was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759 - 1797) with her idea of “A vindication of the rights of a woman” (Thornham 2000:17).
According to Thornham, the idea of a vindication of the rights of a woman raised a number of questions that later became the foundation of many feminist movements in the world. Among the questions raised are the “questions about women’s relations to [the dominant] culture, to power, to discourse, to identity, to lived experience, to culture production and to representation” (Ibid).

The voice which has been recognised worldwide and which still has great impact particularly on developing countries, is the issue of “women and economics” as presented by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860 - 1935) who argues that “[t]he key to women’s oppression lies in her ideological and social economic role as mother and housekeeper” (Cf. Thornham 2000:20). According to Juliet Michell and the CCCS Women’s study group, Gilman argued that “[Human beings …] are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation. With us an entire sex lives in a relation of economic dependence upon the other sex, and the economic relation is combined with the sex relation” (Ibid).

The current economic position of women in developing countries, especially in Africa, gives support to Gilman’s argument about women and economic dependency. For example, it can be argued that the key factor for the spread of HIV/AIDS infection is the economic dependency, especially of women who engage in commercial sex work. “A truck driver on any of the major routes in Africa … might have sex with a commercial sex worker because … he has the necessary money. The commercial sex worker, on the other hand, is driven by poverty and the need to feed her family” (Whiteside 2002:317).

There are many other women thinkers and activists who planted the early seed of Western feminist movements. The concepts stated by Wollstonecraft and Gilman are used in this study to draw a picture of the origin of the movements. Their outlook provoked women in the
Western World to reassess their position. They later organised themselves in groups with different approaches or theories on how to handle women’s issues. Some of these groups are the liberal feminists, radical feminists and social feminists who existed until the early 1970’s (Saulnier 1996: 02). However in this particular section only two groups, liberal and radical feminism, will be outlined because they are the first two movements and are considered relevant for the assessment of feminist statements in the overtly male dominated societies outside of the Western World.

**Liberal feminism**

According to Jaggar 1983, (cited from Saulnier 1996: 10), liberal feminists hold a belief that society violates the value of equal rights by treating women as a group rather than as individuals. This is a generalisation which can be considered as a stereotype. For example, in the society depicted in *Moolaadé*, women’s reasoning capacity is considered to be lower than that of men and therefore they are not allowed to participate in decision-making. However, within all societies there are women with intellectual ability equal to or higher than that of men who are not given chances to show their ability. Jaggar brings to attention the assertion that liberal feminists direct their blame at societies which attempt to dominate women’s minds. From this attitude, they derive the challenge of feminists to generate women’s awareness of their plights and a move to transform social structures; “women should have the same rights as men” (Ibid).

A number of theorists who committed themselves to study liberal feminist movements identify and clarify a number of issues pertaining to women. Some of these issues are still the major concern of the contemporary feminist movements, more specifically, in the developing countries. An example is the barrier of women’s education, economic opportunities,
reproductive rights, decision-making and rights to re-marriage and inheritance, to mention just a few.

The demand of equal rights for both men and women is believed to be the beginning of several attacks that liberal feminist movements, as well as critical theorists, directed against the practices of the patriarchal system of the Western World to oppress women. For instance, Eisenstein 1981, (cited from Saulnier 1996:10) notes that “[in] [t]he nineteenth century, liberal feminists attacked the denial of access to citizenship rights by women”. Such demands raised by liberal feminists brought success in a number of issues. According to Jaggar 1987, (Cited from Saulnier 1996:21):

“[Liberal feminists] have been quite successful at outlawing sex discrimination and at helping to define and contest sexual harassment. […] their] efforts have helped secure and improve maternity leave, and they added women to affirmative programs. They fought for women’s legal rights to abortion, and they succeeded in having rape in marriage outlawed” (ibid).

On the other hand, Donovan 1985, (Cited from Saulnier 1996:21) explains more issues that liberal feminists successfully addressed:

“Liberal feminism’s accomplishments, however, are not limited to the [1970’s] wave of feminism. In more distant times, it was Liberal feminists who achieved women suffrage. Later in the century, women gained property and economic rights within marriage and an improved legal position in child custody cases as well as liberalized divorce laws through the effort of liberal feminists”(Ibid).
All these achievements support the argument that liberal feminists were one of the key catalysts which played a crucial role to radicalise women who later became engaged in several struggles against the patriarchal system.

**Radical feminism**

Radical feminism, believed to have emerged as a new women’s movement from liberal feminism, is based on six fundamental ideas. According to Saulnier (1996:32), these fundamental ideas are: “the person is political, women are an oppressed class and patriarchy is at the root of their oppression, patriarchy is based on psychological and biological factors and enforced through violence against women, women and men are fundamentally different, society must be altered to eliminate male supremacy – incremental change is insufficient and all hierarchies must be eliminated.”

From Saulnier’s explanation, the fundamental idea that ‘the person is political’ means that an individual woman’s experience of injustice, and the miseries that women perceive as personal problems, are in fact political issues grounded in sexist power imbalances (Ibid).

In their second fundamental idea, the radical feminists believe that women are an oppressed class and patriarchy is at the root of their oppression. Explaining this, Jaggar 1983, (cited from Saulnier 1996:34) says that historically, “families have been organised according to male lines of inheritance and dependence and also that society has been constructed in a way that accrues a disproportionate share of power to men”.

Radical feminists also accept as true that patriarchy is based in psychological and biological factors and enforced through violence against women. From a psychological point of view, Echols (1989) and Donovan (1985) say that radical feminists blame men who accuse women that are damaged psychologically by spreading oppressive patriarchal message worldwide,
and argue that the psychological control of women is essential requirement for a patriarchal system (Cited from Saulnier 1996:35).

Thirdly, from a biological point of view, radical feminists believe that biological imperatives, for example reproduction, set up the dependence of women on men. According to Jaggar 1983, (cited from Saulnier 1996: 36), this dependence was created by men “with intent to secure power over women and they then used biology as an explanation for the naturalness of the social order”. According to radical feminists, that kind of violence against women yields domination and control to the perpetrators who abuse women (ibid. 37-38).

The fourth fundamental idea that radical feminists propose is the existence of supposedly essential differences between men and women that are conventionally recognised by society, particularly men. From the idea, Saulnier (1996:40) explains how men and women conceptualise the issue of power in different ways. She says, “[w]hile men seek to dominate and control others, women are more interested in sharing power and in nurturing” (Ibid).

In addition to the claims in the fourth fundamental idea, radical feminists also include criticism of sexism in a social system composed of “law, tradition, economics, education, organised religion, science, language, the mass media, sexual morality, childrearing, the domestic division of labour, and everyday social interaction; the purpose of which is to give men power over women” (Ellen 1989, cited from Saulnier 1996:41).

Although radical feminism is recognised as a western type of feminism, its’ claims become legitimate when one observes how different social systems operate, especially in the developing countries. There are some societies in Africa, for example, the Oku society in Sierra Leone, which still believe that women should work at home as caretakers of the family (Steady 2006:121). In other traditions, women don’t have the chance to make
decisions in any issue concerning marriage and other important issues which have a direct impact on them. Some of these give credence to the fundamental idea proposed by radical feminists that society must be completely altered or transformed to eliminate male supremacy. However, in these Non-Western societies, this might only be a hypothetical solution because of differences in culture and other factors such as economic status, methods of subsistence and an entrenched dependency on wealthy nations.

The last fundamental idea of radical feminists is based on hierarchies. Their protest is based on an excess of power that society has granted to men who always decide on issues which affect both men and women. In other words, radical feminists’ activism is an attempt to claim this power to be able to take their own decisions on matters concerning their own interests. For example, they argue that “any hierarchy based on sex, class, race, sexual orientation, or some other characteristic, is inherently oppressive and should be eliminated” (Saulnier 1996: 42).

The social structures that still exist today in most developing countries continue to grant men social superiority in deciding what should be done, when, why and how. For example, in many societies, men still decide when to have sex, why and how (ibid). For radical feminists, this power conjugation is unacceptable and they suggest the solution to the problem in their fundamental idea that ‘hierarchies must be eliminated.’

2.3.2. African feminism

Feminists in Africa, as in most parts of the world, have experienced many difficulties before and after their activism began. Sheila Petty, a feminist writer, compares the sufferings that feminists experienced to what Africans experienced before and during colonialism. She says,
“It has been argued that the African ‘world view’ and the feminine ‘world view’ share certain similarities. Each ‘group’ has suffered a common experience; a shared history of oppression through slavery, colonialism and apartheid has encouraged an ‘Afrocentric’ consciousness among Black societies and a shared history of patriarchal oppression has led to a ‘feminist’ consciousness among women” (Petty 1996:185).

However, various forms of the patriarchal system have differentiated African feminism from Western feminism. For example, in Africa, the patriarchal system has traditionally enslaved women at home as caretakers of the household. This appears as an extension of slavery, Petty states, except that here, a woman is not for sale as during the slave trade; rather she is “oppressed in her ideological and social economic role as mother and housekeeper” (Thornham 2000:20).

Consequently, it might be possible that the state of being a slave at home as a mother and a caretaker and with a history of patriarchal oppression before, during and after colonialism, has also contributed to African feminist consciousness among women. This has been portrayed in a number of African films, for example Xala by Sembène and Selbe by Safi Faye, where women continuously struggle to escape patriarchal chains and home slavery.

From Petty’s arguments, one of the events that mark the beginning of feminist movements in Africa might be the exposure of African women to Western women during colonialism. For instance, in God’s bits of wood, a novel by Ousmane Sembène, the women’s struggle involves battling the French police. From such struggles, according to Karen Sacks (1978: 367), women became conscious of their own collective basis for inter-dependence and opposition to the colonizer. Sacks further explains that “women became consciousness of their independent relationship to capitalism” (Sacks 1978: 365). Though this is an example
from the novel which depicts a West African society, it might also be used as a good example of African feminism that Sembène has been using in his art to reflect his society.

In the same novel, *God’s bits of wood*, colonialism plays a great role to create awareness among African feminists. Women are portrayed as strong and courageous enough to face any challenge. For example, Penda, a feminist among a group of women in the novel who strikes in defence of their rights, stands before the coloniser and addresses them:

“...I speak in the name of all women, but I am just the voice they have chosen to tell you what they have decided … For us women this strike stills the possibility of a better life tomorrow” (Sacks 1978: 367).

If feminist struggle, according to Pat Horn (1995:71), “is a struggle to end patriarchal domination,” in Africa this struggle means to challenge all those social mechanisms which are still used by men as tools to oppress women. Some of these mechanisms which have been features in Sembène films include male violence, female circumcision and the exclusion of women from participating in decision making, to mention just a few.

In some parts of Africa, for example, among the Chagga society in the north-eastern part of Tanzania, “all women are called ‘mothers’ and act as care providers for everyone and everything – the healthy, the sick, the old, animals, farms. Because motherhood has long been considered glorious, women have come to enjoy the role without questioning the oppressive side” (Leshabari 1991:34). Zulu Sofola (1992) argues for a “de-womanization of African womanhood” (Cf. Ukadike 1996:197), because the intrinsic value of motherhood’s roles is not reflected from the tasks assigned to it. For example, taking care of cattle has nothing to do with motherhood’s roles apart from giving power to an inherently patriarchal system.
If a mother takes care of the healthy, the sick, the old, animals, farms and her children, her day’s schedule hardly allows her to perform other private economic activities other than those defined by the society to which she belongs – those attached to motherhood. This means she is excluded from many other important activities within the society, for example decision-making in financial matters.

According to Leshabari, all these duties entrusted to women are “a camouflage for oppression” (Leshabari 1991:34). She advises that more women must be sensitised for empowerment. However, as an African woman who values the motherhood role, she argues, “[a]s women [in Africa] we must be able to accept our reproductive role as our responsibility. That means accepting ‘motherhood’ without losing a full life as an individual. We must still develop our physical and intellectual capabilities” (Leshabari, 1991:37).

She further insists that all African women should enjoy living as mothers but at the same time, they have to act as pressure groups for change and be able to stand up and fight in a united manner. From Leshabari’s argument, African feminism seems to be “attached to the reproductive role of women and the tendency to put the community before the individual,” (The Rosa-factsheets. No.34. July 2004). Her argument also shows that none of the struggles for the liberation of women or social change in Africa have questioned the African woman’s reproductive role.

Recognition as a mother in African society seems to be the highest level of respect that many African women are likely to reach. For example, female circumcision in most African countries was considered to be patriarchal ideology to control and dominate women and their sexuality, but women were in fact very willing to undergo circumcision because of the social value attached to it. Some of these values are:
“First, it ranks high in the system of merit for women and defines their identity. Second, it is exclusively a female practice conducted by female practitioners and has systems of reward and [womanhood] status acquisition attached to it. Third, it builds women solidarity and provides a power base for women” (Steady 2006:105).

The campaign waged against female circumcision by feminists in most African countries is meant to stop the number of deaths and brutalities happening to women. However, those who value the custom do not accept the outlook of those who oppose it. The great fear surrounding those who value it is to lose the solidarity of womanhood, as Haja Sasso in Sierra Leone puts it, “I don’t want to see this ceremony eradicated, because it binds us, we the woman, together. We respect each other in this way and we feel free together because of it” (cited in Steady 2006:106).

Nevertheless, due to the continuing Westernisation of African women, the pressure to end female circumcision is substantial. Although according to Sembène there is still high respect for traditional value in some African countries, “nowadays there is a widespread women’s movement that stands against […female circumcision]” (Olende and Kimber 2004). Sembène accepts the fact that one could argue that female circumcision is not a serious problem for Africa, however, for him; it is an issue of women’s freedom.

Feminist movements for social transformation organised by women in Africa are carefully considered to ensure they do not affect women’s motherhood status. For instance, Zainabu Bangura, a political leader and a Sierra Leone presidential candidate in the 2002 election, argues that “rituals [of female circumcision] are an important part of [a] whole set of procedures that educated young girls and passed knowledge of womanhood from one
generation to the next. [...] The more you decide you are going to take something like this on, the more you are going to face resistance” (Steady 2006: 107).

Both African feminism and Western feminism aim at transforming social structures, particularly those dominated by a patriarchal system. Feminist movements demand changes; politically, socially and economically. However, whereas the Western version prioritises equal rights to both men and women, in Africa these movements prioritise motherhood, “the [African] traditional way of defining a woman’s status” (Leshabari 1991:34), and the value that identifies women as legitimate members of the society. In other words, women in Africa want to change their societies but at the same time keep their recognised and respected status of motherhood.

2.3.3. Indian feminism

The Indian feminist movement began in the 19th century when women of the urban elite formed a social reform movement (Sen 2000:01). According to Chatterjee (1992), these women perceived some traditional practice against women, for example Sati, as a “civilizational lapse and as recognisable social evil” (Cf. Sen 2000: 07). Sen explains that the movement was an attempt of a new elite to redress the worst feature of a patriarchal order and therefore the founder considered it as a mirror which Indian men were also invited to look into (Ibid).

According to Sen, the social reform movement challenged many of the rituals and social restrictions to which Indian women were subjected (ibid). The main items on the agenda of the movement were prioritising women’s issues because at the time, women were the “arena in which agreements and conflicts between the colonial bureaucracy and the colonised middle class was to be played out” (Sen 2000:09).
During the British colonial government period in India, women experienced very little relief from the patriarchal system that had existed for centuries. According to Govinden (2008:73) the government did not sympathize with the Indian women in issues like the practice of sati, child marriage and widow remarriage, which placed them into oppression. For example, widow remarriage (Carrol 1989), was legalized in 1856 but its enforcement was still oppressing women because Hindu women who remarried, forfeited all claims to the property of her dead husband (cf. Sen 2000: 13). However, a small group of elite women became the beneficiaries of colonial modernity and were able to negotiate patriarchal spaces (ibid).

Interpreting patriarchal oppression in the context of continuity and discontinuity during the colonial period in India, Sunder Rajan (1991) argues that protests against the discriminatory practice, both direct and tacit, under British rule were hardly heard (Cf. Govinden 2008: 73). However, the behaviour of British rulers, not supporting women, partly contributed by the resistance the coloniser faced from an entrenched and powerful ancient structure of customs and traditions as Murshid (1952) explains:

“While the liberal section of the new elite demanded legal and administrative initiative from the colonial state in their reform project, more conservative Indian opinion resisted colonial intervention into traditional social relations. The debates between these two groups have often been seen as a battle between modernists and traditionalists” (Cf. Sen 2000:09).

Murshid’s explanation shows how women were used as a ground on which the arguments between the two sides were conducted. On one hand, the Indian traditionalists wanted to use women to channel patriarchal oppression and on the other hand, the British rulers wanted to use women to channel modernity and civilization. According to Chakrabarty (1994), the British argued at the time that “the condition of woman in a society is an index of that place
in civilization” (Cf. Sen 2000:05). This explanation also shows the need for collaboration from the two sides, to maintain power.

Nevertheless, modernity and civilization did not help significantly to create awareness among the majority of Indian women before independence because many achievements attained by the movement only occurred after independence. According to Sen (2000: 24), these pre-independent movements did very little to transform social structures in India, a situation which generated more desire for new women movements later in the 1970’s.

**Historical perspective**

Describing Indian feminism, Kumar (1989:20) explains that its development is similar to Western feminism due to the fact that they both started in the early Twentieth century. As in Western countries like the USA, the movements in India died away in the 1950’s after women had won some of their demands and reformed out of radical movements in the 1970’s. However some Indian academics like Samita Sen (2000) and Radha Kumar (1989) have attempted to identify some differences of Indian feminism from the Western type. These differences are based on women’s demands, for example, against dowry death and the enforcement of celibacy, just to mention two.

From its beginning, the wave of feminism in India had been characterized by a number of women’s struggles ranging from dowry murders and police rape to protesting against violence and legal discrimination (Kumar 1989:22 and Sen 2000:26). But not all women viewed all these issues as social problems, nor did they feel that the issues needed special attention. According to Kumar, such perceptions were the reason which forced the radical feminists in India to generate women consciousness of women’s oppression before the radical feminism struggles could start and gain momentum in 1970’s.
According to Sen, when the feminist struggles against women’s oppression had begun, the focus was on the serious problems facing Indian women, for instance *sati*. The more the Indian women realised their oppression, the stronger they became. Their problems united them, along with a common agenda of transforming social structures. By 1920, they had already realised that “there were spectacular barbarities in the everyday customs of India, including sati (burning widows alive on the funeral pyres of their dead husbands), female infanticides (especially common in northwest and western India), enforcement of celibate and ascetic widowhood, and pre-pubertal marriages (especially in north India)” (Sen 2000:06-07).

Another problem that united Indian women against the patriarchal system was dowry death or bride burning. This type of harassment, committed on young brides by their in–laws, created a spirit of feminist struggle. Kumar (1989:22) explains that “the public/private dichotomy was broken by groups of women demonstrating outside the houses and offices of those who were responsible for dowry deaths within their families, and demanding the intervention of both state and civil society.” She further explains that feminists gained the support of local residents and after a few months, groups of residents and professionals began to make similar protests independently.

One of the serious issues that enslaved Indian women socially and intellectually, was child marriage (Sen 2000:08). Because of its impact on women, the campaign to end it also needed strong organisation and commitment from Indian women. According to Semita Sen, the Bill to end child marriage was a consensus over issues in the women’s movement and according to her, perhaps it was the last:

“In the course of the campaign women’s organizations acquired a national profile and gained legitimacy and credibility in representing Indian women. By the early
1930s women’s organizations emerged as a consolidated force and were able to respond to national and international issues. They participated in every committee and planning group set up to discuss India’s future. Women, it almost seemed, had been accepted as an equal partner in the nation-to-be. But their hegemony was short-lived. As the momentum of the movement for freedom gathered, priorities changed and overtook the fragile alliances and narrow base on which the women’s movement was founded” (Sen 2000: 16 - 17).

Although women’s campaigns to end patriarchal oppression in India faded out when the movements for freedom gained momentum, they also played a great role in the new political movement. For example, “Gandhi appreciated the value of female picketeers and continually sought to draw more women into such activities. These efforts bore fruit in the civil disobedience movements of the 1930’s. In various parts of the country, masses of women took to the streets and joined picketing lines” (Sen 2000:18). One can argue that the new women’s movement in politics was not the end of previous campaigns but part of the strategy to get into the public sphere. The new public discourse structured in politics helped them to communicate their voice to the general public.
3. Discussion

In this study, the twelve chapters of *Moolaadé* and *Water* as indicated on the DVD versions by 20th Century Fox and Mongrel Media respectively, served as the foundation of this analysis, however, more emphasis is given to main characters, religious themes, traditional themes and all those situations which reveal women’s struggles to escape patriarchal oppression. The selection of situations is based on the three elements explained in the theoretical framework of the study: gender, communication and social changes.

The aim of this selection was to determine the relationship between the theoretical argument of the studies as outlined in chapter two, as well as the impact of women’s voices and the changes that might have been brought about by their struggles within the films. However, I found that there are some male characters who have played significant roles in the female characters’ experiences within the films. Though these men are not the victims of the same oppression, their inputs have been included in this analysis because of their importance in the film plot and in the women’s struggles within these texts.

All themes, characters’ communications and situations have been grouped under five main topics: Tools of patriarchal oppression exercised within the films, women’s reactions to patriarchal oppression, the intrusion of women’s voices into public discourses, the transformation of the social structure and feminism as depicted in the films. Within each topic, several events depicted in both films have been discussed.

3.1. Tools of patriarchal oppression

3.1.1. Religious faith and customs

In some countries, religious faith or belief has been used as a justification for violence against women. For instance, the Bangladesh women’s organisation revealed the following:
“The early 90’s saw a noticeable increase in crimes of violence against women, as 'salish' (religious) courts began to take the law into their own hands, going back to punishments outlawed for many years. In January 1993, a newly-married couple in Sylhet was buried chest deep and stoned for 'zina' (adultery) because the woman had been divorced; in May, a woman in Madhukhali was burned at the stake, also for zina” (Cf. Menon 2000:03).

These verdicts of the Bangladesh religious court appear similar to Hindu religious law: the law of the Manu with regard to the situation of Indian widows portrayed in Water; is simultaneously a command, a promise and a threat: “A widow should be long suffering until death, self restrained and chaste; a virtuous wife who remains chaste when her husband dies [and] goes to heaven; and a woman who is unfaithful to her husband is reborn in a womb of a jackal” (Water).

All three: a command, a promise and a threat as stipulated in the law of the Manu, are the religious tools used to oppress women. These are operational only to believers because the faith entrenched in them is based on Hindu religious ideologies. This suggests that “[f]aith does not generally act in an oppositional manner to ‘ideology’ but helps to make widows subservient to a different kind of stereotyping”. (Bhattacharya 2001:79)

According to Bhattacharya, some of these stereotypes that widows are judged by are partly enforced by the law of Manu. All widows’ characters depicted in Water accept the state of being widows because they have faith in the promise given in the law of Manu. For example, when Auntie, a widow character in the film, dies, Shakuntala tells Chuyia, the victim in the film, that “… she [Auntie] will go to heaven. God willing she will be reborn as a man.” Believing in the promise given by the law of the Manu, that is, ‘going to heaven,’ widows
also accept what is commanded in the same law, namely that they should be long suffering until death.

A faith or the commitment of any believer, according to Bhattacharya (2001:04), is always masked in religion. This kind of faith or commitment makes a believer loyal to the ideologies or to what constitutes the foundation of that particular faith or commitment attached to it. People with such a strong faith in their religion may be willing to sacrifice their life to defend it. Hence Bhattacharya argues that “[w]hen 'faith' or a devout commitment to what is projected as the culture or the values is deeply imbibed, consent to the need for protecting it may be generated” (Ibid).

The consent to the need for protecting the Indian cultures, as depicted in the film, is also revealed by widows regardless of the suffering experienced in their widowhood. A deep desire to protect their culture is driven by what Bhattacharya calls ‘faith or devout commitment’. When Chuyia, in her first prayer meeting, asks “where is the house for [widowers]?” other widows are enraged and shout at her, “Good God what a horrible thing to say. God protects our men from such a fate” (Water). Women want their men protected from ‘the fate’ not because they love them but because of their faith and desire to protect their religious culture. This is reflected by Supriya’s (1996) study which shows that Indian women describe themselves as “shameless wives” if they don’t show respect to their husbands and to their religion (Cf. Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:98).

In Moolaadé, a film which portrays a Muslim society, faith is also used to oppress women. Filomina Steady outlines the roles, usually enforced by patriarchy, that a Muslim girl is expected to play in life. These roles in fact force women to suffer oppression. According to Steady, the girl is “expected to be a good wife and house keeper and to bring up her children,
not to take up a career, to be under the direct control of the husband and [to] always [be] submissive to his will” (Steady 2006:121).

These roles, ‘slavish roles’ as it were, which explain the obligations of a Muslim girl in her society, explain why men are angry about Colle’s behaviour to go against what they call the Islamic culture of female circumcision: “Purification dates way back. It is required by Islam” (Moolaadé). The society depicted in Moolaadé which is dominated by patriarchy, views Colle as a woman who has bad manners because she is not submissive to men, as required by Islam. This society also uses Islamic culture as a protective cover to legitimise female genital mutilation.

In addition to the Islamic culture being used as a cover, society in Moolaadé has attached social recognition promises to those who abide by the practice, for example, those of getting married and having children. Such values and motivations make girls subservient to this kind of stereotype. Babatunde (1997) explains how the logic behind the promises works:

“The logic of the practice is coached in the anthropological, a gift that you give under pain of sanction for which you receive a gift in return. The logic of clitoridectomy is that by taking a tiny bit of the sacred instrument of fertility as an offering, the god of fertility bless you with more children”(Cf. Steady 2006: 108).

The opposite of Babatunde’s explanation is what most women who are portrayed in Moolaadé (with the exception of a few like Colle) believe: if a woman does not give the gift under pain, that is, undergo circumcision; she lacks the blessing of many children from the god of fertility. This also explains why the four children in the film ask for clarification from Colle; “Is it true that a bilakora [uncircumcised woman] can not have children?” (Moolaadé)
3.1.2. Stereotyping

Stereotypes in the two films, Water and Moolaadé, have been portrayed in various ways. On one side, the characters in Water conform to the stereotypes that define their condition, while the characters of Moolaadé challenge them. However, there are also some characters in Water who challenge the customs and some in Moolaadé who conform to them, depending on the role that the characters play. For example, Shakuntala in Water challenges conventions, while Alima, Ciré’s third wife in Moolaadé, conforms to social expectations.

Some examples of these stereotypes seen in the films are: in Water: when husbands die, wives also ‘half die’, widows are not allowed to eat sweets and fried food, widows are dirty and a person can get polluted by simply touching them, widows who remain chaste go to heaven, marrying a widow is a sin and widows who sleep with Brahmins (Indian elders) are blessed by this act; and in Moolaadé: woman should not be allowed to listen to radio, woman should not challenge a husband and a bilakora (uncircumcised) woman should not be married (Moolaadé).

According to Schneider (2004), a stereotype can be categorized as a fixed impression or generalization about a group of people or a collection of trait names. Katz & Braly (1935) argue that stereotype which is categorized as fixed impression, “conforms very little to the facts it pretends to represent […]” (Cf. Schneider, 2004: 16). In Water, an example similar to what Katz and Braly argue, is the statement that Madhumati makes to Chuyia: “When husbands die, God help us, wives also half die.” In Moolaadé, it is believed that a bilakora (uncircumcised woman) can not have children.

Madhumati’s statement does not reflect any fact to show the correlation between the death of husbands and half-death of wives. Chuyia, who is still a child, challenges it probably because
she lacks facts and it does not make sense to her. The impression that Madhumati wants to confer to Chuyia is that a widow does not have feelings: “… how can a half-dead woman feel pain” (*Water*). Madhumati’s intention is to make Chuyia stop thinking about her mother and live as other widows in the house do. Similarly, the impression that elders in *Moolaadé* want to give to the society is that uncircumcised woman can not have children, so as to enforce the custom’s validity.

Women in the Muslim African society portrayed in *Moolaadé* are also stereotyped as having bad manners whenever they challenge their husbands. One of those who suffer from this kind of stereotype is Colle, who challenges elders. The situation seems common in many Muslim societies where “a Muslim woman is never regarded as equal to her husband whether in [social] status or in intellectual ability” (Steady 2006:121).

Mernissi (1974) shows the root of this kind of stereotype when she argues that “the UMMA, the community of Muslim believers, is primarily for males and that women’s position in the UMMA universe is ambiguous: ‘Allah does not talk to them, we can therefore assume that UMMA is primarily [for] male believers’ ” (Cf. Steady 2006:122). In other words, Mernissi shows that a Muslim society like the one portrayed in *Moolaadé* is identified by the image presented by men, and that woman, who do not talk to Allah, are simply the caretakers of the family, for which they are respected, but they have no legitimation in other roles.

Another category of stereotype is defined by McCauley et al (1980) as “those generalizations about a class of people that distinguish that class from others” (Cf. Schneider 2004: 16). Women in both films suffer from generalisation because the society in which they live has distinguished them from the rest of the members. The Indian society of 1938 as depicted in *Water* believes that all widows are ‘dirty’ and anyone who touches them becomes polluted. These widows, who were seen as ‘clean’ before the death of their husband formed part of the
society. However, their society has classified them as widows and attached ‘dirty’ as a characteristic to differentiate them from the remaining female members (married or still single) of the society.

The West-African society depicted in Moolaadé, believes that all bilakora are ‘unpurified’ and should not be married because marriage is sacred. According to the society in Moolaadé, marrying a bilakora woman is a blasphemy. This is also a stereotype attached to a class of people to distinguish them from others and it is a tool that men use to oppress women.

The way in which women in the two societies depicted in the films become outcasts is somewhat different. In India, women become unclean by the death of their husband while in Africa, women are seen as unclean until purified. In both societies, husbands (through their death or the preparation for marriage, respectively) are the forces which drive the change of women’s social identity. On one hand, the death of husbands in Water separates Indian women from their society and on the other hand, preparation for marriage or circumcision in Moolaadé gives social recognition to African women.

Vinacke (1957) defines the third type of stereotype as “a collection of trait-names upon which a large percentage of people agree as appropriate for describing some class of individuals”(Cf. Schneider 2004: 16). The female community depicted in Water is not stereotyped by trait names, however in Moolaadé, a certain group of women is described by a trait name as a bilakora (uncircumcised woman); a feature that classifies them as different from other women. The name is accepted by the entire society and its negative image is created to show disgrace or lack of special quality that others have.

In Moolaadé, there is also another group of women who are referred to by their trait-names. This group is known as Salindana, the name given to women who are considered to have
power to cleanse other women in the society. Although according to Vinacke (1957), these women are positively stereotyped, they are inherently good in their society and their action should not be challenged. Challenging these women is considered the same as challenging the patriarchal system. This makes it difficult for other women to question the legitimacy of their actions.

Generally, the widows portrayed in *Water* conform to all stereotypes attached to them. For example, they accept that they are half-dead and unclean and they therefore do not challenge their life in the ashram. On the other hand, women in *Moolaadé* challenge all stereotypes attached to female genital mutilation. All these stereotypes have been set by patriarchal system to put women in a difficult social environment, a deliberate plan that men use to put women under oppression.

In the period setting for *Water* in 1938, there was no women’s liberation for common people. The situation might be the reason why the widows depicted in the film, as common people, had to conform to all stereotypes. In *Moolaadé* the situation looks different because of the later historical period. The film is set in 2004, about 66 years after *Water*, and the women depicted enjoy the current liberation of women to some extent. This might also be the reason why the society depicted in the film challenges all stereotypes.

### 3.1.3. Traditional culture

One of the traditional customs considered by feminists in third world countries as an opposing force against women’s development is child marriage. In India, for example, some feminists such as Forbes 1996, (Cited from Sen 2000: 16), believe that child marriage is a major impediment to women’s progress because it denies them the opportunity for education at their early age and the development of mind and body.
Chuyia in *Water*, who was placed into an arranged marriage as a child, is an example of many young Indian women who are the victims, when she becomes a widow at the very early age of seven. She does not even know the meaning of being a widow. The conversation with her father reveals the picture of how childlike she is. “My child [Chuyia], do you remember getting married?” …“No!”…“Your husband is dead, you are now a widow.”… “For how long, [father]?” (*Water*).

In most cases, girls in the societies depicted in the films, who become wives during their childhood, are married to men as old as their father. This kind of marriage system is what Sen (2000:11) describes as men’s key to control women, because a new wife has very little, economically and socially, to contribute to her new husband who sometimes has more than two or three other wives. At seven years of age, Chuyia is supposed to be under her parents’ care; unfortunately she is married to an old man. As any other child would be expected to behave, Chuyia wants to go back home to her mother; to get out of patriarchal oppression. Her behaviour is similar to the case of Rukhmabai, an Indian girl, who was married as a child and was tried and sentenced to prison for refusing to live with her husband (Cf. ibid).

However, Sen’s argument reflects child marriage and the life of girls in modern situations where girls have the same human rights as boys and therefore they should be schooled and exposed to all the opportunity and struggles that any human being faces. In traditional perception, girls should be looked after by males and secured into their role of reproduction and caring for men. That might be the reason why Chuyia and other widows were married e at a young age.

In Africa, the culture of female circumcision, as Filomina Steady explains, “[…] marks the biological transmission from childhood to adulthood and the social transformation from girlhood to womanhood. It also confers full membership into the ethnic groups and is closely
linked to one’s social identity” (Steady 2006:98). According to Steady’s argument, the practice may also be described as a ceremony performed to invite children to their respective societies as new members. This explains why the operation is performed on children because in many traditional African societies, once a girl is able to have children, she is considered as an adult regardless of her age, because her body is alike to an adult’s. However, Western society and a modernised society in the Third World, assume that a girl is grown up when she turns 18 and above. At this age she is considered as mature.

In Moolaadé for example, the four children who are the victims are required to undergo female genital mutilation against their will. At the age equivalent to that of Chuyia in Water (seven years), they are forced to be circumcised to fulfil a traditional custom which prepares them to become women or mothers. However, most of these girls who are prepared to become mothers are still children who can’t even handle the family responsibilities. Some don’t even know the cultural value attached to it, beyond the pain which forces some of them to escape. For example, the four girls in Moolaadé desert the circumcision procedure and seek protection in Colle’s house: “Mother Colle, we are requesting protection.” …“We do not wish to be cut.” For Ousmane Sembène, a modern Muslim, circumcision is a bad practice. He says, “We should not lose sight of the fact that it is performed on children […]. For me, that is the most criminal, the cruellest aspect” (Pride 2004).

A woman’s obedience to her husband is highly respected in both the Indian and the African society portrayed in the films. Consequently, in both societies any woman who misbehaves is punished by her society. In Water, the custom of obedience is enforced by the law of Manu which demands widows to live in an ashram, a practice which shows the obedience of a widow to her late husband. On the other hand, in Moolaadé women are expected to be obedient to their husbands. Moreover, the village council of elders expects a man to take
action when a wife behaves badly. For example, Ciré, Colle’s husband, loses status in the village council because he cannot control his wife; “Ciré, you are betraying your men folk!” (Moolaadé).

3.1.4. Women as agents of patriarchal system

Among African societies, for example in Sierra Leone, “a girl is usually […]circumcised] between the age of 13 and 16 and must be sponsored by an adult member, usually her mother” (Steady 2006: 98). The same feature of the practice is portrayed in the Moolaadé, especially when Salba stole her own daughter from Colle’s house and had her cut and she died; “My Diattou died in my arms. Colle, purification robbed me of my daughter” (Moolaadé). In this particular situation, the mother had become the emissary of the Salindana who work in terms of a patriarchal system, and suffered the loss of her child as a result.

These practices are normally performed on girls who are already engaged or about to be married (Ibid). Parents, who, according to Steady, act as the sponsors of their own children or the agents of the system, take their daughters to women who are believed to have cleansing powers through circumcision. The parents are simply used to channel oppression from the system to the victims and by so doing they support the oppression of women and become part of the patriarchal system.

Why do parents sponsor their children or work for the system to abuse their own children through circumcision or life in the ashram? Part of the answer is contributed by a discussion about religious faith, in this study. However, Steady gives more clarification about circumcision. She states, “the operation is a vital aspect of the change of status and is intrinsically linked with identity, solidarity with the group, fertility, and marriage. This
explains why many initiated members […], vigorously and intensely, defend the practice when faced with criticisms from outsiders” (Steady 2006: 98).

In *Water*, Madhumati who is the head at the ashram, acts as perpetrator, playing the role that men or the oppressors would play. She makes sure that oppression is exercised on the widowed children as the system prescribes. For example, when she hears from Chuyia that Kalyani is about to get married, she does everything possible to stop the marriage. She says, “She’ll get married over my dead body. Widows don’t get married” (*Moolaadé*). According to the religious text which flashes on screen before the opening scene in *Water*, a widow has to remain chaste. If Kalyani gets married, as Madhumati says, other will suffer: “You will sink yourself and us. We will be cursed. We must live in purity, to die in purity” (*Water*).

In *Moolaadé*, the Salindana are counterparts for Madhumati in channelling patriarchal oppression to children. Like Madhumati, they use the power they have to make sure all available children get circumcised, as preferred by men. For example, when Colle refuses to release the four children, the Dean Salindana promises her punishment. “Colle, you are too subversive. I will have to neutralise your power” (*Moolaadé*). Though men insist on purification, it is the women who give force to it.

In both films, there is thus a group of women whose role is to push victims into the hands of oppressors. They work closely with the perpetrators to make sure that the social status of women remains unchallenged. However, in *Water*, the role is played by a eunuch, a castrated man, whose main duty is to take widows to the clients. He becomes pessimistic when Kalyani introduces her plan to get re-married; “What a disaster. If one widow wants to [get married] all the widows in India will want to marry; a catastrophe!” (*Water*).
Mothers of the four children who flee from the purification ritual and the two who throw themselves into the well, in *Moolaadé*, play a similar role as the eunuch, Gulabi, plays in *Water*. When it is the season for female genital mutilation, they take their daughters to the Salindana and they pay a certain fee for the service. Colle’s decision to give protection to the four children does not please their mothers who join with Salindana to confront her, demanding the release of their children: “Who put them under your protection? You want our daughters to remain bilakora like your Amsatou.” (*Moolaadé*)

Two different motives observed from the films can be considered as driving forces that make women characters participate in oppressing other women. The first is based on economic reasons and can be explained from the way the perpetrators in both films exploit the victims. In *Water*, for example, Madhumati sends Kalyani to the ‘clients’ to get money for the survival of the ashram. “You must take care of yourself. You are the jewel of this house. If you are happy, our clients are happy. And when they are happy, I am happy” (*Water*). The logic behind Madhumati’s statement shows that Kalyani is used as an economic investment within the widows’ house but the benefit of the investment is not enjoyed equally because it is only Madhumati who benefits when the investment operates, and the price is only paid by the woman who is prostituted.

Similarly, in *Moolaadé*, the Salindana are paid for every child they operate on. This might be a further contribution to their tireless attempts to force Colle to release the four children. When Colle resists releasing the children even when one mother of the children demands it, the mother of the other two missing children advises the Salindana to find them because they are being paid for the job. “Let’s go find our children. For each child you receive 10,000 CFC and imported bar soap” (*Moolaadé*). From the statement, the practice can also be described as business between two sides where payment is made for the service provided. Sembène
condemns this type of capitalist tendency because it humiliates human beings and is used for personal gain (Nianga and Gadjigo 1995: 175).

The second motive is based on the parents’ wish for the well-being of their daughters, driven by social recognition. Although in Water, mothers of the widows don’t visibly participate in the rejection of their daughters (in Chuyia’s case her father and a female person (not her mother) take her to the ashram), in Moolaadé they themselves take their children to the Salindana for circumcision. This suggests that no mother would wish to have her daughter remain a bilakora because, according to their culture, she will not get married nor will she be blessed with many children.

3.1.5. Information censorship and gate keeping

A feminist writer, Linda McCarriston 1995, (Cited from Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:106) once argued that “the denial of class enforces silence and contributes to oppression”. Focusing on women as an example of a denied class in society, Ritu Menon explains that the denial of women’s participation in public discourse is one of the structured silencing which amounts to women’s oppression. According to Menon, “[i]t is necessary to expand the definition of 'censorship' itself in order to appreciate the circumstances in which women read, write and express themselves […]” (Menon 2000:03).

Menon clarifies her point by quoting a Palestinian woman writer, Fadwa Tuquan, who says “I was enslaved, isolated in my seclusion from the outside world, and my seclusion was imposed as a duty. The outside world was taboo for women of good families, and society didn't protest against seclusion; […] the process of maturing was a most painful experience in body and soul. I was oppressed, crushed; I felt bent out of shape. I could not participate in
any aspect of life unless I pretended to be another person. I became more and more distant (Cf. Menon 2000: 03).

Menon communicates the idea that women in some parts of the world are not given enough opportunity to participate in rational debates unless they change their identity, as Madhumati and Salindana do in the two films discussed in this study. Male dominance is powerful in all aspects of their life. For example, the Salindana in *Moolaadé* participate in public discourse, in the village elders’ council, because they discuss ways to neutralise Colle’s power: “Colle Ardo is challenging our tradition. Will you men then marry a bilakora woman?” The Salindana have been granted participation in a meeting not because of their status as women or as female representatives but because they work for the system and they are acting to sustain that system. Their status of priestesses gives them power to legitimate other (lesser) women in the society. This status makes them part of the system and in some cases they are esteemed higher than men because they have the power to cleanse bilakora, who later become the wives of men.

Similar to Menon’s idea, Gans (1979:249) argues that communication within many societies is dominated by a group or individual who has power to get a message to the public, associated with a positive image. In the two films, such a group of men forms the patriarchal system, which uses excessive power to make sure that information with negative images, about the system or its interests, does not reach the public.

Both priests in *Water* and elders in *Moolaadé* behave in the same way as these groups or individuals behave in different parts of the world, particularly in developing countries. This type of behaviour whereby women’s participation in public discourses is blocked or limited is similar to what Gans defines as censorship;” a killing or altering of the communication flow within society” (Gans 1979: 251).
One of the duties of priests defined by Indian society in *Water* is to translate religious texts. However, the translation is in the best interest of a system dominated by men. The information that is communicated to the public does not constitute a challenge to the operation of the system, and that which challenges the system is ignored. For example, when Shakuntala asks the priest about the rights of the widow to re-marry, he reveals why some texts are ignored. “The scriptures say that widows have three options: they can burn with their dead husbands or live a life of self denial, or, if the family permits, marry their husband’s young brother. However, a law was recently passed which favours widow remarriage.”… “We ignore the laws that don’t benefit us [men].” This behaviour constitutes what Gans calls censorship, whereby a religious text is examined for objectionable matter and interpreted to suit those in power.

Gans’ arguments might also be used to analyse confiscation of women’s radios, as depicted in *Moolaadé*. In this particular situation the male elder characters become gatekeepers by blocking the information flow to women; confiscating all women’s radios to keep them ignorant of current developments. According to village elders, women should not be allowed to listen to the radio because they get information which challenges the legitimate patriarchal system. What the village elders claim is shown to be true, since Sembène created the character of the older wife who supports Colle by giving her the secret radio (the only radio that was not confiscated), and she has been secretly subversive because she has been getting information on the radio since it was first available in her house during the colonial era, the time which was the origin of the change in women’s status: “Colle look at this radio. It only needs batteries” … “it might be older than my grandmother” (*Moolaadé*).

Information gate-keeping becomes a shock to Ibrahima, a son of the chief, a modern young man living in France, who has just come back home for his wedding. In a conversation with
his uncle, he is forced to turn off his radio and TV: “Ibrahima, turn off your radio. The elders confiscated all the women’s radios. You can’t turn [on] your TV around here. Its influence is even worse than that of the radio” (Moolaadé).

Women characters in the film might not be aware that the confiscation of their radio is the response to what patriarchy is demanding of them, that is, to stay far away from external influence, which is believed dangerous for the stability of the patriarchal system. However, they are aware that this action is men’s attempt to restrict their mindset (Moolaadé). Village elders believe that external influences brought in by radio broadcast separate women from their traditional culture and cause conflicts between men and women.

3.2. Women’s reaction to patriarchal oppression

3.2.1. Women’s attempts to create their own sphere

When the German sociologist, Jürgen Habermas 1962, (Cited from Thussu 2000:70) “lamented the standardization, massification and atomisation of the public”, he did not direct his laments to the patriarchal system but to the government of that time which was exerting its influence on the public sphere. However, the situation which occurred in the public sphere of Habermas’ time seems similar to the situation depicted in Water and Moolaadé. His work explains “the practice of open exchange of views and discussion about issues of general social importance” (Boyd-Barrett 1995:230), something which is not happening in the plot of films.

Contrary to the features of the public sphere explained by Habermas, where “discussions were framed with reference to and on behalf of broader social interests [rather] than merely the interests of those who were physically present” (Ibid.), men who represent the patriarchal system in both Water and Moolaadé deny women participation in all public discussions for
fear that their own interests will be challenged. For example, in all meetings which were arranged to discuss how to handle Colle’s challenges, women were not invited. This kind of public debate is what Habermas 1989, (cited from Thussu 2000:71) calls a “fake version” of the public sphere.

Derived from Habermas’ ideas, James Curran defines the public sphere as “a neutral zone where all those participating in public debate do so on an equal basis. Within this public sphere people collectively determine through the process of rational argument the way in which they want to see society develop” (Curran 1996:82).

In both films, the public sphere is dominated by men and their private organised interests are served while excluding women interests. This situation forces women to create their own sphere where they bring their issues and discuss them through rational arguments. According to Curran, “the purpose of the public sphere was to enable the people to reflect critically upon themselves and the practise of the […]system” (ibid.). Women depicted in Water and Moolaadé seem to create their own sphere for the same purpose explained by Curran. For example, when women’s radios are confiscated in Moolaadé, they arrange a meeting which discusses two issues: how women are going to get information after the confiscation and a debate about why men confiscated their radios; “We bought these radios, didn’t we? Who should dictate what we listen to?” (Moolaadé)

Within the films, in several formal and informal meetings which are organised by women, women get together in their own sphere to discuss issues important to their society. In Moolaadé there are three meetings which give women the opportunity to share their thoughts without interference of men. The first is the meeting between Colle and the four children who escaped the operation. They first discuss female genital mutilation, the problem that faces
women and then they critically discuss the stereotype that ‘uncircumcised woman can not have children.’

The agenda in the second meeting is the confiscation of radios and in the third one it is the number of deaths which occur when girls are cut, focusing on the recent death of one of the four girls who were under the protection of Colle. They also listen to news from the only woman’s radio in the entire village that escaped the confiscation. They critically discuss how men have failed to force Colle to release the four children. They also discuss measures that will help to put an end to female genital mutilation. In these meetings women get chances to participate in rational discussions but their voice is not powerful enough to go beyond their own women’s sphere.

*Water* presents Indian women whose religious faith makes them conform to all stereotypes attached to widowhood. In other words, they neither need to reflect critically about their status as widows, nor about the practises of the system. However, Narayan, a man, creates and facilitates a discussion about widows’ status in Indian culture. He meets with Kalyani, his widow fiancée, in a rational sphere reflecting the age when a woman becomes a widow, and the rights that society has given to a certain group of people (men) to dictate what is good and what is bad in terms of tradition.

Liberal feminists internationally maintain that rational arguments are effective in both increasing opportunities for women and in providing role models for both adult women and girls (Steeves 1995:392). The rational discussions that are conducted in the meeting organised in the women’s sphere in *Water* give weight to Steeves’ arguments. All meetings increase opportunities for women: the opportunity to air their views and to get new ideas, as suggested by Habermas’ theories. The discussion in these spheres also provides role models. For example, the rational discussion between Colle and the four children gave the children an
opportunity to know the truth about circumcision. The discussion also presented them with Colle as their new role model.

Furthermore, the meeting which is set as an attempt to create a women’s sphere to express grief for the death of their children in Moolaadé, gives women the opportunity to reflect on the promises attached to female genital mutilation. After they realize its disadvantages and risks through the loss of their own children, they begin to criticise the operation. It is in this particular meeting that women, as a group, organise a move to confront the council of elders in the public meeting organised to discuss Colle’s resistance to end the Moolaadé.

In Water, the rational debate between Kalyani and Narayan at the Shiv Temple gives Kalyani the opportunity to find her first lover because she, like Chuyia, became a widow before she met her husband. “He [Gandhi] says widows are strangers to love …” (Water). It is in this meeting where Kalyani, a widow, dared to talk about remarriage, something which is considered as a sin in the 1938 Indian society as portrayed in the film. Narayan’s mother reacts with shock and disgust to his disclosure that he will marry Kalyani: “Marry a widow? How can you even think of it? This is a sin” (Water).

The public space in the films can be identified as the sphere between the women’s private domain and the patriarchal domain and it is where public opinions for the public interest are formed. The women’s space helps them to form women’s opinions for women’s benefit, while patriarchal space, which is supposed to be the public space, helps men to form men’s opinions for men’s benefit. The public sphere could ideally offer a space where both men and women could participate in rational debate. However, the dominance of men in this sphere precludes women from participation in the public debates and forces them to find an alternative solution, evident in the formation of different women’s spaces.
3.2.2. Women’s resistance

Several examples of people who have been oppressed by the system reveal that resistance has been one of weapons that have been used as an attempt to eliminate the oppression. In India, for example, “women […] struggled to gain an education and a place in India’s public life, neither of which flowed automatically or easily from their class or caste status. Women often earned “freedom” at the price of social ridicule, ostracism, and harassment. And while some women were aided by well-intentioned male relatives, others faced severe familial resistance” (Sen 2000:8).

Likewise, there are also characters in the films who resist patriarchy by protecting the victims from more harm. For example, Shakuntala in Water, plays a significant role to save the two victims, Kalyani and Chuyia, from the hands of the oppressors. When Madhumati locks Kalyani in her room as an attempt to stop her marriage, it is Shakuntala who forces Madhumati to free Kalyani and meet her fiancé: “[Give me a] Key to her room” … “Leave [Kalyani] Go!” (Water)

On another occasion, Shakuntala helps Chuyia to escape patriarchal oppression and reach a more liberal society. Chuyia is handed to Narayan to be taken to the Gandhi movement, the movement that respects the freedom of all Indians including women and those of lower castes. Although it is not easy, Shakuntala achieves her goals: “Narayan! Make sure she is in Gandhiji’s care! Give her to Gandhi!” (Water)

Colle on the other hand gives refuge to four children who escape female genital mutilation as it is portrayed in Moolaadé. Determined to face any challenge from men or the system, she uses a traditionally accepted method; tying a string across the doorstep of her house (the power of Moolaadé), which magically prevents anybody to take the children beyond the
string. Colle’s resistance causes conflict because of pressure to release the children emanating from the Salindana, her husband and her husband’s brother. This kind of resistance also explains why Sembène believes that women are powerful. He says “In Africa, we have a lot of strong women. I think that without that, we would have gone down the drain a long time ago. We have very, very strong women. They are the people who hold society together” (Pride 2004).

At first Colle’s resistance to release the four children, as depicted in the Moolaadé, is against the Salindana (exponents of the patriarchal system). Colle’s use of her own past experience of female genital mutilation is what Avtar Brar (2001) calls “the site of subject formation” (Cf. Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:96): “… you cut me and also you buried my two children. … These children requested my protection. They will get it” (Moolaadé). She also resists against her husband’s brother, Amath, who derides Colle’s action as bad manners. Although Colle resists patriarchy, she also faces severe familial resistance as some members of her own family, for example her husband and the third wife, confront her.

The second form of resistance, which also constitutes the turning point of the film, is Colle’s refusal to utter the magic word to end the spell of Moolaadé. According to the traditional culture, Colle is the only person who can end the Moolaadé because she is the one who put it into effect. Since the attempts to pressurise Colle into submission had failed, the council of elders has ordered Ciré, the husband, to flog her in public, but still she resists. The humiliating punishment that Colle gets is the strongest of all punishments that the elders could mete out on any woman who misbehaves. The failure of this punishment implies the failure of the council: “After all this beating not a word, that’s the end of it. What a failure” (Moolaadé). Colle is the proverbial sacrificial lamb or martyr; her punishment is the price for women’s entrance into public spaces as well as women’s social progress. The failure of
Colle’s resistance would have given victory to the patriarchal system and women would have remained oppressed.

At the flogging event, all women give support to Colle by encouraging her not to utter the magic word: “Say nothing. Nothing” (*Moolaadé*). The part that these women play to support Colle is driven by what Astrid Fellner (2002) calls a ‘shared experience.’ According to her, “[w]omen’s wish to give expression to their subjectivity is a key motivation underlining the emphasis on the importance of speaking out as a member of a specific group suffering from [a] shared form of oppression” (Cf. Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:97). These women, each at a different time, have experienced the pain of female genital mutilation. At this point, given the deaths of the children and the overt aggression of the men, most of them understand the language or the meaning of Colle’s resistance, hence they offer her support.

In *Water*, women’s resistance is revealed by Kalyani when she refuses to be exploited as a sex worker: “This is an ashram, Didi, not a brothel” (*Water*). It is the first time Kalyani refuses to comply with Madhumati’s order after she has her first meeting with Narayan. Narayan, who is a member of Gandhi’s movement, is a nationalist who believes in passive resistance. His ideology gives Kalyani power to become more radical and she starts resisting the patriarchal system.

### 3.2.3. Patriarchy challenged

The most provocative challenge that the patriarchy faces in *Moolaadé* is when Colle ties a string of yarn across the doorstep of her house, to protect girls in her house. The challenge is what keeps the film plot advancing because all other conflicts are built on it. It is very clear to every member of the society portrayed in the film that a string signifies a customary magical power which gives protection; according to the ancient custom, the girls inside the house are
safe because no one can come after them. The string of yarn across the door, the *Moolaadé*, constitutes Colle’s house as a safe zone that will bring a terrible curse upon anyone who breaks it.

Colle uses this silent weapon as a powerful form of non-verbal communication which she directs against men in her society who are the lawmakers. In this particular society, the string of yarn has power to neutralize other traditional customs and Colle uses it as a shield which gives her more power to protect the children. For Colle, this seems an alternative means of communication especially when perpetrators of the system refuse to listen. As Rakow and Wackwitz state, “[s]ilence is integral to speech and is a form of communicating that can be chosen or strategic... silence can be a powerful means of communicating when [voice …] is denied” (Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:95-96).

The action is similar to what Catherine Boyle 1993, (Cited from Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:106), argues that “voice can be cultivated in everyday objects and practice of living”. The voice of Colle finds representation in the string of yarn, an everyday object, which is part of her custom. Though men constitute customary law, they didn’t foresee that women would one day use it to challenge circumcision. In the past, the use of different objects which were considered to have magical power was a common practice among African societies. For example, among the ‘Ha’ tribe [to which I belong] in the western part of Tanzania, a piece of wood charcoal was believed to have magical power to stop bad dreams during the night. Parents used to tell their children to put a piece under a pillow before they went to bed.

Another challenge portrayed in *Moolaadé* is an expected behaviour that Ibrahima shows towards his parents. Ibrahima, a modern and educated businessman who lives in Paris, comes back home and finds himself in a debate about the rights of marriage for uncircumcised women; he eventually refuses to let his parents dictate against his marriage to the main
protagonist’s daughter, a bilakora. Traditional customs in many African societies, including the one depicted in the film, give parents power to make decisions in all matters concerning marriage. However, when Ibrahima’s father objects to his son marriage to a bilakora woman, the son challenges him: “Father, my marriage is my own business” (Moolaadé). In other words, the son inherently challenges all traditional customs structured by patriarchy.

The elders in Moolaadé suspect that too much outside influence is the reason of many challenges from women against men. These influences include radio broadcasts from the city, the character of Mercenaire, a trader who occasionally arrives at the village to sell different goods, and Ibrahima who has adopted Western ideologies. As the first step to stop the influence, the village council orders men to confiscate all women’s radios to stop external broadcasts which open up women’s minds. In this case, “media has ceased [to] be an agency of empowerment and rationality and become a further means by which [women are] sidelined” (Curran 1996:82). Mercenaire later becomes one of the casualties of the aggressive operation to stop external influence, but there is initially no direct reason for the men to attack him. However, his attempt to stop Colle’s punishment is used as enough evidence to kill him, for the reason that he challenges the elders. Mercenaire and radios, the great influences, are thus eliminated from the village as an attempt to stop women’s challenges. One woman observes: “You are scared of radios. Fear also led you to murder Mercenaire” (Moolaadé).

Another provocative challenge directed to men is a question asked by Chuyia in Water. As a new widow who knows nothing about widowhood, she poses the question about the ashram for men during a prayer meeting. She asks the question in the presence of a priest, a member of a patriarchal system whose work is to translate religious text which oppress women. For Chuyia, it is just a question like any other question a child of her age could ask. However, it
is addressed to the right person, the priest, to gain insight into the mechanism of power. Hence, Chuyia challenges the religious traditions which are hidden in religious text, the priests who translate the texts and the patriarchal system as well.

3.3. Women’s voice in public discourse

The discussion of women’s participation in public discourses can be explained from two perspectives. In Zanzibar, for example, there are few women who have been playing a part in muting the voice of others, for what they claim to be protecting their culture. In the words of Al-Barwani (1991: 42), these women are “internalising some concepts.” These concepts, most of which focus on participation and decision making, prohibit women to make their own decision without men’s contribution. Examples of these concepts are: “Wait until your father comes, Are you a man to comment on [what you want], Please don’t go to a […] meeting until your husband comes and if he allows you to go, okay” (Ibid.). In other words, this group of women does not recognise the importance of women’s participation in decision-making and they seem hold the view that men should dictate the participation of women in public spaces.

Women in this group have a similar standpoint to Alima, Ciré’s third wife, who also does not accept that Colle should make the decision to harbour the children in the absence of Ciré, the husband: “Elder, I don’t want to be burnt by the fire Colle has started” (Moolaadé). They are the internal barriers to their own development because they discourage those women who would like to initiate women’s campaigns for social change. Independent decision-making is the only weapon that women can use against all traditions and backward cultural beliefs that men use to stop them from getting into public discourses.
Another perspective of women’s participation in public discourses can be discussed from groups of women such as those around Colle in *Moolaadé* and Shakuntala in *Water*, who are open-minded and believe that independent decision-making is the only means that can help them to change social structures. This group seems to accommodate liberal feminist ideology which assumes that “rational mental development is the highest human ideal and that the [system] should act to assure equal opportunities for all in pursuing this goal and associated ones” (Steeves 1995:392). Colle and Shakuntala are good examples of such women because they have the ability to get the women’s voice into public spaces.

The two contradicting views accentuate the differences among women because as a result, they fight each other instead of supporting one another to strengthen their struggle against patriarchy. The fight becomes a threat to women’s spaces or positions in the society, let alone their participation in the public sphere. If they united, they would speak in one voice which has power to change social structures. An example of union, which is powerful enough to stop male dominance and which helps women to bring changes, is the full support that woman in the *Moolaadé* give to Colle during the beating scene. All changes of social structures are re-oriented in this particular meeting. The group of women who mute the voice of other women need to accept the view, as already presented by Bernard (1976) that in any changes of role there is always some degree of individual deviance from any social norm (Cf. Turner 1990:89).

Women in both India and Africa, as depicted in the historical and present-day settings in the films, have been left out of the social debate within their societies. Their social identity has been described within fixed family limits, particularly motherhood. They are restricted from participating in decision-making at family level, let alone at society level. For instance, the legitimacy of Colle’s action is challenged when she decides to give protection without her
husband’s permission. This kind of oppression compromises women’s acts, placing them in a position which fails to define their social identity. Luce Irigaray (1993) criticizes this male dominance because “[t]he position of being out of the centre of discourses is the very means by which a subordinated identity is produced” (Cf. Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:96). It is patriarchal dominance which renders the women characters in these two films as less powerful compared to men.

However, less power does not mean that women have to accept oppression because the little power that a group of women might have acquired can have great impact in a campaign. For example, Tharu and Laritha (1991) present Rassundari Davi, an Indian woman who struggled to get education under very severe male dominance and managed to become the first female graduate in India. She was enslaved at home as a mother but she could not accept the status because she had a very strong desire to study (Cf. Sen 2000: 8).

The wise decision of Rassundari to use the little power she had had, helped her to change her social identity from being a housewife to an academic. In other words, she contended the home slavery boundaries or limits defined by patriarchy. Linda Gordon appreciates this kind of effort revealed by Rassundari; she says, “to be less powerful is not to be power-less, or even to lose all the time” (Gordon 1988: 24).

Gordon’s appreciation describes a woman as a person who has less power compared to a man. However, the same woman is not powerless and this means she also stands the chance to win a space in public spheres if she can fully use the potential she has. The Chicago-based Sun-Times film analyst, Roger Ebert, proves the idea using an example from Moolaadé. He says that “one of the themes coiling beneath the surface of […] Moolaadé] is that the women in this society have great power, if they are bold enough to exercise it” (Ebert 2007).
In *Water*, Shakuntala is the woman among those who use their potential to help others achieve their goals. As the only example of a determined woman in *Water*, she first uses her ability to help Kalyani to overcome the boundaries defined by Madhumati within patriarchy. This is the same as changing Kalyani’s status from being a sex worker, a Jewel of the Ashram, from an identity defined within the limit of the widows’ house to one recognised by the entire society; that of a married woman.

In both films, the voice of women has become heard in public discourses. However, the clear example of this intrusion of the voice into men’s spaces can be traced in *Moolaadé* where women show a strong determination to have their voice heard. In other words, they are using the little power they have against the overbearing men to change their status. In *Water*, on the other hand, only very few challenging voices achieve access to public discourse; according to Bernard (1976), the consciousness of a critical mass of widows is not raised to campaign for change (Cf. Turner 1990:89). In other words, these women don’t use the negligible power they have to make change.

The two examples from the films indicate a contrast of the magnitude of women’s struggles to get into public spaces. *Water* shows a weak and disorganised movement, while *Moolaadé* shows a strong organised movement which achieves a positive outcome. This explains what Filomena Steady argues when she argues that “Women’s associations are viewed as platforms and spaces for transformation of female identity” (Steady 2006:6). Women in *Moolaadé* offer proof of this argument when they respond to women’s circumcision, their unifying problem, as the platform to get their voice into the council of elders, something which was impossible before.

These women’s platforms or spaces, as Steady calls them, have given women the opportunity to express their opinion about female genital mutilation in *Moolaadé* and widowhood in
Water. They have also helped them to compete with dominant male voices and their female representatives and change their social status, lifestyle or identity. In Moolaadé for example struggle has given women the chance to participate in rational debate and logically present their voice: “Some give birth, others kill…. The child killers, [Salindana], are here. They will no longer cut anyone…. Let’s end our genital mutilation” (Moolaadé).

However, this journey to the public sphere has not been easy because it has cost the life of Mercenaire, women’s radios have been destroyed and the event has left unsolved conflicts between Colle and her husband’s brother on the one side, and Ibrahima and his father on the other side. The fact that the voice opposing women’s circumcision has reached its destination, does not guarantee changes of social structures because men still predominantly resist marrying a bilakora: “Do what they, [women], please but no one will marry a bilakora. Never! Never!” (Moolaadé).

Marriage, in many African societies, is associated with the highest social recognition a woman can achieve, but if men refuse to marry uncircumcised women as it is the case in Moolaadé, how is the social identity of a woman going to be redefined? In this situation, Rakow and Wackwitz (2004:95) present the advice to women that they might be clearer and more reflexive about what they hope to achieve through uttering their voice, as this could lead them to another phase of activism. This is what is happening in Moolaadé, where women’s voices in the public discourse have led them to another level of social consciousness. At this new level of campaign, women have the task to change the cultural ideology of men to accept bilakora as wives.

In Water, women’s voices have also managed to intrude into the public discourse of Gandhi’s movement, as outlined above, since this particular political sphere is different from the one depicted in Moolaadé in the sense that it does not overtly restrict female participation. This is
the new public sphere dominated by a new generation of men who follow Gandhi’s ideologies to liberate the entire Indian society, ideas which are contrary to a number of Indian customs. Shakuntala hopes that Chuyia, representing Indian widows, will become a member of this male-dominated sphere. The participation of Chuyia or widows in this sphere becomes possible after the severe struggle of Shakuntala who managed to get the young voice, Chuyia, into the new sphere through the enlightened character of Narayan: “This child is a widow! Give her to Gandhi” (Water). Since the film closes with this scene, the uncertainty of Chuyia’s future in the new movement is not explored, but is rather loaded with hope for change. The above historical outline invites some doubt as to the potential success of this character in what was still predominantly a men’s movement.

3.4. Transformation of social structure

Change or transformation in any aspect of human culture is something which cannot be avoided. According to Makanga (1997:325), traditional cultures are processes and historical events that occur everywhere and at any point in human development. His view reveals that culture is not in stasis at any point in human history. In other words, changes in culture are driven by change within human history happening in any society. For instance, the changes of culture in most developing countries during the era of globalisation were partly driven by ‘culture imperialism’ whereby the powerful Western culture intruded into the Third World and became dominant culture, or what Stuart Hall 1981, (cited from McGuigan 1995:375) calls “popular culture”.

If a change of human history, according to Makanga, is proportional to the change in traditional culture, changes in female behaviour in both films, Water and Moolaadé, due to different factors driven by external forces like modernisation and information imperialism, to mention just two, become inevitable. These changes bring, to the respective societies, a
conflict between men who protect the long-standing traditional culture, and women who invite changes as an attempt to end oppression. As the result, women who have less power become the victims of this conflict.

On the other hand, Stuart Hall 1996, (cited from Kapur 2000:58) explains how the existing culture in any society can disappear or be used as reference material to shape the new culture developed in a society. He says,

“[W]e can not speak about one story without acknowledging the raptures and discontinuities of the story we tell or re-tell. We can not speak for [a] very long time, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity,’ without acknowledging its other side – differences and similarities. … Far from being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the name we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narrative of the past” (ibid).

Hall’s views establish the fact that culture can be borne by the society and exist for a number of years, but can also be eliminated at any point of human history. Furthermore, new culture can be re-born out of the old cultural experiences, as revealed in Moolaadé where women want to put an end to the culture of female genital mutilation and welcome the culture of marrying uncircumcised woman. They also want to change the idea that bilakora cannot get married, and male dominance in decision-making.

According to Hall’s argument, societies with a culture of enslaving women in the widows’ house or of sexual control masked in female circumcision eventually had to acknowledge the resistance from the voices of women in changing social conditions, who represent the voice
of the victims, like Colle and Shakuntala in *Moolaadé* and *Water* respectively. This acknowledgement of the women’s voice becomes the turning point of the culture; the end of the old culture and the re-birth of the new ones, or rather, the transformation of social structures.

However, all these changes are not necessarily appreciated by every woman in the society, as Sheila Petty (1996) says: “[W]omen are not all agents of change, nor are they all victims. They represent a multiplicity of voices in … filmic ideology, and to understand this ideology one must listen to all the voices” (Petty 1996: 68). The multiplicity of voices that Petty refers to, is echoed in different women characters, such as perpetrators: Madhumati in *Water* and the Salindana in *Moolaadé*, victims: Chuyia and Kalyani in *Water* and the four children in *Moolaadé* and the agents of the oppressive system: Chuyia’s parents and Gulabi in *Water* and the mothers of the four children in *Moolaadé*.

Women like Colle in *Moolaadé* and Shakuntala in *Water* consider all women who are not the agents of women’s change, as enemies of women development. For example, at all times when the Salindana come to her house, Colle quickly takes a machete, ready for a fight: “Kawako, they are like vultures that smell blood” (*Moolaadé*). Colle embodies the belief that “…central to transforming patriarchal society is the transformation of the position of women in [all forms of oppressions practiced] in our society” (Horn 1995: 71). This explains why she is even prepared to become a martyr to save the four children.

The spirit of sacrifice from Colle transforms the social structures. Women in *Moolaadé* not only managed to get into public discourses but they also managed to use the sphere to put to an end the practice of female genital mutilation. For example, they tell the Salindana: “No girl will get cut. Forever! Throw your knife quickly” (*Moolaadé*). The Salindana throw down their knives, women collect them, put them into the girls’ loincloths and take them to elders:
“Here are the knives Salindana use to mutilate us” (Moolaadé). In this gesture, the Salindana surrender their power, leaving the men at a loss as to further action since their complicity ends in this scene, and there is no traditional substitute for their crucial role in the subjugation of women.

At the time, women are presenting their voice at the council, their confiscated radios are collected in front of the mosque and fire is set to them while some of them are still turned on. The image of melting radios in the fire grotesquely emphasises the silencing of voices. This action is men’s attempt to stop external influence. However, soon after this scene, the women take all the circumcision knives in the loincloths and throw them in the same fire to stop female circumcision. The same fire set to stop radio broadcast, is used to stop traditional customs which oppress women. Fire which always causes destruction is thus symbolically used by women to destruct those cultures which put them in oppressive side and allow them to live in a transformed society.

Fire, as argued by Scott 1974, (cited from Kuhlken 1999:360) “must be understood as a potent and potentially devastating [form] of power, used by desperate people when they have no other weapon”. Women in Moolaadé also use this means to weaken the patriarchal power by destroying the very tools which have been used to oppress them. This power of destruction is pointed out by Kutzberger and Laxenaire 1996, (cited from Kuhlken 1999:362), stating that fire is a dangerous weapon especially when it lands in the hands of weak, passionate or rebellious people (Ibid). The men in Moolaadé clearly fall into this category.

Women also use information from the radio as an authoritative testimonial that circumcision is in fact not required by Islam. They use a broadcast by a Grand Imam: “Each year millions of pilgrims go to Mecca. All have not been cut” (Moolaadé). Symbolically, social transformation in the film is depicted in the sign of a TV antenna which is set to receive TV
and radio waves from the city. And finally, Colle’s daughter tells her fiancée Ibrahima: “I am and shall remain a bilakora.”

While *Moolaadé* thus ends on a note of definite change, *Water* on the other hand only presents a point of departure for Indian women. The fact that it is set in the India of 1938, sixty years ago, can be read as the backdrop to the outset of social transformation. In the film, transformation is driven by Shakuntala who brings Chuyia to a Ghandhi prayer meeting at the train station to save her from being used by Madhumati as the prostitute of the widows’ house. Wherever Chuyia is taken to by Gandhi supporters, she is going to neither live in a widows’ house nor face social restrictions like not eating fried food and sweets. The movement of a train in the film shows change, i.e. a point of departure for Chuyia, from patriarchal oppression to a more liberal society which can be interpreted as a move towards social transformation.

3.5. Feminism as depicted in the two films

3.5.1. African feminism in *Moolaadé*

The African female society depicted in *Moolaadé* shows resistance against female circumcision, the custom which seems to be a threat to the women’s social development. In this society, women accept all traditional roles that an African woman has to play, but they do not embrace those traditional customs which enslave them within patriarchally defined restrictions, such as marriage restrictions for *bilakora*. In other words, the African women depicted in *Moolaadé* show their willingness to modernise those customs which are a burden to their development.
Motherhood roles

The chores that are centered on the concept of motherhood, as Terry Arendell (2000:1194) explains, aim at delineating what mothers do. According to him, mothers engage in maternal practices defined in three main roles: the nurturing, protecting and training of their children.

The view of maternal practices in African feminism is quite different to that of Western feminism where motherhood is not given the same value as it is given in Africa. Aronson points out that most women in America, especially feminists, believe in the ideology of equality between men and women. In this context, women support “equal opportunities, abortion rights, equality in childhood socialization … and are concerned about issues such as sexual assaults” (Aronson 2003:913).

Although abortion is supported in present-day Western culture and legislation in some countries, in African culture the practice is not supported and it is difficult for a woman to consider it, because “the culture of Africa appears to take a more collective approach to both fertility decision making and child care” (Madhavan 2001:503). Among those who make decisions, according to Madhavan, are women such as mothers-in-law, co-wives and sisters-in-law.

The group of women, who traditionally form the social environment of a pregnant African woman, are the same people who are responsible for childhood socialization once a child is born. They are all considered as collective mothers and required by their customs to take care of all children in their society. Unlike in Western feminism where equality in childhood socialization between men and women is legally entrenched and insisted upon by social practices, in African culture, as Madhavan (ibid) explains, men are left out of the childhood socialisation process.
In *Moolaadé*, as an example of African society, there is a setting of collective motherhood roles. For example, Ciré’s elder wife helps Colle’s daughter to get a new dress to wear when her fiancé arrives from Paris. All Ciré’s three wives, as mothers, take care of all children within the family regardless of the children’s biological parentage. Most of the time, as depicted in the film, the husband is away from his family and children remain in the care of their mothers.

In the Western World, there is furthermore a view that associates feminism with living single and having no children, or being a single parent. For example, one respondent interviewed by Pamela Aronson (2003:916), gives her thought on how feminism is viewed in America. “I have couple of friends that have very different views than I do…. My boy friend’s sister is a feminist, and she will never have children. She will probably never get married…” (Aronson 2003:916). This attitude which Western feminists may hold, has led to some apprehensive views about Western feminism even within Western society. For example, a Christian minister (US catholic 2002) views feminists as women who “leave their husband, kill their children … become lesbians…” (Hall and Rodriguez 2003:883).

On the other hand, feminists in Africa recognise the motherhood roles implied by maternal practices, as explained by Aronson (ibid). They nurture, protect and train their children at their homes where they are enslaved by their husbands. In *Moolaadé*, all women seem to accept this role because most of them are portrayed as housewives engaging in maternal practices without being visibly unhappy about their roles. These women can be identified as mothers, in view of the argument by Sara Ruddick 1980, (cited from Arendell 2000:1194) that “mothers are identified not by what they feel but what they try to do”.

Colle, as an example in the film, can also be identified as a mother who accepts her motherhood role by nurturing, protecting and training not only her own daughter but also
other children in the society. For example, when Colle is confronted by her own daughter, Amsatou, who wants to know the reason of her not being purified, she educates her: “Allah is great. Feel no shame in being a bilakora. … You owe your life to your doctor namesake. She tore me apart to deliver you” (Moolaadé). Colle refused to have Amsatou purified to protect her from death after she had lost her other two other daughters who died after purification. This reason sets the scene for further social change: while Colle’s husband accepts her and her daughter as they are, the remainder of the villagers have to experience similar tragedies to achieve the same tolerance.

Another maternal practice that Colle embodies is to protect four children who absconded from the customary purification ceremony. She gives them both physical and magical protection and educates them about circumcision: “Genital mutilation is a bad thing” (Moolaadé). As a traditional African woman depicted as a feminist in Moolaadé, Colle fulfils her motherhood roles by strongly resisting pressure to release the children who, according to her, face danger. Other women in the society consequently honour her resistance and she responds by recalling the role of African mothers: “Any other mother would have done what I did” (Moolaadé).

In Africa, as Madhavan (2001:503) argues, “childbearing and child rearing take place within the context of large social unit, often extended family structure or clan.” This kind of motherhood role is evident in Moolaadé when one young woman gives her biological child to another woman who has lost her daughter: “Mothers, be my witness. Salba, here is your goddaughter, have her for life” (Moolaadé). One of the reasons that one mother gives a child to another mother might be the fact that in Africa, as it has been argued by Madhavan, any woman is seen as a mother and can fulfil the motherhood role to a child of any other woman.
Independent thinkers

Independent women thinkers among the African society portrayed in *Moolaadé*, are very important because they help to sensitise other women who still believe that men are wiser than women. For example, Colle in *Moolaadé*, as an independent thinker challenges the wisdom of men’s decisions on women’s issues. She does not accept that men can make decisions on issues like women’s circumcision. Her own husband even respects her for this strength of character: “You are my favourite wife. You refused to have our daughter purified…” (*Moolaadé*).

Colle’s decision-making does not seem to depend on any other person for support, and when this character decides on a course of action, she follows it through regardless of any challenges she might encounter. For example, in the film she decides to question women’s circumcision independent of any external contribution, not even from her co-wives or husband. The elder wife doubts if Colle can manage to fight the tradition and culture in that particular society: “Colle, you have started the Moolaadé. Are you aware of the responsibility?” … “Elder, it is a question of life and death” (*Moolaadé*).

As an independent feminist thinker, Colle also refuses to utter the magic word to end the *Moolaadé* when she is harassed and assaulted by men: “As long as Colle Ardo has not uttered the word, no one will be able to take the girls away from her quarters” (*Moolaadé*). However, once she is convinced that neither the Salindana nor the men are a threat to the children any more, she cancels the spell: “Elder, the Moolaadé has ended. Alima, go undo the symbol” (*Moolaadé*).

Colle’s intelligence and her independent mind, as depicted in the film, have brought about feminist forces important for social transformation. Different female groups in the village
stand to enjoy the benefit acquired by her independent mind. For example, she rescues three of the four children and manages to stop female circumcision in the village altogether, and has enabled the more timid women to act in their own interests.

3.5.2. Indian feminism in Water

The Indian female society, as depicted in Water, seems to accept the style of life for widows defined by a Hindu religious text: to live an oppressed life in a widows’ house. The situation reveals how widows, in this film, have strong faith in their religious customs. According to the film’s plot, all widows who are depicted as feminists accept modernisation but are not willing to change their religious customs. For example, Shakuntala accepts what is required by the law of Manu, but she rejects the custom that child widows like Chuyia should also be confined to the ashram. This progressive view motivates her to help Chuyia escape the confinement of the ashram and join the positive male character heading for the social revolutionary, Gandhi.

Some Indian scholars like Radha Kumar (1989:20) see the development of Indian feminism as similar to Western forms, as the individual development of women is promoted. As in Western feminism, the movement of Indian feminism gradually died away after a number of their demands were met. As Kumar explains, the turning point started from 1979-1980 when “[Indian] feminists began to move away from their earlier methods of agitation, such as demonstration, public campaigns [and] street theatre” (Kumar 1989:24). A move away from group-organised campaigns signified a break in unity among the organisation’s members, something which could be interpreted as the beginning of individualism.
**Campaign to end restraint and chastity**

At the beginning of the second wave of feminism in 1975 (Kumar 1989:20), Indian feminists waged campaigns against the issues stated in the law, which oppress women. The main theme of *Water* portrays the oppressed life of Indian widows enforced by the three aspects in the law of Manu. However, the initiative taken by the characters to transform social structures is not powerful. The irony that the senior widow engages in prostituting the beautiful widow Kalyani to wealthy Brahmins, serves to highlight the contradiction of custom and law.

One of the feminist campaigns depicted in the film aims to end the custom which restricts widows from remarrying. Shakuntala, the only widow who seems to protest against this custom, actively challenges Madhumati’s reign to help Kalyani to get married to Narayan. However, she does not succeed because Kalyani decides to drown herself in the river when she realizes that her marriage is impossible since her future husband’s father had been using her as a prostitute.

Another campaign waged by Indian feminists that is depicted in *Water*, is the non-violent protest against self-restraint. Shakuntala is the feminist behind this protest which aims at improving living conditions for widows. She takes Chuyia from the ashram to Gandhi, who believes in non-violent protest, based on explicitly moral values (Kumar 1989:20). In both her self-restraint and her view on chastity, Shakuntala opposes the interpretations of religion and culture enforced by patriarchal society.
4. Conclusion

The films investigated in this treatise, *Water* and *Moolaadé*, both present a crisis in social relations between women and the patriarchal system. This crisis is the outcome of unjust treatment that women have been experiencing from men and which has provoked women’s anger to transform social structures by raising their voice. Women in the films use the crisis as a subject formation within their campaign against the oppression. This is similar to what Lipman Blumen 1973, (Cited from Turner 1990: 89) argues, when he states “crisis in a social system provides the most favourable condition for rapid and widespread [social] transformation”.

The campaigns to transform society depicted in the two films have the agenda to change the identity or image of an ‘unclean women’ (uncircumcised women and widows). They have been socially expensive in terms of relationships of the protagonists with the remaining women and the men in power which sustain the image that women want to change. Some agents of change have to face the costs of the transformation, for example, Kalyani in *Water* committed suicide, Colle in *Moolaadé* was flogged in public, and Mercenaire was killed.

Moreover, the transformation of social structures in the films could not be attained without the change of women’s roles and a reciprocal change of the roles or identity of men in the respective societies; as Turner (1990:88) argues, “a role always bears a functional or representation relationship to one or more other role, change in one role means change in a system of roles” (Ibid).

According to Turner (ibid), a role can change by creating a new one or by dissolving the established one either by adding or subtracting duties or rights, or by a gain or loss of power. All feminist communications in the two films reviewed in this treatise seem to substantiate
Turner’s arguments. In *Moolaadé*, for example, women want to end the practice of female genital mutilation by gaining power over the traditional customs which had put circumcision into practise. On the other hand, women in *Water* want to terminate the practise of celibacy by asserting widows’ rights of marriage and their freedom to live within the ‘clean’ society.

Before waging a campaign to change what seemed like ‘bad customs’, women depicted in the films had to realize the negative side of the customs. However, not all were able to see the wrong side of their customs because culture has made them believe that traditions have an intrinsic value. Florence and Reynolds (1995) believe that “the potential of change comes whenever a subject intervenes in meaning” (Cf. Wackwitz and Rakow 2004: 174). This explains why only few women who realized the meaning attached to circumcision and chastity, initiated campaigns for change.

In *Moolaadé*, for example, the African men depicted in the film believe that female genital mutilation means the cleansing of women, but the same practice has a different implication to Colle. Using her past experience, the practice means the possible killing of female children and adding complication to a woman’s labour at the time of giving birth. It is through this intervention of the meaning given to circumcision, that Colle initiates her campaign to end the practice. Correspondingly, the Indian men depicted in *Water* believe that self-restraint and chastity means fulfilling what a religious law demands of women. But for Shakuntala who has the opportunity to ask a priest puzzling questions, the religious text favours men by unfairly treating widows who have mostly been widowed when they were still children.

Colle and Shakuntala in *Moolaadé* and *Water* respectively, are the initiators of change who manage to sensitize other women in their respective society. From Bernard’s (1976) point of view, this is a very important stage in any movement for change because “change begins with few innovators, followed by more early acceptors, and then an early majority and a late
majority and finally the few laggards” (Cf. Turner 1990: 89). In other words, if the two societies had lacked dedicated women like Colle and Shakuntala, patriarchal structures would not have changed. “The few women who hold influential positions should sensitise others on the existing situation so […] that women can work together towards the development and liberation of women. Otherwise, the situation will become even worse” (Shirima 1991:33).

The questions asked by Gayatri Spivak (1998) might also be used to understand the potential that women depicted in Moolaadé and Water have, and to know whether they have managed to transform their respective societies. Can women in the two films speak? If they speak, are they women any longer? And if not women, then who would the women be? (Cf. Rakow and Wackwitz 2004:96).

As depicted in Moolaadé, women can speak because they have made known, publicly, the inherent problem hidden behind the female genital mutilation. However, their communication does not mean to change their roles as women but to make them socially recognised from the biological point of view, hence their very explicit communication aims to stop clitoridectomy. This means, in this particular society, men will have no choice but to marry bilakora as they will be the only women available.

In Moolaadé, feminist communication has been shown to have a potential to transform society because social changes are happening. Women depicted in the society have ended female genital mutilation and have attained a new social identity, which signify change. The future generation of women in the society depicted in the film might probably be full of bilakora woman: “this day will see the end of our ordeal” … “No girl will ever [get] cut again” (Moolaadé).
In *Water*, Ghandhi’s supporters would recognise the voice of Shakuntala and Chuyia as she has changed her identity; she has left the widows’ house in a society where she is not allowed to live with ‘clean women,’ to the society where the rights of individuals are respected. However, due to the earlier historical setting, *Water* ends on a note of hope rather than a comprehensive achievement. The milling crowd at the train where Chuyia is handed to Narayan, as well as the men hanging onto the handrails and shouting political slogans, rather suggest a moment of social upheaval to which the feminist character’s hope is desperately joined in the gesture to save the child from prostitution. The vivid objections in India to the making of this film in the early 21st century suggest that, although schooling and social empowerment for girls are a reality, many men’s sensitivity to cultural criticism remains and the desired social change has still not been implemented for all of India’s lower-caste women.

What the study has established does not provide entirely conclusive evidence of the influence of feminist communication in transforming social structures. The study focused on the content of two fiction films that constitute products of the imagination of the scriptwriters and directors. The characters are enacted by present-day actors and relate experiences that reflect possible real situations, but which remain fictional. The plot and its closure reflect the interpretation of the two directors who, as the study has shown, have a sensitive and post-modern outlook on gender issues.

Further study, possibly based on a different film text for comparison to one of the above, should be conducted to establish whether women’s communication in fiction films can in fact play a significant role in social transformation. Feminist film theory as well as a critical inquiry into representation of African gender issues should form part of such a study.
5. Reference


Appendix
6. Film dialogue analysis

Film: *Water* by DEEPA MEHTA.

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<th>Chapter.</th>
<th>Situation/ Event in the film.</th>
<th>Character/s</th>
<th>What was said/ Important quote.</th>
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<th>Reflection in Indian Feminism</th>
<th>Reflection in Western feminism.</th>
<th>Thoughts about the situation/ Argument</th>
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<td>01.i.</td>
<td>The death of Chuyia's husband and the move to the Widows' house.</td>
<td>Chuyia, her father and widows.</td>
<td>FATHER; “My child, do you remember getting married.” CHUYIA; “No!” FATHER; “Your husband is dead you are now a widow.” CHUYIA; “For how long?” FATHER; “This is your home now.” CHUYIA; “Then where is ma?”</td>
<td>Chuyia’s hair is shaved, two rings on her hands are also removed and she starts dressing like widows.</td>
<td>Hindu Child marriage Bill; a part of Indian feminists’ agenda.</td>
<td>Protest against child (women) violence.</td>
<td>Women’s oppression starts at very early ages. Indian feminists believed that this was a major impediment to women’s progress because it denied them opportunity for education and development of mind and body, (Sen 2000: 16).</td>
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<tr>
<td>01.ii.</td>
<td>Chuyia’s first day in the Ashram. She causes trouble at the widows' house.</td>
<td>Chuyia and all widows in the Ashram.</td>
<td>CHUYIA; “I am not staying here.” MADHUMATI/DIDI; “How I feel for you... I was also young when my bastard husband died... in grief we are all sisters and this house is our refuge. CHUYIA; “I want my mother.” MADHUMATI/DIDI; “Our holy books say, a wife is part of</td>
<td>Chuyia bites DIDI on her toes and runs. The middle aged widows start chasing her.</td>
<td>Protest against enforcement of celibacy and ascetic widowhood.</td>
<td></td>
<td>A widow child struggles to get out of patriarchal oppression which is under the cover of religious teachings. An example of a child who, like Chuyia in the film, fought against the system was Rukhmabai who refused to live with her husband after marriage, (Sen 2000:11).</td>
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her husband while he is alive... when husbands die... wives also half die. So how can a half – dead woman feel pain?"

CHUYIA; “Because she is half alive.”

MADHUMATI/DIDI; “Don’t try to be too clever or I will throw you into a river!”

CHUYIA; “I don’t want to be a stupid widow. Fatty

CHUYIA finds a new friend at the Ashram. Chuyia, Auntie and Kalyani.

AUNTIE; “Come here little one. What is your name?”

CHUYIA; “Chuyia”

AUNTIE; “…Do you have sweets? Awake or asleep, even in dreams all I see are sweets.”

KALYANI; “… Dogs are not allowed here. They are bad omen. Don’t tell anyone about Kaalu.”

CHUYIA; “But I am not staying here. My mother is coming to get me. If not today, tomorrow for sure.”

Chuyia and Kalyani become best friends. Protests against child marriage and domestic slavery.

Protest against domestic slavery.

Most women became widows when they were still children. All the memory they have about life outside the Ashram reflect childhood.

Chuyia and Kalyani meet Narayan, a man

CHUYIA; “Do you know I am Chuyia and Kalyani leave Narayan and go

Oppression based on

The scriptures/ system has also denies widow’s rights

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| **who falls in love with Kalyani.** and Narayan. | a widow?  
  
  **NARAYAN:** “Yes... Where do you live?” ...  
  **CHUYIA:** “She [Kalyani] lives in a house of widows. I am just visiting her.”  
  **KALYANI:** “Chuyia, tell him not to follow us it will be a sin.” | back to the house. | faith. | of associating with other people. |
| **ii. Kalyani (the jewel of the Ashram) is taken to the client.** | Kalyani, Gulabi, Didi (Madhumati), Narayan and Rabindra. | **MADHUMATI:** “why are you still here? Take her to Seth Dwarkanath.”  
  **RABINDRA:** “There she goes?”  
  **NARAYAN:** “There goes who?”  
  **RABINDRA:** “A whore. To meet a client. Perhaps my father.”  
  **NARAYAN:** “Does she look like a whore? She is a widow you fool... have unnatural concern for widow.” | **Gulabi takes Kalyani across the river to meet Seth Dwarkanath.** | Women oppression based on sex. | Women oppression based on sex. | The perpetrator, Madhumati extending patriarchal oppression – widow oppression based on sexual exploitation. |
| **04. i. Chuyia first prayer meeting at the temple.** | Chuyia, Shakuntula, priest and other widows. | **THE PRIEST:** “A new widow...She is just a child.”  
  **WIDOWS:** “She has turned the house upside down.” | **The priest continues to lead a player.** | **The 1974 reports; ‘Towards equality’. The report prepared by the committee on the status of women.** | Radical feminism; Equal rights. | When 'faith' or a devout commitment to what is projected as the culture or the values is deeply imbibed, consent to the need for protecting it may
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| 05. | i. Shakuntula comes to the river close to couples who are celebrating their wedding. She fetches holy water to prepare a temple. | SHAKUNTULA AND PRIESTS. | THE 1ST PRIEST AT THE WEDDING: "Watch it! Don't [Shakuntula, a widow] let your shadow touch the bride."
THE 2ND PRIEST AT THE TEMPLE: "Shakuntula you have been doing this service for many years. So many years of sacrifice and devotion. Do you feel closer to the truth written in the holy books because you get opportunity to be out of the house and to ask questions to the priests."
Shakuntula, and priests. | Oppression based on faith. |
| ii. Lunch time at the Ashram. | CHUYIA: "Where is Kalyani?"
AUNTIE: "Eat slowly. Chew each grain. Your next meal is tomorrow. With her uncut hair and clients eating with Kalyani would pollute our food... Rights." | Chuyia takes her food and goes to Kalyani's room. | Oppression based on faith. |
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CHUYIA: "Didi (Shakuntula) where is the house for men widows?"
WIDOWS: "Good God what a horrible thing to say. God protect our men from such a fate. May your tongue burn. Pull her tongue and through it in the river."

(Bhattacharya, 2001:04)

Being a widow has been described by holy scriptures as being unclean - a polluted woman.
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<td>to self liberation?&quot;</td>
<td>SHAKUNTULA: “if self liberation means detachment from worldly desires. Then no, I am not close.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>ii. Chuyia comes across a place where ladoos are sold.</td>
<td>Chuyia and a seller.</td>
<td>A SELLER: “Get lost.”</td>
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<td>CHUYIA: “I have money.”</td>
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<td>Chuyia managed to buy a ladoo, one of forbidden food for widow.</td>
<td>Oppression based on beliefs.</td>
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<td>Chuyia and a seller.</td>
<td>Widows are restricted to eat all foods that are considered to be delicious. The fact that the whole society considers widows as polluted beings; they have also restricted them to eat food which is eaten by the so called clean or unpolluted people.</td>
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<td>All widows.</td>
<td>KUNTI: “Didi. The money for the cremation?”</td>
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<td>DIDIMADHUMATI: “Every penny we have goes for the rent. Go get Auntie’s thing. Nothing.”</td>
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<td>KALYANI: “Didi [Shakuntula] I was saving this for my cremation.”</td>
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<td>DIDIMADHUMATI: “What a</td>
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<td>Kalyani donates the money for cremation.</td>
<td>Protests against equal economic opportunities.</td>
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<td>Protests against equal economic opportunities.</td>
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<td>Despite the poverty life that widows have been exposed to, society has even denied them important services like cremation.</td>
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| ii. **After the death of Auntie, Chuyia runs away. Shakuntula starts looking for and finds her playing along the river.** | **Chuyia and Shakuntula.** | **SHAKUNTULA:** “Where do you run off?”

**CHUYIA:** “You are always angry. I was going home.”

**SHAKUNTULA:** “You can’t go home.”

**CHUYIA:** “I know.”

**SHAKUNTULA:** “Forget that life.”

**CHUYIA:** “Didi. Auntie ate a ladoo.”

**SHAKUNTULA:** “Don’t worry after eating the ladoo, she will go to heaven. God willing she will be reborn as a man.” | They start talking as a mother and a child. | Oppression based on beliefs. | The translation of holy texts deludes widows’ minds. For instance widows believe that if a widow eats fried food (which is not easy to get due to social restriction) she will go to heaven. And if she dies in celibacy, she might be reborn as a man. |

|   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 07. **The first dating meeting between Kalyani and Narayan.** | **Kalyani and Narayan.** | **KALYANI:** “Are you gently?”

**NARAYAN:** “Would it matter if I was?”

**KALYANI:** “Yes”

**NARAYAN:** “...When did you become a widow?

**KALYANI:** “I don’t” | The relationship between the two grows up. | Social movements which invited men who were willing to protest for women’s rights. | Liberal feminism | The fact that most widows don’t remember the time they became widows, the culture established to lock them in the houses, might also be a deliberate plan to lock their minds. |
remember. May be when I was nine."

NARAYAN: “Was your husband good to you?”

KALYANI: “I never met him. Anyone else in your house?”

NARAYAN: “No I am not married.”

KALYANI: “Good God! Why not?”

NARAYAN: “My father says childhood is a time to play...If she had her wish, I would have a child as old as Chuya.”

KALYANI: “Your mother’s right. That’s how thing are.”

NARAYAN: “That is how things were. Times are changing. All the old traditions are dying out.”

KALYANI: “All of them? But what is good should not die out.”

NARAYAN: “And who decides what is good or bad?”
KALYANI: “You [Men]"

ii. Conversation between Madhumati (DIDI) and Kalyani.

Madhumati (DIDI) and Kalyani

MADHUMATI (DIDI): “Come on in child... You must take care of yourself. You are the jewel of this house. If you are happy our client are happy. And when they are happy I am happy.”

KALYANI: “This is an Ashram Didi not a brothel (bordello).”

Madhumati (DIDI) gives Kalyani a new widow cloth. She (Kalyani) leaves the room angry.

Second generation of Indian feminism.

Radical feminism.

The meeting with Narayan, a person with liberal ideology, has sensitised Kalyani. For the first time she gets angry with Madhumati’s statement about clients.

08. i. Narayan and Kalyani’s second date.

Kalyani and Narayan.

NARAYAN: “This is the edge of the city where the British live. They don’t care if you are a widow.”

KALYANI: “why not? Don’t they have widows?”

NARAYAN: “Of course they do. But not like ours... I was applying for a job in Calcutta.”

KALYANI: “When do you go...?”

NARAYAN: “I am not going anywhere without you.”

Touring the city in a chariot.

Modernization.

Narayan exposes Kalyani to the modernised world.

ii. Narayan at home chatting with his mother.

Kalyani and Narayan.

NARAYAN: “… that’s Ghandiji not some crooked priest.”

His mother starts crying.

Liberal feminism under social movements.

Liberal feminism.

The Gandhi’s political ideology based on freedom is not accepted by perpetrators of the system.
does he say then?”

NARAYAN: “He talks about freedom, about truth.”

HIS MOTHER: “To talk about truth is easy but to live by it is not... who am I going to find for you?”

NARAYAN: “You don’t have to I found her myself... she is a widow ma.”

HIS MOTHER: “Gandhi has turned you into a Lunatic! Marry a widow? How can you even think of it? It is a sin.”

NARAYAN: “… Raja Ramohan Roy says widow should get remarried.”

HIS MOTHER: “And Raj whoever Roj, what does he know of our tradition?”

for the fear that it might change Indian traditions.


MADHUMATI: “Are you mad? Giving a widow forbidden food.”

CHUYIA: “I will eat a hundred puris at Kalyani’s | Chuyia fights with Madhumati. | Protests against marriage rights. | Protests against marriage rights. | The young and beautiful widows are sexually exploited by the system. If Kalyani gets married the Ashram will lose the only source of income they have. |
iv. Madhumati confront Kalyani.

Madhumati, Kalyani and all widows.

MADHUMATI: “Chuyia says you are getting married... Have you gone mad? No body marries a widow.”

KALYANI: “He will.”

MADHUMATI: “Shameless. You will sink yourself and us. We will be cursed. We must live in purity and die in purity.”

KALYANI: “Then why do you send me across the river.”

MADHUMATI: “For survival. And how we survive here, no one can question, not even God... let's see the whore get married now.”

Madhumati cuts Kalyani’s hair and lock her in a cell.

Protests against widows’ rights to remarriage.

Protests against marriage rights.

The system tries to make widows believe that they at polluted and no one would want to marry them. Sometimes these beliefs are imposed in brutal ways.

i. Conversation between Gulabi and Madhumati about widows' marriage.

Gulabi and Madhumati.

GULABI: “What a disaster. If one widow wants to marry all the widows in India will want to marry. A catastrophe! Do you know what he says?”

Madhumati starts crying because Mitthu, the parrot, was 'murdered'.

Protests against widows’ rights to remarriage.

Protests against marriage rights.

The perpetrators of the system are shocked by Kalyani’s action to fight for her rights of remarriage because if she succeeds all widows are going to
### ii. Conversation between a priest and Shakuntula.

**Shakuntula and a priest.**

**SHAKUNTULA:** “You have studied the scriptures. Is it written that widows should be treated badly?”

**A PRIEST:** “The scriptures say that widows have three options: they can burn with their dead husbands or live a life of self denial, or if the family permits marry their husband's young brother. However, a law was recently passed which favour widow remarriage.”

**SHAKUNTULA:** “A law? Why don't we know about it?”

**A PRIEST:** “We ignore the laws that don't benefit us [men].”

**Shakuntula changes her perception on Kalyani's marriage.**

**The campaign initiated by Social reform movement to fight for widows’ rights of remarriage.**

**Protests against marriage rights.**

**A priest plays an important role like the social reform movement did, however changing of social behaviour can not be easily enforced by law within unwilling society.**

The patriarchal system put in effect only those laws which protect the existence of the system. The threat ones are ignored.

### iii. Shakuntula confronts Madhumati demanding Kalyani's release from cell.

**Madhumati and Shakuntula.**

**SHAKUNTULA:** “key to her room.”

**MADHUMATI:** “I won't give you.”

**SHAKUNTULA:** “The keys.”

**Shakuntula grabs the keys and let Kalyani off to Narayan.**

**Protests against widows' rights to remarriage.**

**Radical feminism**

**Knowledge about widow’s rights transforms Shakuntula. She becomes more radical.**
| 10. | i. Narayan takes Kalyani home | Narayan and Kalyani. | KALYANI: “You really told your mother?”
NARAYAN: “…I said I wanted to marry you…She began to cry.”
KALYANI: “Good God!…What is your father’s name?”
NARAYAN: “Dwarkanath…Seth Dwarkanath [The Kalyani’s main client].”
KALYANI: “Turn the boat around.”
The boat turned around and Kalyani returns to the Ashram. | Patriarchal oppression becomes an obstacle for women’s struggles. | Patriarchal oppression becomes an obstacle for women’s struggles. | Kalyani couldn’t stand becoming a daughter in law to a person she has slept with (The client). |

|  |  | Narayan and Kalyani. | FATHER: “So you’ve found out she’s not goddess. Don’t marry her, keep her as a mistress.”
NARAYAN: “I respect you so much.”
FATHER: “…Brahmins can | Narayan leave the house. | Social movements which invited men who were willing to protest for women’s rights. | The patriarchal system interprets holy scriptures by attaching the issue of blessings to legitimise sexual exploitation of widows. |
sleep with whomever they want and women they sleep with are blessed."

NARAYAN: "...never to honour those Brahmins who interpret holy scripture for their benefits.

iii. Kalyani’s return to the Ashram, her death (suicide) and cremation.

Kalyani; "Didi (Madhumati)"

MADHUMATI: "So you have come back. Your father-in-law didn't like you? ... Wait there Gulabi will be here soon [Gulabi is a person whose responsibility is to take Kalyani to the client]."

SHAKUNTULA: "The holy text says all this is an illusion."

NARAYAN: "Kalyani's death is no illusion."

SHAKUNTULA: "Why are we widow sent there? There must be a reason for it?"

NARAYAN: "There is no other reason why you are there. Disguised as religion, it's just about the money."

Kalyani decides to draw herself into the river and she dies.

Protest against dowry murder.

Widows' plight seems to be intolerable to the extent that Kalyani decides to draw herself into the river.

Shakuntula seeks answers to the question that has been sparkling in her mind, 'why widows are sent to the houses?'

11. i. The priest and Shakuntula discuss

ANNOUNCEMENT: "the Shakuntula goes back Liberal feminism The Gandhian-socialists"
### 111

#### about Gandhi.

British have let Gandhiji out of jail! He is free on his way from Allahabad.

A PRIEST: “Gandhi is one of the few people in this world who listens to the voice of his conscience.”

SHAKUNTULA: “But what is our conscience conflicts with our faith?”

#### 12.

#### i. Gandhi arrives in the town. He holds a

A crowd of people

ANNOUNCEMENT: “...[Gandhi] is here at the train 

Narayan takes Chuyia and the train starts

Second generations

More radical feminists

The release of Ghandi from jail was also the release of initiated several of the first women's movements in post-Independence India, (Kumar 1989:20).
meeting prayer at the railway station. including Narayan, Shakuntula and Chuyia. station for five minutes. He is holding his prayer meeting. If you want his blessings please be there."

SHAKUNTULA: “... Please, give her [Chuyia] to Gandhiji... Why doesn’t anybody listen? This child is a widow!”

NARAYAN: “Didi [Shakuntula]!”

SHAKUNTULA: “Narayan! Make sure she is in Gandhiji’s care! Give her to Gandhi!”

moving.

of new Indian women.

widows from patriarchal oppression. The new women become both feminists and nationalists, (Sen 2000:14)

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ii. Statistics of widows in India is released. “There are over 34 million widows in India according to the 2001 census many continue to live in condition of social, economic and cultural deprivation as prescribed 2000 years ago by the Sacred text of Manu.”
**Film: Moolaadé by Ousmane Sembène.**

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<th>Chapter.</th>
<th>Situation/ Event in the film.</th>
<th>Character/s</th>
<th>What was said</th>
<th>Consequence.</th>
<th>Reflection in African Feminism</th>
<th>Reflection in Western feminism.</th>
<th>Thoughts about the situation/ Argument</th>
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| 01. ii.  | Four children run to a hiding place (Colle’s house) to avoid circumcision. | Four children, Colle, Amsatou, and two Colle’s co-wives. | **CHILD 1:** “Mother Colle we are requesting protection.”
**CHILD 2:** “We do not wish to be cut.”
**AMSATOU:** “Mother, do not deny them. One can not deny someone protection.”
**COLLE:** “Allah willing, tomorrow, I will make their case public.” | Colle grants protection to the four children. | African motherhood role to take care of the children. | Women's role to protect children below 18 yrs. | Children seek Colle's protection because few years ago she protected Amsatou, her own daughter. |
| 02. iii. | Colle puts a rope at the entrance door to her house as a sign of protection. | Colle | **COLLE:** “See this rope? You will only cross it with my permission... Whoever breaks the law will be killed by the Moolaadé... Hear me?”
**CHILDREN:** “We do” | Colle puts the rope to the gate- traditionally accepted as a sign of protection. | Resistance against circumcision. | Resistance against patriarchal oppression. | Colle uses one custom (rope) to challenge another (circumcision). |
| 02. iv.  | Mercenary convince women to take his offers in exchange for sex. Amsatou refusal to take an offer base on the information from the radio that Mercenaries are bad guys. | Mercenary, Amsatou, and Aiwa. | **AIWA:** “Your money”
**MERCENARY:** Please allow me to do the giving, here...Say could you come see me tonight?”
**AMSATOU:** The money I don’t have now, how can I | All women that were approached by Mercenary refuse, Amsatou being the strongest of all. | Men economic power has been used to oppress women sexually. | Men economic power has been used to oppress women sexually. | Mercenary (representing males) use economic power he has to oppress women. Possessing information is as important as possessing weapon against enemies. |
| 03. | 3. Colle in conversation with the four girls who deserted purification. She explains about the misleading idea that a bilakora (uncircumcised) can not have children. | Colle and the four girls. | CHILD: “Is it true that a bilakora (uncircumcised woman) can not have children?” COLLE: “That is not true.” | Colle (a feminist) sensitises girls about patriarchal oppression based on circumcision. | Radical feminists’ movement of 1970s sensitised women in several issues for example sex power imbalances. | Society has imposed false ideas to legitimise women's oppression. |
| 04. | 4. The first confrontation between Colle and Salindana. The Salindana force to get children for purification but Colle keeps resisting. | Colle, the four girls, Colle’s co-wives, Salindana and mothers’ of the four children. | DEAN SALINDANA: “Why do you oppose the purification of these children?” COLLE: “…you cut me ...and you also buried my two children... These children requested my protection. They will get it.” CHILDREN’S MOTHERS: “Who put them under your protection? You want our daughters to remain bilakora like your Amsatou.” DEAN SALINDANA: Colle, you are too subversive. I will have to neutralize your powers.” | Salindana and mothers of the four fail to get the children from Colle’s house. Colle and her supporters start celebrating the first victory. | Fighting between women movement and patriarchal system on issues like child marriages and circumcision. | Fighting between women movement and patriarchal system on issues like sexual violence. | The customary power (a rope at the entrance door), gives to Colle a victory over Salindana. |
| 05. | ii. Conversation between the elder wife and her son, Balla. | Khardjatou and Balla. | BALLA: “Salindana did complain. Send them back - the children.” | Khardjatou (the mother) decides to end conversation with her son. | Resistance against the extension of the patriarchal system - from father to son. | All western women movements aimed to top patriarchal system. | Domination and control is only extended to male children. But Khardjatou resists to any means of patriarchal domination. |
| 05. |  |  | KHARDJATOU: “Never! They have not committed any crime.” |  |  |  |  |
| 05. |  |  | BALLA: “Mother, the Salindana will cast a spell on them.” |  |  |  |  |
| 05. |  |  | Khardjatou (the mother) decides to end conversation with her - son. |  |  |  |  |
| 05. | iii. At the purification site the Salindana meet to discuss the source of Colle’s power against the long standing customs. | All Salindana. | ASSISTANT TO DEAN SALINDANA: “Colle thinks her powers greater than ours. She wants us to give up our knife. Should we give in?” | The meeting is conducted. | Plans to silence women’s voice. | Plans to silence women’s voice. | Salindana (patriarchal system), discusses how to stop women struggle against oppression. |
| 05. |  |  | DEAN SALINDANA: “Let’s request a meeting with the Dougoutigui. Colle is challenging us. I will destroy her powers.” |  |  |  |  |
| 05. |  |  | The meeting is conducted. |  |  |  |  |
| 06. | iii. A meeting between Salindana and Dougoutigui who is the father of Amsatou’s future husband. The Salindana wants to put pressure to the father to stop his son from marrying Amsatou because she is not circumcised. | Salindana, Dougoutigui and the village council which is always dominated by men. | DEAN SALINDANA: “Colle is challenging our tradition...Will you men then marry bilakora women?” | Declaration is made to force Colle bring an end to Moolaadé. | Women are restricted to participate in public discourses or decision making. | Masculinity is applied trying to maintain patriarchal system. | The setting of the social structures gives no chance for women’s voice to be heard in public discourses. |
| 06. |  |  | ELDER (MEN): “Never, Hell no.” |  |  |  |  |
| 06. |  |  | DOUGOUTIGUI: “...hear this; my son is not going to marry a bilakora.” |  |  |  |  |
| 06. |  |  | Declaration is made to force Colle bring an end to Moolaadé. |  |  |  |  |
| 06. |  |  | DEAN SALINDANA: “Colle is challenging our tradition...Will you men then marry bilakora women?” |  |  |  |  |
| 06. |  |  | ELDER (MEN): “Never, Hell no.” |  |  |  |  |
| 06. |  |  | DOUGOUTIGUI: “...hear this; my son is not going to marry a bilakora.” |  |  |  |  |
ASS. TO DEAN ELDER: “our ancestors offer a way out. A husband has unlimited power. He may demand his wife to offer redemptive word. This has to be done publicly to bring an end to the Moolaadé.

07. iv. The second appearance of Salindana to Colle’s house followed by a confrontation (Colle and AMATH, her brother-in-law).

Salindana, Colle, Amath, Khardjatou, Alima and Balla.

AMATH: “Your co-wife has bad manners. Purification dates back long ago and she wants to challenge it. No over my dead body.”

ALIMA (3RD WIFE): “Elder I don’t want to be burnt by the fire Colle has started.”

Khardjatou (1ST WIFE): “Shut up and go back to your quarters.”

Still Colle resists releasing the children. More patriarchal forces are applied to stop women’s movements. When a woman challenges the patriarchal system, it is perceived as a disobedient act.

08. v. Amsatou blames her mother, for not having her circumcised; the reason why she has been denied the right to give welcoming water to her fiancé.

Colle, Amsatou and the four children.

AMSATOU: “mother why didn’t you have me purified? I would have given Abraham (her expected fiancé) welcoming water.”

COLLE: “Allah is great. Feel no shame in being bilakora. Genital mutilation is a bad thing. A bilakora is a good wife, a good mother.”

Amsatou reacts by tearing Abraham’s photo. The marriage right is subjected to traditional customs. Patriarchal forces are applied to stop women’s movements. Patriarchal has set circumcision as a pre condition for a girl to get married (marriage is connected to oppression).
| vi. News about the two missing girls in the mid of the welcome party at Dougoutigui home. | The mothers, Dougoutigui and all members of the community. | MOTHER’S OF THE TWO GIRLS: “The two missing girls threw themselves in the well.” DOUGOUTIGUI: “Oh, my God. Allah is great. Tomorrow we will fill it in.” | The whole cloud starts mourning and the decision to fill up the well is made. | The two girls’ decision to throw themselves into the well seems the best option to take than circumcision (being oppressed by the system). |
| vii. A plan to confiscate all women’s radios is discussed. Ciré, Collé’s husband arrives from his business trip. | Balla (son), Ciré (father), Amath, Dougoutigui and villager’s elders. | BALLA: “The women should not be allowed to listen to the radio. All their radio should be confiscated.” AMATH: “Colle’s radio should e confiscated.” CIRÉ: “Confiscate her radio? Hamsatou, her daughter’s namesake gave it to her.” AMATH: “What about your authority.” | Ciré rushes home to confront his wife (Colle). | The knowledge of African women is limited within the family. Any external information, for instance participating in public discourses is blocked by husbands. Women were denied to participate in politics. The agents of the patriarchal system put new plan to neutralize the power of women’s voice through confiscating of all women radio– cut out everything that links them to external information or news. |
| vii. Confrontation between Collé and her husband Ciré. | Ciré and Colle | CIRÉ: “Colle...You refused to have our daughter purified. I didn’t object. Now you want all girls to remain bilakora. You have climbed over my head...Tomorrow morning you will utter the words that end the Moolaadé...” COLLE: “May I be | Colle still resists | The power that society has given to men enables them to make decision even in matters concerning women. Men can make decision even in matters concerning women. How power invested to men by society can mute women’s voice. |
| 7.  | The three Ciré’s wives discussing how to raise the voice. | Ciré’s three wives. | COLLE: “Amsatou’s father has decided to make me say the redemptive word to ward off the spell.” | Colle takes the advice from first wife. | Heavy punishments are also used to keep African women at oppressive side. | Heavy punishment is given to women to mute their voice. |
| 8.  | Conversation about marriage between Ibrahima, and his parents (his father Dougoutigui, mother, and his uncle). | Ibrahima, Dougoutigui, mother and uncle. | UNCLE: “Ibrahima, turn off your radio. The elders confiscated all the women’s radios. You can’t turn your TV around here. Its influence is even worse than that of the radio.” | Ibrahima refuses to side with his parents’ decision. He gets angry decides to take a walk visiting his bilakora fiancée. | Ibrahima, a modern and civilized young boy from France challenges traditions and customs. |
| 9.  | The confiscation of radio starts from Colle’s husband house. | Ciré, Balla, Amsatou and Ciré’s wives. | BALLA’S WIFE: “I bought this radio with my toil.” | All women’s radios were taken from Ciré’s house except the old one which was later given to Colle to replace the taken one. | Women don’t have rights to challenge men’s decisions. |

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Here this one too.

AMSATOU; “Father, this is my radio!”

1ST WIFE; “Colle, look at this radio [old, dusty and full of cockroaches]. It only needs batteries. Now be aware. If Balla or his dad catches you with it, I don’t know you.”

Ibrahima visits Amsatou, the opposed bilakora fiancée.

Ibrahima, Ciré’s wives, Amsatou and the four children.

1ST WIFE; “Amsatou, bring your husband the welcoming water.”

IBRAHIMA; “is it you who refused to be purified? You will never have husband [Joking].”

ONE OF THE GIRLS; “Won’t you marry a woman bilakora?”

IBRAHIMA; “A woman bilakora! [Joking].”

Ibrahima drinks welcoming water given by his bilakora fiancée.

11. iii. The burning process of radios. Women cry for their radios.

All women

WOMEN; “our radios, we want our radios.”


All radios are burnt near the mosque.

Ibrahima, a modern and civilized young boy from France challenges traditions and customs.

Closing the link which can channel modernisation and civilization to African women.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>120</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>16</th>
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### iv. Women’s secret meeting held at the well during the night.

**ONE WOMAN:** “Samata, since you hang a lot around men, do you know why they are confiscate our radios?”

**SAMATA:** “Our men want to lock up our minds.”

**ANOTHER WOMAN:** “But how do you lock up something invisible?”

**SAMATA:** “We are all ignorant, I am telling you.”

### All women

**WOMEN’S VOICES:**
- “We bought these radios, didn’t we?”
- “Who should dictate what we listen to?”
- “I am outraged. It is intolerable.”

**No any strong statement or call was made after the meeting.**

**African women are not allowed to speak in public discourses or spheres.**

**The formation of different western women’s movements was an attempt to get their own forum where their problems could be voiced.**

**The denied women’s voice finds its own sphere.**

### 12. v. Ciré and his brother Amath confront Colle.

**CIRÉ:** “Colle I wouldn’t have married you if you were a bilakora. Never.”

**AMATH:** “young brother have you given up your authority as a husband? Purification dates way back. It is required by Islam, and your woman wants to put an end to it. Why are you Colle is taken by Salindana as an attempt to force her to utter the word publicly.

**Ancestral power invested to husbands is used to punish Colle.**

**Religion (Islam) is to legitimise oppress women.**
vi. Colle on a public place forced to utter the word. Mercenary rescue her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All members of the village.</th>
<th>CIRE: “Utter the word! [While flogging her], say the word! Say it!”</th>
<th>Colle keeps resisting and Mercenary intervene the male forces.</th>
<th>Ancestral power invested to husbands is used to punish Colle.</th>
<th>The failure of Colle against the forces would signify the failure of women’s struggles to end women circumcision.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ELDERS: “Tame her! Tame her! Harder!”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>KHARDJATOU: “Don't say it. Do not utter it. Do not resist Colle.”</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SALINDANA: “Tame her. Break her.”</td>
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vii. Elders confront Mercenary for his action to stop traditional practice.

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<tr>
<th>Mercenary and village elders.</th>
<th>KEMO AMSOUMARA: “After all this beating not a word, that is the end of it. What a failure.”</th>
<th>Mercenary is chased from the village and killed.</th>
<th>Conflict between African customs and traditions on one side and western modernity and civilization on another.</th>
<th>The elder has killed Mercenary to makes sure that all external forces against their power are muted.</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>KEMO TIECOURA: “That is the end of it.”</td>
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<td>ELDERS: “what have you</td>
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<td>xiii.</td>
<td>Just done? Stop a husband beating his wife? Who do you think you are?</td>
<td><strong>MERCENARY</strong>: “I can not bear the violence!”</td>
<td><strong>KEMO AMSOUMARA</strong>: “Get hold of this mother fucker. Out of the village, make him disappear!”</td>
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<td>viii.</td>
<td><strong>KHANDJATOU</strong>: “Allah is my witness; no other girl will ever be cut.”</td>
<td><strong>COLLE</strong>: “Where are my girls?”</td>
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<td><strong>KHANDJATOU</strong>: “During your flogging, Salba stole Diattou. She had her cut and she died.”</td>
<td><strong>SALBA</strong>: “My Diattou died in my arms. Colle purification robbed me off my daughter.”</td>
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<td>Salba was given a new baby by another woman and all women go to confront men at the meeting.</td>
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<td>The second wave feminism of 1970s – Radical feminist movement.</td>
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<td>ix.</td>
<td><strong>COLLE</strong>: “Throw your knife quick [telling Salindana]. No girl will ever get cut again.”</td>
<td>The resistance of Colle has sensitised more women to join the movement to end circumcision.</td>
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<td>“You are scared of radios [telling men]. Fear also Colle hands to the elders, all tools that Salindana were using for mutilation and later she threw them into a blaze.”</td>
<td>The birth of Radical feminists.</td>
<td>Women struggles have given them access to public discourses. The long silenced voice is finally head in public.</td>
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<td>All villagers.</td>
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leads to murder Mercenary."

"Here are the knives the Salindana used to mutilate us. Purification is not required by Islam. The grand Imam said it on the radio."

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<th>x. Dougoutigui quarrels with his son Ibrahima following son's decision to marry Amsatou, a bilakora girl.</th>
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| **DOUGOUTIGUI**: "Ibrahima! You will not marry this bilakora."  
**IBRAHIMAA**: "Father my marriage is my own business."  
**DOUGOUTIGUI**: "Cursed son challenge me and I will disinherit you."  
**IBRAHIMAA**: "Father it is easy to hit a son but the error of little tyrants I s over. Forever and ever. From now on I will have the TV on."  
**AMSATOU**: "I am and shall remain a bilakora." |
| Ibrahima moves to meet his fiancée and he goes home to set a TV antenna.  
Customs against modernity and civilization.  
Radical feminism  
Modernization and civilization has helped to transform social structures. |