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Gender, Power and Identity in an African-American Church

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ABSTRACT

An abstract of the thesis of Catherine Douillet for the Master of Arts in Anthropology presented June 5, 1997.

Title: Gender, Power and Identity in an African-American Church

This thesis examines gender relations and gender symbolism in a small African-American Christian church in North East Portland. The study is based on ethnographic research in the church, from February 1995 to July 1995, and from February 1996 to June 1996, during which time I participated in Sunday services, religious activities outside of the service, and the social networks of some female church members. One section of this thesis describes my personal relationships to my fieldwork, not only to situate my position as a White female in an African-American church, but also to look at how my research questions relate to my personal experience.

In order to interpret gender divisions and representations, we must begin with a set of questions. What do we mean by "power" and "domination?" What are the different levels or spheres of power? What power do women have in the church? When one looks at the ritual of the Sunday service, it seems that women are "dominated" because most of the prestigious positions are taken by men. Yet outside of the ritual itself, women also exert authority and gain prestige, although their prestige is earned and activated in different domains and through different activities than that of men. We examine the socio-political reasons why the African-American church seeks to present men as if they are in control and how this politics of representation can both empower and disempower women. Women may be disempowered in the sense that the church does not challenge the female traditional role, yet through church activities both women and

men resist society's racial stereotypes. This constitutes a type of empowerment vis-à-vis white society. At another level, women become empowered through their spiritual lives and the helping network that the church provides. The sense of belonging and the collective identity created by the church constitutes for them a form of resistance and empowerment not readily apparent by focusing only on the symbolism of formal rituals.

GENDER, POWER, AND IDENTITY IN AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

by

CATHERINE DOUILLET

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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in
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This thesis is dedicated to my parents.

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I- INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

About two years ago, I began my research project at Redemption Church , a small African-American church in N.E Portland. After briefly describing the neighborhood in which this church is located, I will look at my personal relationship to the fieldwork and explain why I became interested in the women, and, more specifically, in the power relationships between men and women in the church.

What do we mean by "power" and "domination?" What are the different levels or spheres of power? What power do the women have in the church? These are the main questions I will consider in this work. When one looks at the ritual of the Sunday service, it seems that women are "dominated" because most of the prestigious positions are taken by men. We will look at the political and social reasons why the African-American church may attempt to present the men as if they were in control. We will see that, outside the ritual itself, women also exert a certain authority and prestige, and that, at another level, women become empowered through their spiritual lives and the helping network that the church provides. Through church, both men and women create a form of resistance in a certain racial context within the United States.

This resistance is constructed through the sense of belonging and the collective identity that the church creates. Hence, although religion has often been considered as a means to control the dominated, in this case it becomes a means of empowerment and resistance.

Churches attended mainly by African-Americans have been and are still often called "Black churches." However, I will throughout this work refer to the church and its members mostly as "African-American," not only because it is the term most members use, but also because it is the term that best reflects the "African-American" identity that the members construct through their church.

METHODOLOGY

From February of 1995 to June 1996, I attended, with a gap of about six months (from July 1995 to February 1996), the Sunday services in Redemption Church. I also participated in religious activities outside of the service itself including Bible Study led by the Pastor; Sunday School organized by and for women; a prayer group organized by a local preacher; a revival taking place in a sister church; and non-religious activities organized by the church that included lunch in the basement of the church and a Singles' Group in the members' homes. Finally, I participated in the social network of some members of the church outside of the activities officially structured by the church, as well as in the normal everyday life of some church members in their homes.

While attending these activities, I attempted to socialize with people and ask them different questions in order to get to know the formal and informal structure and hierarchy of the church. I also attempted to ascertain people's understandings and their amount of knowledge regarding the ritual, by asking them to explain some the specific practices of Sunday services. Besides these informal questions, I conducted more formal and extended interviews with Pastor, with the Pastor's main assistant and preacher, and with the (female) pianist of the children's choir. I also interviewed Kimberly Moreland, author of the article "The Christian Church in the Black Community" and co-author of the publication *The History of Portland's African-American Community.*

RESEARCH ON THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

The important role of the African-American church during the Civil Rights movement in the 1950's gave birth to a number of studies focusing on the African-American church itself. We can broadly identify two categories of research: 1) research that focuses on the political aspects of the church and 2) Black feminist research.

Most of the research in the first category was done by males, in the 1960's and 1970's, in the aftermath of the Civil Rights movement. These writings focused on the African-American church, then called the "Black Church," as a means of political struggle for liberation and for the construction of Black unity and identity. Little

attention was paid to the spiritual role of the church at an individual level (Wilmore 1973), or to the role of women in the church (Raboteau 1978; Lincoln 1974). Although some authors included in their work a chapter on women in the church, the question of women's presence in the church was clearly secondary and not fully part of their analysis (Cone 1979; Lincoln 1990). This work implied that men could represent and speak for women; that there was no specific female understanding of the ritual; and that men and women went to church for the same reasons. It thus implied that racial identity subsumed all other distinctions.

The second category of research, starting in the 1970's, can be considered a response to the first one. The implied starting point of Black feminist research was that, as men do not fully represent women and as women represented 70% of the church members, an analysis of the Black church must take women into consideration. But before analyzing Black feminists' research on the church in more detail, we need to look the type of research they did outside the church.

Black feminist research centered on the roles and positions of Black women in the church and in the family. Much of their research was based on the debate concerning whether there was a "black dominant female" who either put down or uplifted Black males and the community. This debate arose within a context where social science research had focused on the causes of the social and economic problems of the African-American population. Many of these problems have been attributed to the Black family and to the Black woman. McCray (1980) has shown that the Black

family and Black females have often been described "in terms of pathology and deviance" (1980: 68). Hence, problems such as the high rate of unemployment, criminality, and drug use were often attributed to a "deviant" African-American family in which the "hyperdominant" female "castrated" the Black male and impeded him from undertaking his responsibilities as head of the household (Gilkes 1980; Ryan 1971). Rodgers-Rose (1980) and Staples (1982) have argued that social scientists have often assumed that, because boys were raised in households were men were absent, they could not internalize the masculine model of the bread-winner of the family. Hence, boys were made "lazy" or irresponsible by women, and men were doomed to be unemployed and gang members. The "deviance" of the African-American family has often been "explained" as having been inherited from West African culture where the woman is supposedly dominant (McCray 1980).

This attribution of African-American socio-economic problems to the deviance of the African-American family has not gone uncriticized. For example, McCray (1980) maintains that this type of analysis makes African-Americans themselves responsible for their poverty, and clears Whites and institutions of any responsibility. Staples (1982) has argued that the segregation of many American institutions, including education, has made it very difficult for African-Americans to be "socially successful." Plagued by unemployment, African-Americans, especially African-American males, have very few options in terms of social success outside of illegal practices, such as participation in gangs and drug selling. In the same line, Sharff

(1987) has criticized the concept of "the culture of poverty*" which implies that the poor do have opportunities to be successful but do not take advantage of them. Sharff has observed that there are economic reasons why some "people do and must engage in 'illegal activities'" in order to survive. Consequently, the reasons why so many African-Americans remain unemployed and participate in gangs is not determined by a culture in which the family is deviant but by external economic forces.

Meanwhile, Stack (1974) has focused on the African-American female's role in the family. Although high rates of households headed by women in the African-American community have often been "explained" as a pathological deviance inherited from the African culture, Stack challenges this type of explanation by demonstrating that African-American family arrangements and strong self-supporting networks among women are actually "adaptive strategies" to cope with poverty.

Other authors have focused more specifically on the stereotype of the African-American female. Dumas (1980) and Smitherman et al. (1995) have argued that the stereotype of the African-American female who impedes African-American males from being "real men," has been created by the Whites. McCray (1980) argued that social scientists have a responsibility in creating these stereotypes. During and after slavery, Black families had to be very flexible in order to survive. Black women often had to share the roles designated by society by women as male roles, and Black men

* Proposed in 1965 by Lewis, the concept of Culture of Poverty suggested that the poor have internalized "wrong cultural values" (Steinberg 1981). Passed from generation to generation, these "wrong values" impeded the poor from profiting from the opportunities that are offered and that would allow them to be socially successful.

had to share some traditionally designated female roles (Hill 1972: 17). McCray argues that "the ability to adapt to roles traditionally thought of in this society as male roles should have been viewed by social scientists as a positive strength necessary for survival; instead, it had led to negative labeling" (1980:74).

Black feminist research focusing on the church looked at the question of female responsibility and female power in the church. These authors mostly focused on the tension between being black and being female in the construction of Black unity and identity. Responding to the stereotype of the dominant Black female who "puts down" the Black males and the Black community, some argued, by giving examples of historic Black females, that Black females who undertook a great amount of responsibilities did not "castrate" Black males, but that they worked for the uplifting of the Black community (Brooks 1986). In the same line, Gilkes (1986) emphasized the importance of women in the church and in the struggle for Black unity.

Others authors such as Dawson (1995) have argued that females, whether in the church or in the political movements that fought for Black rights and unity, have remained subordinate to males. Different authors have explored avenues for fighting against this subordination. Some have analyzed the reasons why White feminism cannot "fit" Black females and then looked for ways to construct a "Black feminism" ("womanism") that would empower and liberate Black females, as well as the entire Black community (Williams 1986). Others, such as Grant (1979) have argued that Black Theology, reflecting a male-dominated society which restricts female

participation in positions of power, was actually produced entirely by males who, in seeking to liberate themselves from racism, forgot about women's oppression. Women were left out and "invisible" in the theology that was supposed to liberate the entire Black community. In a parallel manner, within the church, women were relegated to the "background" and given responsibilities in the kitchen, while men, appointed to the leadership positions, were the decision-makers. Women were therefore oppressed in the very church that was supposed to liberate them. Grant's alternative was to construct a "Womanist Theology" that would liberate not only females, but also the community at large.

In sum, some Black feminists analyzed how females' responsibilities and activities in the church contributed to the empowerment of the African-American community while others, by looking at the structure of the church, concluded that females were disempowered and subordinate in the church. In spite of their differences, what these works had in common was that they all considered the "empowerment" or "disempowerment" of women in terms of their amount of responsibilities in the structure of the church. Black feminists looked at "empowerment" from a certain viewpoint, based more on their own conception of empowerment than on women church-goers' perspectives. For example, they did not look at how the experience of going to church and participating in both rituals and other church activities made sense for the women themselves. By not taking into consideration women church-goers' perspectives, Black feminists failed to understand

how the church can "empower" women even though they are concretely subordinate to males in the structure of the church. As we shall see, my research suggests that, by taking into consideration women's perspectives, one realizes that women do get "empowered" by performing church - related activities.

RITUAL THEORY AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Numerous anthropologists have looked at the relationships between ritual, domination, and empowerment. We will focus here only on one aspect of the theory of ritual as it relates to social control. My account draws heavily on Catherine Bell's Ritual Theory Ritual Practice (1992) as I found this book extremely useful in presenting the main issues concerning ritual and social control.

As Bell (1992) has noted, there is a long tradition in anthropology in viewing ritual as an instrument of social control, through the internalization of social solidarity during the ritual (Durkheim 1915); through the control of human violence (Girard 1977); through the definition of norms internalized through symbols (Geertz 1971; Turner 1977); and through "formalization" (Bloch 1978). Religion has often been thought of in anthropology as a way for the "dominant" to control the dominated, and ritual is often analyzed in terms of power relations that would benefit some at the expense of others.

These perspectives on ritual are related to, or derived from, a certain conception of the "individual" according to which there is no distance between the

individual and his/her culture. Such an approach is found, for example, in Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and socialization. It is through socialization, according to Bourdieu, that individuals internalize power relationships in their bodies. Furthermore, since these power relationships are inscribed in the body and in the organization of space and time, the individual cannot see them. And in not seeing these power relationships, the individual cannot resist them. In Bourdieu's words (1977: 94), "The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit" (cited in Comaroff 1985: 5). The individual can strategize but the very strategies used are inscribed in the structure itself.

Views that conceptualized there being no distance between individuals and their culture are now being revised by a number of anthropologists. For example, in her analysis of the Tshidi, an indigenous group of South Africa that was colonized by Europeans, Comaroff (1985) argues that contrary to a general assumption, the colonized and their local systems have not been passively "engulfed" by European capitalism. Critiquing the notion that people are compelled by the ideology of the dominant and by the structure, Comaroff reconsiders the relationship between structure and practice. She argues that the Tshidi are not passively determined by the external socio-cultural structure.

> *Determined, yet determining* their own history; [they are] human beings who, in their every day production of goods and meanings, acquiesce yet protest, reproduce yet seek to transform their predicament. [italics added] (1985: 1).

Consequently, the individual is determined and shaped by the new socio-economic order, yet he/she also acts upon it through *everyday practice*: there is an "*interplay*" between structure and practice. Hence, "practice is more than mere habitual repetition" (1985: 6). Comaroff also looks at the central role of ritual in resisting the dominant social order. While adopting part of the Christian ritual that symbolically promotes capitalism, the Tshidi also integrated into this ritual many elements that carry messages of resistance to Protestantism and capitalism. The discourse promoted by the Tshidi ritual "stretched far beyond the domain of ritual itself, penetrating acutely into the experiential fabric of everyday life" (1985: 11). Hence, through the "symbolic mediation" of ritual, the Tshidi transform their everyday experience. Resistance and transformation are initiated and internalized in the body through ritual; it is a "symbolic mediation" which is not necessarily "reflected upon" (1985: 9).

One problem with this conception of the individual, as it is applied to ritual, is the implication that ritual is uniformly adopted and understood by people who are completely determined by their culture. The members of the church are considered as a single entity that uniformly internalize the ritual, rather than as individuals with unique feelings, understandings, and perspectives on the ritual.

Ortner has also sought to clarify the relationship between culture, structure and human action. Seeking to reconcile "overly structural and overly actor-focusing frameworks" (1989: 15), Ortner asks "how people can be both created and creators,

product and productors, symbols and agents of [the] world" (1989: 1). She looks at the ways in which individuals can be constrained by and products of their culture, and still be cultural and historic innovators. Through action, the "actors" are both produced by the cultural structure, and producer of the structure.

Ortner identifies "cultural schemas" (1989: 14) that dictate the individuals' response to the contradictions of their culture. Yet, while individuals are shaped by culture and cultural schemas, they are not socialized uniformly. The individuals' understandings vary not only according to their positions in the hierarchy of the society and to their sexes, but also *from individual to individual.* Individuals have unique personalities, emotions, intentions and interests. Hence, actions are never undertaken uniformly by all, but are undertaken by unique individuals who use some of the elements of action that culture makes available to them. Finally, Ortner conceptualizes an actor who is:

> "loosely structured," who is prepared-but no more than that-to find most of his or her culture intelligible and meaningful, but who does not necessarily find all parts of it equally meaningful in all times and places. [. . .] Even when [people in different social positions] appear to share the same symbols, and even though they are socialized as cultural actors, they may have different relationships to their cultures (1989: 198-9).

We shall see that my own research suggests that we may identify similar patterns of understandings which result from socialization, such as certain types of knowledge and actions among women versus men. However, we cannot in any way talk about uniform systems of beliefs and actions among all members of the church. As Bell has pointed out, nuancing Bourdieu's concept of habitus, "possession of this

"sense of ritual" [internalized through socialization of the body] does not mean that members of a community always agree on how to do a ritual or what to make of it." (1992: 80). We will show that Redemption Church's members vary greatly in terms of their understandings of the role of the church, and their goals within the church.

African-American religion has often been viewed as an institution that controls people's minds. However, we shall demonstrate that it is actually a very complex institution in which determined, yet unique individuals participate. Far from being uniformly shaped and dominated, as Black feminists' approach suggests, women, as well as men, obtain a form of empowerment through the church.

DESCRIPTION OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Brief History of the Blacks in Oregon

Minorities in Oregon have had a difficult history. As McLagan (1980) and the Portland Bureau of Planning (1993) point out, laws designed to exclude Blacks, Chinese, and Native Americans from coming to Oregon were passed in the 1840's, and made part of the Constitution in 1857. Among the few Blacks who were already present in the state when the laws were passed, very few were actually expelled. However, the laws actively prohibited new Blacks from migrating to Oregon. According to Millner (1978), between 1850 and 1860, there was a minimal increase in the number of Blacks living in Oregon from 55 to 128. In contrast, almost 4000 new Blacks came to live in California during this period.

Even after the Emancipation proclamation in 1862, the legislature passed racist state laws in 1862 prohibited Blacks from voting and from marrying Whites in

Oregon. Also, one law required people of color who lived within the State of Oregon to pay an annual tax. In many counties of Oregon, another law required Blacks to be off the streets after sundown.

Constructed from the East Coast to Oregon in the 1880s, the transcontinental railroad offered new job opportunities and brought Blacks to Oregon, employing them as porters, cooks and waiters. Hotels were the other business sector where Blacks could find jobs. In the late 19th and early 20th century, the great majority of Blacks of Portland, Oregon's largest urban concentration, were employed either in hotels or in the railroad industry.

The number of Blacks coming to Oregon increased only very slightly from 1900 to 1940 and stagnated during the Depression. But during the Second World War, the ship building industry revolutionized the economy of the city, attracting new workers. Within two years, 160,000 new citizens migrated to Portland. About 25% of these migrants were Blacks, with many of them employed in the ship building industry. The number of Blacks in Portland increased from 2,000 to 20,000 during the 1940s. However, because their numbers increased so quickly, Blacks encountered open hostility. During this period, "White trade only" signs proliferated and housing became increasingly segregated.

In 1900, most Black Portlanders lived on the west side of the city, next to the train station and hotels. The burgeoning east side was at that time occupied by the White middle-class neighborhood. By 1940, pushed by unwritten laws that had forced

Blacks into the least desirable areas, the majority of Blacks lived in the industrial areas close to the Broadway Bridge on the east side of the town. Gradually, Blacks started to migrate into the Albina area further north, that had been previously occupied by White citizens and denied to Blacks. By 1950, most Black Portlanders lived in a restricted area of inner Northeast Portland, while the great majority of Whites had moved out. In the 1960s, the majority of Blacks lived in poor and overcrowded neighborhoods. A few redevelopment programs were designed, one of them was implemented and completed in 1972; it resulted in successful tree planting and development of parks. The Black neighborhood received funds as part of the War on Poverty Program launched by President Johnson. This program funded the creation of diverse social services centers.

Between the 1970's and the 1990's, the "Black neighborhood" became, as we shall see, more racially and ethnically diverse. Moreover, Black became more dispersed throughout the city. We cannot really talk about "a" Black neighborhood. At the end of the 1990's, one notices that the center of the city is expanding to the North and to the East, partly through the construction of the Lloyd Center, and more recently, the development of the Rose Quarter. Hence, the value of the land on the East side of the city is increasing. Large real estate agencies buy houses in the "Black neighborhood" at low prices which they then sell to White middle-class people, who are increasingly attracted by the traditional style of the houses in this neighborhood, as well as their reasonable prices and close location to downtown. Between 1992 and

1995, the prices of homes in N.E Portland have continually increased. According to Kimberly Moreland, author of the article "The Christian Church in the Black Community" and inhabitant of the "Black neighborhood" of Portland, the value of her house has doubled over a period of 5 years. Hence, unable to afford these increased prices, the Blacks are being pushed out further north. As we shall see, Redemption Church actively works towards making its members aware of this phenomenon of "gentrification."

Stereotypes of the "Most Dangerous" Neighborhood of Portland

I lived in a predominantly Black neighborhood of Portland for about a year. My own experience of this neighborhood differs from the image many White Portlanders have about it, as well as from the way Black neighborhoods are represented in the media. With three other international students, I had moved into a house with a very low rent. I thought that the neighborhood was truly beautiful. When I first visited the house, I did not know that it was located in the "Black neighborhood." I thought it was in a lower middle-class neighborhood. Having lived most of my life in France, my only encounter with American cities had been through Hollywood movies, and the quiet streets surrounding my house did not look at all like the dark and thrilling ghettos represented in movies.

I first realized that my house was located in the "most dangerous area" of Portland through what other people told me. My American host family advised me to

be cautious and never to walk or take the bus alone. Mentioning drug, killings and gangs, most (White) people I met at the university advised me to move out of the neighborhood as soon as possible. On several occasions, we had to put ads in local newspapers to replace housemates who had to move out. Most people who answered the ad would suddenly become uninterested as soon as we gave them the location of the house. And most people who moved in were either White people who lived on the fringe of society or African-Americans.

These reactions from White people vis-à-vis the neighborhood angered me since most people who said such things had never stepped in the neighborhood. While there are indeed problems of gangs and drugs in the neighborhood, this Black neighborhood was not necessarily the only dangerous area of Portland. For example, after one year living in N.E Portland, I moved to a very poor street in the downtown area. This street was actually very dangerous and I encountered verbal aggression from homeless people on several occasions; this was a type of aggression I had never experienced in N.E Portland. Yet, when I indicated to people I met at school what part of the downtown area I lived in, no one ever advised me to move out.

Although a dangerous neighborhood when compared to White upper-class neighborhoods, the dangerous aspects of neighborhoods like N.E Portland have been exaggerated by decades of stereotypes that associate the Black male with the threatening animal, and the Black neighborhood with violence. The Hollywood film industry has played a significant role in shaping these stereotypes. For example, in

1915, the film Birth of a Nation presented the Black male as a hypersexual and threatening animal who had to be tamed by the Whites. More recently, the film White Man's Burden (1995), a movie that was supposedly anti-racist, represented the Black neighborhood as inhabited by mobs of violent and parasitic people who were unwilling to work. The Black hero of the movie, a hard-worker who actively fought against racist injustice, was presented as the only exception in this unsafe neighborhood.

My own experience of the Black neighborhood was rather different. Far from being dark and miserable, this neighborhood seemed to me full of life and laughter. I enjoyed taking a walk or riding my bicycle. I found the streets, bordered by trees and colorful houses, really beautiful. I liked looking at the noisy children or teenagers playing and laughing in the street. Sitting on my deck, I enjoyed listening to the sounds of jazz and rap coming from every house or from the passing cars. I much preferred this atmosphere of freedom and diversity to the supposedly "desirable" White and quiet neighborhood where I later lived in Lake Oswego. Certainly, there is violence and poverty in the Black neighborhoods of Portland, but my experience of this neighborhood did not parallel the one represented in the movies.

Economic and Ethnic Diversity

What is thought of by many Portlanders to be the "Black" neighborhood of Portland, sometimes called "Albina," is actually very ethnically diverse. Many Hispanic and White people live in the neighborhood. The population is distributed in

"zones" of a few blocks, in which the proportion of each ethnic group may vary. However, within any "zone," Blacks are more represented than the other groups. Also, the Hispanics are much less represented than the Whites. But in the last few years, the number of Hispanics and Whites has increased.

The different ethnic groups do not generally socialize together. If one looks at children's play, one notices that, in each street, children form groups according to their ethnic background and gender, and generally do not intermix. African-American boys generally form groups of 7 or 8 to play basketball on the street, while African-American girls gather to chat and sometimes appear to watch the boys play. White children generally play with what they find on the street (i.e. cardboard, plastic bottles) or their bikes, if they have one. One of the favorite games of the (White) children who lived opposite my house was to play on a wrecked car, or, on rainy days, to rub it with mud and then rinse it. The mother of these children, apparently on drugs, normally left them unwatched until late in the evening. In contrast, the (Black) landlady of my house, a former middle-school teacher who raised her grandchildren, would never let her charges play on the street. She considered the street as dangerous and would organize instead educational games inside the house.

Statistically, Albina is one of the poorest neighborhoods of Portland. The Whites and Hispanics living in the neighborhood are considered low income. As indicated earlier, at the national level, African-Americans experience even greater unemployment rates than their White counterparts. According to my informants at

Redemption Church, Black people who become socially successful generally prefer to move to more "desirable" neighborhoods. But certain Black middle-class people remain in the neighborhood in support of the Black community, although they could afford to live in more prestigious neighborhoods. As mentioned earlier, in the last few years, the number of White middle-class people living in the neighborhood increased.

The neighborhood is diverse in terms of the ethnic and socio-economic background of its inhabitants. But it is also diverse in terms of how well kept the streets are. On the street where I lived, there was one area where, even though it was not designated as a dumping area, parts of bicycles or cars and rubbish were thrown away. Also on the street, there were a couple of abandoned houses. Some inhabited houses were completely falling into decay, with cracked paint, front yards covered with rubble, old or ripped open armchairs on the front porch, and sometimes rubbish on the front stairs as well. But other houses were extremely well-kept. Within the neighborhood, the state of the streets may be completely different from one street to the next. Whereas some streets were very dirty and unkept, some streets were so extremely clean that one might think that one had entered another neighborhood.

Having described the Black neighborhood in N.E Portland, I will now talk about my fieldwork experience.

II- PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND FIELDWORK

Fieldwork is a strange experience in which the personality, the past, the emotions and the social or cultural background of both the ethnographer and informants are involved. Fieldwork constantly evolves as the ethnographer and the informants get to know one another and as the ethnographer gets to know better the culture in which she is immersed. Fieldwork is also affected by the ethnographer's personal reflections, as well by her different anthropological readings that influence her glance on the "Other's" culture. It is a dynamic process in which the ethnographer goes back and forth between her questions, the readings in anthropology (which constantly raise new questions) and the fieldwork *per se*.

This dynamic, in which the ethnographer's personal experiences are involved, gives birth to a type of scholarly research. In this chapter, I will recount how the principal components of this dynamic - the ethnographer's identity; rapport between ethnographer and informants; and anthropological readings - determined the choice of this specific fieldwork and of the types of questions that were raised. We will see that it is the intersection of my questions about my life, my fieldwork observations and my

reading of certain anthropological theories which were new to me that made me ask certain questions and choose to analyze certain issues. After explaining why I chose to work on an African-American church, I will describe the difficulties I had in doing fieldwork and analyze the different reasons for these difficulties. Then, I will look more specifically at my relationships with women in the church and explain why I decided to work on the power relationships between men and women in the church.

THE CHOICE OF "FIELDWORK" SITE AND ISSUES

The choice of the fieldwork setting was influenced by several traits from my past and my own identity. Without being really politically involved, I have always been in political movements of resistance: I was a non-committed member of Amnesty International, and, like most French students, a participant in the numerous students' demonstrations against the government's decisions in matters of education and against far right political parties. I was passionately interested in the ethnic riots provoked in France by the murder of Malik Oussekine by French police; I was also interested, with the same fervor, in the riots provoked in the American Black community by the police beating of Rodney King in 1992. Regarding this latter case, I could not understand thoroughly the implications of these riots as I did not, at that time, have a significant understanding of race relations in the United States. From what I later realized was a French white middle-class perspective on American riots, I wondered why African-Americans were reacting to this murder by the robbery of stores. I was even

disappointed that resistance to the capitalist system and to racism was acted out by paradoxically stealing consumer products. In other words, despite my naiveté and lack of qualified information, I was already very interested in the ambiguities of "resistance."

When I first arrived in the United States, I happened to live in an African-American neighborhood of Portland mostly because this was, by far, the cheapest neighborhood in town. But besides the obvious practical advantages, I was enthusiastic about living in this neighborhood not only because I truly liked the neighborhood, but also because it matched my own position against racism.

At first, I did not intend to do research on Albina. But the annoying continual advice from (White) people at the university, telling me to move out of this neighborhood as soon as possible, attracted my attention to the issues of ethnic identity, of racial stereotypes and conflicts that I was already interested in. Also, I did not originally intend to focus my work on a church since religion in itself was not of much interest to me. Raised in a Catholic family, I practiced this religion during my childhood, but I had ceased any religious practice since then. The anthropology of religion was not my main interest either. I started to go to Redemption Church because it would allow me to meet African-American people. It was not difficult to find a church, given the great number of churches in Albina. I simply went to the closest one, one block away from my house.

However, I was not at this time interested in the church, or rather, I conceived of the church only as a way to gain "entry" in the African-American community. I thought I would leave it after I got the entries that would steer me to different issues. I did not yet know anything about the ways in which the African-American church connected with the political and social issues I was interested in. But during my very first visit to Redemption Church, I heard the Pastor make continual references to *slavery* and *racism* in front of a congregation dressed in African clothes; I heard the extraordinary choir sing about *fighting* for freedom. It was not only this wonderful singing and dancing that made me completely keen on this church, I also realized that the church interconnected the questions of resistance, politics and identity that I was interested in. I decided to stay with this church.

THE DIFFICULTIES OF DOING FIELDWORK: A WHITE ANTHROPOLOGIST NOVICE IN AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

Confusion and Difficulties of Communication

The first few months of fieldwork were difficult for me. I had thrown myself into this foreign church in which I felt lost. Confusion and hesitation are the terms that would best characterize this period. First, I did not know what to ask people. I did not have any knowledge of the African-American culture; I had no idea of what I was looking for; I simply had the vague idea that I could work on the relationship between identity and religion. My main questions had been for the first few weeks: what could

I ask these people ?! What questions do anthropologists ask people to write those wonderful articles that I read in scholarly journals? I felt I knew nothing about anthropology, or rather, about the way I was supposed to manage my research.

Also, the Sunday Service of this church was rather confusing to me. I had spent my childhood in Catholic churches where the monotonous tone of the priest did not break into the quiet regularity of the ritual and the immobility of the congregation. I was now thrown into this thundering Sunday service where everyone communicated with the Pastor, clapped hands during the sermon, shouted, and stamped feet to mark the tempo of the impressive choir. Although I was completely enthusiastic about this music and ritual, I often felt uncomfortable. I knew that everything in me marked me as an outsider, from the way I was speaking, to the way I was dressing, to the way I was moving. I was the only White in this church and I really stood out among these people dancing and dressed with African style clothes: boubous for the men, dresses and hats for the women usually of yellow or orange color with green and red stripes.

Uncomfortable and a bit shy, I did not know how to start to have thorough conversations with people. First of all, I did not know how to present myself. I did not know if it was better to tell people immediately that I was there as an anthropologist. If I had to present myself as such, I did not know how to do it without making more labored a communication already difficult. I was indeed trying to talk to people, but in a very clumsy way. My English was very poor and I did not understand very well the "African-American English." Not only was my English not good enough to have a

smooth conversation, but I also did not know what to talk about with people. I knew how to make a conversation with French people; I also more or less knew what to talk about with American students since we shared a certain background regarding school; but I really did not know what to talk about with Black Americans outside the university setting.

Also, people were not really prone to come and talk to me. Although I obtained, after a few weeks, the implicit consent from the Pastor to attend this church, many people showed me clearly that they did not want me in the church. As we will see later on in more detail, I experienced people's refusal from the very first day when people looked at me clearly as the "unwanted." Little by little, I reached a good level a communication with some people. During the first few weeks, I made friends with one of the women, Judy, and we even socialized a few times outside the church. Still, our conversations were rather tensed and limited, especially at church. At the end of the service, a time when the congregants meet and talk informally in groups, she would either leave the church very quickly or talk to her acquaintances to whom she would introduce me, but very briefly and almost reluctantly, without giving me much opportunities to integrate the group. Also, some of my first "successes" regarding communication with some other people turned out to be hurtful pseudo-successes. It hurt when, after giving a few free French lessons to a man, he did not even say hi to me anymore a few weeks later. It hurt when a woman, who definitely knows you because you talked to her several times, suddenly does not recognize you anymore! At

that time, the experience of fieldwork was so difficult that I very often believed that *everybody* in the church hated me. I had then very *simplistic* explanations for the reasons why people did not want me: either, I would blame myself and my perceived inability to communicate; or I would blame the church members and call them racist.

Reconsideration of my Difficulties in the Church

After a few months, as the research was "progressing," I could step back and critically reconsider my difficulties. At first, I interpreted my confusion and my difficulties in doing fieldwork to my lack of ability to do research. Thanks to my readings in reflexive anthropology and to my on-going conversations with my advisor, I realized that any fieldwork is necessarily, at first, characterized by confusion. One has to "mingle" and get accepted in a community whose rules and habits are foreign. The first observations and communications are necessarily confused since one has to learn *everything* about the foreign community. One does not know what "to look at." As Margery Wolf (1992) points out, the first few months of fieldwork are necessarily spent at "looking for the questions."

Nevertheless, as time went on, I realized that I also needed to reconsider some of my expectations and assumptions about the people I was studying. When I started my fieldwork, I probably unconsciously thought, with condescension, that these "poor good Blacks" would accept me immediately. I probably believed that they would be "happy" to have a White French "anthropologist" interested in them. I was probably

influenced by these more or less colonialist and romanticized ethnographies in which the ethnographer appears as completely accepted and cherished by "her" tribe. In reality, it is not the way field study works. The members of Redemption Church were not really much concerned with the fact that I was White and that I was interested in them. In fact, at best, they were wondering what I was doing in their church; at worst, they were suspicious about my presence. I first started my fieldwork with a slight condescension, but I soon realized that I had no power; they were the ones who had the power to accept me or to reject me. Whites have the power to create racial stereotypes which play against the Blacks, but in this church, Whites had no power.

It is condescending to believe that the people one observes will immediately and unanimously love "their" anthropologist, as if there ought to be something special about the anthropologist or about the people the anthropologist observes. Actually, the people one observes are just "normal" people; some of them are very friendly, some are very cold and uncommunicative.

Further experience and reflection enabled me to go beyond my initially simplistic explanations of Redemption Church members' responses as racist. The difficulty of doing fieldwork partly lies in the fact that the ethnographer brings to the fieldwork her own cultural ways to communicate and interpret situations. It is therefore difficult for her to interpret the reasons why a person seems to reject her, until she has a better understanding of the communication styles of the community. In my case, this difficulty of interpretation made me overexaggerate and misinterpret my

difficulties of communication at Redemption Church. A behavior that I first interpreted as racist was actually very often related to differences in European and American communication styles. For example, when a person talked to me enthusiastically one Sunday, she or he would often ignore me the next Sunday. Confused, I interpreted this, the first few weeks, as evidence that somebody, behind my back, told the person not to talk to me anymore or that I had somehow offended this person. But I realized, after a few months in the United States, that this was not necessarily a "Black" behavior, since I experienced it also with many White Americans. It was actually due to different conceptions of politeness in France and in the United States. According to the French, Americans are extremely cordial when they first meet somebody. Because this cordiality is unusual in France, a French person would interpret it as evidence that the American is trying to begin a durable and sincere friendship; whereas in the United States, it is simply considered a basic rule of politeness.

Moreover, what I interpreted at the beginning of my research as "racist" behavior was often simply caused by the fact that people at the church had responsibilities, people to talk to, friends to greet, etc. People simply did not have time to talk to a Frenchwoman asking weird questions.

But it would be romanticizing the members of Redemption Church to say that all the difficulties of communication were due to my untimely interpretations. For reasons I will analyze below, it is clear that some people did not appreciate my

presence at the church. I had to learn to accept the fact that no matter how long I would stay in the church I would never "belong" to it. After showing endlessly to people, for months, how much I respected them and how much I wanted to communicate with them, most people finally accepted me and some people liked me. But I would never share with Redemption Church's members their color, their identity, their economic and social position and, above all, the faith that brought them together.

The Impossibility of Being Politically, Socially and Racially "Neutral"

Critical examination of my relationships with church members did not always solve my communications difficulties, for my interactions were still often strange or tense. People would talk to me, but I was always somehow apart from them and their social worlds. For example, I was outside of their jokes; I felt that people talked to me just as a matter of being polite, not because they really wanted me to feel accepted. It seemed to me that people did not trust me.

Because I had realized that my difficulties were not completely the fault of my perceived inability to do fieldwork and that the causes of these difficulties were actually very complex and multi-layered, I was also able to step back and relate my difficulties of communication to a larger social and racial context. Little by little, I could see how the distrust I experienced at Redemption Church was related to the relationships between Whites and Blacks that I observed at school or downtown. These relationships are "marked" by decades of slavery and racism.

To get a certain sense of the relationships between African-Americans and Whites in the United States, I asked a few White Americans students whom I encountered at school what type of relationships they had, in general, with African-American people. Their answer was commonly that they "*could* not [have a relationship with them] *because* they do not trust *us*." None of them had an African-American friend.

The African-American constitute a minority in the United States; this minority is even far less represented in this town than in Eastern states. In Portland, this minority rarely socializes with White Americans. Although one can see groups of African-Americans and Whites together or mixed couples in certain neighborhoods, it is fairly rare in the downtown area. Similarly, at Portland State University, not only do African-Americans represent a very small minority (about one or two percent) of the students, but one rarely sees African-Americans and Whites socializing together. Although this university gives of itself an image of a multicultural university, there is real segregation. In the cafeteria, one notices four "sections" which are very clear, although they constitute each other informally: the "White" section, the "Black" section, the "Middle-Eastern" section and the "Asian" section. In each of these sections, the size of the groups and the styles of interpersonal interactions are completely different.

Given this context, I could not be "neutral" in the church. However, regarding my living in Albina, a relatively "pluri-ethnic" neighborhood as we have seen, I did

not encounter any suspicion or disapproving attitude. People in the neighborhood were simply indifferent to me. But it is interesting to note that people generally would not even look at me when I was by myself. In contrast, when I would take a walk with my Black housemate, people on the street would say hi to him.

I never experienced any problem or suspicious look when I was walking by myself, until one day, I decided to take pictures of the neighborhood in order to document my description of the neighborhood in this thesis. My (White) friend from France, Sylvie, had kindly proposed to accompany me. Although she did not participate in the research, she was interested in it, and she accompanied me a few times to church. We made the decision to always ask people's permission before taking a picture. Upon seeing us coming to them with a camera, people would generally look at us suspiciously. But, probably because we had foreign accents and because we were young and females, they would not be suspicious anymore shortly after we asked for their permission. In contrast, some sections of the neighborhood, considered to be the "toughest" (in terms of gang problems and number of crimes), simply upon seeing the camera, people on the street, especially males, would look at us so disapprovingly that we would not even dare to ask to take a picture. It happened a couple of times that people were clearly attempting to force us to leave. For example, once two males stopped us to ask us what we were doing. One of them was really threatening, but the other one calmed things down telling the other that we were only kids. Another time, two male teenagers yelled at us and threatened us while they saw

us taking a picture of the street. This happened only a few times in one afternoon, but we were scared enough to go to another street as quickly as possible. In fact, in a neighborhood where gangs and drug dealings are present, one does not necessarily run a risk if one is not involved in these activities. Yet, it was really dangerous to take pictures, as people felt threatened by it. The fact that I heard some shootings right in front of my house a couple of nights later made us realize, although these shootings were not related to us, the potential danger in this neighborhood. We gave up our plan of taking pictures regularly.

If there is suspicion in the African-American neighborhood vis-à-vis the Whites, there is also suspicion at church. It is generally difficult for White Americans to do research in an African-American church. The African-Americans, considering the church as the only institution that entirely belongs to them since slavery, are, understandingly, reluctant when some Whites come to get information about it. I happened to talk to an instructor in charge of a program designed for White students intending to become middle-school teachers. One of the students' projects had as its goal to require that students go to "ethnically different" neighborhoods in order to make them aware of "cultural differences." Some students went to African-American churches. They experienced terrible difficulties getting people's trust in the church.

I experienced this type of "distrust" the very first time my friend and I went to Redemption Church. But the distrust actually worked both ways. We had no idea about what an African-American church was like. Nervous, we did not know at all

what to expect. Although we had always been very critical about the stereotypes regarding the dangers of the Black neighborhood, I must admit that, a few minutes before entering the church, we were talking, half-jokingly, half-fearfully, about how crazy we were to go to this church and how people might murder us! Although it is only normal to be nervous when one is about to be in a new situation especially in a foreign country, our fears were certainly increased and influenced by stereotypes we would normally reject critically.

We did not know how people would welcome us and we did not know what we would do. We simply decided to smile at all times. When entering in the vestibule, the group of four or five men who were standing there looked at us: their glance was, at the same time, surprised, disapproving and haughty. We were so nervous that our own glances were probably not very friendly ones either. Disturbed by the way these men looked at us, we rushed into the church, avoiding looking at people. A few seconds later, a little boy, probably sent by the group of men, ran after us asking us to fill the card he was holding. In fact, we later realized that this group of men were in charge of welcoming the guests and asking them to fill an identity card. But we did not know that we were supposed to introduce ourselves, and the way they looked at us did not explain what we were supposed to do. Later on, we also realized that this was a church whose members are exclusively African-Americans. We were probably among the very few Whites to step in this church. These men were unprepared to see and welcome Whites. Moreover, the few Whites who occasionally come to this church are

all accompanied by the Black friend or spouse who invited them (about ten Black members of the church have White spouses. Although it is very unusual, the latter occasionally come in church). Thus, the Whites who normally come to church are introduced by a member of the church who knows its "rules." Therefore, these men's reaction was not due only to their suspicion to Whites. It was also due to our incongruous presence and attitude, as well as to the lack of experience from both parts to communicate with people of another skin color. Also, we can assume, (although this is only an assumption) that, if we had been Black, these men would have looked at us in a way that would have invited us to understand what we were supposed to do. Our skin color carried with it a racial context. People were wondering what we were doing here.

The first time we went to church, we were surprised to see behaviors that seem to us contradictory. Whereas the first minutes had been cold, after we had formally introduced ourselves in front of the congregation during the service, people became rather nice to us at the end of the service: several persons said hi to us and told us that they were happy "to have [us] in the church." The Pastor also welcomed us warmly the first Sunday as well as all the following Sundays. He would always say hi to me in a rather dramatic way, calling me by my first name. Yet, he seemed to be rather contradictory with me. For example, during one of the services, he announced that the church bus would go, the next day, to Salem for a conference organized to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr.'s anniversary. He asked interested people to talk to him after

the service, which I did. Without answering my questions regarding the time and place where we were supposed to meet, he gave me his personal phone number and asked me to call him in the afternoon. Surprised by his kindness, I did call his home and left a message; but he never called me back. The next Sunday, he apologized for his failure to call me back; but he did not give any reasons for it. I actually heard a few days later that all the arrangements regarding transportation had been made after the service and not later in the afternoon. The following Sundays, he always greeted me warmly, but he would always turn away and avoid me immediately after saying hi.

Nevertheless, as a French woman, I probably had fewer difficulties being accepted and I encountered less suspicion than if I had been a White American. As I mentioned earlier, it was hard for me to start a conversation with people. I would talk only to people next to me, but the "conversation" was most of the time limited to "hi, how are you today?" Then, people would simply turn to their own friends and family members. I did not feel comfortable forcing myself into groups of people. But my French friend made me greatly improve my relationships to the people because her presence made it easier to stand in the middle of groups of people. The two or three times we did that, people ignored us for a few minutes. Then, as the majority of the people left, some people, curious about these two White foreigners, came and talked to us. The fact that we were French was actually a wonderful help, despite the language barrier. First, if we had nothing to talk about, the usual questions one asks a foreigner started a first conversation that would then steer us to a more interesting one. More

importantly, instead of identifying us with slavery, inequalities and racism, people would identify us with the stereotypes about France which are, generally, positive ones in the United States: (assumed) easy-going way of life of the South of France or of Paris, good wines and French cuisine, Parisian artistic life and night-life, supposedly romantic Eiffel tower and champagne.

In order to ease the potential suspicion towards a White in the church, I also tried, although rather unsuccessfully, to emphasize the fact that I was French when I was introducing myself. At that time, I believed that people would be suspicious about my presence if I presented myself as an anthropology student immediately. I thought at that time that it would take me only two or three weeks to get acquainted with a few persons, and that it would be better to give the reasons why I was in this church after I was a little acquainted with people. Thus, I introduced myself as a French student who lived only one block away from Redemption Church and was simply trying to get American friends through the church, as well as to become familiar with the American culture. I actually soon realized that not to introduce myself as an anthropology student immediately was a mistake: Some knew that I indeed lived in the neighborhood and my going to the nearest church more or less made sense to them; others did understand that one might want to use the church as a way to become acquainted with people. Yet, nobody could really understand the reason why I was in this church. It was probably odd to these people that a French student, who did not share with them either the social background, the age or the religion, would try to

socialize in this particular church. Their suspicion was probably sharpened by the fact that I was taking notes during the sermon! Actually, the program distributed every Sunday did allow a space for note-taking; but as I was the only one to take notes, people were probably curious about what I was doing in their church. Once I actually decided to introduce myself as a student interested in doing research in their church, people I was meeting were a lot more relaxed with me because, contrary to the people to whom I had not talked about my research, they could understand the reasons of my incongruous presence.

Nevertheless, even if being French helped reduce suspicion or rejection, still, I did not share with the parishioners the same racial and social backgrounds. I could not be socially and racially "neutral." In a church where most people do not have an education higher than senior high school and do not possess the economic and social "capital" (Bourdieu) that would allow them to be successful in college, as a student in a White university, I stood out. For example, some people did not know that, during my first year in the United States, I had a grant from France which took care of my tuition and most of my living expenses: these people considered me as a very rich person who did not share with them their economical hardship. As for those who knew it, they would consider me as a brilliant student successful in a world reserved to the Whites.

I naively tried to erase our differences in order to make the communication easier. If I could not actually "erase" our differences, I could try to show that I was

"on their side." For example, I tried to show that I was not rich at all. I emphasized the fact that I was living in the same neighborhood as them. But I realized how my living in Albina could be interpreted when I noticed that talking about these issues raised tension and awkwardness. For example, during his interview, the Pastor explained to me the process of gentrification I described earlier and how the church had a role in making people aware of it. He became suddenly uncomfortable, when I pointed out to him that I lived in the neighborhood and that, as a White, I was part of the process. Although he is a wonderful speaker who was extremely at ease in the interview setting, suddenly uneasy, he could not find for a few seconds anything to answer. It was also an uneasy situation when one of my main informants, Joanna, first explained to me that her job consisted of keeping Albina's houses at a price low enough that the Blacks could still afford it. However, as both the Pastor's and Joanna's missions were to keep Black ownership of the houses rather than necessarily to keep the neighborhood Black, and as I was actually a renter of a house owned by a Black, my living in the neighborhood did not actually affect our relationship negatively. Our relationship was anyway close enough at that time not to be affected by this topic. Yet, this topic raised an uneasiness that underlined our differences. Also, if my living in the neighborhood did not affect my relationships with the Pastor and Joanna, it might be that other people in the church interpreted it as part of gentrification. It might be that the difficulties I encountered in being accepted were partly caused by

that. Therefore, it might be that what I used as evidence that I was "on their side" was actually interpreted by some as me being "against" them.

Secondly, during part of my second year of research, I lived downtown. Because I knew that most people in Redemption Church could not afford to live there, in order to show that I was similar to them, I explained people that I lived in a tiny and cheap studio contaminated with roaches. But my attempt was again countered by the fact that, although I was poor, I had the choice, as a White, to live in an area where very few Blacks live. Also, contrary to them, my poverty is, supposedly, only temporary and caused by my condition as student.

Moreover, I had lived for a couple of months in Lake Oswego, a town known by Blacks to be very restricted to Whites. I happened to live there more as a matter of circumstances than of my own decision. I actually hated this town which I sometimes heard people at Redemption Church as well as at Portland State University calling "Lake Oswego, Lake no Negro." While I was living there, I had been unable to go to church because of a lack of transportation. When I came back to church, I explained to some people the reason for my absence. However hard I tried to explain how much I truly hated living in this town, everybody knew that the difference between me and them was that I actually was accepted in this town, whereas they might have been asked to leave.

Lake Oswego was actually a typical topic of joke in the church. For example, once one of the guests introduced herself and said that she lived in North Tigard, a

town next to Lake Oswego. The Pastor started to make jokes about Lake Oswego, alluding to the racism of the town, asking this woman for instance what brought her to this *friendly* and *welcoming* town. It is interesting to note that when she said that she was living there, it made the church members laugh. In contrast, when I said to people that I was living there, nobody would tell me anything, nobody would make jokes. Actually, to them, there was indeed nothing to laugh about because there was nothing incongruous about my living there. As a White, I could not *participate* in the joke among Blacks about a White racist town.

In contrast, my living there was actually incongruous according to my political orientations and my hatred for what I called racist, White, conservative towns, a fact about which my close White friends outside of the church were aware. Hence, my living there was a matter of jokes among my close friends but I was disappointed that people at church could not feel that I could be included in their joke situation. Normally I would be part of a community of French anthropology or literature students, a culture in which the poorer and the more ethnically diverse the neighborhood you live in, the better. However, for the church people, they could not include in the sense of connection their version of this type of culture. They did not know that I would have liked to be part of their jokes too and that I did not want to be confused with the other, the White Lake Oswego inhabitants.

Finally, everyone knew that I did not share with them either their identity or their faith. Everyone knew that I could not identify with the Pastor's comparison

between the period of slavery and the Black's situation today. I was the only White in a church where people met in response to their political and economical oppression by Whites.

Hence, our differences could not be overcome. But, over time, most people would become less suspicious of my presence in the church. During the first few weeks, people would avoid me or say hi to me without giving me a chance to actually reply and without trying to figure out what I was doing there. But after a few months, I got closer to a few people who understood that I genuinely respected them. Some understood that I did not consider them simply as an object of study but that I was truly seeking their friendship. These few persons would introduce me to their friends and I later got the explicit consent of the Pastor to come to church. Gradually, after a few months in church, more people would talk to me and invite me to the different activities; some people would even give me a ride home or perform other personal social interactions. I gained the trust of the Pastor and of his (male) assistants with whom I had formal interviews. But I soon realized that the way the men talked to me was very different from the way women talked with me.

So far, I have not referred to gender in my description of my difficulties in becoming a member in the church community and of my relationships to the church members. I will now analyze how different my relationships were with men and with women. We will see how my relationships with the women of Redemption Church

and my own experience as a woman produced finally a set of research questions and goals.

AN "ETHNOGRAPHER" AMONG THE WOMEN OF REDEMPTION CHURCH

If communicating with Redemption Church's members was difficult as an overall experience, to a certain extent, it was even more difficult with women. Getting a formal interview was an easy process with men who had responsibilities, or in other words, men who had *prestige*[*] in the church. On one occasion, one of the men (the Pastor's second assistant) even took the initiative in asking me if I wanted to interview him. I had, the week before, talked with the Pastor's first assistant; I guess that he had told the second assistant about my research. The second assistant then came to me, introduced himself, and after a few minutes, proposed an interview.

In contrast, women would not be my informants. More than the men, the women would greet me and say hi to me. I even made friends with some of them. But they would not answer my questions about the ritual or the role of the church and its structure. When I would ask questions, they would either answer that they did not know or that they had not been in the church long enough to give me an answer (although some of them had been in the church over ten years). Most of the time, they would tell me to ask other people, such as the Pastor or another person who had been

[*] "Prestige" can be defined by having certain responsibilities in the church and being highly visible during the ritual. The most prestigious persons at Redemption Church are the Pastor and his assistants. We will define more thoroughly what we mean by this term in the last chapter.

in the church longer, generally a male. It is interesting to note that I experienced this same type of difficulty when trying to interview men who did not occupy prestigious positions within the church. The difference between the women and the men without prestige is that the women would generally socialize with me; and in turn, I was also "naturally" more attracted to women in that as a woman I felt that I blended into their groups more easily.

The difficulty I encountered with trying to have the women "inform" me made me curious to know more about them and what they truly thought. In addition to the fieldwork, I started to read research done in reflexive anthropology and research that focused on gender issues. Research done by Reiter (1974) seemed to validate not only my experience as an ethnographer trying to get information from the women, but also, on a personal level, as a woman in society. I had always been reluctant to talk to other people in public. Like the women of the church, I would rather have other people talk for me. In France, I had participated in political meetings in connection with student demonstrations. I would never say a word; only the men would speak. I greatly admired the men's ability to speak. I had the feeling that, as a female, I had not been prepared through my education for public speaking. I was angry with myself because I felt I had many things to say and what I had to say was as interesting, if not more so, than what the males had to say. But I thought that I would seem too ridiculous to these people who already spoke well. Anybody would have thought that I had nothing to say or that my opinion was similar to that expressed by the men. But my silence was only

due to my fear and to the fact that I had not been prepared to speak in public. I w upset that I was unable to express my own opinion.

This experience made it essential for me to attempt to know the women's perspectives at Redemption Church. I did not want the men to speak for the wor As Caplan asserted about her research on systems of kinship in the Mafia Islands "changes in [her] own consciousness [fed] into the process of constructing ethnography" (1992: 78). If I had not personally experienced the lack of female I would probably have never become interested in the issue of how to represent women's perspective in my own work.

My identity as a female influenced my research, and, in turn, my fieldwor influenced my personal life. As I became increasingly interested in the issue of t representation of women in arts and the media. I started to have the feeling that men's voices were heard in movies and in literature. During the second year of r research, most of the books I read and most of the movies I saw were done by wo I found in many women's work a sensitivity and a focus of interest that spoke to found I could identify with the characters created by these women, whether these characters were men or women. I could recognize myself in the characterization within these women's works, whereas I could not in men's works.

My desire to understand women's perspectives in this church was not due simply to issues of feminism but related to issues raised in anthropological settin well. Influenced by society at large, anthropological research had assumed for a

time that male and female perspectives were the same, and that men could speak
women. Ardener (1972) was one the first to criticize this assumption and to look
the reasons why women had often been neglected by social anthropologists. Wo
he noted, generally did not belong to the male-dominated public sphere and did n
possess the type of speech associated with that sphere. Because women spoke an
"inarticulate" speech, they were often disregarded by ethnographers. Although w
had their own worldview and understanding of rituals, ethnographers did not hea
them. Ardener argued that this was due to the framework of anthropology itself,
which reflected Western male-dominated society, and thus impeded the airing of
women's worldviews. As Reiter (1974) argued, male researchers transferred fro
their own society to other societies the assumption that "men control significant
information;" thus male researchers neglected women in their research. Moore (
disagreed with this in part, arguing that women were always present in ethnograp
but that male researchers viewed women as "unimportant" and hence left them
unanalyzed.

The research by Ardener and Reiter has given birth to considerable resear
focusing on women which seeks to break through women's "invisibility" in
ethnography. But much work still needs to be done to reach an understanding of
women's perspectives of the world. Therefore, attempting to know women's
perspectives becomes not simply a feminist goal, but also an anthropological goa

which knowledge is gained by studying the diverse cultural perspectives located the same community.

Little by little, I learned that I had to address women differently from the addressed men, specifically, prestigious men. For example, after a few weeks of fieldwork, I became interested in the fact that the majority of the church member women. Initially, I would naively ask the women: "Why are there more women men in the church?" I was probably expecting the women to answer me with a n and long "anthropological essay."

In fact, the Pastor did give me an "anthropological essay" in response to t question, an "essay" that I could critically analyze later on as the product of his position as a prestigious man. He was able to do that because he had the necessa education and because he had reflected on the political role of the church in the African-American community. Furthermore, he was aware of the socio-political debates about the relationships between men and women in the community. He already reflected on his role as a religious and unofficial political leader. He kne about the situation of Redemption Church in the social, political and racial conte Portland and the situation of African-American churches in the United States in general. He also knew about the role that ritual plays in socializing men and wo according to certain models. The interview I had with the Pastor was a real "suc Because he had the same level of education as myself and because he knew abou anthropology, the Pastor knew the type of responses I expected. Also, because I

level of education similar to his, we spoke the same language. Because we shared same language, I became what Caplan (1992) calls an "honorary male": Despite th fact that I was very young, I could still speak to the Pastor as an equal during the interview.

The formal interview was a very convenient tool for me. I felt more comfortable talking to only one person at a time in a quiet environment, rather tha church, surrounded by groups of people. But I realized that I could not use this to with the women. As mentioned earlier, all the women refused to have an intervie with me, even the women I got closest with. In retrospect, I think that their refusa was partly due to the fact that, because I was in the beginning anxious to get some information as quickly as possible, I asked for interviews with the women too soo My request made them uncomfortable.

Also, during the first few weeks, women would not answer me when I wou ask them some questions in informal situations, generally at the end of the service There were different but related reasons for that. First, the women of Redemption Church were probably uncomfortable with me. Most were not accustomed to foreigners and I was not myself very comfortable. Also, we had not established a of trust good enough for me to be in a position to ask questions. Moreover, most not know about anthropology. Some were probably afraid of talking to a very you person who had a higher education than them. It might be that some of them belie

that I was expecting sophisticated answers; it might be that they were afraid that t
were not able to answer my questions.

Finally, I realized that I could not ask the women the type of questions I as
the Pastor. I had to work on the type of questions I was asking the women.
Obviously, when an ethnographer asks questions, the informant has to reflect on t
everyday practices she does not normally think about. However, I had to realize t
could not ask the women to do the anthropological analysis for me. For example,
instead of asking them questions such "why are there fewer men than women in t
church?," I had to find questions such as, "why was your husband not at church
today?"

Women were uncomfortable with my requests for interviews and with my
weird anthropological questions. I had to learn instead to "follow" the way they
wanted to integrate me into their groups and the way they wanted to talk to me.

In contrast with the prestigious men who regularly asked me questions abo
how my research was going, women never referred to it. The women with whom
established rapport talked to me as a young woman, not as an ethnographer. For
example, they would talk to me about their new dress, ask me where I got my hai
tell me where to find very inexpensive clothes or give me recipes. At the beginni
was rather uncomfortable. I was more at ease with the *formal* conversations I had
the prestigious males, because I did not have to put forth much effort to *adjust* to
way they were talking.

The type of conversations I had with the women were rather destabilizing
me, since we did not share the same background. But I was actually lucky that the
women integrated me into their group. I realized that I had to "play fair." I started
talk to them "as a woman." With Judy, my first informant, we spoke about recipe
losing weight, aerobics and Slim Fast. We would gossip about handsome men at
church and about the ridiculous dress the solo singer wore. Later on, as we becam
closer, she told me about the reasons why she left the church and came back after
several weeks. She said that she had become "lazy" for awhile and explained that
faith made her come back. She would also tell me, for example, about how Africa
Americans were restricted to stores in Albina to find shampoos that fit their hair.
When we became even closer, we talked about her ex-husband, a man who spent
of his nights gambling and drinking. We talked about her life and how she had liv
in Harlem when she was still married. We would talk about her fears for her thirt
year old daughter regarding teen pregnancy, gangs and drugs. She was also anxio
because her daughter wanted to go to the East Coast to live with her father whom
hardly knew. She would tell me about her colleagues from her night job at the po
office, about her boyfriend who she said was unable to make a commitment. We
to the movies together several times where we watched movies made and played b
African-Americans, and movies about the African-American experience.

My three main informants treated me as a woman. Thus, they integrated m
into the community of women, a community in which women support each other.

throughout the world experienced a universal oppression that made them all some similar. This assumption has been criticized during the past fifteen years by femi anthropologists. As Abu-Lughod pointed out, "womanhood is a partial identity" (1995: 347). The similarity of sex does not override the differences of race or cla was similar to the women of the church because, as a woman, I shared with them certain traits, such as a shyness to speak in public or to other people. However, as will see later in more detail, shyness does not characterize all women for some wo of the church had a great ability to speak in public. Also, although as a woman ra in a working class family, I was also oppressed, the nature of my oppression was different. Because I was White, I did not experience the racial oppression they experienced.

Moreover, I had a higher level of education than most of them and I did no share their national and ethnic background. We had very different concerns, opini and styles of conversation. For example, after a few months, I got close to Judy. both liked to go to see movies made by African-Americans or movies made by Wh about the African-American experience. I think we both truly liked going out toge to the movies, but we did not like these movies for the same reasons. We had diff concerns and interests. Judy could identify with the characters. I could not; I ever found the quality of the movies and some of the characters mediocre. Instead, I lik these movies because I enjoyed looking at the treatment that was made of African-American males and females in both types of movies. It was also interesting from

anthropological perspective to see her reactions and to know Judy's opinions abou these movies.

Also, I was rather uncomfortable, at least in the beginning, with the type o "female chat" women were having at church. When they would talk about Africa American hair styles or dresses, I could not fully participate in the conversation. I could only participate as an ethnographer asking questions, not as a woman chatti about women's things. This lag between us attracted my attention to African-American identity and to the role the church plays in the construction of this ident

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND PERSONAL LIFE

Because of my own experience as a woman, my goal centered on knowing women's perspectives. As for my research questions, I became interested in Afric American identity through my conversations and socialization with the women of church. I also became interested in the question of women's power. This interest arose from a constant back and forth movement between the questions raised by th fieldwork and the questions I was having in my personal life. Caplan analyzed "th processes through which knowledge is produced" (1992: 73), and pointed out, "wh we find depends upon the questions which we ask and the angle of vision from wh we approach our material" (1992: 78).

I realized that my research questions arose from my personal interest in ge power relationships. In parallel to my fieldwork, I was having numerous

conversations with my Iranian boyfriend about women's position in Iran. As an anthropology student and as a reader of Virginia Woolf and Simone de Beauvoir, have always been interested in women's position historically and cross-culturally. we shall see, the *interplay* between the conversations and the fieldwork observatio highlighted the power relationships between men and women in the church.

The information my boyfriend gave me about women's position raised sev questions that actually became a part of my main research questions. According t him, many Iranian women do not *feel* that they do not have freedom or that they a oppressed. Most Iranian women do not question the way they live. They do not h the feeling, or they are not aware, of being disempowered. Similarly, most Weste women do not, for example, question the reasons why they wear certain kinds of clothing, such as high heels, or the reasons why they occupy certain positions less frequently than men, such as being engineers. Women cannot question a situation are not aware of.

These statements about Iranian women made me reflect on what it means to have the feeling of being oppressed. Iranian women do not have the feeling of being oppressed; but, according to my own perspective, they are indeed oppressed since they may not have the freedom to leave their houses whenever they want, no they have many opportunities to study or to have a career outside of the household environment. For me, most Iranian women are raised in such a way that they do no

have the desire to have a career or to study; in the same way, most Western women do not have the desire to become engineers.

These different issues about feeling oppressed were vague when I set up my research since I did not have much background about Iran. Yet, they raised in my mind a series of questions about power, domination, consciousness and "false consciousness" that became central to my research. Is one dominated if not conscious of being dominated? Who decides if Iranian women are oppressed or not? Iranian women themselves? Western women? Iranian men? Western men? Anthropologists? I was frustrated because I could not obtain any evidence or answers to my questions. I felt vaguely that none of these "emic" or "etic" perspectives were sufficient but that all had to be taken into consideration.

Moreover, I had obtained my information about Iranian women from a man. This fact made me ask certain questions whose orientation was influenced by on-going discussions with my advisor and other instructors, as well as my readings in feminist anthropology: How does this man know that women do not have the feeling of being oppressed? As a man, he has never been able to participate in women's groups or conversations. In the privacy of their kitchen, what do women talk about while men are away? Also, I was wondering if women did not have a certain form of power. Iranian women have apparently no power in the "public sphere," since they do not usually work outside of the home, but do they exert power? Rosaldo proposed in 1974 the public/private dichotomy as a framework to explain the universal domination of

women. This model has been subsequently criticized by several authors, including Rosaldo herself. Nelson (1974) who examined women and power issues in Middle-Eastern societies argued that the western public/private categories erroneously described Middle-Eastern women as powerless. She demonstrated that women influence men and mediate alliance making. Hence, they have an impact on the so-called "public sphere."

These conversations made me realize that Iranian women's condition was not actually so different from women's situation at church. At the time of these conversations, I was, in my fieldwork, in the process of examining the hierarchical structure of the church. I observed that, as we will see later on, most of the prestigious positions were held by men and that women had apparently no power. I realized that, in both cases, men apparently dominated the "public sphere." I became curious to know how much power women might actually have despite their apparent domination. What were the different levels of power? In what sense are women empowered or disempowered? Why did the church so carefully present men as if they were the only ones who had power?

III- Ritual and Other Activities at Redemption Church

Before going on to consider male and female power relationships at Redemption Church, I would like to present the church, its ritual and other activities. We will see that the ritual of the Sunday service creates many distinctions according to gender. Space and time, but also types of activities and ritualistic gestures, are strongly gendered. Although the service is normally attended by women more than by men, the most visible and prestigious positions are occupied by men. Redemption Church also creates distinctions according to gender during the activities organized outside of the ritual.

The Church and its Members

Redemption Church is a Christian Methodist Episcopal church (C.M.E.) having a membership of approximately four hundred people. The members are almost exclusively Blacks. However, about ten members are White, mostly because they are spouses of Black members. But most of the Whites never come to church; those who come visit only on extremely rare occasions.

The different Black churches of Portland have a reputation or a sense of prestige based on the age of the church, the number of its members and the members' social status. Redemption Church is a fairly large-sized church compared to other churches of Albina, where many churches are not much larger than a tiny chapel. Many of Albina's churches do not actually have a church building; their Sunday Service or their Bible Study groups meet in people's homes or houses converted to church buildings.

Built in the 1950s, Redemption Church is relatively old and prestigious; but the lack of prestige in the job positions of its members makes Redemption Church less prestigious than, for example, Maranatha Church of God, which is located not far away. According to a local plumber, who belonged successively to several churches, Maranatha is a "huge" church. With pride, he stated that many Maranatha members are "judges and doctors" whereas Redemption Church is more simple and has members who are "only employees."

Although fairly old, Redemption Church is recent when compared to the First African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the oldest and most prestigious African-American church in Portland. Formerly called People's church, First African Methodist Church was organized in 1862, and met in the home of a laywoman until 1869 when a building was erected. Redemption Church is also less prestigious, based on the age criteria, than Mount Olivet, the fourth oldest African-American church of Portland, established in 1902. Mount Olivet is probably one of the largest and most

prestigious African-American churches of Portland. Its beautiful, modern building can house about four thousand people and its status allows the ownership of a radio station that broadcasts Sunday Services. Whereas it is extremely rare to see a White in Redemption Church, Mount Olivet's reputation is such that, based on my observations when I visited this church, about ten percent of its regular members are Whites.

Thus, Redemption Church is less prestigious than the three churches that we just mentioned. Yet, because of its size and age, Redemption Church is a fairly well-established and well-known African-American church when compared to Albina's numerous short-lived and tiny sized churches.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Most of Redemption Church's members live in N.E Portland, and within N.E Portland, most members live in the Black neighborhood. A few members live in Beaverton, which is mostly a White middle-class suburb; a few live in Vancouver, Washington, across the Columbia River. One cannot consider Redemption Church as a "neighborhood church" since, even within the Black neighborhood, most people live far away from one another.

According to the Pastor, Redemption Church has approximately four hundred members. To obtain precise information concerning the socio-economic level of the members proved to be difficult. Hence, I am unable to provide statistical data. But, according to the Pastor and my own observations, most members are from the working

class with very few of them having an education above senior high school. Many are unemployed or are threatened with unemployment; most have several of their family members unemployed. According to the Pastor, many of Redemption Church's members have some of their family members involved with drugs or with gangs. My female informants also acknowledged the problems of unemployment, drugs and gangs among Redemption Church's members and their families.

It was also difficult for me to obtain information about family arrangements. However, according to the Pastor, a great number of heads of households are female. At Redemption Church, a majority of women are divorced and raise their children with no man in the house on a regular basis. Many women live with sisters or other female relatives. Several women of the church are raising their grandchildren because the parents are unemployed, in jail, on drugs, too young or too poor to take care of these children.

Observations of my female informants' family arrangements corroborate the Pastor's descriptions. Both Judy and Joanna are divorced and raise their children alone; both are having a long-term relationship with a boyfriend who does not live with them. Judy explained that her ex-husband spent most of his nights out, and that her current boyfriend was unable to make a commitment. Marsha, recently remarried, does not completely live with her husband either. Although she normally goes to her husband's house at night, she spends a great amount of time during weekdays and weekends in her own house which she shares with her sister. When I asked for her

phone number, she gave me both her husband's house and her own house's numbers. Also, her nineteen year old daughter, a college student, lives at her mother's house when she comes back to Portland during school breaks. Since Marsha already experienced in the past several serious arguments with her husband, she considers this arrangement as a warranty for her independence in case they separate.

Diverse observations of other women at Redemption Church suggest that my female informants' family arrangements were not "atypical," and that many women in the church head their households by themselves. According to Judy, about half of the Single's Group members are divorced. Two or three women came to this group's meeting with their children. Also, Judy's best friend at Redemption Church is divorced and raises her two grandchildren by herself. The fact that about ten older women regularly come to church with their grandchildren seems to indicate that they also raise their grandchildren by themselves.

Attendance in Church

Although Redemption Church counts about four hundred members*, not all of them come regularly to church. About one hundred persons are present on the average

* Generally, one becomes a member after attending the service for a period that may vary from a couple of weeks to a few months. At the end of every Sunday service, the Pastor invites people to "join the church." If someone steps forwards, Pastor performs a short ritual that consists mainly of asking the person if he/she believes that Jesus was the son of God and of blessings. Then the stewardesses, and in some cases, the entire congregation, come close to the altar to greet and congratulate the new member. Some discuss their decision of joining the church with the Pastor in advance, others simply step forward when the Pastor invites people to do so. Some become member but attend the service only occasionally; some may stop attending the church after a few months.

Sunday, with the congregation swelling to two hundred or three hundred for important occasions like Easter or the celebration of the church anniversary.

Attendance in church varies greatly with gender. For example, on ordinary Sundays, women make up about seventy percent of the congregation with twenty percent male and female children and only ten percent men. But on very important Sundays such as Easter, the percentage of men may become almost equal to women. Since, during the year, ordinary Sundays outnumber important Sundays, women attend the Sunday service much more than men.

The attendance in church varies also in relation to *both age and gender.* Women over fifty years old represent approximately thirty percent of the church membership, but in terms of attendance, their number varies according to the importance of the Sunday. On ordinary Sundays, the number of older people is great, regardless of gender, and the number of younger women is greater than the number of younger men, as young men are sometimes completely absent. In contrast, on important Sundays, the number of younger people greatly increases.

The importance of the Sunday can be determined by the Christian calendar (i.e. Easter, Christmas, Palm Sunday), but it is also determined by the choir assigned to sing on a particular Sunday. The church has five choirs grouped according to age and gender: a children's choir; a women's choir; a men's choir (called *the Men of Prayer*); a mixed choir of younger adults in their thirties, and a seniors' choir. Each choir is assigned to sing on a certain Sunday. For example, the men's choir sings the first

Sunday of each month and the children sing the second Sunday of each month. When the men's choir sings, the number of people present in the church and the *number of men* are far greater than when other choirs sing. A Sunday when the men sing can be considered an important Sunday because of the increased number of people and the festive atmosphere that prevails. This festivity originates from different factors: the number of singers in the men's choir is greater; the men have commanding voices and an extraordinary presence. Moreover, thanks to the greater number of people present, the assembly is more likely to start clapping hands and singing along than on other Sundays when the crowd is smaller and the excitement diminished. Actually, one can say that the women's choir is as sophisticated and as beautiful as the men's, but it attracts fewer people and thus generates less excitement. As we shall see later in more detail, the men's choir is the one that "represents" the church. For example, the men sing when a sister church is invited to worship or when the church travels to another church to worship; they also sing on important Sundays such as Easter or Palm Sunday, even if the date breaks up the normal assignment calendar for the choirs. Thus, the church members take greater pride in the men's choir. When the men sing, it produces more excitement among the congregants; in turn, the male singers are very persevering during rehearsals and are very proud of their choir. Could this also mean that their participation in the choir incites the men to take greater pride in their church?

One also observes that when the children's choir sings, the number of people is smaller than on other Sundays. While the number of women drops only slightly, the

number of men drops dramatically; on several such occasions, there were fewer than ten men present in church. One could therefore call the Sunday when the children sing an ordinary Sunday. However, I would like to emphasize the fact that the term "important" needs discussion. What I call an "important" Sunday is certainly, *according to the men*, more "important" than ordinary Sundays since most do not come to church on these occasions. But "ordinary" Sundays are actually considered "important" by women.

THE RITUAL

General Overview: African Clothes, Music and Emotions

The first time I went to Redemption Church, I was surprised by the movements and emotions that prevailed in the church. Nearly half of the congregants were wearing African style clothes, although I later realized that this number was so great because it was February, the month of celebration of African-American History. During the rest of the year, although many people wear an African accessories such as jewelry, hats or scarves, only a few members wear complete African costumes. In February, a large number of men wear African costumes. Yet, during the rest of the year, no more than two or three men wear African style clothing or accessories; in contrast, about twenty or thirty females regularly wear this type of clothing or accessories.

Those who did not wear African style clothes wore "Sunday clothes." Most men wore black suits; most women wore long dresses and hats. Older women were even more dressed up than younger women: most wore sophisticated hats which matched their dresses. The few male teenagers who were present at church were the only members who were not dressed up. Although some of them (mostly members of the choir) wore black suits, the few male teenagers who were present wore Nike tracksuits and tennis shoes that sharply contrasted with the dressed up clothing of the other members, as if to show, along with their unconcerned and bored looks, even when the entire church was clapping hands or dancing, that they did not belong to this ritual.

My friend and I had arrived a few minutes early. Groups of people were scattered around, talking informally in the aisles, close to the altar, and in the foyer. Children were playing and running between the groups of adults. Suddenly, on one gesture from the main usher, everything became formally organized: everybody took their seats and became quiet; the four ushers, dressed in black uniforms and white gloves, took their formal position, the "Men of Prayer" (the men's choir) gathered at the back of the church. After a short period of silence, which underlined that a formal period of time was starting, the Men of Prayer, wearing black suits and stoles made of orange and yellow African style material, started to sing the "Negro National Anthem." Later on, I realized that this was one of Redemption Church's favorites: most Sunday services start with this very inspirational song, especially in February, the

month of national celebration of African-American history. As the choir began to sing accompanied by the three musicians, the Pastor and his assistants came and sat behind the altar. Following two young children dressed in white who carried a candle in a golden holder, the Men of Prayer started towards the altar, marching in tempo to very rhythmic and dynamic music. They had powerful voices and such an extraordinary presence that after a few seconds, most congregants were already singing along and clapping hands; some started to dance.

Halfway to the altar, the choir and the musicians stopped and the Pastor's assistant gave the "Call to Worship" while the children lighted the two candles located on each side of the altar. Then the men started to sing again and marched to the raised platform behind the altar, thereby dominating the assembly. Once the song was finished, the assembly enthusiastically applauded. People became suddenly quiet and the Pastor gave the "Prayer of Consecration."

Like all first Sundays of the month when the men sing, the church was truly crowded. What struck me the first time I went to this church was the emotional flow throughout the service that was sustained by the music and the songs. Quiet and formal periods of meditation followed periods full of songs and dances; there were periods when some people cried from emotion, when the assembly was called to go to pray collectively at the altar; there were also informal periods when people would laugh at the Pastor's jokes. "Relaxed" periods were followed by periods of tense formality. For example, the introductory song during which people sang, danced and

clapped hands was followed by a rather formal period of the service, the "Prayer of Consecration" and the "Affirmation of Faith" during which people kept very quiet and the ushers did not let late people come in. This period was followed by an informal one when the Pastor welcomed the visitors. Then, the choir sang two or three songs in a row. After this period of dance and great excitement in which the soloists were applauded, the assembly became suddenly quiet and the Pastor started his sermon.

Dressed in an African costume, handsome and elegant, the Pastor had a commanding presence. He started his sermon by the reading of a few verses taken from the *Exodus*, one of the favorite parts of the Bible in Redemption Church. His tone of voice was at the beginning very serious and calm; the congregation listened very quietly. Gradually, his tone became urgent, and his already powerful voice started to amplify. The Pastor started to break the quietness of the congregation by calling on them and by telling jokes. He started to use his body more and more: he was not only making many gestures, but he was also pantomiming what he was saying, sometimes to communicate what he was saying more efficiently or sometimes to make the congregants laugh. Little by little, people started to communicate with him, shouting "Amen!" or "Praise the Lord!" or, as if impatient to hear him, "Preach!" Some would repeat some of the Pastor's sentences. Sometimes, some people were able to finish some of the Pastor's sentences, having heard them often enough to know them by heart. At other moments, the Pastor would ask the assembly to repeat some of his sentences several times. The tone and the voice of the Pastor intensified and

quickened till it became, at the apogee of the sermon, a very specific way of talking: between singing and speaking. The Pastor's body movements were then at the most exuberant. The participation of the assembly was also at its height with people shouting "Praise the Lord!," nodding their heads or raising their hands to show their approval. Then, this dramatic emotion fell, the piano started to play slow and quiet music and the Pastor began to speak very softly.

After the sermon, members were called to pray at the altar. I was surprised to see that there was a specific order in which people went to the altar. First, the deacons (the men in charge of the financial management of the church) came to pray, followed by all the men of the church. Then, the stewardesses (the "spiritual guardians" of the church) and finally women and teenagers (the children did not participate). This observation attracted my attention to gender divisions and spatial arrangements during the service.

Organization of Time and Space: Visibility and Prestige

During the ritual, prestigious people (Pastor, preachers, deacons and stewardesses) and the assembly do not occupy the space in a random fashion. There are spaces within the church that are more sacred than others. The amount of prestige ascribed to a space varies with its visibility; with the prestige of the person who enters it; with the type of activity that takes place; and with the restriction of access to this space. Generally, the more the space is visible and/or restricted to certain persons, the

more sacred and prestigious it is. But, besides visibility and restriction of access, other factors such as ushers' position and music delimit and emphasize the degree of sacredness of a space, as well as the degree of prestige of the person who penetrates this space.

One observes that generally men are more visible and prestigious than women. But, as we shall see when we look at the usage of space by ushers, deacons, stewardesses, choir, and preachers, a simple hierarchy according to the categories male/female, prestigious/non prestigious, visible/non-visible would be an oversimplification of the ritual. These different categories overlap one another and evolve throughout the ritual.

The role of the usher is, first, to welcome people coming to church; it is also to "organize" the service and make sure that nobody disturbs the service, especially during the most formal moments of the service. Redemption Church has about twenty ushers, but this number fluctuates a lot. The ushers are divided into four "boards" of four or five ushers. There is a children's board (the children are always assisted by one or two adults during service); a men's board (because there are not enough men, one or two women always work with them); a women's board and an older women's board. Only one board works each Sunday. The four boards are supervised by a (male) head usher.

The ushers wear black uniforms (black skirt and jacket and white shirt for females; black suit and white shirt for males) and white gloves. They also wear a

golden badge which indicates their name and title. The task of the head usher, who wears a bigger badge than the other ushers and who is present at every service, is to supervise the service and the other ushers. He signals the beginning of the service and gives messages to the Pastor during the service if necessary. He stands throughout the service in front of the exit door located to the left of the altar. Thus, his visibility is very high.

The first task of the other ushers is to hand out programs of the service to people as they enter. The covers of these programs vary, but normally include a picture that refers to African-American history and society: political or religious leaders such as Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, James W. Johnson (author of the Negro National Anthem) and Joseph Cinque; a picture of an African bare-foot on a dried-out land; a Black male teenager alone on a basketball court with a citation from the Bible: "I am not alone because the Father is with me"; a group of African-American children; a Black woman holding a child with the citation: "her children arise up and call her blessed"; the wedding of a black couple, etc. Generally, the frame of these pictures is decorated with African style designs. These weekly programs indicate the name of the Pastor and preachers, and the order of different prayers, verses of the Bible and songs that comprise the service. They also give the dates of meetings of the boards of ushers, deacons and stewardesses, as well as dates of choir rehearsals and miscellaneous activities outside the ritual. The ushers also distribute with these programs diverse leaflets written by other organizations which consist mainly of

various announcements such as meetings about African-American medical problems; free medical check ups; shows or concerts related to the African-American experience; political meetings for the improvement of the neighborhood, or for the increase of the minimum wages, etc.

After the service begins, two or three ushers sit on a pew reserved for them at the back of the church. These ushers make sure that nobody disturbs the service; ask children to keep quiet; assist people who need to leave; ask late people to stay in the lobby until the time they are allowed to come in; or indicate to people as they are entering which seats are available. During the first half of the service and during the sermon, two other ushers stand exactly at the center of the church, facing the altar. In contrast with Maranatha Church, where the ushers are very mobile and serve to cheer up the congregation especially during the songs and to shout phrases such as "Amen!" during the sermon, at Redemption Church, the ushers keep purposely very still, hands crossed behind their back. They take this formal posture only during the first half of the ritual and the sermon, as if to underline the "sacred" characteristic of this period of time. Once the first prayers have been said, upon a gesture from the main usher, the ushers who sit at the back let people who came late come inside. Announcements of the activities organized outside of the ritual are then made by a church member. During these announcements, the ushers who stand at the center of the church break their formal posture and go to sit at the back, as if to indicate that this is a less "sacred" time. They then come back to their formal position when the Pastor or the preacher

starts to speak again. Hence, the ushers' formal posture underlines the degree of sacredness of specific periods of the ritual; their position also emphasizes the importance or the prestige of the activity taking place at the altar. Thus, the ushers represent *an element of organization of time and space*. They delimit a hierarchy of time and space, the front of the church being more "important" and prestigious than the back, certain times being more important and formal than others.

Contrary to the deacons and the stewardesses who are chosen by the Pastor, the ushers are chosen, independently from the Pastor, by the boards of ushers, under the direction of the main usher. According to the Pastor and his main preacher (his assistant), to be an usher is the easiest responsibility in the church, a responsibility which does not require a large number of years of membership in the church or a lot of training. Ushers have less prestige than deacons or stewardesses. Moreover, even though the ushers are essential to the ritual, their high visibility during the ritual emphasizes and creates the prestige of the persons who enter the altar area, rather than procuring prestige for the ushers themselves.

The treatment of altar space clearly demarcates divisions between preachers, the Pastor, and the congregation. The space surrounding the altar, slightly raised compared to the rest of the church, is the most visible, the most restricted in access and thus, the most prestigious. Only the Pastor and the preachers routinely occupy this space, separated from the rest of the church by a wooden barrier and a two-step stairway. The role of the preachers during the ritual is to give the introductory "Call to

Worship," then the first two prayers ("Prayer of Consecration" and "Affirmation of Faith"); occasionally, they also give the sermon. Only one of the preachers works each Sunday. Generally, the preachers serve during the first part of the service (about one hour), then the announcements mentioned above make the transition to the second part of the ritual when the Pastor starts to speak. But occasionally, the Pastor takes care of most of service.

The altar area is itself divided in spaces which do not have the same degree of accessibility. The left (from the congregation's perspective) area of this space is restricted to the Pastor. The preachers are restricted to the right area, even when they say the prayers. They can enter the Pastor's area only when they give the sermon. Also, there is one pulpit in each area; the Pastor's pulpit is bigger than the preachers'. When they are not speaking, the Pastor and the preachers sit in wooden armchairs, and the Pastor's armchair is bigger than the preachers'. When the Pastor is sitting, when for example the preacher is speaking, he is slightly hidden by his pulpit; thus, when he is sitting, he is not very visible, or at least, not from every pew.

The prestigious or sacred spaces can become more profane during the ritual according to the activity taking place and according to the person penetrating this space. The only person, besides the Pastor and preachers, who can penetrate the space of the altar is the woman in charge of the announcements, but this woman can go only in the right side of the altar and uses exclusively the small pulpit. Thus, the space of the altar is indeed penetrated by people without prestige (although the person in charge

of the announcements is more prestigious than women without responsibilities or without visibility in the church). However, as indicated above, these announcements are made during a "profane" time of the ritual, when the tense formality is slackened: late people can come in, making noise while the announcer is speaking; the ushers break their formal position; the Pastor tells jokes; the ushers do not make sure that the congregants keep quiet. Thus, this woman penetrates the space of the altar at a time when it loses its prestigious and sacred formality. It is interesting to note that the utilization of space has evolved: the second year that I attended the church, a smaller pulpit and a microphone were installed at the foot of the altar, outside of the wooden barrier of the altar area, to be used by the announcer. Thus, now, nobody is allowed in the altar area except the Pastor and the preachers.

It is also interesting to note that the activity of the preachers has evolved. The first year I attended Redemption Church, two out of seven preachers were females. One of the female preachers, Sister* Goode, used to preach fairly often (once or twice a month). Brother Nelson, who is now the main preacher, used to preach more rarely. But he started, throughout the months to preach more and more often, till he replaced her completely the second year I was in the church. It is important to note that, during the period when Sister Goode used to preach often, she did so only on "ordinary" Sundays, whereas Brother Nelson would preach on Sundays when the Men of Prayers were singing. Also, although the Pastor normally gives the sermon, there were several

* In C.M.E denominations, all members, including regular members, call each other by "Sister" or "Brother."

occasions that Sister Goode gave it, but only on Sundays when the children's choir sang; as we have seen earlier, when the children sang, the great majority of attendees women. One Sunday, Sister Goode took charge of the entire service. But this was on a Sunday when Redemption Church had been invited by a sister church to worship. Thus, only about twenty people were attending the service at Redemption Church on that day, and most of them were elders who did not want to travel. Also, the women's choir (more than half of the singers had gone to the sister church) was assigned to sing at Redemption Church, while the Men of Prayer were singing at the sister church. Thus, although Sister Goode used to preach more than Brother Nelson, she would preach on less important Sundays. The last few months I attended the church, the two female preachers did not work anymore (Sister Goode had apparently retired and the second female preacher, very young, had been promoted by the C.M.E. church to work in another church).

Besides the altar area, the rest of the church is also divided in several zones which are more or less restricted and prestigious. There are three sections of pews. The first three rows of the central section are reserved for the stewardesses. Dressed in white dresses and berets (white in the summer and black in the winter) and chosen by the Pastor, they are the "spiritual guardians" of the church. This responsibility is strictly reserved for the females. Redemption Church has about fifteen stewardesses, all of whom are over fifty years old.

To the left of the altar, there are two short rows of pews, located perpendicularly to the other pews, which are reserved for the deacons. Dressed in regular black suits, the deacons are in charge of the financial management of the church. The deacons face the musicians, located to the right of the altar. Thus, in terms of visibility, the deacons, the stewardesses and the musicians all sit the closest to the prestigious altar, where they are all highly visible. However, the stewardesses are less visible than the deacons and the musicians, since people sitting behind them obstruct their visibility, whereas the deacons and the musicians, located almost next to the altar, are visible from any point in the church. Nevertheless, the white uniform of the stewardesses makes them extremely visible compared to the deacons, who do not have any distinctive sign or uniform. Also, although there are equal numbers of deacons and stewardesses, the deacons attend the service less regularly than the stewardesses. The attendance of the deacons varies with the importance of the Sunday: normally, all of them attend the church when, for example, the Men of Prayer sing, or for Easter. Hence, on important Sundays, all grouped in this very visible place, the deacons stand out in the church. In contrast, on ordinary Sundays, it is not unusual for only a couple of deacons to attend the service, and, on such Sundays, having no distinctive sign, the deacons look like "regular" congregants, despise the special localization of their pews. Therefore, the stewardesses become much more visible and distinct than the deacons on Sundays which are considered as less important. At the same time that the attendance and the absence of the men (in the

choir, among the congregants, the preachers, or the deacons) determines the prestige of the service, the prestige of the service determines the attendance or the absence of the men.

It is interesting to compare the roles that deacons and stewardesses play as well as how their visibility evolves during the ritual for, as we will see later, the deacons and the stewardesses are part of the models of masculinity and femininity shaped by Redemption Church's ritual. Stewardesses play several roles during the ritual. Whereas ushers take the first collection, stewardesses take the second collection. The first collection is used for the management of the church and the Pastor's wage, while the money gathered at the second collection is used to support church members financially in case of the death of one of their relatives, unemployment or sickness. In contrast to the first collection, the amount gathered by the stewardesses is not announced publicly. Although I was not able to obtain precise information, it seems that the amount gathered by the ushers is much larger than that gathered by the stewardesses. Although the stewardesses are officially in charge of deciding how the money they gather is going to be spent, according to Brother Nelson, it is actually the Pastor who makes the decision.

When the stewardesses take this collection, they are obviously very visible, but it is interesting that nothing is done during the ritual that attracts the members' attention to them. During the second collection the choir sings two or three songs in a row, and soloists show their talents. In contrast to the songs sung at other times of the

ritual, which are intended to make the assembly participate, these songs are intended to be listened to and admired for their artistic quality. The congregants may sing along, but as if they were at a concert. Thus, the attention is completely turned towards the singers rather than the stewardesses. Once the money is collected, the choir stops singing. Some deacons (from two on ordinary Sundays, to four or five on important Sundays) gather in front of the altar. The assembly becomes completely quiet. Because of this silence, the attention is completely focused on the deacons. The stewardesses hand the deacons the collection baskets and go back to their seats. Then, the musicians suddenly start to play triumphant music while the deacons hold the baskets towards even. Once the Pastor has blessed the money, the deacons go to the Pastor's office to count the money.

Thus, while the stewardesses are quite visible during the collection, the deacons are even more visible. While nothing (music or ushers) focuses the attention on the stewardesses, the usage of music and silence and the presence of the Pastor giving the blessing do focus attention on the deacons' ritualistic gesture. Yet, it would be simplistic to think that the stewardesses are hierarchically inferior or less important than the deacons, for the situation is actually more complex. Although the deacons are given more importance and visibility during the collection, there are other ritualistic gestures that focus attention on the stewardess roles. For example, during baptism, an extremely important ritual in Christianity whose importance is underlined at Redemption Church by the use of music, the formal position of the usher and the tense

atmosphere, it is a stewardess who holds the child. However, it is the Pastor who makes the "active" gesture and says the sentences which baptize and bless the child, while the stewardess is "passive" and simply holds the child. But, once again, it would be a simplistic interpretation to say that the stewardess is "passive": by holding the child, the stewardess becomes his godmother who spiritually guides him throughout his childhood. As we will see later in more detail, any analysis should take into consideration the point of view of the person being observed. The church members are Christian: a gesture which seems to be of little "importance" or "passive" may be actually extremely important for believers.

Moreover, the deacons also do not participate in the preparation of the Holy Communion, which is celebrated in C.M.E churches once a month. It is the stewardesses who set the table at the foot of the altar with small glasses of wine and small pieces of bread. While doing that, they are obviously very visible. Once the table is set, the stewardesses step back, the Pastor blesses the wine and bread, and the members start to take Communion. The stewardesses stay around the table, making sure there is enough bread and wine, while the Pastor keeps saying blessings. Thus, the stewardesses are "passive" while the Pastor says the "active" ritualistic sentence. But, again, the stewardesses undertake a role during an important ritual of the Christian service while the deacons are completely absent.

In many respects what the stewardesses do during the ritual reflects what women are supposed to do in ordinary life: they set the table and they take care of the

children. In the same way, the deacons do what the men are supposed to do in ordinary life: they manage the money. In the church, neither of these responsibilities is given more importance than the other, or at least, (before we analyze this issue more thoroughly), neither of these responsibilities is more difficult to access than the other. To become a deacon or a stewardess is more difficult than to become an usher. In contrast with the ushers, deacons and stewardesses are chosen by the Pastor. Normally, one can get chosen only after a certain number of years of membership in the church and a certain amount of involvement in church activities. It would be improper for a person who has not come to church often enough to master the ritual and the Bible to ask for such a position. To be a deacon or stewardess reflects this mastery and this knowledge. During his interview, the Pastor emphasized that there is no requirement in terms of age to be chosen. The fact that most deacons and stewardesses are above fifty only reflects the church's difficulty in recruiting younger people.

The spatial organization of the congregation suggests further divisions according to gender, age and length of church membership. In contrast to the deacons and the stewardesses, they are no formal rules regarding the seating arrangements for the congregation. Yet, the seating arrangements are not completely random. One observes trends that vary with age and gender. The most distinctive trend is the fact that older women (over sixty) who have been in the church for several years almost all sit behind the stewardesses, occupying three or four rows. The five or six first rows

are therefore occupied by the stewardesses in uniforms and the older women dressed up in long dresses and sophisticated hats. Thus, whatever the "importance" of the Sunday, the older women are extremely visible because of their number; their spatial centrality in the church; the fact that they are gathered in a group; and their clothing.

As for the rest of the assembly, it seems that the single males and some of the married men have a tendency to sit together. Also, the women, married, single or divorced have the tendency to sit together. But these are only tendencies which are insufficient to define a clear-cut separation between men and women. Also, the teenagers generally sit at the back of the church, separate from their families. It is interesting to note that often, when the weather is good, a group of from two to six men stand and talk outside on the entrance porch. They sometimes stay out during the first half of the service or during part of the sermon, and on several occasions a couple of men stayed out during almost the entire service.

We also note that there a large number of children at Redemption Church; many women have one or more children and several older women come with their grandchildren. During the service, women take care of the children, whether they are their own children or not. For example, one woman might take a friend's child on her lap while her own child sits on another woman's lap.

Finally, it seems that the longer people have been members of the church and the more they are involved in the church, the closer they sit to the altar, whatever their gender and age. In contrast, people who are not "well-established," such as people

who rarely come to church, people who are new to the church, people who are not very involved in the church activities, or male teenagers, have a tendency to sit at the back. Once again, these are only tendencies, but these tendencies are strong enough that there are implicit rules of seating arrangements. It would be, for example, very incongruous for a person new to the church or without responsibilities, or myself, to sit in the first rows among the "well-established" people. Thus, the prestige or the recognition obtained by certain people is indicated by their high visibility, the centrality of their spatial position in the church, and their proximity to the altar. Being restricted through implicit rules, the seats located at the front of the church convey that people who use them are well-established members; at the same time, these seats offer people who use them a sense of prestige.

The choir is also highly visible. It is the choir, marching down the central aisle, that starts the ritual. The choir sings throughout the service on a platform raised above the church floor and the altar area. The choir is essential to the ritual: it enhances the emotional flow and marks the transitions between the emotional components and the contemplative components of the ritual. As we saw earlier, the choir also focuses attention on certain persons, such as the deacons when they raise the money collection towards the sky. Hence, the choir has also a role similar to the ushers in emphasizing certain aspects of the ritual and in making certain persons more visible than others.

Most of the choir's songs refer to African-American history (slavery, resistance through Faith, political resistance, desire for freedom, etc.). This music is central, as we will see, to the construction of a sense of community and of an African-American identity. Singers have great prestige in the church and, to underline the importance of the choir in the church, there is at the back of the church a plaque commemorating past singers.

In contrast to the challenge of being selected by the Pastor as a deacon or stewardess, it is not very difficult to become a member of the choir. Some of the singers enjoy greater prestige than others. In some of the choirs, it seems that there is an implicit rule that each singer will have an opportunity during the year to perform at least one solo. In the men's choir, however, it is always the same three or four singers who sing solos. These male soloists are like "stars" in the church; the assembly becomes very enthusiastic and applauds them as soon as they take the microphone.

As mentioned earlier, the men's choir "represents" the church and sings for any special event or on important Sundays. On one occasion, Redemption Church had invited for its anniversary commemoration day a choir from San Francisco of about eighty singers, four times as many as the Men of Prayer. Half of the service consisted of music performed by the San Francisco choir and the local choir. The two choirs, who sang in turns, were almost openly competing with each other. For example, when the Men of Prayer were about to sing, the Pastor would say something like "make us

proud of you and our church" and, while they were singing, he would look at them in a satisfied and admiring manner.

Each choir is accompanied by two or three musicians (a drummer, a pianist and, occasionally, a guitarist). In the past, each choir has its own musicians but this arrangement has changed over time. The first year I attended this church, Marsha was the pianist for the children's choir only, while the musicians for the Men of Prayer were all males. In the ensuing months, as we will see later, Marsha "negotiated" to become the pianist for all five choirs of the church, the men's choir included.

The end of the ritual brings with it somewhat of a reversal in terms of prestigious spaces. As soon as Pastor has said the last prayer and blessing, he goes to the back of the church where he formally greets people as they are leaving. Meanwhile, other people begin to form conversational groups inside the church that are generally divided by gender. The stewardesses stay at the front of the church where some of the female church members come to greet and talk with them. The Pastor's wife always stands near the stewardesses and greets the women and the stewardesses. In parallel, groups of men and deacons start to form at the back of the church or outside if the weather is good. Once people who want to leave immediately are gone, the Pastor joins the groups of the remaining men and deacons. The communication styles are rather different when one compares the groups of males and the groups of females. The groups of females are more "informal"; rather, the women are more mobile than the men and are more likely to go from one group to another.

Also, since the children play around the women, there are a lot more "movements" among the women than among the men.

During the ritual, the front of the church, with the altar reserved for prestigious men, was marked by a high degree of formality and prestige; the back of the church was less formal and prestigious (the back of the church is where not so well-established members sit, while the lobby is where people stand when they arrive late, ushers may rest, and the women take noisy children). In contrast, at the end of the ritual, the back of the church becomes the space where the Pastor greets people, at a specific location, in a pre-set way and where male members and prestigious men gather near the Pastor; the front of the church becomes the women and the children's area. But this does not mean that women such as the stewardesses and the Pastor's wife do not have a form of prestige: people would not go to greet them if they did not have prestige. As we will see later, men and women simply acquire different types of prestige.

Although there is a very clear pattern according to which men tend to remain at the back and women at the front, some people join groups of the opposite sex. Yet one notices that it is rare for the stewardesses or the Pastor's wife to go and talk to the men, since they normally stay in front of the church so that people can come and greet them. Women who mix with the men's groups normally talk to smaller groups of two or three men to remind them of a meeting date or of a church-related task to be done. Similarly, the men mix with a women's group only when the group is very small and

generally, they interact for a rather short period of time. However, younger people tend to mix with the groups of the opposite sex more often and for longer periods than older people.

To conclude this section, we have noted divisions of time and space during the ritual according to gender. Apparently, women are given less importance during the ritual. First, the women's participation in the service is less visible than the men's; when the women are visible, there are ways in which music and ushers focus the attention on what the men do rather than on what the women do. Second, the ritualistic gestures made by the women are more "passive" than those made by men. Also, although some women do hold prestigious positions such as preachers, they preach only on Sundays which are less "important." Similarly, some women (the announcer) do speak publicly and enter the restricted altar area, but they do so only at moments of the ritual which are less formal. Thus, even if women are extremely visible (stewardesses' spatial centrality), it seems that the ritual conveys that the women's activities are less important.

These observations might lead to the conclusion that the men acquire more prestige than the women during the ritual and that the women are "dominated." But one can ask, what is meant by "dominated"? Are the women really dominated? Do women also exert some type of power? Before answering these questions, we must describe the different activities organized by the church outside of the Sunday service, once again contrasting women's activities and responsibilities with men's.

ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE RITUAL

In this section, we will contrast men and women's activities outside of the ritual. We will observe that, similarly to the ritual, the diverse activities organized by the church are strongly gendered. Women's activities are generally centered on education and children, while men are in charge of the financial management of the church, in collaboration with the Pastor. Also, when a woman is in charge of an activity whose goals are similar to an activity organized by the Pastor, the manners in which this activity is directed as well as the conversational styles are very different. Finally, we see that the activities organized by and for women largely outnumber those organized by and for men. Therefore, outside of the ritual, women have more opportunities than men to socialize together and perform responsibilities. Finally, we will see that activities performed within the ritual mirror those performed outside of the ritual. They also mirror the roles that men and women are expected to play outside the church.

Sunday School and Bible Study

Sunday School was held in the church and, in part, in the basement of the church, before the Sunday service. Bible Study was also held in the church but on a week-day and in the evening. Although both Sunday School and Bible Study centered around readings and discussion of the Bible, they differed in several ways. Whereas

Bible Study was directed by the Pastor and attended by both men and women, with men in the majority, Sunday School was directed by a woman and attended exclusively by women and children. The Sunday School seemed more "well-established" and better attended than the Bible Study which generally attracted only about ten participants. In fact, by the second year that I attended the church, the Bible Study had been abandoned for reasons that I was not aware of. Also, while the Bible Study participants varied from one week to another, it was always approximately the same twenty women who participated in the Sunday School, including five women who were stewardesses. As we shall see, a few months after the Bible study was abandoned, a laywoman, Joanna, started a Bible study that was very different from the Pastor's.

The Bible Study and the Sunday School also differed in terms of their organization and "atmosphere." The Bible Study was fairly formally structured and organized by the Pastor. After opening the Bible Study with a general lecture on the topic to be discussed, the Pastor asked each participant to read a few verses in the Bible, one after the other, in the order in which they were sitting. Each person was asked to comment on the verses read; after which the Pastor gave extra information and explanation on the person's comments.

The first part of the Sunday School, in which about a dozen children from six to twelve years old participated, was also fairly formally organized. After a common prayer which included both the women and the children, the Sunday School director,

Emma, asked the children to recite the passage of the Bible or the prayer that they were supposed to memorize during the week. Generally, the children did not like this session since most of them had not actually learn anything by heart, and since Emma sometimes scolded them. Some of them, especially the boys who were almost in their teens, looked rather bored or even rebellious. The children then took a collection from both the children and adults, while Emma reminded them of how good it was to support their church. After this short session, the children were asked to go to the basement of the church where a younger woman (twice a month, the fifteen year old daughter of the Pastor) organized some activities for them. The way the children ran happily downstairs seemed to indicate that they far preferred the activities taking place in the basement to those shared with the women.

After the children left, before going on with their own activities, the women chatted informally for a few minutes. In contrast with the Bible Study, the second part of the Sunday School was fairly informal. Emma began by reading from the manual that she used for her "teaching," a manual published by the C.M.E denomination that gathered together prayers, songs, passages from the Bible, and short comments on the Bible. The manual was used to open up the discussion; it was not closely followed. While Emma was reading, she would stop from time to time, asking the women their opinion of the passage. Unlike the Bible Study, where people generally spoke only when asked by the Pastor, the women participating in the Sunday School interjected

freely, without specific order. Sometimes they even interrupted Emma's reading without being asked any question.

Not only was the atmosphere a lot less rigidly directed and structured, but the themes of discussion were also very different. Whereas the Bible Study's discussions were fairly abstract, the Sunday School's discussions were closely related to everyday life. The Bible Study consisted of comments on the Bible without many references to daily life or to one's personal life, but it seemed that the Sunday School was an occasion for the women to talk about their own experience. Unlike the Sunday School where the participants varied from week one to another, it was always the same women who went to Sunday School. Hence, there was more familiarity among the women than among the Bible Study's participants. Also, because they all knew each other, the women were more likely to talk about personal matters. For example, women would talk about the role of their Faith when confronted with problems such as poverty or children's education. Once, they talked about how God and Jesus could give alcoholics the strength to fight against their desire to drink. From this, they started to talk more generally about the importance of Jesus in their lives and how He gave them strength.

A few months after the Bible Study stopped, Joanna started a "Bible Study" that was very similar to the Sunday School in terms of its types of discussions and organization. Joanna's Bible Study did not take place at church but at her own house, and it is not announced in the church's program. Hence, people were aware of it only

by word of mouth, and the seven or nine people who participated each Sunday afternoon were mostly Joanna's friends. Thus, rather than a "lecture" on the Bible, this Bible Study was rather a very informal discussion shared among friends. Joanna neither "directed" the discussion or asked questions, but served as a facilitator. Since she did not speak much more than the others, she was actually more a hostess welcoming people to her home than a facilitator. The discussions in this group originated from the reading of a manual called "How Much Money is Enough?"

The Single's Group

The church also organized a single's group which had about twenty people (only two males) in their mid-twenties and mid-thirties. Headed by a woman, about half of the participants in this group were divorced with children, but only a couple of them bring occasionally their children at the group's meetings. The group met about once a month in one participant's home and participants took turn hosting this meeting, which involved preparing snacks for the group. I participated in this group only once, invited by Judy, when it was her turn to be hostess. I helped her to prepare the snacks and do the last cleaning of the living room and kitchen before the guests arrived. Very nervous, because it was the first time that she was the hostess, Joanna was cleaning everything compulsively. A bit cynical, she told me in substance that "the only reason why these people come to your house is to check what your house looks like, and see if you have nice decorations or if you dust your furniture."

Because the guests had come in car-pools, they all arrived exactly at the appointed time, and they did not get a chance to talk informally once they arrived at Judy's home. Almost immediately after the twenty guests arrived, the food was blessed. and rapidly consumed. Then, the guests took their seats, arranged in a circle, in the living room. One of the women said a prayer. Then, Linda, the woman in charge of the group, started to talk about future activities. The biggest "event" was their annual two-day trip to the beach. Linda gave details concerning accommodation, transportation and price, and then talked about the next lunch that would be offered, after the Sunday service, in the basement of the church. She asked each person, in the order in which people were seated, what food and drink they would contribute. Then she mentioned that they needed to support senior citizens and the poor; and she mentioned several activities that they should undertake. The meeting ended with a song and a prayer. After this prayer, people started to talk informally but, after a couple of minutes, some people started to leave. About ten minutes later, everybody was gone. Altogether, the meeting had not lasted more than an hour and a half.

Other Activities and Responsibilities

Women are in charge of the decoration of the church: they arrange new flowers, sew the table cloths of the Holy Communion table, and make banners and posters. They also make special decorations for specific events. For example, for the celebration of the church's anniversary, a group of five women made, several weeks in

advance, special table cloths and special covers for the pulpits. The money raised at the Sunday School collection is used for the decorations.

The women also undertake the diverse secretarial tasks of the church. A (female) secretary has office hours; she answers the phone, takes care of the Pastor's calendar, and all of the paperwork. Women are also in charge of putting together the church's program and bulletin.

Redemption Church regularly organizes lunches after the Sunday service, in the basement of the church. Although one or two young men might help, the women normally undertake most of the responsibilities during these lunches. Normally, about ten women cook one or two dishes at home. At church, they set the dishes on a large table in the basement and serve the congregants who wait on line and eat their food at tables.

The lunches served by women are always given for free. However, on some occasions, the church sells sandwiches or snacks for profit. On such occasions, no tables are prepared in advance, and people eat their sandwiches standing up. Interestingly, although the sandwiches or snacks are still prepared by women, they are served by (young) males who also take care of the cash box.

Once a year, the women organize a weekend retreat. Unfortunately, I was not able to participate in this retreat. According to my informants, it is a week-end in the Portland area where the women have an opportunity to pray together and share their experience and concerns. Most of the women who participate in this retreat are the

ones who also participate in the Sunday School. Apparently, the retreat attracts older women more than younger.

The women also participate in many other activities that are not formally organized by the church. As mentioned earlier, the women talk and chat before and after the service; during the service, they take care of each other's children. The church creates many informal groups of friends who socialize outside the church, going together to movies, concerts or conferences. Some share lunch for Easter. Younger women go to dance clubs or eat out together. These groups of friends support each other both emotionally and practically: they call one another, take care of each other's children, or exchange clothes.

Consequently, the women participate in many activities both within and outside of the church that are organized for and by women. These activities give the women the opportunity not only to socialize but also to have responsibilities. In contrast, one notices that, besides the deacons who help the Pastor to manage the church financially, the men of the church have few specific responsibilities or activities. The men's choir is the only men's activity which gives the men who sing the opportunity to socialize before and after the weekly rehearsal. Other men have no church-related activities outside the ritual. As we shall see, one of the church's main difficulties is in attracting men to the church and getting them to participate in activities besides singing or music related ones. Also, in contrast with the women who socialize together outside of the church activities, the men socialize with one another

only before and after the Sunday service. The men who socialize the most at the Sunday service are the deacons and the singers. When men do socialize with congregants outside the church, they actually join the women's groups who invited them.

Consequently, one observes that when a woman undertakes responsibilities, whether in the Bible Study, the Sunday School or the Single's Group, it is always for an activity organized primarily for women or for children. Moreover, when a woman is in charge of an activity or group, the topic of discussion is more centered on everyday experience than when the Pastor is in charge. Not only are the women's topics of discussion less abstract, but the discussions are also less formally and rigidly structured. In the case of Joanna's Bible Study, its location at Joanna's home creates a lesser degree of formality than the Bible Study directed by the Pastor at church.

To summarize, there is a strong connection between types of activities and gender at Redemption Church. Both within and outside of the ritual, each sex is assigned certain types of activities in certain domains. Women are in charge of everything that relates to children not only outside of the ritual (i.e. Bible Study, direction of the children's choir), but also during the ritual (i.e. a stewardess holds the child during baptism, the women take care of children during the service). In contrast, most responsibilities that relate to money are undertaken by the men both outside the ritual (the sandwich sale, management of the church) and also during the ritual (deacons' role). When the women take care of money-related activities (stewardesses

and Sunday School's collections), they do so only when the money will be used for the church's decoration or for charity; in contrast, the money handled by the men is used for the management of the church and the Pastor's salary.

The activities performed by women at Redemption Church mirror what they are expected to do in everyday life. The stewardess takes care of children's education; she is benevolent and generous, and handles money only for charity. In the same way, in everyday life, the "good woman" is supposed to be a benevolent and generous mother. Also, the women of Redemption Church decorate the church, in the same way that the "good mother" is expected to care for her home. Similarly, the activities undertaken by the men within the church reflect what men are expected to do in everyday life. The deacon manages the money of the church, in the same way that the "good man" provides for his family.

IV- POWERS AND IDENTITIES

INTRODUCTION

Discussions of the question of women's subordination in anthropology over the past several decades have, according Ortner (1990), focused on three separate dimensions or issues. The first dimension is that of "relative *prestige*:" a prestigious person who has "higher status" is "accorded greater cultural value or charisma, or [has] greater authority" (1990:37). What is at issue in this dimension is "a culturally affirmed, relative evaluation or ranking of the sexes, something that is perhaps most commonly called 'status'" (1990: 37). The second dimension deals with the issue of "*male dominance and female domination*" which Ortner defines as a relationship in which "men exert control over women's behavior (with varying degrees of legitimacy/authority for doing so) and women find themselves compelled to conform to men's demands" (1990: 37). The last dimension deals with the issue of "*women's power*" which Ortner defines as women's "capacity . . . to control some spheres of their own and others' existence and to determine some aspects of their own and others' behavior" (1990:37). In this chapter, we will explore the complexity of the

relationships between prestige and power on the gendered activities within and beyond Redemption Church rituals.

Every society divides its members according to a certain hierarchy of prestige. Ortner (1980) defines prestige as a "system of social value differenciation," "the ordering of human relations into patterns of deference and condescension, respect and disregard, and in many cases command and obedience" (1980: 14). Some individuals obtain more "prestige" than others, depending on their abilities to perform or embody what a society values. In some societies, the individual may acquire prestige because of his/her knowledge or his/her courage; in others, prestige may be acquired because the individual is capable of performing certain tasks. The mastery of these qualities determines the individual's political or social status. But within a society, different types of prestige can be acquired through different types of activities. Hence, individuals may have prestige in one area and not another.

At Redemption Church, prestige is displayed both through the individuals' ability to speak in public and by their relative degree of visibility during the ritual. We have previously noted that men are most likely to enter the most visible and prestigious altar area, and that even though some female preachers also enter the altar area, fewer females than males preach, and female preachers preach only on "less important" Sundays. Similarly, while most ushers are females or children, the main usher is a male. Thus, during the ritual, the more visible and restricted the position,

the more likely it will be occupied by a man, allowing men more opportunities to gain "prestige" and "higher status" through their participation in the public ritual.

From a Black feminist perspective, the relative paucity of public positions and responsibilities for women in this church would lead them to conclude that the women of Redemption Church are dominated and disempowered. In this chapter, however, we will argue that the Black feminist view of women's power needs to be reconsidered. In order to understand women's power in the church, we need to take into consideration power relationships that are developed through women's activities *outside of the ritual.* These activities not only convey their own but also allow women to exercise certain forms of power.

We will also argue that traditional approaches of ritual according to which members of a religion uniformly internalize values which reinforce their condition as dominated need to be reconsidered. The great diversity of actions, beliefs, and abilities in terms of public speaking among the church members refute these traditional approaches. Although apparently passively dominated, not only are women unique individuals, but they are also active members of the church who accomplish many things outside of the ritual.

Yet, although women do obtain a form prestige and have some power, we will see throughout this chapter that their prestige and power are still gained and activated in different domains and through different activities than those of the men. While there are some women who perform activities in the men's domains at Redemption

Church, the ritual does not *present* women as belonging to those domains. We will examine the socio-political reasons why the church presents men and women as belonging to different domains.

We will also look at the implications of the gendering of church activities in terms of women's empowerment and disempowerment. The question of the relationship between gendered domains and dominance has been debated in anthropology since the 1970's. Several authors have challenged the idea that women have been universally dominated by demonstrating the actual importance of women's domains in the economic or political spheres, while others have demonstrated that women often exert greater power than it might first appear (Sanday 1974). However, still others maintain that women's domains are less powerful (Reiter 1974; Ortner 1990), and that, if men have a greater status, then there is "male dominance" no matter how much manipulative power women might have (Ortner 1990: 39). Thus, one could argue that at Redemption Church women are disempowered in the sense that they are socialized in a way that discourage them from playing public roles, and leave them confined to the women's domain. Moreover, even if one considers that, objectively, the women's domain is more important than it might appear, still, it is largely considered in society as less important. By not putting the women forward as much as the men, the Church does not challenge the notion that what women do is less important. Hence, whatever one's theoretical perspective on gendered domains and

dominance, the ritual seems to disempower women, because it does not challenge women's traditional role.

However, our analysis does not stop here, but places the roles that men and women at Redemption Church play in the context of the larger society. By taking into consideration the racial context, one realizes that the ritual, by challenging society's racial stereotypes, might empower women after all. Here, the apparent lack of women's participation in the "public" sphere might be understood as women's voluntary effort to put the men forward, and by extension the entire community. In this sense then, the ritual becomes a facade that does not simply represent the true powers and statuses of African-American men and women.

Hence, the issue of women's power is complex, for women are at the same time, although at different levels, empowered and disempowered. Also, paradoxically, by empowering others, they also empower themselves.

Finally, the analysis of women's power is made even more complex by the fact that women are not equally empowered or disempowered in the church. While some women challenge to a certain extent the traditional role of women, others obtain a form of empowerment through their spiritual lives or their participation in the network of support that the church builds. Women, as well as men, also benefit from the Church's construction of an African-American identity. Hence, the Church's construction of a positive identity provides an empowerment at a personal and spiritual

level, while also raising people's consciousness regarding the issue of the African-American community's economic and political disempowerment.

GENDERED SYSTEMS OF PRESTIGE

The way one looks at domination reflects one's perspective and ideology. For example, one might consider only what is *publicly* shown during the ritual without considering what is going on outside the ritual itself and draw conclusions regarding the amount of power that men and women have. Thus, upon observing that, during the Sunday service, nobody except the Pastor and the (now exclusively male) preachers enter the altar area, or that the deacons are made more visible than the stewardesses, one could conclude that the men dominate the women. Indeed, despite considerable spontaneous oral participation from the congregation (as with the different "Amens" and "Praise the Lords" during the sermon), the ritual is rigidly structured in a way that makes men more visible than women.

However, as indicated previously, several authors (Rogers 1975; Nelson 1974) have demonstrated that women can significantly influence the so-called public sphere and that they are not as powerless as the private-public model implied. At Redemption Church, if one considers what is *not publicly shown* during the ritual, one realizes that the women actually exert a form of authority and power. One might argue that the ritual is only a "facade" that presents the men as if they are the ones in control, although women exercise considerable authority. The following section investigates

the kinds of power that women in Redemption Church have, and how women's power is manifested.

There are in the church power relations in which some have more prestige and authority than others, and it is important to note that women also can maneuver within these power relations. The greater her knowledge and her degree of socialization in the church, the more a woman can maneuver these power relations and strategize. The women's ability to maneuver depends not only on her degree of socialization within the church, but also on her conception of the role she should undertake within the church, and on her willingness to perform certain functions in order to obtain certain goals. We will illustrate this point by looking at how Marsha's position "evolved" within the church during the two years I have been at Redemption Church.

When I started to attend Redemption Church's services, Marsha had no responsibilities in the church. At that time, she was a member of another church which she attended more frequently. About a year before I met her, she had become dissatisfied by the other church and she had started to attend Redemption Church. When I met her, she was in the process of deciding whether or not she would stay at Redemption Church. At that time, she thought that Redemption Church's members were "passive." She also thought that the church should be more involved in politics since, for her, one of the roles of the African-American church is to create African-American unity and to fight against segregation. She attributed the church's lack of action, in general, and in terms of politics, to the fact that most members were old.

Also, according to Marsha, Redemption Church did not know how to "use people's talents." She had just opened a small store of African curios and African style clothes that she made herself. At that time, she also sewed African costumes and stoles for the other church that she was attending, and she was slightly bitter that Redemption Church did not also use her abilities as a seamstress.

It was only a short time before she was able to offer her talents to the church. She started to make friends with several women from the church, including the Pastor's wife, who is the conductor of the children's choir. Through this connection, she became the pianist for the children's choir a few weeks later. As a very sociable person that most church members appreciated because of her high spirits, Marsha started to make friends with many other people, including the singers and the musicians from the other choirs. About one year after becoming the pianist for the children's choir's, she also became the pianist for the Men of Prayer. Thus, Marsha managed to do what she intended to do in the church. As a woman, she also integrated herself in the men's activity by drawing on her own talents.

Her new role as pianist gave her a certain status and authority in the church. About a year later, she met two (White) members of a church located in Lake Oswego at a party, and they started to talk about their respective churches. The members of the Lake Oswego church mentioned how "White" their church was, and said they were sorry that their church was not attempting to achieve the Christian mission to encourage people, whatever their racial background, to meet and communicate. After

further discussions, Marsha realized that it would be possible to ask Redemption Church's choir to sing at the Sunday service of the Lake Oswego church. Because she was now an established member of the church, she persuaded the whole choir to visit this church and was trusted to make all the practical arrangements to make it happen.

Thus, Marsha had the power to do what she wanted to do through her connections and her abilities of persuasion. But the nature of her power is different from the prestigious men's power whose power derives mainly from the "public sphere." Although Marsha has obtained a certain public status as pianist, she is not as visible as the Pastor or the preachers; she has never entered the altar area, which is mostly reserved for the men. Interestingly, Marsha is so little visible that I did not realize that she was a pianist at Redemption Church until I interviewed her several weeks after I had first met her. One might argue that, similarly to the ushers whose formal posture highlights the prestige of the people who are speaking, Marsha's role as a pianist emphasizes the Pastor or the preachers' prestige rather than giving prestige to herself. Marsha's prestige also differs from the Pastor or the preachers in the sense that, contrary to them, she never speaks publicly during the service. Hence, Marsha does not acquire prestige through public speaking or through high visibility during the ritual. Instead, although the public status obtained as a pianist certainly reinforces her authority among the church members, her prestige is still mainly obtained *outside* of the Sunday service, through talking to people, using her male and female connections, going from one group to another, and learning with whom she should talk, depending

on the type of issues she wants to address. Hence, she has learned how to *maneuver* outside the ritual to get people to adopt her ideas.

Over time, Marsha has become respected and listened to also on political issues. But we will see that, again, the ways in which she exercises her authority in the political domain are different from that of men. On one occasion, a delegation of Redemption Church's members participated in a political meeting at the University of Portland. The meeting centered on the role of the church in terms of social action, with a focus on increasing the minimum wage. This meeting, in which about five hundred people participated, consisted of delegations from approximately twenty churches from the Portland metropolitan area. Redemption Church was the only African-American church represented. About a dozen women and seven or eight men from Redemption Church participated in the meeting. At the meeting, there was not only political discussion but also entertainment provided by a multi-church choir of about twenty singers; almost half of the performers were Redemption Church's members. Marsha had been one of the few involved in setting up this multi-church choir.

On some occasions, Redemption Church offers lunch or makes snacks after its regular Sunday service. It did so in anticipation of this meeting, which was held on a Sunday afternoon. While taking her snack, Marsha went from group to group, greeting people and persuading those who were still undecided to join the meeting. The church provided a bus for transportation to the meeting, but only women and

children (except for one man who accompanied his wife) took advantage of it. Although the bus was large enough for everybody, the other men, including the Pastor, preferred to take their personal cars. The Pastor's wife also took the bus. While on the bus, Marsha made the final arrangements for the choir, approaching women who had not yet indicated an interest in joining the choir and inviting them to participate. She handed out the sheet music for the songs, insisting that the songs were so simple that anybody could join even if she had not attended the rehearsals. Marsha argued that the more people from Redemption Church who sang, the better, so that they would "add a bit of color," implying that the meeting would be mostly white.

It was Marsha who directed most of the songs. She also sang a duet with a (White) woman from another church. By setting up this choir and persuading people to participate, Marsha was working toward her ideal of getting people from different races to meet and communicate.

At one point during the meeting, the representatives of each church were asked to discuss the issue of minimum wage as a group. Interestingly, Redemption Church's representatives, instead of discussing the issue as a group, divided into one group of women and one group of men. Only one woman joined the group of men, a woman noted for her long membership and her strong involvement in the church. Also, only one man joined the group of women, and this young man, newly married to one of the women, seemed to be proud to stay with his wife at all times; he was also on the bus with her.

As a female, I did not join the group of men where I would have felt "out of place." But the snatches of conversation I could hear, and the comparison of the seating arrangements and organization in each group, brought to the fore differences between the two groups. Whereas the group of women was not "directed" by anybody, there was a main speaker (one of the male preachers) in the group of men. This preacher was almost giving a lecture on political issues in front of the men who formed a perfect circle and did not intervene much. In contrast, the women's group looked more "disorganized." The women did not form a perfect circle; instead, they formed little groups of two or three persons. It seemed that they were having a "chat," rather than participating in a political meeting. Contrary to the men who seemed to talk rather abstractly and formally about politics, the women talked about the issue in a very pragmatic way. For example, they talked about the difficulty of filling a shopping cart every week with what could be purchased with the current minimum wage. Also, the fact that the children were with the women added to the "disorganized" appearance of the women's groups. While the men were rather staid, the women moved around, one woman taking care of a child, another putting her son on my lap to go out briefly, and yet another accompanying her grandson to the bathroom. Also, while the men mainly concentrated on the political question, the women's discussions on the minimum wage were also mixed with "chats" about the kids. Marsha went informally from one woman to another, talking with one about how difficult it was to make ends meet with the current minimum wage, chatting with another about how expensive

Safeway was compared to Cub Food, or asking still another how her son was doing in high school.

One person from each church then reported on that church's discussion. Redemption Church's representative was the preacher. Although each representative was supposed to make a report on what had been said during the group discussion, all speeches had actually been prepared in advance. In retrospect, I realized that in the men's group, the preacher had not really facilitated an open debate; instead, he had simply presented what he was going to say in his speech. After these "reports," one of the meeting organizers suggested that church members gather signatures in their community in support of an increase in the minimum wage for the next election's ballot measure. On the way back to Redemption Church, it was Marsha who took charge of the petition. On the bus, she was easily able to obtain signatures from the other women.

If one considers only those who spoke publicly during the meeting, it would be easy to conclude that the men make the decisions. Men represented the position of the church and appeared to talk in a single discussion group in a "serious" manner. But the fact that women did not speak publicly does not mean that they did not play an important role in this meeting. Marsha certainly played an important role. As a woman, she knew how to touch other women. The pragmatic way in which she spoke probably influenced and persuaded the women much more than the way the preacher spoke. Thus, although Marsha does not speak in public, this does not mean that she

does not make herself heard. She had the power to persuade some people to come to this meeting and to sing in the choir; she also had the power to persuade women to sign the petition. Ultimately, although only a small proportion of Redemption Church's male members signed the petition, a great proportion of female members signed the petition.

Marsha did not try to mix with the men during the group discussion or to talk to the men about the petition. It might be that she felt that she would not have authority among them. As a woman, she knew how to persuade women but not men. It seems that she would probably not have much power to persuade the men in regards to politics. But, as we have seen, Marsha had the power to persuade the men to sing in the Lake Oswego church. Hence, it seems that, whereas Marsha has prestige and authority among both men and women regarding music, she has prestige and authority only among women regarding politics. It seems that there are certain domains, such as music, where women can exert their authority more openly than other domains, such as politics. Consequently, the type of prestige that Marsha enjoys is different from that of the Pastor and preacher. As mentioned previously, whereas the Pastor and preachers' prestige is acquired mainly through their ability to speak during the ritual, Marsha's prestige is acquired mainly through her connections and activities outside the ritual.

If we look at systems of acquisition of prestige within the church in general, what we said about Marsha is true for other women. Women acquire prestige only in

certain domains such as decoration, children's education, charity or singing. As a result, not only does the ritual present women, mainly through the stewardesses' role, as belonging to the domains mentioned above, but also, women acquire prestige only in these domains.

Women's prestige in these certain domains can also be illustrated by the "small rituals" that the Pastor sometimes performs during the Sunday service. These "rituals" may vary from simply asking women to stand up to report on an activity they participated in, to asking them to stand in front of the altar where, flanked by two stewardesses, they are given either a medal, a diploma, or a small gift by the Pastor or a stewardess. Generally, such rituals are performed for women who have participated in activities in the women's domains; these activities might include special decorations for the church; supporting older people; visiting sick people; or participating in a two-month series of weekly prayer in preparation for the church's anniversary or in commemoration of deceased members of Redemption Church. The Pastor might also occasionally recognize women for their participation in non-church activities, such as their participation in political meetings. During each of these rituals, women are congratulated for their participation in the church and in the community. On one occasion, the Pastor organized such a ritual for a group of seven older women who had been meeting for several years to discuss church-related issues and to pray together. Talking about this group, the Pastor emphasized the women's friendship and the support they gave one another. Interestingly, he compared this women's support

network to a political organization: "Here, it's not NAACP, but there is something else going on. There is something strong and powerful, it is friendship and mutual aid."

The Pastor also performs such rituals for men. However, because fewer men than women participate in activities such as prayer groups or church decoration, more women are honored by these rituals. When such a ritual is performed for a man, it is usually for his participation in a political meeting on which he is asked to report. On one occasion such a ritual was performed for a man whose job consisted of taking care of some older people found completely abandoned in their house. On several occasions, a male recipient was given a medal because he had worked for a period over thirty years. Interestingly, I have never seen such a celebration for a woman.

On one Sunday, when the women's choir was singing and there were not many men in attendance, the Pastor gave a whole sermon aimed at celebrating women. He mostly honored women's importance in the family, as well as their abilities to educate children. He also mentioned the strength of women during slavery, when the family was dispersed. At one point in the service, while the Pastor was talking about the ability of women to support one another and the strength that this support gives them, he asked the women to stand up and hold each other's hands to form a circle in the church.

Consequently, these "small rituals" reinforce and emphasize women's place in certain domains. The Pastor does occasionally perform such rituals for women who have participated in activities that are not part of women's domains, such as

participation in political meetings, but, he does so only occasionally. The honori
women's activities outside of their "domains" is not fully integrated into the norm
course of the ritual. In other words, the structure of the ritual celebrates men's
financial responsibilities (through the position of deacon) and women's education
responsibilities (through the position of stewardess). Except for the "small rituals
nothing within the structure of the ritual honors women like Marsha or Joanna wh
have political responsibilities and power, for both the African-American church a
the larger society associate such political roles only with men. The ritual also doe
show the amount of responsibilities that women undertake outside of the ritual.
Hence, although women do have authority in diverse activities, this authority is n
expressed during the ritual, a ritual apparently controlled by men. In the next sect
we ask the question, does the fact that the church assigns certain roles and domain
each sex means that women are "dominated?"

RECONSIDERATION OF WOMEN'S POWER

We have argued previously that Black feminists' conception of women's
power needed to be reconsidered and that, in order to understand women's power,
needed to take into consideration women's actions that are not shown during the r
Now, we will see that an analysis of women's power should also integrate women
own perspective. From a believer's perspective, the activities performed by wom
within the church are not necessarily considered "unimportant."

Moreover, we will see that theories of religion that conceive of ritual as a w
for the "dominant" to control the dominated (Bloch 1978) need to be reconsidered.
Far from being uniformly shaped, Redemption Church members are unique
individuals with different conceptions of the ritual, as well as different needs and
expectations. People who have a "dominant" position within the church *must and*
take everyone's needs into consideration.

Bell (1992) has shown how, during ritual, people internalize in their bodies
certain organization of time and space. The church gives models of femininity and
masculinity that the members internalize through socialization during the ritual.
According to these models, men and women are expected to perform different task
But how these tasks are valued is another issue. Why should pouring the water on
child's head be considered more important than holding the child? Why should tal
care of children be considered less important than taking care of money? One mig
also argue that from the perspectives of the people who are socialized by these mo
one model is not necessarily superior to the other. Certainly, from the perspective
believer, the role of the stewardess during baptism is not less important than the ro
the Pastor, since the stewardess becomes the spiritual mentor of the child. Hence,
stewardess might herself be spiritually empowered through this gesture. When I as
people to describe the deacons' and the stewardesses' roles, the females informant
described the stewardesses' role as extremely important. Yet, the male informants
emphasized the importance of the deacons' role.

Theories of ritual such as that of Bloch (1978) that regard ritual as a means the dominant to control and take advantage of the dominated, suggested that the dominated uniformly internalize values which reinforce their condition as dominat This view implies that individuals are completely and uniformly shaped by ritual. However, my own research suggests that each member's understanding of the ritua so personal and so unique that talking about a uniform understanding of the ritual would be erroneous. Although we might identify similar patterns of understanding which result from socialization, such as certain types of knowledge and actions am women versus men, we cannot talk about uniform systems of beliefs and actions among all members of the church since there is an extreme variety of perspectives personalities within the same sex group.

At Redemption Church, one notices certain patterns of understandings of th ritual according to a person's sex, but also according to a person's position within church. For example, the Pastor has a perspective on the ritual's role that reflects h position both as a male and as the most prestigious person in the church. When ask about the ritual structure and its role, he mainly talked about males, describing the of the deacons as much more central than the role of the stewardesses. The Pastor a lot more knowledge about the deacons' role than about the stewardesses' role, wh he described rather quickly before referring me to the stewardesses' manual or to th stewardesses themselves. Interestingly, my female informants did the opposite: the had more knowledge about the stewardesses' role than the deacons' role. Also, as

mentioned above, in the same way that male informants emphasized the importan the deacons' role, the female informants emphasized the importance of the stewardesses' role.

Not only can we identify patterns of understanding of the ritual, but we ca also identify certain patterns in terms of public speaking. Ardener (1972) contend that women have not been socialized to master the "articulate speech" mastered b men who also control the "public sphere." At Redemption Church, some facts indicate that women are indeed uncomfortable speaking in public. We mentioned earlier the difficulty I encountered at Redemption Church in trying to obtain information from the women. The same women who were uncomfortable with m asking them for interviews were also uncomfortable talking in public. During the service, the Pastor regularly asked a few persons in the assembly to stand up to gi short "report" to the other members on an activity they had participated in, or a meeting they had attended. Generally, the women were rather uncomfortable with request. Rather than standing up, they remained in a sitting position, speaking hesitatingly, and almost whispering. Age played a role in the differences between women: while few older women were comfortable speaking in public, a greater proportion of younger women were comfortable, a few of them being, as we shall good speakers. In contrast, the men were generally fairly comfortable speaking in public, regardless of age. However, if the men were generally better speakers than women, there were many women who were far better speakers than most men.

Although we can identify certain patterns among women versus men, the ability to speak in public cannot be associated *in a simple manner* to a specific ger group. The ability to speak publicly is often associated with the *position* that one occupies within the structure of the church, rather than with the sex of the person. Most women who had responsibilities in the church did master the art of public speaking. For example, the women in charge of the Bible Study or the Singles' Gr spoke with great confidence when the Pastor asked them to during the service.

However, a person's position within the church does not necessarily determ the degree of mastery of public speaking. Some women with responsibilities neve spoke in public. Given her great ability to answer my questions when I interviewe her, I assume that Marsha could be an excellent speaker. But since she was never actually given a chance to speak publicly in church, I cannot determine her level of mastery of public speaking. Moreover, although men who have a fairly high amou of church responsibilities are generally good speakers, some of them are very uncomfortable in public. Take, for example, John, who had been attending in the church for only five years and did not occupy the most prestigious positions. Yet, was fairly well-established in the church as a singer and as an usher, and was also fairly well-integrated into church life since he always socialized with the men's gro during or after the Sunday service. Although fairly well-established, he was extrem shy, and probably much shyer than any woman when it came to talking in public. was far more reticent than any of the women when I asked him for an interview.

John's shyness might be an exception in the church since, generally, men are bette speakers than women, especially if they have responsibilities in the church. But hi case supports the observation that one cannot apply wholesale the art of public speaking either to gender or to position.

The degree of mastery of "articulate speech" varies not only with both a person's sex and position in the church, but it also varies with a person's *level of education* and social achievement. For example, Joanna had a college degree, wor in a real estate agency, and had even recently opened her own agency. Although sh did not perform many responsibilities in the church and did not even attend the ser very regularly, she would occasionally go to the pulpit to talk about the process of gentrification in N.E Portland or to announce different upcoming political meeting Although her style was not as aggressive and assertive as the Pastor's, she was a ve good public speaker: loud, clear and straight to the point. As an expert in real estat issues with a higher education than many men, she was a much better speaker than most men, including men like John who had more responsibilities than she did wit the church.

Thus, the mastery of "articulate speech" is not determined by gender in a simple manner since it also depends on the level of prestige within the church and social class within the larger society. Furthermore, the mastery of "articulate speec is also determined by a person's *personality*. Mike, for example, was probably the most well-established man in the church. While not as *prestigious* as the Pastor or

preachers, he was well-established as one of the few persons who had joined Redemption Church in the 1950s, serving both as a deacon and as a singer of the men's choir. He was sufficiently well-recognized that, when I asked people for interviews, several persons told me that I should talk either to him or to the Pastor. Yet, he was a terribly shy person. Although truly nice and polite with me, he was r embarrassed when I asked him questions. Also, when the Pastor asked him, on a f occasions, to stand up to make a "report" on a meeting he had attended, he was as uncomfortable as most of the older women.

Although men and women are socialized so that members of each sex share certain characteristics concerning their ability and willingness to speak in public, e individual is unique. People's reasons for going to church and their conception of role of the church varies greatly from one person to the next. For example, althoug two of my three female informants shared a similar educational background and a similar position within the church, they each had different perspectives on the ritua different relationships to the church and different ways to connect their faith with t liberation of the African-American community. The following sketches of Judy, Joanna and Marsha illustrate the diversity of individual perspectives.

Judy, who is in her mid-thirties, has a high school education. The second y I attended Redemption Church, Judy left the church for several weeks because, as s

put it, she had been "lazy." Later, she explained to me why she came back in the following manner*:

> You need to be close to God once a week to thank him for what He does for us. You never know what might happen. You can never thank God enough for what He does. You can lose your job and your house in a second. Look at all these people who lost their houses [at that time, floods had caused serious damage in Oregon]. I am not rich, but when I see all these homeless people on the street... It's why you have to thank God once a week and thank God before eating [We had just had dinner together and, laughing, she had reminded me, imitating my surprised look, how surprised I had been when she blessed the food when we first had had dinner together].

Often during our conversations, she would talk about her past experience a Black teenager. She told how much she suffered from being in a middle school in which fewer than ten students were Blacks. The other students were so unaccusto to Blacks that, on several occasions, a student touched her skin to know if it was " skin." She also talked about her present experiences. The first time we saw each outside the church, I had invited Judy and her (Black) boyfriend, John, along with friends of mine from Europe for dinner. When my friend naively asked Judy and if they suffered from racism, the first thing that came to John's mind was to answe that he always kept a loaded gun at home. Judy said she had a gun too. They both explained that African-Americans used to be slaves and are still "treated as an underdog"; thus, they must have a means to defend themselves.

Although she suffered from racism, Judy does not look at the church as a political means to fight against racism or poverty. For her, the church is a way to

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* This informal conversation was not recorded but was transcribed immediately after it was finishe transcription does not reflect exactly what the person said.

thank God through singing and praying for what He does, not a way to fight inequalities. For her, the Sunday service is a way to be close to God once a week. Judy sings in the choir but has no other responsibilities at the church. She has little prestige within the church and she does not attempt to gain prestige, since gaining prestige is not at all why she goes to church. Judy is rather shy and not really well-integrated into church. She has a couple of friends that she met there, and even met her boyfriend at church, but she does not normally stay very long after the service since she does not have many people to talk to. She often complains that people in the church are not very sociable. But, although she wishes she had more friends within the church, making friends is not necessarily the reason she comes to church. Although she does not really like the other singers in the choir, she truly enjoys singing, one of her favorite songs being the Negro National Anthem.

Joanna, who is also in her mid-thirties, has a B.A from college. Like Judy, she talked about her experiences of racism, telling me of the death threats that she had received when living in Eastern Oregon that had forced her to move to Portland. Like Judy, she thinks that the Sunday service is a way to thank God "for all the nice things that he does." For example, once while telling me that she used to live in Virginia, and describing the beautiful landscape there, she added that one needs to thank God for all these beautiful things. Yet, in contrast to Judy, religion is for Joanna also a way to fight politically. In the Bible Study that she holds at her house once a week, the manual used is titled *How Much Money is Enough?* The main question debated during

these sessions is how not to allow oneself be governed by money and yet not to allow oneself to be poor. This is a political issue that questions how to be a Christian thanking God for what he does and yet fighting against the poverty of the African-American community.

As mentioned earlier, Joanna is a real estate agent. Her main task is to buy houses in N.E Portland and sell them to African-Americans at a low price. Her goal is to prevent large (White) real estate agencies from buying houses and selling them at very high prices that African-American cannot afford. Hence, very aware of the gentrification process, Joanna talks at the Sunday service once in a while, keeping people aware of the process and of the different political meetings concerning Black ownership in N.E Portland. Although she is not a student, Joanna is also a member of an African-American sorority at Portland State University, an association that fights for an increased presence of African-Americans in the university. This association organizes miscellaneous political meetings and an annual "step-show" which focuses on empowerment and increasing the self-esteem of African-American males and females. Joanna also keeps Redemption Church members aware of these different activities. Thus, Joanna believes, like the Pastor, that it is the role of the church to keep people aware of the different political issues related to empowerment and disempowerment in the African-American community.

As for Marsha, she also thinks that the church should be politically involved, but she looks at the nature of its political involvement slightly differently from Joanna.

Marsha is in her early forties with a high school education. She looks back to the time of Martin Luther King Junior, a time when the African-American church was more politically involved, and believes that the church should be a means of bringing Blacks and Whites together. She tries to bring White people, including me, to Redemption Church, and bring Redemption Church to White churches. For example, as we have seen, she arranged for an exchange visit between members of a White church in Lake Oswego to Redemption Church, and the performance of the Men of Prayer at the White church. For Marsha, the church is also an avenue for personal accomplishment where she can use her talents as a dressmaker and as a pianist.

Thus, these three women, who are similar in age and levels of education, all have a different conception of and a different type of involvement with the church. Redemption Church, by the complexity and the diversity of what it offers, can respond to these different conceptions and sensibilities.

To summarize, we identified similar patterns of actions among men and women, such as the ability to speak in public. Yet this ability cannot be applied wholesale to a gender group. Also, we have seen that my three informants had fairly different conceptions of the role of the church based on their different histories, different characters, and different backgrounds. Individuals who have a unique conception of the role of the church also go to Sunday services for different reasons. The recognition of the fact that each individual is unique repudiates the idea that

people are uniformly shaped by ritual. In turn, it also repudiates the conception of ritual as a means for the "dominant" to control the minds of the "dominated."

There are indeed power relations in the church: some members have more prestige and apparently "dominate" others. But the "dominating" must satisfy everyone's requests and needs. They cannot do whatever they want, or people would leave. Hence, we cannot argue that women are simply "duped" during the ritual.

Gramsci pointed out (cited in Mitchell, 1990) in his analysis of ideology, there is always "negotiation" within power relationships. In the church, the power relations are not *monolithic* but endlessly *negotiated.* Hence, the church is not a monolithic institution which would take advantage of, and dominate women. Although the Sunday service is rigidly structured and organized in a way that underlines the prestige and the importance of the Pastor, church members make the decision whether or not they will listen or daydream. They can make fun of the Pastor, and they are free to gossip with their neighbor during the service, they do not have to come to church. One could give numerous examples to illustrate that people are not "controlled" by the ritual: Judy, without prestige or responsibilities within the church, comes purposely late to the Sunday service when she does not like the preacher who is going to preach the first half hour. On one occasion, when one of the soloists in the women's choir was conspicuously singing out of tune, many members put their heads down to hide that they were laughing; some exchanged knowing or superior smiles with their neighbor, while a few (like Judy) simply left the building.

THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHURCH

Objectively, there are no reasons for an observer to decide that what women do at church is less important than what men do. However, while the women's role is not less important, the ritual makes it look that way. Moreover, not only are there decisions made by the church in terms of visibility and emphasis during the ritual, but there is also a decision made in terms of what is presented as men's or women's domains. As mentioned earlier, although there are at Redemption Church women like Marsha who have authority in the political domain, women are still represented, mainly through the stewardesses' role and ritualistic gestures, as generous care-takers of children and quiet assistants of men.

In order to understand why Redemption Church rituals represent men as dominant and in control, and before discussing *who* in the church makes these decisions, we need to put this particular church into the larger context of the African-American community and the issues and dilemmas confronting this community both historically and today. Questions concerning African-American identity and how best to express this identity continue to challenge African-Americans of all social classes. Some ask whether it is necessary or even desirable to make common political choices within the African-American community? Should attention be paid to the construction of a Black unity? As Dawson (1995) points out, there are many contemporary debates concerning the possibility or the impossibility of reconstructing an African-American

"public sphere" such as the one that prevailed between the 1950s and 1970s. He defines this "public sphere" as a set of institutions and networks of communication that encouraged debate on the political, economic and social conditions of the African-American community during previous decades. Dawson argues that this public sphere, based on the Church during the Civil Rights Movements, has since been destroyed by different socio-economic factors, one of them being the African-American feminists' refutation of a Black unity based on a Black public sphere dominated by men.

Nevertheless, African-American Churches have been and continue to be the main institution representing the African-American community in the public sphere. As such, the Church has to make decisions about how to present itself vis-à-vis the White community. More specifically, it has to make decisions in terms of its politics of gender representation. Eric Lincoln (1990) compares the decisions made by the African-American Church during and after slavery, arguing that when, during slavery, the African-American Church was a clandestine institution, the public sphere of the Church was controlled by women as much as by men. At that time, many women were preachers or religious leaders. However, after slavery was abolished, the Church became the only institution controlled by African-Americans, and in turn, the only institution that represented the African-Americans among the Whites. Lincoln maintains that when the Church came out of its clandestinity and became public, it adopted the public sphere of the White society, a sphere in which women's

participation is hidden. Thus, African-American women lost their positions as leaders and preachers held during the period of slavery.

Today, the African-American Church still has to make decisions in terms of its politics of gender representation. It has made the choice to "put the men forward" during the ritual and to present them as if they are the ones in control at the expense of women who are made less visible. Could this mean that the church is attempting to respond to the tension that Black males experience in a White society that stigmatizes them as "good for nothing"? To answer to this question, we need to look at the problems that Black males confront in the larger society.

In an investigation of African-American male identity with the larger social and economic context, Staples (1982) has argued that African-American males have been excluded from the American model of the man as head of the household who provides for his family. On the one hand, they are presented with this model, but on the other hand, they experience differences in education and work place that often makes it hard for them to attain fulfillment of this model. Nationally, Black males experience a much higher rate of unemployment than their White counterparts. African-American males' identity conflicts are due to continual unemployment or to precarious job situations which do not allow them to provide for their family. According to Staples, "[Black males'] definition of masculinity in conflict with mainstream definition causes self-devaluation and questioning regarding ability to lead." (1982: 138). Furthermore, because of their difficulty in integrating with the

educational system, Black male teenagers are more likely to drop out of school and to be unemployed. In consequence, they are also more likely to join gangs which procure for them a sense of self-esteem. Staples argues that "[many Black males'] response to failure to fulfill their manhood is expressed in anti-social behavior" (1982: 13). Furthermore, "violence [is] a means of status" (1982: 11), a status that Black males do not normally obtain in White society, but one that they can achieve through participation in gangs. According to Staples, given the racial and economic context, even if Black males do not participate in gangs, many of them are still likely to have masculine values that reflect the use of violence as a means of power, and to follow lifestyles such as staying single and dating many women rather than settling into a marriage situation.

When the Pastor of Redemption Church described the lifestyles of African-American males, he implicitly related those lifestyles to racism in the United States:

> The lifestyle that young men live is much more violent and reactionary than the lifestyle of women. [When I asked him what he meant by "reactionary"] You know, there is a racial problem in the world and in Oregon--we have a tendency to react to a situation that happened in the past--'since they did, White people did this to us, then we are not going to do this.' It's a matter of standing up and 'being a man' kind of thing . . . [When I asked him where women stood in terms of "reactionary" attitudes] Men don't settle down a burden of responsibilities of caring for children or household, they can easily get up and leave; whereas a woman is more tied down-- and I hate to be sexist, but that's just the way it is... You see more men abandon their wives, and it's more acceptable, unfortunately. Men are out, doing other things, they are not there . . . That's a Black thing and an American thing. You have lots of divorces and single parents. And that's everywhere. (Pastor Johnson's interview, 7/6/1995)

Although it seems that the Pastor does not want to hold the Whites completely responsible for the current situation by claiming that Black males are "reactionary," he does acknowledge that Black males have been "left out" of responsibility-taking at church as well as in larger society. According to him, the church has a role to play in re-instilling into these men a sense of responsibility as well as "positive" values:

> That's a specific ministry that needs to be developed--to bring men back into roles of leadership and positions of prominence in the church and in their homes and communities, because they seem to be left out, and I am not trying to blame anyone for that, it's just the way the situation has developed. (Pastor Johnson's interview, 7/6/1995)

But "to bring men back into roles of leadership" is difficult to achieve, Pastor Johnson claims, since "men do not come to church." When I asked the Pastor why men are largely outnumbered by women at church, he explained that, besides the fact that men generally die younger than women, there is also a conflict between male values and church-related values:

> You have younger men who are not interested in being involved in church-work or anything that is non-profit oriented. They are unfortunately caught in a lot of fast-paced, hard living. There are other avenues [other than church-activities] that attract them like football, basketball games or baseball games on T.V. (Pastor Johnson's interview, 7/6/1995).

My own observations corroborate the Pastor's. When I would ask my female informants where their husbands or boyfriends were during the Sunday service, most of the time, they would answer that the men were watching a football or basketball match on T.V. One can understand why many males are more interested in watching sports than in going to church. Sports is a realm where Black men excel and are

granted prestige by White society. Moreover, while the church values forgiveness, charity and generosity, sports, such as NBA basketball, value fierce competition and wealth through competition. Hence, unlike sports the church discourages the very characteristics for which males are valued in larger society, and more specifically in the African-American community. As Fernell (1995) pointed out in her work on White and Black Southern churches, male masculine values are in conflict with the church's values. A man is often not considered by other men, but also to a certain extent by women, as a "real man" if he does not demonstrate strength and combativeness. By extension, a man may feel that if he goes to church he is not a "real man," and he may run the risk of being treated as "girlish" by his peers. He may also lose his peers' esteem.

Hence, when one keeps in mind the tensions and identity problems that Black men experience in a society that offers them few opportunities to obtain status and recognition, one realizes that going to church could put at stake the "status" that many Black males may obtain among their peers with whom they do "men's things," such as going out drinking, watching sports, or dating women. In turn, one can understand why males in their teens do not dress up to go to the service and sit at the back of the church, looking bored or unconcerned. One can also understand why many fewer men than women go to Redemption Church. The church is often not considered a "man's thing." When I asked Joanna's brother and her boyfriend why they did not like going to church, both told me that church was "women's business." Indeed, the values put

forward by the church, such as generosity, correspond more to what is associated in the larger society with womanhood. Hence, contrary to men, a woman who goes to church does not run the risk of being treated by her peers as a "faulty woman;" she might on the contrary be valued for it among her peers and also in the larger society.

Not only are the church values in conflict with "masculine values" but also, as the Pastor puts it, "there is not a lot for men to do in the church." Indeed, other than the main authority figures (Pastor and preacher), there are not many positions in the church that are associated with the masculine values of strength, leadership, and authority. Since slavery, but most of all during the Civil Rights movement, the religious leader has also been a political leader. Hence, with the political sphere being traditionally the male sphere, the positions of Pastor or preacher are associated with masculine values. However, with these two positions of leadership limited to only a few men, there are few opportunities offered to other men that embody masculine characteristics. Thus, it is not very surprising that some men consider the church as "women's business," and that women outnumber men at church.

There are three other special positions available for men in the church, besides preacher and Pastor: these are singer, usher and deacon. Whereas women do not risk being stigmatized if they go to church as ordinary worshippers, men might fear being treated by their peers as "girlish" if they do not undertake "manly" positions at church. Hence, although many men are ordinary worshippers, a considerable number of men are either singers, ushers and deacons, with a great number of men occupying two or

three of these positions. Partly because of its central role in African-American culture, music seems to be a very attractive area for the men of the church, including young men and teenagers who are generally not very involved in the other activities of the church. It seems that the open competition between choirs, especially on very important Sundays such as the church's anniversary, associates music with masculine values, and in turn attracts men. Hence, when the Men of Prayer are assigned to sing, the Sunday service becomes "men's business" and a much greater number of men attend the service.

Acknowledging that there are not many leadership positions available for men within the church, the Pastor consciously attempts to "change things." He attempts to "include the men rather than to exclude and to keep them out of the arena of leadership." His goal is to attract men to church, but also to instill into men "positive" values by "uplifting" men who "do the right thing":

> One of the things that the church can do is to lift up positive men so that it's not always the negative things that you get-- and you probably see it when you open the newspapers or turn on the news where it is usually something negative that is reported. So if you can lift up the positive things that men or children are accomplishing, you incite other people "to do the right thing." (Pastor Johnson's interview, 7/6/1995).

As mentioned previously, the Pastor thinks that males are less likely than women to undertake responsibilities in the household; they are also more likely to abandon their families. According to him, the Sunday ritual constitutes a way to awaken the men's sense of responsibility. Because in the larger society men are expected to manage the money of the home, the ritual attempts to present this function

as prestigious. For example, the Pastor consciously attempts to put the deacons forward. By extension, the ritual should result in making the men of the church look at this responsibility as a positive value in their everyday life.

Although the Pastor did not mention it, the ritual also embraces women as generous care-takers of children and quiet assistants of men. Consequently, the church makes decisions when presenting males and females as connected to certain gender roles and values. The church also makes the decision to make the men more visible than the women during the ritual. Here one might ask, who participates in the decision-making besides the obvious contribution of the Pastor in the decision? Do women take part in these decisions? Certainly these decisions affect the complex issues of women's empowerment or disempowerment. We shall see that because of the way they are socialized, women might unwarily contribute to decisions that might disempower them, or at least, limit their leadership opportunities. However, women still get certain forms of empowerment through the church.

Certainly, some of the decisions about gender roles in ritual are made at the level of the C.M.E denomination. Historically at this level, women have had considerable influence in terms of the modification of the structure of the church and ritual. For example, it was through pressure exerted by women that the denomination created the position of stewardess at the end of the 19th century, and the activity of the "Women's Retreat" at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, there is a board of women at the national level. Although I did not have a chance to learn about the

power of this board, the presence of this women's board suggests that women at the national level have some part in the decision making.

Many of the local decisions, such as assigning a preacher on a given Sunday, limiting access to the altar area, and nominating the director of the Bible Study or choir are made at the level of Redemption Church. Although it seems that most decisions are made by the Pastor, apparently, women do not feel that the Pastor's decisions are unfair. For example, it seems that the women do not feel that assigning exclusively male preachers on important Sundays, such as Sundays when the men sing, constitutes an injustice. When the men sing, there is not only an increase in the number of men, but also an increase in the number of women (especially young women) coming to the service. As mentioned earlier, there is a greater atmosphere of festivity, and the women are more likely to start dancing and clapping hands when the men sing. The women seem to be very proud when the men sing. Could this mean that the women attempt to put the men forward? In all of the time that I attended, I never saw Sister Goode preaching on important Sundays. I actually do not know who made this decision but there seems to be something significant here. Could this mean that women, consciously or unconsciously, prevent themselves from taking responsibilities in the public sphere?

According to Dumas (1980) who looked at leadership during the Civil Rights Movements, Black women prevented themselves from holding leadership positions because they had internalized the stereotype of the Black castrating female:

> [During the Civil Rights Movements], women did not occupy prominent leadership positions. They were often caught up with Black men in that hydraulic principle which forced them to take only those roles that would enable their men to go forward. Many Black women with outstanding leadership abilities held their skill in abeyance lest they might undermine the security and threaten the masculinity of the Black men. Bound by the fear of the strong, uppity, castrating Black woman, the full range of the Black female's leadership was never fully exploited (1980: 205).

Apparently, in Sister Goode' case, it is the Pastor who decides who preaches each Sunday, but it might be that Sister Goode, having internalized the stereotype of the Black dominant female, does not attempt to preach on important Sundays. Hence, it seems that although the decision to put the men forward is made by the Pastor, this decision is reinforced by women.

Besides this possible internalization of the stereotype of the Black "castrating" woman, there might be other factors that explain why the men are put forward during the ritual. The women seem to recognize that male preachers are endowed with greater talent and prestige than females. All members think that the Pastor is the best preacher in the church. His preaching creates a lot more participation and emotional excitement than that of any other preachers. It seems that members also enjoy Brother Nelson's preaching, but they prefer the Pastor's. Sister Goode is apparently the least appreciated preacher; when she preaches, members do not participate much and do not seem emotionally carried. My female informants (especially Judy) think that she is very boring. Hence, it seems "natural" for members that the Pastor or the male preacher is the one who preaches on the important Sundays. Each person's degree of prestige within the church seems to be due to a "natural talent."

However, although talent seems "natural," as we mentioned in a previous chapter, it actually results from a process of socialization. This socialization is "invisible" and "unrecognized" by the members (Bell 1992). Moreover, the church members are not socialized uniformly. They do not master public speech uniformly and they do not acquire prestige in the same way. Rather, it is through a process of socialization that some obtain more prestige than others, and that men and women obtain different types of prestige. We will illustrate this point by looking at the Pastor's children.

The Pastor's twelve year old son is already extremely comfortable in public. He sings in the children's choir, and although he is not necessarily the best singer, he is much more comfortable than any of the other children singing solos. In public, he is as confident as his father, carrying his body in the same manner. Comfortable with the microphone, he sings like a "star," sometimes asking the whole assembly to sing along with him. In contrast, the Pastor's fifteen year old daughter is never seen in public, but still has many responsibilities for her age. For example, she organizes by herself the children's activities at the Sunday School.

Hence, the Pastor's children, without recognizing it, are socialized in a way that the girl can perform very important responsibilities in the Sunday school, and the boy can obtain an extreme visibility in the choir. At a very young age, both of them have already acquired a greater amount of prestige than most children. They have already acquired what Bell has called "ritual mastery" which is obtained "through the

interaction of the body with a structured and structuring body" (1992: 107). Ritual mastery is unequally acquired among the members. Not only are some people more likely to gain prestige and power within the church than others, but also, people acquire different types of prestige according to their sex. As early as childhood, boys and girls are socialized to perform responsibilities and acquire prestige in the domains assigned to their sex. Thus, the decisions made by "the church" regarding the type of prestige acquired according to one's sex are not made only by specific individuals, but also through an invisible socialization within the church. The church socialization process directs and funnels the acquisition of prestige according to sex by offering certain opportunities to certain people. While the boy is offered opportunities that allow him to be comfortable in public, the girl is offered opportunities that allow her to participate in activities in the women's domain, in a less public setting.

How then does this invisible socialization and the church decisions affect the issue of women's empowerment or disempowerment? Certainly, one cannot argue in a simple way that females are either empowered or disempowered by rituals or the structure of the church, for as MacLeod has shown, females' domination and resistance are complex and ambiguous:

> Women, even as subordinate players, always play an active part that goes beyond the dichotomy of victimization/acceptance, a dichotomy that flattens out a complex and ambiguous agency in which women accept, accommodate, ignore, resist, or protest sometimes all at the same time (MacLeod 1992: 534).

We will see that if the church does indeed provide a *resistance vis-à-vis the White community*, it does not challenge the traditional female role as care-takers and helpmate, a role that might both empower and disempower women.

The lack of public roles may be one way in which women are disempowered. Because of the way they are socialized, many women have neither the desire nor the capacities to undertake a public role. Instead, they have the desire and the capacities to take care of and educate the children or assist the men. Some women do have the capacities to undertake a public role but, socialized as females, they often do not excel as much as men. Because boys' and girls' socialization is "invisible," to the congregants' eyes, the men's greater public role than the women appears "legitimate." Hence, the "established order" of the church appears to be "legitimate" (Bourdieu 1977). The women themselves think that the Pastor and the male preacher are better preachers than the female.

Not only are women disempowered by the church's lack of public roles for women, but the church also does not attempt to make women's diverse roles as visible as those of men. During his interview, when the Pastor talked about leadership in the church, he discussed this issue exclusively in relation to males. The Pastor's and the African-American church's greater focus on males' leadership over females' is the very fact upon which many Black feminists have focused. We have explained above how the internalization of African-American women of the "castrative" female might impede women from undertaking public roles in the church. Many Black feminists

have gone further and have argued that Black liberation movements and Black Theology, in seeking to liberate the African-American community from racism, have forgotten about African-American women's oppression (Dawson 1995; Grant 1979). Brown (1995: 114) points out that Black political movements did not take into consideration Black females and the specificity of their domination:

> Prevailing assumptions seem to equate the condition of the Black community with the status of Black males. It is a continuation of an ideology of Blackness, of group identity, that equates the status, condition, and progress of the race - the good of the race - with men. It is a masculinization of Blackness and race progress. Often, therefore, it is an ideology that looks to ways to improve the lot of men while not just omitting women from the picture but often even accepting the violence against them.

Black movements of liberation being masculinized, women have to privilege their identity as Black over their identity as female:

> The parallel pursuits of equality for African-Americans and for women have trapped Black women between often conflicting agendas for more than a century. We are asked in a thousand ways, large and small, to take sides against ourselves, postponing a confrontation in one arena to address an equally urgent task in another . . . Despite the bind, more often than not we choose loyalty to race rather than the uncertain allegiance of gender. (Bray 1991: 56; cited in Brown 1995: 118).

By privileging their identity as Blacks, Black women also put aside their abilities to lead. Yet it would be erroneous to think that the church and the Pastor altogether "forget" about females' leadership issues. Although he did not mention it during his interview, the Pastor also attends to females' leadership. At the end of a Bible Study session I attended along with about ten people, the Pastor asked people who they thought would be the right person to replace the retiring "Director of

Christian Education." Although completely invisible during the ritual, the Director of Christian Education is a very prestigious person in the church. The director, invariably a female, is in charge of supervising children's education in the church and the Sunday School. To be chosen by the Pastor as a director, besides a great commitment to the church, one has to show a perfect knowledge of the Bible and an ability to lead people in their Christian life. Although he did not explain why, the Pastor emphasized that he preferred a woman for this important position. Consequently, we cannot argue in a simple way that women are disempowered in the church. Women do undertake important positions even though these positions are less visible. Women's authority may be less public than men's, but they still exert an authority.

Nevertheless, one could argue that the type of leadership positions occupied by women are restricted to certain domains. The issue of gendered domains and dominance has been much discussed in anthropology since the 1970's when Rosaldo (1974) proposed the public/private model in order to explain the universality of women's subordination. This model has been criticized by several authors including herself (Rosaldo 1980; Mathews 1984; Ortner 1990) as it imposes a Western categorization on other societies, and impedes researcher's recognition of females' actual participation in the so-called "public sphere." Other authors have questioned the idea that females have been universally dominated. For example, Nelson (1974) argued that manipulation and maneuvering are important aspects of power relations that give women a great deal of power. Hence, women's actual power may "balance"

(Ortner 1990: 39) men's greater prestige or status. Others have demonstrated that the sectors over which women have control (i.e. household and children), although apparently unimportant and described by many researchers as unimportant, are actually key spheres of activity socially, economically, and politically (Friedl 1967; Reigelhaupt 1967; Rogers 1975). At Redemption Church, then, while women's activities might be objectively important, these activities are still considered in society as less important than those of males. By making women's positions generally less visible than those of the men during the service, the church reinforces the idea that what women do is less important.

However, if some authors have argued that women's domains were actually important, others have associated the gendering of domains with women's subordination. While criticizing Rosaldo's private/public model for the reasons cited above, several authors think that the model has some explanatory value (Ortner 1990), especially in industrial societies (Murcott 1983). While she demonstrates that hegemonic patterns of practices are never "total," Ortner (1990) still embraces the notion that societies with strongly gendered domains are more inegalitarian. In the same vein, Reiter has shown how the gendered division of labor, while serving the capitalist State, also "subordinates" women and "reduces" their status (1974: 282). Hence, one could say that women in the church are disempowered in the sense that they belong to and have authority domain with less "public" authority. Ortner thus

criticizes positions such as Sanday's which argue that women's greater power "balances" men's greater prestige:

> Prestige and power cannot be "balanced" against one another . . . If men in a given society have culturally stated higher status, then by definition this is a "male dominance" or gender asymmetrical society, regardless of how much de facto power women actually exert (1990: 39).

Hence, according to Ortner, although the women of Redemption Church might have more power than it appears, there are still subordinate.

From yet another perspective, when investigating women's power, one has to keep in mind that a community is constituted by *both* men and women, and that women do not necessarily want to take men's place. As MacLeod has argued in research on veiling and the ambiguities of resistance in Cairo:

> Women's power relations are often intertwined with other kinds of ties, such as romantic love or family bonds . . . [In Cairo], most husbands and wives consider themselves partners in the family structure and neither wishes to switch roles nor to dissolve the differences between male and female character (1992: 554).

Indeed, one cannot understand women's action in the power structure if one imagines women as a group that would be separated or willing to be separated from men. In addition, an analysis of women's power in the church should also take into consideration the larger context of the African-American community. If we consider that Black women are often stigmatized as "castrating females" and men as "lazy good-for-nothings," women probably take pride when they see their men, dressed in suits and having responsibilities as leaders in a church that other people respect. The great atmosphere of festivity that prevails when the men sing seems to confirm this

point. Hence, what has often been interpreted as men's domination over women in the church could actually be women's voluntary willingness to put the men forward, and by extension the African-American community as a whole. Thus, when looking at women as members of a minority community, the ritual becomes a resistance to society's racial stereotypes.

Moreover, if the rituals put the men forward and acknowledge their importance in the church as well as in the family, they also recognize women's importance. In everyday life, women undertake many responsibilities by themselves concerning their children's care and education. These responsibilities are very demanding on many levels, since a majority of women in the church are divorced and take care of their children by themselves. The church is the only place that truly acknowledges publicly women's merit and responsibilities as care-takers of children. In outside society, by contrast, these same tremendous responsibilities have led to Black women being stigmatized as "hyperdominant" and "castrating" females.

Hence, the ritual constitutes a resistance to society's stereotype. Consequently, one could argue that the rituals empower women vis-à-vis the White society, but disempower them as females. Yet an analysis of women's power is made even more complex by the fact that one cannot make a blanket statement that would cover *all* women in the church. Certainly, empowerment and disempowerment are not uniform within the church. Some women like Marsha, Joanna or Emma, by taking a public or political role, actively challenge the traditional female's role. Hence, some of the

women of the church might be more empowered than others in the sense that they challenge both society's racial stereotypes and gender stereotypes.

Yet women who seek to challenge gender stereotypes have to work within a system which constrains their abilities or opportunities to lead. As indicated above, in response to the idea that females actually have a great deal of power (Rogers 1975), Ortner has argued that, if men have higher prestige, then "female power is not fully legitimate and can only be exercised in hidden and/or distorted ("manipulative") ways" (1990: 39). Moreover, if some women fight to have important positions, they do not or cannot really attempt to challenge the domain they are assigned to. As we have shown earlier, Marsha does not try to convince the men on political issues and she does not convince people in public settings. As MacLeod has argued, "although women definitely struggle to widen their options, they also play a real part in maintaining the social context, including power relations, that limit women's opportunities" (1992: 535). Women's resistance is "an ambiguous resistance, an accommodating protest" (MacLeod 1992: 552-3).

However, the challenge of the traditional female's role does not constitute the only source of empowerment for women, for there are several other ways in which the church empowers women. First, women's spiritual lives might empower them. As a White female getting a Master's degree from a university, one might think that I was dominating Judy who did not have much education and who worked at night at the post office sorting mail. But her knowledge of the Bible not only gave her a certain

dignity but also a knowledge that I did not possess. Although she lacked the type of knowledge that I had, she was in no way "inferior" to me. During our conversations, we were equal. Once, I was very surprised when she told me she believed in reincarnation. When I told her that this was not a very Christian belief, she answered me with a long and perfectly logical "essay" that I was totally unable to refute, showing that a belief in reincarnation was completely compatible with Christianity.

While Judy's knowledge of the Bible was much greater than mine, I had more knowledge of the theory of ritual. Objectively, one type of knowledge is not "higher" than the other. Within the university, my knowledge is "superior" to hers, but within the church, my knowledge has no value. When I went to the Bible Study, I looked really ridiculous when the Pastor asked me to comment on the verses of the Bible I had just read. I simply did not know at all what I was supposed to say.

The church experience is an individual one through which women might achieve a sense of dignity and power over their destinies through their spiritual lives. But it is also a communal experience from which women, but also men, benefit.

Another way in which the church provides a sense of dignity and a form of empowerment is the diverse support groups that the church creates. As mentioned earlier, women socialize together after the ritual at church, meet during the Sunday School or the Women's Retreat, meet at each other's homes for church-related programs (Joanna's Bible Study, Singles' group), and socialize outside the church.

Through these diverse ways of meeting one another through the church, women create helping networks which in turn create an African-American identity.

CONSTRUCTION OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN IDENTITY AND SYMBOLIC RESISTANCE

The Women's Network: Identity and Cultural Persistence

Once, Joanna invited me to a lunch she had prepared for Easter. Six women came to this lunch with their children. The only two men present were Joanna's brother and her boyfriend. The guests ranged in age from late twenties to mid-thirties. One of the women was Joanna's step-sister and the others were among Joanna's closest friends. They all had met each other through church or church-related activities, although not necessarily through Redemption Church. One had the feeling that this was a "women's" gathering, although it also focused on children, since the "event" of the day was a Easter egg hunt. While the women spent most of their time in the yard or in the kitchen, the two men spent most of the afternoon in the lounge located in the basement of the house, watching a very "important" basketball game. They joined the women only at lunch-time, when Joanna's brother made the barbecue and the men watched the children looking for the Easter eggs for a few minutes.

Throughout the afternoon, the conversations were similar to the conversations I had heard in similar informal settings among other Redemption Church women. A substantial part of the discussion centered on the women's respective churches: they

"chatted" about the Easter service. One woman, invited by Joanna to attend Redemption Church's Easter service, compared it with that of her regular church. Another mentioned that she was not a member of her husband's church because she thought that the service at his church was very long and boring. Other women then compared the different churches they had attended in the past in terms of how exciting or boring and lengthy their services were.

Another substantial part of the conversation centered on children: how they were doing at school, how good schools in the area were, etc. A woman talked about how upset she would get when her acquaintances would reproach her because her eighteen year old daughter still lived with her. She said that she would rather have her daughter at home so that she could focus on her education, rather than have her living a so-called independent life, getting pregnant or getting into troubles with drugs.

During most of the afternoon the guests clustered into small groups, women circulating from one group to another. But at one point, they all gathered in the lounge to listen to the soundtrack of *Waiting to Exhale*, a very popular movie which created controversy in the African-American population by depicting four middle-class Black females and their difficulties with their boyfriends or husbands who were unable to make a commitment or to take on responsibilities. Interestingly, when I asked the women what they thought of the movie, they first answered that the movie was rather good, but that what they actually enjoyed most were the songs of the soundtrack rather than the movie itself. When I asked the same question of the men, they answered that

they had not seen it because it was a "women's movie." This started a "debate" between Joanna's boyfriend and Joanna's step-sister, where she argued that every man should watch the movie to realize how men treated women; he replied that this was only a women's movie, and that, in real life, most men were not like those represented in this movie.

While listening to the music, three other women talked about their hairstyles, and one gave the address of a good store for artificial hair and products for Black hair. Then, they went on talking about good hairdressers in NE Portland.

As a White, I could not truly "participate" in the conversations. I had watched *Waiting to Exhale* but enjoyed it only from an anthropological perspective. I did not enjoy the music from the movie and I was rather embarrassed when they sang along with the lyrics. I also felt "out of place" when they talked about African-American hairstyles, especially when they talked about products to uncurl the hair. I was more comfortable during the conversation about children because it related to education. But I could not really share their concerns, especially their worries over things such as teen pregnancies. Interestingly, this last issue was also a very important one for Judy, who often told me how afraid she was that her thirteen-year-old daughter might get pregnant.

It is in part through these conversations that Black females create an African-American identity. While talking about their African-American hairstyles and describing how they fix their hair, they emphasized (and created?) the difference

between White bodies and Black bodies. In her work about differences and the creation of identities, Moore (1994) wrote that "deciding on differences is one way of delimiting identities. Difference(s) from others are frequently about forming and maintaining group boundaries" (1994: 1). Furthermore, she wrote:

> What is at issue here is the embodied nature of identities and experience. The very fact of being present as embodied subject gives a particular character to the ontology of experience which emphasizes the degree to which social interactions are embodied ones taking place in concrete space and time. . . . Intersubjectivity and dialogue involve situations where bodies marked through by the social, that is the difference (race, gender and so on) are presented as part of identities." (1994: 3).

It is through construction of this identity that African-American culture "persists." As Green (1981) has noted, contrary to Italians (or other Europeans) who originated from a single country, African-Americans originated from diverse African countries. Today, African-Americans remain extremely diverse socially, economically and politically. Hence, they do not share a unique national identity or common cultural background. According to Green, the only thing that African-Americans share is a sense of collective identity based on their African ancestors, as well as on their experience of racism and segregation. In the words of Spicer,

> The cultural persistence and the continuity [of the African-Americans] are not based on genetic purity, or in continuous possession of a homeland, in the maintenance of a particular language. [The crucial factor is the existence of] a coherent sense of collective identity which is *based on common cognitive and affective aspects of meaning* [Italics added] (1976: 5, cited in Green 1989: 70).

Hence, through the Church, women can meet and talk to one another about their experiences as African-American females. They also help each other emotionally

and practically by talking about their difficulties raising their children, by looking after one another's children, and by sharing their concerns. Through participation in a helping network, women create their identity as African-American females. But African-American identity is also created during rituals, so that if mostly women benefit from their networks outside of the church, men also benefit from the church itself.

Creation of a Sense of Community

So far, we investigated male and female relationships only in terms of power, structure, and authority. But, as Bell noted, if one considers the ritual only in terms of authority and social control, one forgets the "communal identity" that participants acquire through ritual (1995: 122). This "communal identity" constitutes an empowerment and a "symbolic resistance" (Comaroff 1985) vis-à-vis the dominant White community.

Hobsbwan (1983) observed that ritual can "traditionalize" (Bell 1995) and create what he calls "invented traditions." These traditions establish a more or less fictive continuity with a past. At Redemption Church, wearing African style clothes is one of the ways in which these traditions are created. Whereas the African-Americans historically originated from different cultures, African-American clothes become symbols of an imaginary common past which is linked to a geographic area. While wearing these clothes, a sense of commonality is created in reference to this

"common" past. As Hobsbawn argued, "the invented tradition establishes or symbolizes a social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities" (1983: 9). Through this "tradition" and the wearing of African clothes, the church creates a community with its own "traditions" which distinguishes itself from the White community.

If the Church creates a link to an "imaginary" common past in Africa, it also creates a link to the "real" common past. By constantly referring to the period of slavery, both sermons and songs, such as the Negro National Anthem, create links to a "real common past." Songs and sermons often compare Black unity and the Blacks' common struggle for freedom during slavery with the contemporary political struggle.

Hence, beyond the gendered power relations and the question of prestige, the Church creates a sense of communality: the Church is a place where people pray, but it is also a place where people socialize "among themselves." It is a place where people feel "at home." Unlike the workplace, where African-American slang is not accepted, in the church, people can use this slang in a friendly environment. The congregants often refer to the church members as their "extended family." They call one another "brother" and "sister." On one occasion, a woman asked the Pastor for permission to publicly thank during the service her "brothers and sisters" who had helped her to repair her damaged roof. The Pastor then emphasized the "power" of this "extended family."

The Church is also a place where, since people are "among themselves," racism can become a topic of jokes. We have mentioned earlier how the Pastor made the entire Church laugh by teasing a woman who lived in the "friendly" town of Lake Oswego. Similarly, the fact that African-Americans are often stigmatized in the larger society as being tardy and lazy becomes a joke. For example, when a person comes late to Church, his neighbor will almost inevitably tease him by saying "C.P. Time!" Simply saying this term, which means "Colored People Time," creates and activates a whole rapport of complicity and communality between the two persons. By extension, it also creates a sense of communality within the African-American community vis-à-vis the White community. Hence, the church implicitly creates a separation between "us" and "them." It creates a sense of belonging to a group that delimits itself from the Whites. It creates a *symbolic* resistance to the Whites from which both men and women benefit.

Besides this symbolic resistance, the Church also attempts to undertake diverse *concrete* political actions. These actions are mostly centered on the issues of poverty, gentrification of the neighborhood, and the health and empowerment of the African-American community. An important aspect of the Church's political involvement is centered on keeping the congregation aware of diverse political debates and meetings both at the national level and at the Portland metropolitan level. In the lobby of the church, *The Skanner,* the local African-American newspaper which focuses on these types of issues, is always available. Redemption Church also actively participates in

meetings such as the one which focused on the minimum wage described earlier, or in conferences such as the celebration previously mentioned of Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. On one occasion, the Pastor organized an action to support Black small businesses in N.E Portland: on two consecutive Sundays, he distributed bread coupons in order to support a local supermarket. He also talked for about twenty minutes about the crucial role of Black businesses in gaining power and independence vis-à-vis the Whites.

Many women participate in these different activities, such as the announcements of political meetings, reading of *the Skanner*, the support of Black businesses through bread coupons, and the signing of the minimum wage petition. Men also get politically involved, but a greater number of women than men participate in these activities. When Redemption Church sends a delegation to a political meeting, the number of women is always greater than men. Hence, in a church where the idea of improving social conditions and empowering the African-American community is so central, women *do* play an important role.

Yet, one needs to determine what impact this struggle actually has in the political and economic sphere. As Reiter (1974) argued, one needs to look at power at different levels. In her work on male and female power relationships in a village in Southern France, she noted that power appears to be held by men since they control the "public sphere." Yet, she also demonstrated that women's power in the private sphere is such that, at the level of the village, power and authority are actually held by

women. Nevertheless, Reiter then points out that at the national level where positions are again dominated by men, the village has no power, for economic and political decisions are made by the national government rather than by the village.

We observe similar patterns in Portland politics. Although this question needs further research, it seems that the political actions undertaken by Redemption Church are limited, not only in terms of number of actions and participants, but also in terms of the impact of these actions in the political and economic sphere. For example, one can wonder how much impact the action aimed at supporting a Black-owned small supermarket actually had. Along with a few single males, many of Redemption Church women did go to this supermarket to purchase the loaf of bread which cost thirty cents with the coupons distributed at church that day. But most of them did not purchase anything else, leaving one to wonder how much impact this promotion actually had. I asked four or five persons if they would, from this Sunday on, do their shopping at this store. All of them answered that they had already come to this store on a few occasions, but that they could not afford to do their shopping there regularly since it was far more expensive than larger supermarkets. It seems that Black small businesses find it difficult to keep their prices as low as the national supermarket chains. Hence, the action undertaken by the church can have only a very limited impact, since local businesses are actually confronted by national monopolistic chains. One also wonders what real effects a petition for a ballot measure on the minimum

wage can actually have. There are larger social and economic forces which actually fix this wage.

Hence, if the women have indeed more power than the "facade" of the ritual suggests, one can still question what impact this power has in the wider economic and political spheres. Moreover, we mentioned earlier that women's spiritual lives and knowledge of the Bible might provide them with a certain authority over a female who belongs, as a White studying in a White university, to the "dominant" society. Indeed, the knowledge of the Bible is not objectively "superior" to anthropological knowledge. Yet, in the larger society, both types of knowledge are not given the same value. Whereas anthropological knowledge allows me to go to the university, Judy's type of knowledge would not allow her to enter this White institution. Hence, once again, an analysis of domination relationships must look at the different levels of power. What constitutes power and authority within the church is not recognized as such in the larger society.

However, even though church members may not have the power to modify the economic and social structure of a country, it does not mean that the Church does not exercise a kind of power. By raising the level of consciousness around the issues of empowerment within the African-American community, the Church *does* have power. During the Civil Rights Movement, the Church did modify racial relationships in the United States. At the level of Redemption Church, even if the Church cannot modify larger economic structures, it can "make a difference" in its members' lives. It creates

networks of mutual assistance mostly among women, but also among men. For example, Joanna, a real estate agent fighting against the gentrification of the neighborhood, sold low-price houses to several members of the church.

CONCLUSION

Research for this thesis began with the goal to demonstrate that African-American women church goers are not as dominated as they have often been described. But, while investigating the ways in which women might actually have power, we realized that we could not argue in a simple way that women are either empowered or disempowered. We realized that the issue of women's power was very complex and ambiguous, and that it should be investigated in relation to a larger racial context.

We began by arguing that although men have higher prestige than women during the ritual, women also obtain a form of prestige. Furthermore, through the many activities in which women participate outside of the ritual, women have leadership positions and exert a form of power. Women are unique individuals and active members of the church. They manipulate, maneuver and negotiate within the church's power relations. However, we have also argued that women exert their authority and get things done mainly in certain domains. We have presented several perspectives on how gendered domain affects women's power or subordination, and concluded that whatever one's theoretical perspective on this issue, the women of

Redemption Church seem to be disempowered. If one considers along with Rodgers (1975) that women's domain is actually very important, the women of Redemption Church are disempowered in the sense that Redemption Church does not challenge the notion that what women do is unimportant. If one considers along with Ortner (1990) that societies with strongly and inflexibly gendered domains are inegalitarian, the women of Redemption Church seem disempowered in the sense that the church does not give them many opportunities to undertake leadership positions in more public settings.

However, the consideration of the racial context forces us to move beyond a simple and static view of women's power, a view according to which women would be either empowered or disempowered. By taking into consideration the racial context, one realizes that women are actually empowered as the ritual challenges the racial stereotypes of both African-American men and women. They empower the men of their community and indirectly themselves by resisting African-American male stereotypes. Hence, to get back to Ortner's definition of women's subordination, the women of the church are not subordinated in the sense that "men [do not] exert control over women's behavior and women [do not] find themselves compelled to conform to men's demands," (1990: 37) for women seem to willingly put the men forward. Hence, while we agree with African-American feminists' arguments that Black liberation movements have focused on liberation from racism rather than on both

racism and sexism, we cannot argue in a simple way that the church disempowers women.

The issue of women's power is made even more complex by the fact that women are not equally empowered and that women are not all empowered in the same way. While some women obtain a form of empowerment through their participation in political activities or their leadership positions, others obtain a form empowerment through their spiritual lives. Moreover, the Church also focuses on *concrete* liberation of the African-American community through diverse participation in political movements. We can question the real effect of these actions on the socio-economic sphere. We can also question the real power that women might have even though, as we have demonstrated, they have a greater authority than the "facade" of the ritual indicates. Yet the Church can make a real difference in people's life, including at the economic level, even if it cannot revolutionize the socio-economic structure.

Consequently, the Church and its rituals are extremely complex. They offer diverse types of support systems and opportunities for members. They offer a spiritual life, opportunities to achieve one's goals and one's talents, as well as helping networks and friendship. The Church also creates a place where people can meet "among themselves," creating a sense of belonging to a group and providing its members with a sense of dignity. Because the Church offers many types of options, all members, according to their sensibilities, their perspectives on what the Church should be, and their goals, have an opportunity to obtain what they want.

African-American religion has often been stigmatized as a hyper-emotional religion which, by offering people a "spiritual evasion," prevents African-Americans from becoming aware of the real causes of their social and economic disempowerment (Raboteau 1978). I have argued here that religion is in no way a monolithic institution which oppresses men and women who are easily duped, but that it is actually extremely diverse and does provide certain forms of power.

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