

MOTHERHOOD IN THE NAMING: MOTHERS AND WIVES IN THE FINNISH/KARELIAN CULTURAL REGION

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Women: Mothers and/or Wives? An African/Western differend?

This paper has been prompted by a stimulating intervention of Oyeronke Oyewumi whose article in the *Signs* (2000) links up with the theme of 'motherhood' quite centrally and in a comparative tone. Her basic argument is to emphasize the importance of motherhood as an important self-identity of African women, obviously not well understood by Western feminists. Her critique of Western feminism is added by some critical observations by Ifi Amadiume, who has written extensively on the Igbo gender system. Both scholars are prominent Nigerian feminists.

Oyewumi focuses on feminism as a particular discursive site from which to investigate the scope and depth of family rhetoric and to articulate African family arrangements in order to show the limit of universals. She is concerned about the relevance of Western feminisms for African women and quite importantly, deals with some of the shortcomings of Western feminisms, which she liberally tags with one common term-- "Western feminist discourse". She suggests that the (Western) feminist discourse (that she identifies with Simone de Beauvoir and Nancy Chodorow) is flawed and partial, because it is rooted in the nuclear family. (The nuclear family is taken as a vehicle for the articulation of values such as the necessity of coupling and the primacy of conjugality in family life. Oyewumi considers it a problem that despite the globalization of feminism, many feminists continue to think through the Euro-American nuclear family. This is problematic, because the controlling concept of feminist scholarship -- *woman* -- conceptualized as a synonym for *wife* provides an inadequate basis for theorizing gender because the woman, defined as a wife, never steps out from the confines of the home.)

In Oyewumi's presentation, there is a distinctive difference in the ways in which motherhood is constructed in Africa and the ways in which Western feminists conflate women and wives. (Oyewumi 2000:1094) Amadiume, again, leaning largely on Cheikh Anta Diop's reflections on patriarchy and matriarchy as historical constructions (Amadiume 1997, 71-88; Diop 1990), tackles Western feminisms head on and asserts that the very thought of women's power being based on the logic of motherhood has proven offensive to many Western feminists. While in the European system, wifehood and motherhood was a means of enslavement of women in the African system of matriarchy it was women's means of empowerment. (Amadiume 1997: 114) For Amadiume the difference

between European and African gender systems also resides in the language. In the Igbo gender system there was a collective neuter gender that could mediate the difference for role and status fulfillment. The problem for European women is that they did not construct this difference; rather it was imposed on them because according to Diop, patriarchy was the rule since their earliest history. (Ibid, 115)

Amadiume gives a lot of significance to the neuter space in the gender system, which she sees as more flexible than the “Western” rigidity of gender that ties the ideological gender more rigidly to the biological sex. The Igbo gender system gave women a great autonomy, which was disturbed by the imposition of Western notions of gender that meant that roles were defined as rigidly belonging to either men or women. In contrast, in the Igbo gender system women could play roles usually monopolized by men, or else, be classified as ‘males’ in terms of power and authority over others. When women as daughters and sisters were classified as male they had relatively more power in the household compared with the wives of their brothers who as strangers remained submissive to their sisters-in-law. (Amadiume 1987)

Both Oyewumi and Amadiume construct a steep difference between Euro-American or European feminisms and African women centered on the distinctions the feminisms construct between mother and wife. For Oyewumi, within Western feminism there is little understanding that African social arrangements, familial and otherwise, derive from a different conceptual base. (1096) In much of Africa, “wife” is a subordinate category and many women have not privileged it in identifying themselves. Wifeness tends to function more as a role than as a deeply felt identity, and it is usually deployed strategically. Across Africa, the category generally translated as *wife* is not gender specific but symbolizes relations of subordination between any two people. Hence, in the African conceptual scheme it is difficult to conflate woman and wife and articulate them as one category. “Although wifeness in many African societies has traditionally been regarded as functional and necessary it is at the same time seen as a transitional phase on the road to *motherhood*. *Being a mother*, says Oyewumi, *is the preferred and cherished self-identity of many African women*. In all African family arrangements, the most important ties within the family flow from the mother, whatever the norm of marriage residence. The idea that mothers are powerful is very much a defining characteristic of the institution and its place in society. (Oyewumi 2000:1097)

I think that it is a pity that Oyewumi and Amadiume who provide sophisticated and insightful analyses of their own societies should fall back on rather simplistic arguments about Western feminisms. While de Beauvoir has been focus for a lot of rereading and criticisms in the West also, most notably as a philosopher, I would still acknowledge the significance of her ‘mother text’ of the *Second Sex* for a variety of movements that came with the second wave of feminism in Europe and the United States. A lot of the ‘anger’ of the movements took inspiration for the various ways in which women sought liberation from their subordinated position as both wives and mothers. (Cf. also Okely 1986)

Apart from these reservations, I consider the concerns of Oyewumi and Amadiume extremely productive and useful. If from the Nigerian perspective, the Euro-American (and Anglo-American in particular) hegemonic discourses have been vexing, so they have been from many European perspectives, too. The 'domestic' in Europe is not necessarily identical with the nuclear family either, or else, there may be variations in the ways in which nuclear families have been organized and even in how they evolved in the first place. Seeming 'universals' have often been partial and limited views that call for attention to better readings of history. Maybe some of the things uniting or dividing us as women, mothers and wives, may be more complex than simple divisions on the map. I am intrigued by the proposition that the woman in Euro-American feminism is defined as a wife, whereas the woman in African thinking is the mother. I am wondering, whether one can make such continental distinctions and furthermore, can one make such clear-cut distinctions between mothers and wives?

My paper is also motivated by the view there is a need to build bridges for enabling us to enter into fruitful dialogues with each other. For this, I think it will be important both to do better research on one's own histories and then to learn from the others, perhaps by making questions in a common inquiry. It is in the spirit of *nzagwalu* literature mentioned by Amadiume that I now take a look into motherhood in the Finnish context. In Igbo language *nzagwalu* refers to the obligation to answer back, if one has suffered an insult. Although critique is not an insult, there is a point in saying that in the best of cases, this kind of a dialogue clears the space from which different positions emanate (Amadiume 1997,4) Following the linguistic bent of Amadiume and Oyewumi, I venture into an anthropological excursion to seek some of the ways in which women have been named as mothers and/or wives in the Finnish-Karelian cultural area. By focusing on linguistic categories I will ask to what extent they could help one to understand the position of women as mothers in our traditions. I do this as an anthropologist who assumes that nominations inscribed in kinship are significant for understanding many aspects of the people's socio-political being. (Cf. Butler 2000,94 quoting Clastres) I try to tease out the significance of mothering on the basis of naming only. My presentation is based on a cross reading of older studies in linguistics and ethnology, complemented and inspired by later interventions of feminist scholars' reading of magic and ritual practices.¹

Motherhood in the Finnish-Karelian Cultural Area

The making of present Finland is the result of a complex history, which makes it difficult to make any definitive statements about the history of naming and language categories. The Finnish-Karelian cultural area is one where both people and boundaries have moved a lot. Largely, the historical changes that took place in Finland before 1809 took place under the ruling of the Swedish king until the Napoleonic wars after which Finland became part of the Russian Empire in 1809, to finally gain her independence in 1917. There is a cultural variety and historical layers that do not necessarily coincide with present national borders. Culturally and linguistically the history of this area is quite complex, and the shifting of borders between Sweden-Finland and Russia have had an impact on the relations of ruling, administrative cultures and their impact on everyday life as well they have added to the complexity of religious adherence. For example,

Ingria with Balto Finnic population near St. Petersburg belonged to the Russian empire during the entire medieval period. After 1617 (the Treaty of Stolbova) however, it became part of the Swedish empire, and was then ceded back to Russia in the Treaty of Uusikaupunki in 1721. (Nenola 2002, 54) Belonging to the Balto-Finnic and the larger family of the Finno-Ugric languages, Finnish and Karelian and their dialects are not related to Germanic or Slavonic languages, even if loanwords have been adopted from both, especially via Swedish as well as from the Baltic languages.

The power shifts between Sweden and Russia have also been felt in religious orientation as well. While Finland and Western Karelia were under the influence of the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages, Eastern Karelia was more closely intertwined with the Russian Orthodox Church and Eastern cultural influences. (Timonen 1990, 111). The story of the Reformation reached different parts of the Finnish Karelian area at different speed and strength, such that the Orthodox Church has remained one of the two official churches in Finland up to today. Traces of religious history do still show in the ways people's memory combined elements from the various phases.

Against this background, reading about the ways in which the kinship terminology has shifted historically in the Finnish Karelian cultural area, vividly demonstrates that it is rather difficult to make any general claims for exclusive, or even stable words for mothers, grandmothers and wives, anchored in one particular place. This is because of the historical changes in language, and because of the ways in which people move from one area to another, and the ways in which the very names also shift and change within families from one generation to the next. In addition, the fact that people have also married cross-culturally across ethnic and dialect boundaries has an effect.

Animals and Humans: Emancipation of the Woman as Human Mother?

My excursion into the history of naming in the Balto Finnic languages offered a number of surprises. The first of them was the discovery of a consensus that the current word for mother, *äiti*, in standard Finnish language, is a Germanic loanword that started its expansion only during the 16th Century. The word mother in standard Finnish that I somehow assumed to be an age-old basic word has come to us from the Gothic *eiti*, *äitei*, *eitens*, *eide*. *Eide* also refers to a grandmother or an old woman more generally. *Eidekene* meaning grandmother is a derivative of the Germanic *aidi* gothic *aidei*, or *eid*. This surprising finding prompted another question: has motherhood not been important in our tradition, if such a primary word has come to us as a foreign loan?

Indeed, there are some hints at this in our research literature. In her study on women's magic rituals Laura Stark-Arola refers to a missing idealization of *motherhood* in Finnish peasant culture. She suggests that there is nothing in women's magic rituals to indicate that motherhood was an important goal for women. They didn't seem to have longed to become mothers in the same way that they longed to become wives. It appears that 'being a good mother' was not an im-

portant social goal or was not seen an important part of their identity. This may have been due to the fact that it was not practically possible for many married women to spend very much time with their children, being 'mothers' in the modern sense of the word. There was simply too much work to be done in the farm households for women to pay much attention to childcare. Moreover, women could also spend a lot of their time by doing various chores away from the house, while other women, such as grandmothers and sisters, who stayed behind took care of the children. In some areas women's work was appreciated so much that it compensated for their role of becoming mothers or getting married. In the tar producing areas of Ostrobothnia, the products of women's labor were seen to be more important than the children they bore (Stark-Arola 1998:199; Räsänen 1996:58)

Stark-Arola proposes that in magic rituals connected to marriage and childbirth the central topics were *pairing, sexuality and health*, not fertility or maternalism. Once children were born, women used magic to ensure a future spouse and economic success for their children and to ensure success for the farm household and members living in it. In her assessment, within the discourse of women's magic, the most gender-related role was not that of mother but that of a partner in a heterosexual relationship. Moreover, the bond between husband and wife seemed to be very important. Are we then to conclude that, indeed, women in the Finnish peasant tradition were very "European" in their aspirations, in their strivings to become wives or in their efforts to ensure good spouses for their daughters?

I would take such a proposition with a pinch of salt, though. The magic practices that Stark-Arola refers to here were rather directly related to the women's practices related to arousing love or ensuring a spouse, which makes the argument a bit circular. For an emphasis on fertility and the importance of motherhood, evidence could perhaps be sought from other types of magic, too. To take one example, the practice of putting a small boy to sit on the knees of the bride in the wedding ceremonies was geared to ensuring a big number of sons to the newly wed couple. (Sarmela 1994) The relative importance of getting married and getting children in a woman's life may have undergone some historical changes also, as will be discussed in this paper further on.

Winning and Losing Synonyms in the Making of Standard Finnish

Before discussing the meanings given to mothering and the magic intentions any further, I like to go back to the words referring to motherhood before the adoption of the Germanic loanword. How did the Finnish speakers talk of their mothers before the adoption of the new word? And why should the old names be replaced by a new loanword? This is a question also posed by Ruben Nirvi whose study on Finnish kinship terminology was very helpful for my inquiry (Nirvi 1952).

In his study on adoption of new synonyms to replace old ones Nirvi looks at linguistic changes as outcomes of contestations, whereby some words are receding and others expanding on the basis of the speakers' preferences. He speaks of changes that come about because some words 'wear out' and get new, pejorative meanings that make their users receptive to new words. This was one of the

methods used in the study of the making of the national, written language. It entailed a lot of mapping that located the uses of single words and made it possible to study how words and vocabularies receded and expanded historically.

The words that were replaced by *äiti* from the sixteenth century onwards were *emä* and its diminutive *emo*, which has, however, lived longer in lyrics. In the meanings given by the Finnish etymological dictionary, the word *emä* referred to the 'mother' but not only to the mother but to other things as well. It referred also to the womb or the *vagina*, *anything big*, *the trunk*, even to a big whole in the ice covering the lake or the sea, through which one would draw lots of fish. Most importantly the word *emä* referred to the sex of an animal such that anything attached with the prefix *emä* would refer to the female of the species, such as *emäsika*, *emälammas* (the female pig, the female sheep etc.) In the etymological dictionary for the origins of the Finnish language *emä* also referred to the *mother of God*, *grandmother* and *mother-in-law*.

It appears that the word *emä* had contradictory connotations. That it could refer to anything very big could be put to pejorative uses as well. The word *emä* has survived in the meaning of big until today so that calling somebody *emäsika* (mother of a pig) continues to label somebody as a very filthy person or somebody behaving very badly; similarly *emävale* refers to a very big lie. Also such words as *kanaemo* (mother hen) or *hanhiemo* (mother goose) are still sneeringly used when talking of fussy mothers, whereby the hen mother also has connotations of stupidity. Thus the word referring to the mother in the "basic Finnish" could also be loaded with negative meanings on top of its capability to referring to animals, too. Nirvi concludes that because of such pejorative connotations the words *emä* and *emo* lost their position in the "competition" of synonyms to the more neutral or more refined word that also had only one single meaning; subsequently the Germanic loan *äiti* that has remained the correct word in standard Finnish up to now. The major advantage of *äiti* for Nirvi was that it made a distinction between animal and human mothering and the new word had only one, single meaning. (Nirvi 1952) I got very curious and asked, can one read more from the difference constructed between animals and humans; the nature bound and humanly centered views on mothering? Were there other reasons for the expansion of the word *äiti* for mother?

This was Nirvi's view also and he suggests that the new word found its way into the Bible, which was translated into the Finnish language during the same sixteenth century; the word would then gradually spread anywhere the biblical texts were read and heard, whereby the clergy also played its role. This can be observed in the fact that the word *äiti* was adopted earlier in the Western parts of the country, while its spread to the Eastern parts took longer. According to Nirvi, the gothic *äiti* and the Swedish derived *muori* (from *mor*) were first replacing the old Finnish words in South Western Finland, whereas in the East the word *emo* resisted change up to 1930s, to give way in some places to the Slavonic word *ma-moi*.

The Receding Mothers: *emä* and *emo*

Is the distinction constructed between animals and humans the only ‘emancipation’ of mothers? What else happened in this ‘discursive turn’? Did the position of women as mothers change somehow? What exactly can we make of the position of mothers before the Reformation? That mothers were identified with a word that referred to the female sexual organ, suggests that motherhood was closely identified with the physical fact of giving birth. As such it puts emphasis on the biology of motherhood, identified very closely with the woman’s body. *Emä* referring to the female sexual organ has survived also in the form of *emätin*, introduced by Lönnrot into medical language. I would conclude that the position given to mothers in the older tradition of naming was very significantly that of a birth giver closely identified with her bodily self.

To pursue this argument, the importance of the mother as the one who gives birth is very prominent in the ways that women as daughters express the mother-daughter relationship, as documented in Aili Nenola’s study of Ingrian laments. In her beautiful rendering of the Ingrian laments one can also hear the tenderness of the feelings. To take some examples, the women could lament their mothers:

My sweet birth-giver, / my dear soother, /my good fosterer, / my holder in the daylight, /my bearer.

Or

My sweet birth-giver, /my dear soother/, my kind rocker, /my fond fondler, / my precious swaddler, my holder in your lap, /my holder in nice swaddling.

Or,

My precious bringer-up, / my nurse into the world, / You bore me into dark sorrow on this earth, /in great agony to the world.

(Nenola 2002:130 -)

I read a definite tenderness regarding the mothering of the infants from these poems. In her analysis of the naming system of the laments, Nenola points out that the agent nouns used as epithets to describe the mother-child relationship often derive from verbs indicating such acts of the mother as giving birth, feeding, bathing, dressing caring for, caressing. The mother is the birth-giver, the bearer, and the bather. Nenola also draws our attention to how the language of the laments is based on fundamental oppositions such as mother/child or human/non-human, center on the mother, while the father is completely absent. If a father is mentioned, it is as a “child of the grandmother”. (Nenola 2002: 96-97) What strikes me as important, however, is that ‘mothering’ is so centrally identified with taking care of the baby infant. The passages that refer to other kinds of ‘mothering’ seem to be less common.

Powers of the Birth Giver

In the older conceptualization of being a mother was not a mere physical fact, but women held considerable spiritual powers, too. This becomes even more obvious, if we study another word that refers to the female sexual organ, *vittu*. In her study on women’s dynamistic power Apo coins the power residing in a woman’s sexual organ as the woman’s force, *naisen väki*. Women held *force (väki)*

that could be mobilized both for constructive and productive purposes or else, for curse. (Apo 1994; 1998)

Apo describes, how power of the vagina was recognized by men and expressed in the kind of folk-poetry they sang. In the men's fantasies the genitals could be separated from the rest of the body and personified so that the female vagina could fly through the air and land on the fence of a field. It could also walk through a forest and climb up a tree "like a golden squirrel", or else it could do chores in the cottage such as cook gruel. In more mundane fantasies the female sexual organ runs through the town with silk stockings on her legs and it is the object of the gentlemen's admiration. In these fantasies the vagina is sometimes also described so powerful that one man is not sufficient for it. (Apo 1994: 67-68)

Incidentally, this synonym for *emä, vittu*² has also survived until the present day in the colloquial language and has become the most frequently used power-word (or four-letter-word), not only in men's speech, but it is also very popular with the youth, boys and girls alike. Traveling in any public transport with young people one cannot escape hearing the word *vittu*, which has bypassed the other frequently used Finnish words for swearing. Some parents have started wondering whether the youth any longer even recognize the word's original meaning. While I do not agree with this suggestion, I would venture to say that whether they like it or not, the youth may indeed be unwittingly calling for the powers of their mothers for help.

It appears that the woman's body yielded an awe-inspiring power that was identified with her ability to give birth. More than that, it held a dual power that could be mobilized both for protection and for cursing. This was a power that made men jealous and even forced them to some counter-magic. For instance when entering the sauna they needed to protect themselves from the vagina's wrath or the woman's wrath which may cause a man an infection in the sauna. This could be prevented or healed if one knew the words of the steam: blowing on the steam and greeting it with correct words when opening the sauna door" would protect the man entering the sauna. (Stark-Arola 1998, 206) The vagina thus was both revered and feared and, indeed it had a double-edged ability to both bless and curse. Women could prevent the effect of the evil eye by spreading their legs over the person who had to be protected. Doing this their force could flow freely, because until very recently the peasant women did not cover their lower body with underwear. There was a special word *harakoida* that refers to this protective gesture that was carried out by women, when people living in the same household had to go to the world outside the household, either to the village or to the forest. Through this practice, women protected their kinsfolk and acted as gatekeepers against the outer world of the home. Women were not only guardians of the farm household's symbolic boundaries but they also acted also to promote the integrity of the household, where tensions could be felt between the women who joined the household as wives and the relatives of the husband. In their magic practices the wives also sought to protect their marital relationship and to keep their marital bond intact (Vuorela 1960; Apo 1998; Stark-Arola 1998)

The Reformation – a “Civilizing” or the “Taming” of the Mother?

It appears that before the Reformation women as mothers did have spiritual powers that became the focus of worship like other *loci* and entities of force which belong to the category of the ‘sacred’. As holders of spiritual powers that resided in their physical body, mothers were both revered and feared. It should then come as no surprise that the word *emä* could also refer to the Mother of God who thus shared a revered position as the one who gives birth. Mary’s achievement is similar to the peasant mothers whose great merit is in the event of giving birth to sons. From this perspective it is tempting to think of the ways in which different views on motherhood resonate with different ways in which Holy Mary is perceived as a mother.

In this regard, I am struck by the paucity of my knowledge of the mothering role of Mary in the Bible, who appeared as the birth-giver and the caring mother of the infant, but then disappears. Senni Timonen has studied how in the Finnish-Karelian cultural area older pre-Christian elements intertwined with Christian beliefs in the reverence given to Mary, also reflective of the transformations of the role of Mary in different church traditions. In the Orthodox Karelian magic, her worship was connected with the sphere of women, which includes giving birth, the arousal of love, and caring for children and the cattle. The mother’s role as healer was central. Timonen even proposes that the worship of Mary in the Orthodox Karelian tradition could be seen as women’s religion. Comparing the different emphases given to Mary, it appears that in the Roman Catholic thinking Mary was a distinctly Holy Mary to be revered because she was conceived without sin and thus also came to this world as sinless and remained distinct and set apart from human beings. In contrast, the Orthodox Church held that Mary was born a human like any other, but reached the state of holiness because of her own submission and the choices she made during her life time. That she transformed from a person who has been given grace by God to one who radiates grace, she could be identified with both humans and God. In the Lutheran interpretation of Mary, she is represented as an exemplary person in her humility and piety, but making her the focus of worship could easily cross the line into the worship of unholy deities. (Timonen 1990, 112-114) In the Lutheran view she comes closest to a secular mother. Obviously, there is a need to study the process set in motion by the Lutheran Reformation more closely.

It seems to me that with the Lutheran Reformation, the awe-inspiring power of mothers as birth givers and those who presided over funerals was tamed into a more submissive role in conjugal parenting. Gradually, being a mother and a wife became subjected to the authority of the church and the state. This was a process whereby elements from old and new religious traditions were intertwined on the one hand, and on the other, the differences between Lutheran and Orthodox areas became more pronounced. The adoption of the word *äiti* was obviously not a singular incident, but part of a process that started with the Lutheran reformation and was spread both by the church and the legal system. The translation of the Bible into the vernacular was followed by the publication of an ABC –book and efforts to teach the population to read. The 1686 Ecclesiastical Law contained an order that those planning to marry had to know how to read. In the

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1700's the reading skills of the engaged couple began to be tested when they requested the banns.

The distinction that was constructed between animals and humans in the naming then gave further impetus to a gradual transformation of the significance of the mother and mothering. If motherhood was previously poignantly identified with birth giving and maternal care of only infants, with *äiti* came a whole number of other things. The adoption of a Germanic loanword for mother was parallel to the adoption of the Germanic patterns of concluding a marriage. Gradually the church took over the management of family affairs, of weddings and funerals including the registration of weddings, births, and deaths. The idea that the marriage began with the publication of the banns was adopted, and among the lower classes the banns publications could even replace the wedding. Prior to this, the engagement had been the most important of the marriage ceremonies and the church strove to even sacralize the engagement. The acceptance of the church wedding came into force gradually and in 1571 it was ordained as an official binding rite of marriage. This meant also a change in the mores such that sexual life and thus motherhood also were to be restricted to the confines of the marriage only. (Sarmela 1969, 86-88) Being a wife became a prerequisite for becoming a mother; in the eyes of the authorities you could not become a mother without first becoming a wife.

The changes instigated by the Lutheran Church also consolidated some of the differences in the ways in which motherhood was seen. More could be learned from studying the appropriation of Lutheran ideals in Germany and their impact in the northern countries. As to Germany, Barbara Beuys who studied the significance of the Lutheran reformation for family life argues that the new Protestant church needed people and Luther lifted having children into a virtue in the service of the state. Furthermore, the family and the school were now endowed with the task of educating good citizens (Beuys 1984, 232-234). These ideas were perhaps not immediately adopted in the Nordic countries, but had their impact at a slower pace. What was important for Luther was in the words of Inger Hammar that "from cradle to grave", the individual was incorporated into a patriarchal structure where the household was both the essence and the heart of the state. The Sovereign was seen as a replacement of God on the earth, so that total submission to both was required. Parenting became a vocation and a calling that applied to fathers and mothers, husbands and wives alike. In the Lutheran gender system, the man could be a public persona whereas the woman's active calling was assigned to the *oeconomia* that is, the household. In the domestic space, a woman is supposed to live under the man's sovereignty, be it as spouse, mother, daughter, sister or servant. She could influence the public sphere only through the man. (Hammar 2000, 28-30) The Lutheran view on the status of women as mothers and wives has been subject to debate, though: while some argue that the reformation underscored the submission of wives, others see that a focus on marriage was a condition for a strong role of women in the domestic and productive activities (Hammar 2000, 29 citing Roper 1989 and Ozment 1983).

With regard to Finland, motherhood and parenting drew the larger attention of women's movements and family policy debates during the nineteenth century.

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The idea of the family endowed with the duty to educate and produce good citizens only gained force during a period starting from 1840s until the early twentieth century (Nätkin 1997; Vuori 2001) The debates about parenting in the homosexual and lesbo families became subject to public attention by the end of 1990s, parallel with the legalization of the registration of homosexual and lesbo couples. (Kuosmanen 2000)

Recent debates about mothering in Finland have until recently carried traces of this earlier history. There are accounts of how women had to juggle childcare and work in peasant society. How this was resolved varied according to region and to the degree to which intensive-intensive agriculture set demands on all members of the household including women. Heavy work duties set restrictions on the length of the breastfeeding period of peasant mothers in the Western parts of Finland, where the children were swaddled tightly and put to lie in the rocking cot, soothed by wooden horns to suck on – in order to free women for cultivation and other work on the farm. The situation was different in the Eastern parts of Finland, where shifting cultivation and big extended families provided more options for childcare, not only by mothers but also by a variety of female relatives living in the same household. (Sarmela 1994, 32) The role of fathers in shared parenting has come into public discourse only in the 1990s after the first attempts to deal with it in the 1970s.

Since the Reformation and the language shift, the distinct human mother was to be more closely identified with woman-as-wife in Finland. This idea was part of both the national and the Lutheran project, although in the areas where the impact of the Russian Orthodox Church was felt, the Mother of God retained some of her revered position. This observation reflects the ways in which the image of mothers in the Eastern areas significantly was identified with Holy Mary.

One could argue that with the transformation of the older complex of motherhood there was a loss of status for women as mothers, a position that had combined the power of the fertile body with spiritual forces.³ The powers identified with birth giving and burying have been taken over by the medical profession and the church. The loss of powers expressed in the public laments sung by women culminated in the symbolic representation of a patriarchal order in the funeral of president Kekkonen in 1986 that for me epitomized the combined alliance of the state, the church and the military. The spiritual powers of women have been partially reclaimed by women since, when they were given access to priesthood and the rights to carry out important life cycle rites in the 1990s. In 2002, an interesting debate arose in the Finnish media after the publication of the heraldic symbol of our current president Tarja Halonen; this emblem connects her with Holy Mary in the way in which lilies were represented in it. While some doubted the correctness of this interpretation, I would like to see in this symbolic representation another reconnection with the spiritual significance of motherhood in the ancient traditions of the Finnish Karelian cultural region.

Naming Mothers and Wives: Situational Categories and Cyclic Time

In this final section, I will discuss aspects of flexibility in the categories of naming in the Finnish-Karelian traditions. I would argue that motherhood in the naming is not only historically shifting but also situated and situational. From a presentist perspective, the categories of naming may seem very confusing, because the same words can have different meanings to various people, and it will not be easy to anchor mothers and grandmothers on a regional map. Not only have local traditions got mixed due to the ways that people have moved from one place to another and have married cross-culturally, but there are idiosyncratic traditions in each family also, whereby the naming of mothers vary according to generations. A word that refers to mother in one place may mean grandmother or mother-in-law in another. What is also striking is that a whole host of previously respectful and locatable words such as *muori*, *akka*, *ämmä*, *muija* exist side by side in the current colloquial speech. Although some of these words have perjorative connotations, often referring to any old woman.

From the history of these words, it becomes clear that behind the seeming nominal jungle, certain patterns are present. For example, *akka* first used to refer to either one's spouse or the mother, changed its meaning with the aging of the person or her changing position in the household. So, words referring to a mother at one point would refer to the grandmother or the mother-in-law at another. What we see as mere technonyms now, were used as if they were proper names, especially when there were rules of avoidance that did not allow daughters-in-law or sons-in-law to address their seniors with their proper names or else the use of the proper name of a daughter-in-law in her presence was not allowed.

Naming was important in the everyday management of personal relations, as an indicator of respect, derision, equality, avoidance, or cooperation. In naming also, distinctions were made between "insiders and outsiders", so that people living in the same household, in the same village were addressed differently from those living in other houses or in the neighboring villages. In addition, in the older tradition one was expected to speak differently about one's own mother, wife, daughter-in-law and those of others. *Äiti* has stayed with us as the neutral, official word, whereas the colloquial words keep changing and the dialects keep living their lives.

With the changing of interpersonal relations and new family forms in recent years technonyms are increasingly being replaced by the use of proper names for even one's own parents. Calling people in the family by their proper names puts more emphasis on individualism and hints at changing relationships between parents and children. Attempts to find new terms to speak of various categories of parents are still ridden with the urge to make distinctions between one's biological versus social parents in the context of new family forms, whereby old categories no longer meet the social need within the myriad of new relations of kinship that come about with increasing variety of step-families and complex social situations. (Vuorela 2002, 270)

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Naming one's relatives is not a private matter but the process is also structured by the interaction between the public and the private. The adoption of the word *äiti* thus reflected the restructuring of the public and the private spheres in life. The making of standard Finnish was part of the social consequences of the new alliance between the church and the state. While the public was distinctly identified with the rulers, it also sought to control the people through the management of their private lives. Parallel to the increasing role of the church and the state, language bifurcated into the public standard language of the official world on the one hand, and the language of private life on the other. In the household, colloquial speech and a host of dialects, and various speech registers continue to thrive.

In the "civilizing" process language usage also gave new dimensions to strategies of distinction whereby the upper classes distinguished themselves from the lower classes or the educated from the ordinary "folk. In Finland the word *mamma*, first adopted by bilingual gentry, administrators and people living in towns started its expansion from the beginning of the 18th Century. The word was adopted from Sweden where the court had adopted it from French in the 17th century. Although the spread of this word was obviously mediated by its obviously class, it also spread to those areas in the east that had been slow in accepting the word *äiti*. (Nirvi 1952,116) Borrowing from other languages certainly continues. In the 1990's, the word *äitiminen* was introduced to the Finnish language to express mothering as well as the 'desire to mother' into our feminist discourse. *äitiminen* convey mother-work in the larger sense of the care of children in all its aspects. (Jokinen 1996, 22)

In our peasant traditions, it has also been important to distinguish between generation and age, often more important than distinguishing between gender, between language of respect and language of derision, between the official and the colloquial and taking into consideration the speaker's position vis-à-vis the addressed person. Language in the process of naming also expresses proximity and distance, patterns of avoidance as well as it memorializes taboos in communication. The texts of linguists and other researchers on peasant culture in the Finnish language area show that the gendering and naming of the relatives are situational, that is, specific categories refer to relationships of persons at a particular moment. A distinction can be made between a linear history of language shifts and the ways in which cyclical time is manifest in the process of naming. Words either lost their status or disappeared from the language altogether, sometimes only to reappear sometime later. Sometimes the words that sound old fashioned because they are identified with aging persons to whom they referred in everyday speech return after one or two generations. The cyclic dynamic of naming is manifest in the way in which first names are given to children; one might easily recognize the generational fashions that keep recurring in the naming of babies. When the first names in the parents' generation sound "old" or dull, the parents seek the names from those further "up" in the family line.

Apart from local traditions in the naming of women as wives in the Finnish Karelian cultural area, local and regional variations also indicate that a woman is not one even during her individual lifetime. As a girl grows up she passes through various stages and after each transgression in the developmental cycle she is

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named differently. In the naming, her position as a member of the household also is made clear to outsiders. There were specific words for speaking about the young wife such as *nuorikko*. Sometimes the same word referred to both a bride and a newly wed wife such as *morsian*, a Baltic loanword that also referred to both a bride and a young wife who has not yet given birth to children or else has given birth to a boy. The newly wed bride who was called *morsian* for 3-5 first years of marriage then became *akka*, a word that refers to relative age. In the Eastern areas (Aunus and Karelia) the same word (*mut'shoi*) referred to both a 'bride' and a 'young wife' during the first years of her marriage. The same word could also be used as a term of endearment. For how long a wife was called a *mut'shoi* could depend on the sex of the first child she gave birth to. She would stay a *mut'shoi* if her first child were a boy, whereas if the first child were a girl, she would be called with a different word (*akka*). (Nirvi 1952:48)

To conclude, in the Finnish-Karelian traditions, a woman is sometimes identical with a wife, but the naming of the wife changes during her lifetime according to the life cycle and depending on her position in the household. In the older peasant tradition, marriage could be a confirmation of a relationship that had already led to pregnancy, whereas in the eyes of the reformists, being a wife became a precondition for being a mother. The number of women who wish to become mothers regardless of their marital status or having a permanent bond with the father has increased dramatically during the last decades. It is also important to note that within peasant society, we are not talking of nuclear families, but of extended households that consisted of people of various kinds, of different generations, kin and non-kin. Furthermore, patriarchal relations were more pronounced in the Western parts of the country, where the ownership of land and patriarchal lines of inheritance were more important than in the Eastern parts of the country. Some scholars have even suggested that in the areas where shifting cultivation prevailed one could also talk of elements of matrilineal succession (Sarmela 1994).

Thus the Western notions of a woman, and the connections between motherhood and wife-hood are not a monolith either, and not necessarily similar from one language and cultural context to the next. While taking stock of these debates, feminist discourse shares some of the same challenges as does androcentric and Western anthropology.

Conclusion

I found the arguments presented by both Oyewumi and Amadiume productive because they made me ask questions related to my own roots that I might not have explored otherwise. One of the main points of this paper has been to say that motherhood is not one but needs to be seen as a situated and situational, historical category. In the case of Finnish Karelian cultural region there is a lot of regional and local variation depending on the dominant cultures, religion and the changing relations of ruling. A major turn was identified with the Reformation, which marked a shift in terms of increasing interventions in the family by the Church and the state. With the changes that were initiated by the Reformation, in the Western parts of the country being a wife became first a condition for be-

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coming a mother and the position of mothers within families became subject to ruling and interventions from “above”. In this process, the spiritual powers of women identified with the ability to give birth gradually were lost. With the construction of the nation state, motherhood as a care taking and educative role became subject to professional management and advice.

Drawing a distinction between motherhood and being a wife has also been differently emphasized in the Finnish context. Coming back to my initial question about seeing mothers and wives as distinct and exclusive categories, I am inclined to say that in the Finnish Karelian context, from a woman’s point of view, being a mother and being a wife signified different aspects of being a woman that endowed her with different kinds of power, relative to her position in the life-cycle and in the household she belonged to. I am also tempted to ask, how can we understand the difference between the hegemonic practices that transformed motherhood in Finland and the processes of domination that took violent forms in the colonies. Such juxtaposition would be helpful in thinking about the differences between processes of persuasion, violence and resistance in different contexts.

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Notes

¹ Because of the focus of the seminar on motherhood, I leave other kinsfolk out from this presentation.

² As I later discovered, this is also a Germanic loan

³ That there was a new loan word for the respected mother maybe had its counterweight in the loanword for the female sexual organ that was to carry powerfully negative connotations.