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INTRODUCTION: THAT ALL MAY LIVE!

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Introduction

Nyambura J. Njoroge¹ has made a profound contribution to African theology and religious studies. This has been particularly through her unwavering insistence that faith communities in Africa must be radically inclusive. Battling against patriarchy, poor leadership, stigma, and discrimination, she has consistently called for “abundant life for all.” She is an avid promoter of “*talitha cum*” hermeneutics (see for example, Njoroge and Dube 2001), where the emphasis is on bringing African women and girls to life in its fullness. Promoting ecumenism, challenging harmful norms and values, and advancing the cause of women in Africa and globally, she has been unrelenting in her quest for freedom and dignity. Unsurprisingly, she has championed “an African Christian feminist ethic of resistance and transformation” (Njoroge 2000). In keeping with African women’s theologies, where she is one of the leading voices, Nyambura has called for persistence and vigilance since, “... the ideology of patriarchy is alive in the church and in theological schools” (Mombo 2019: 459). Even when the COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc globally in 2020, Nyambura spoke against sexual and gender-based violence, stigma, inequality, and other forces of death. She proclaimed, “COVID-19 does not have the final word!”

Women’s issues have preoccupied Nyambura’s mission and calling, leading to her insistence that faith communities in Africa must not add to women’s burdens. If anything, they should become the veritable vehicles for social transformation and human flourishing. Her contribution to ecumenical theological education, resistance to homophobia and exclusion, belief in the leadership of children and young people, as well as Africa’s right to self-determination and autonomy, is significant. Driven by

¹ Although academic convention requires the use of the surname, in this introductory chapter (and in other chapters), some authors utilise her first name to identify her, while retaining her surname for references.

the urgency to address sexual and gender-based violence globally, Nyambura has been unwavering in mobilising faith communities to break the conspiracy of silence. This theme has been taken up in the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence in African theology and religious studies (see, among others, Getui and Wamue 1996; Maluleke and Nadar 2002; Chitando and Chirongoma 2013).

An early, active and consistent member of the International Network of Religious Leaders Living with and Personally Affected by HIV & AIDS (INERELA +), Nyambura has devoted a significant part of her life and career to the ecumenical response to HIV & AIDS (Kurian 2016). She has reflected on the key drivers of the epidemic and has challenged religious leaders to be compassionate and act in solidarity with people living with HIV. Her activism and scholarship within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle), where she is one of the founding members, is equally noteworthy. At its fifth Pan African Conference in Gaborone, Botswana, in July 2019, the Circle awarded Nyambura the Mercy Amba Oduyoye Global Leadership Award and the Circle Community Champion Award.

Calling for new ways of leadership (Njoroge 2005), she has insisted that all faith communities in Africa must respect and uphold the full dignity and humanity of women. According to Fiedler (2017: 145), Nyambura Njoroge has “a record of involvement in leadership development and ecumenical theological education discussions.” In a reflection that packages and synthesises her views on many of the key issues that have dominated her professional life, publications and activism, namely, the *Progressio* Comment entitled, *Gender Justice, Ministry and Healing: A Christian response to the HIV pandemic* (Njoroge 2009), she has highlighted her preoccupation with African women’s agency. For her, African women are not weak subjects waiting for their salvation from elsewhere. Rather, they are life-long freedom fighters whose tenacity must be celebrated. We cite her at length below:

Consequently, it is right to say that the subordination of women is one common thread that runs through many religious communities, in the Bible, in African religion and culture, and in most of the world’s cultures and religions. It is equally right to say that from a Christian perspective many women do not accept that patriarchy and other dehumanising:

structures render them powerless and less than equal as human beings. Men and women are created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:26-27). If women did indeed believe they were powerless, they would not

struggle as hard as they do to resist and denounce gender inequalities and injustice. As a result, many Christian women have resolved to reject victimhood, reclaim their God-given birth right and dignity, and be fully engaged in God's mission. Hence, some African women theologians and religious scholars have chosen to focus their energies constructively and creatively by identifying a ministry that brings reconciliation, healing, justice, peace and fullness of life. As Christian women, we take our example from Jesus, and try his ways of 'breaking all the rules' that dehumanise people and fuel death (Njoroge 2009: 5).

When it comes to African women's dignity and rights, Nyambura jettisons diplomatic etiquette and protocol. She insists that women must do whatever they need to do to achieve full liberation, without seeking men's endorsement. She is also of the conviction that women must seek justice actively (see for example, Dube and Njoroge 2004). One of Nyambura's favourite biblical characters is the revolutionary and subversive woman who 'broke all the rules,' and anointed Jesus (Luke 7: 36-50). She annoyed the men who were in the house, but Jesus asked that they leave her alone! Women simply need to know that Jesus is on their side, and they must stop worrying about the men who might feel annoyed when they (the women) defy social conventions (Njoroge 2012).

Of course, some (probably, many or most) people in authority have found Nyambura's approach abrasive. These include male religious leaders, men in positions of power, as well as some women and men from the global North. She is an extraordinarily strong African woman who is not afraid to stand her ground on matters of principle. Her fiery determination can be unsettling for those who have not sought to understand the odds that African women (and women of African descent) have had to and must continue to overcome. The slaves had to sing, "We Shall Overcome" in order to survive. So too are African women singing and acting to survive. Indeed, Nyambura Njoroge (2008: 116) defiantly and prophetically proclaims, "...we shall overcome."

Politically, Nyambura may be located within what Malisa and Chidembo (2018) refer to as the radical Pan African liberationist movement. She detests Africa's marginalisation in the global economic and political (dis)order, maintaining that it stems from the history of the exploitation and marginalisation of the continent. She is proudly African, even as she will not hesitate to critique problematic cultural values and traditions, especially those that deny some individuals or groups the opportunity to lead

wholesome lives. Extolling the power to name oneself, she will not be undermined based on her identity as a black African woman. If anything, this very identity provides her with the resources she requires to fight, and fight to the death she will! Begging, pleading and asking for favours from the powerful do not feature in her vocabulary or way of doing business. Instead, partnership, mutuality and respect are among the key concepts that guide her operations.

Nyambura's radical politics can be seen in her insistence on fair representation. Who speaks on behalf of who is a critical question in her approach to politics? For example, when panels are organised at international conferences, she is very keen to know who is speaking on behalf of who, particularly who is speaking on behalf of black African women. She is upset when men speak on behalf of women, adults speak on behalf of adolescents or people from the Global North speak on behalf of those from the Global South. Neither does she believe in the activist slogan of being a "voice for the voiceless." Her consistent refrain has been, "when given the space and the platform, everyone can speak for themselves." She is a passionate advocate of the activist conviction that people who live the reality are best qualified to articulate that reality.

Consequently, Nyambura will always quarrel with individuals from the Global North who seek to lecture Africans on African realities and issues. She calls for humility and asks these so-called "experts" to sit at the feet of their African interlocutors. Neither is she comfortable with researchers from the Global North who dismiss African intellectuals as being far-removed from the daily struggles of rural Africans, or of using rural Africans for fundraising purposes (Page 2019). Nyambura has been adamant that African intellectuals and activists have the right to speak on behalf of the continent. She has sought to resist all those who seek to undermine African intellectuals and present themselves as having a greater right to speak on behalf of Africa than African intellectuals and activists.

Below, we seek to highlight some of the major themes in Nyambura's academic and professional engagements. These are by no means exhaustive, but they provide insights into her contribution to African theology and religious studies. We must also hasten to indicate that although we have separated these themes, in reality, they overlap in many ways.

Women's Full Dignity and Rights

Nyambura will not relent when it comes to promoting African women's rights. Identifying patriarchy as an oppressive system that denies women's health and well-being, she has declared a permanent war against this stifling ideology. With fellow Circle activists, Nyambura might be said to be in a state of permanent vigilance against patriarchy. She has invested in challenging oppression and exclusion of women and promoting women's leadership. For her, it would have been normal and not surprising for African women to desert the church due to its oppression, insensitivity to the rights of women and steadfast refusal to be compassionate. However, African women have refused to be driven out of the church (Njoroge 1997). They are calling for justice within the church and throughout the world (Dube and Kanyoro 2004, and Iozzio, Roche and Miranda 2008). An African male theologian, Orobator (2018: 145) refers to a "...new generation of theologically astute African women" who have asserted their right to be heard.

While we have noted that Nyambura holds the conviction that African women have the capacity to act for their liberation, it should be acknowledged that she does not shy away from naming their desperate situation. Her ideological commitment to truth-telling demands that her point of departure is the unacceptable dehumanisation of women globally and in Africa. Thus, the category of lament is key to understanding her engagement with pain and suffering. Unlike some contemporary prosperity movements that are not willing to engage with the reality of evil, Nyambura embraces vulnerability and maintains that lament has a role and a place in African Christianity. Nyambura is convinced that lament is a powerful resource for social transformation. For her, the African context has largely prevented women from enjoying abundant life. She protests the marginalisation of the continent and the continent's own careless approach to life in all its diversity. Spending many years in Geneva, Switzerland, has led her to wrestle with God regarding the plight of Africa. Thus:

To say the least, the kind of affluence and 'conflict free' context make me raise issues with God about the enormous suffering in Africa. Why all this madness and destruction? How long do we have to endure such indignity and misery? Do we indeed belong to the human race? Why this disproportionate suffering in one particular continent? It only gets worse when I read well-researched documents on sexual and gender-based violence, wars, genocide and abuse of the environment in many African countries (Njoroge 2008: 115).

Crucially, for Nyambura, lament must not lead to paralysis and inaction. If anything, lament must mobilise individuals, institutions, communities, nations and the continent into actions that have the power to transform. In the specific case of women, Nyambura has been keen to ensure that they are freed from patriarchy and its attendant evils. Through her active involvement in the history of the Circle, she has placed the health and well-being of African women at the centre of her professional work, intellectual reflections and practical interventions.

Throughout her ministry, Nyambura has emphasised that women should not spend time listening to what men think of them. Instead, they must reflect on what Jesus thinks of them. For her, the decision by Jesus to have women as his friends, disciples and supporters settled the argument a long time ago. Thus, “In Christ, women enjoy full humanity despite the big lie that has been propagated, in many ways that women are inferior to men” (Njoroge 2012: 103). Even as they groan in faith (Kanyoro and Njoroge 1996), women realise that religion does have liberating potential and must seek transformation from within, Nyambura maintains. Men do not possess the keys to heaven, she avers.

Contemporary African theology and religious studies have taken the theme of African women seriously. Indeed, the theme has been firmly and decisively put on the agenda of African theology and religious studies. Many theological institutions and faculties/departments of theology/religious studies in public and private universities on the continent teach aspects of African women’s theologies. The major drive is to ensure that African women live in dignity (Mouton et al. 2015). Nyambura is among those who have devoted a large quantity of their professional lives towards ensuring that African women are counted as full beings, with full rights and privileges in society.

Transformative Femininities

One dimension of Nyambura’s commitment to women’s liberation that has not received adequate attention (and which she has not had an opportunity to elaborate on in detail through writing) is her conviction regarding, “Transformative Femininities.” Its background might be located in the growing focus on “Transformative Masculinities,” namely, the more active mobilisation of boys and men to participate in the overall response to HIV & AIDS within the ecumenical movement, particularly since the

mid-2000s. The quest to ensure that boys and men became more actively involved in addressing sexual and gender-based violence and HIV (see for example, Chitando and Chirongoma 2012) generated considerable interest and remains an ongoing concern in African theology and religious studies. There is a recognition that there is need to retrieve the initial meaning of gender by bringing men back into the picture.

Nyambura has actively supported the “turn towards men” in the overall response to HIV & AIDS. However, she has contended that “Transformative Masculinities” are, by themselves, inadequate to propel a fundamental shift in addressing gender imbalances in Africa. Instead, she has advanced that they must be accompanied by “Transformative Femininities.” Thus, African women must also be willing to let go of gender oppressive norms and other oppressive norms they have normalised if the struggle for gender justice is to be achieved. “Transformative Femininities” speak to the quest for women who are adequately equipped to support men who are undergoing “Transformative Masculinities.” Without such simultaneous transformation of men and women, progress would be stalled, argues Nyambura.

“Transformative Femininities” can be seen in women challenging patriarchal norms that prevent them from taking up leadership positions in the church, for example. Nyambura has been insistent that God has endowed women and men with equal abilities to provide leadership (see for example, Njoroge 2010). Women who are willing to support men who challenge traditional masculine roles are demonstrating “Transformative Femininities,” she contends. Therefore, the radical transformation of men must be initiated at the same time as the radical transformation of women for gender justice to be attained in Africa.

Nyambura takes the argument beyond theology and church life. For example, a global black woman tennis player such as Serena Williams is, an expression of “Transformative Femininities.” For Nyambura, women must be equipped with the confidence that they can stand tall: all alone! Yes, they can form relationships and partnerships with men. Yes, men can partner with women. Yet, women must not be made to feel incomplete without men. “Transformative Femininities” is Nyambura’s radical critique of oppressive gender norms and values that inculcate in girls and women the longing for male approval in their different undertakings. As the Circle theology has consistently articulated, strong women are a resource for the transformation of families, communities, nations and the

world. However, for this to happen, the socialisation process must be altered in very profound ways. Nyambura has been insistent on exactly this point.

Effective and Relevant Theological Education

For Nyambura, relevant theological education in Africa must be tied to the transformation of communities. She has invested heavily in making African theology and religious studies effective in addressing the felt needs of the communities. Having served as the global coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education (TEE) from 1999-2007 at the World Council of Churches (WCC) before moving to the desk on HIV & AIDS as Programme Executive of the Ecumenical HIV and Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), later to become the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy under the same acronym, Nyambura has been actively involved in key decisions regarding the direction of ecumenical theological education globally, including in Africa.

Nyambura edited the journal, *Ministerial Formation*, which provided insights into developments within the field in diverse settings. Africa enjoyed a special place in this journal, with contributors from diverse regions articulating their views on relevant theological education. As we elaborate below, she considered theological education as having the responsibility of promoting ecumenism (Njoroge 2003).

Nyambura has sought to ensure that theological institutions and departments of theology and religious studies in Africa address the lived realities of Africans, not some complex theologies developed elsewhere. Thus, she is not interested in abstract theological reflections. While she is fully aware of the major theological and ethical debates, her major focus has been on ensuring that graduates of African theological institutions and departments of religious studies are “equipped and ready to serve” (Chitando 2010). Her focus is on graduates who can contribute towards social transformation and human flourishing.

It is important to acknowledge that the quest for quality theological education is not separate from Nyambura’s commitment to women’s dignity. By encouraging women to pursue quality theological education, Nyambura seeks to promote their leadership in the church and in the community. She has consistently challenged patriarchal dominance in theological education globally. Further, she bemoans the exclusion and harassment

of women leaders in theological institutions by representatives of patriarchy. She also calls upon men to accept that women can be effective leaders of families, institutions and government.

In the context of HIV & AIDS, Nyambura has challenged theological institutions to be creative and to provide effective responses. She regards curriculum transformation as being key towards ensuring that theological institutions in Africa are relevant to their context. Her central argument has been that competence requires that one has the capacity to interpret the dominant challenge in one's context and that one is integral to the implementation of solutions to the challenges that have been identified. If graduates of African theological institutions are unable to provide accompaniment to members of their communities, as well as to address the pressing challenges in their environment, then their education would have been compromised. Consequently, corrective steps need to be taken to ensure that they can champion social transformation.

Ecumenism

Denominationalism, religious bigotry and competition are real threats to the viability of religion as a resource for social transformation. Nyambura has challenged these factors by promoting and deepening ecumenism, particularly in Africa. For her, it is critical that theological education in Africa invests heavily in promoting ecumenism (see for example, Njoroge 2001).

In relation to churches and HIV, Nyambura's ecumenical vision is tied to the urgent need for churches to join hands in providing quality service in response to the challenge. Instead of each denomination working in its own corner, there is need for joint action to promote health and healing. Since churches journey with individuals "from the womb to the tomb," they are well placed to collaborate in promoting wholeness of life for all (Njoroge 2014).

While she is steeped within the ecumenical tradition of the mainline churches, Nyambura regards partnership with African traditionalists, African Initiated Churches (AICs), the younger Pentecostal churches, Muslims and followers of other religions in Africa as critical. After all, God does not discriminate. Why should Christians? Although (as the authors) we have not confirmed her stance on this issue, she would probably agree

with Desmond Tutu (2011) that God is not a Christian, or that God is not a member of a particular Christian denomination.

Radical Inclusion

Flowing from and following her ecumenism, Nyambura's ecclesiology is an expanded one. All human beings, being "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139: 14) have inherent dignity. With every person having emerged from her/his mother's womb, there is need to ensure that there should not be stigma and discrimination against any person. Nobody, let alone flesh and blood humans who have their own weaknesses, has the right to demean and exclude any other human being.

The concept, "That All May Live" aptly captures Nyambura's radical inclusion. All human beings, irrespective of their sexual orientation and gender identity, race, ethnicity, physical or health condition, migration status, HIV status, etc. should enjoy life in its fullness. Nyambura is convinced that all human beings are invited to abundant life. She has challenged sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and all other forms of exclusion. At the heart of Nyambura's worldview is a far-reaching theology of embrace, hearty welcome and expansive (even expensive) generosity.

Nyambura's radical inclusion has been accentuated by her reflections on HIV. She has embraced and fulfils the activist slogan of "leaving no one behind." She contends that effective interventions in the context of HIV demand that every person's needs are addressed. Hence, churches must accept the reality of sexual diversity and stop attacking homosexuals. At any rate, African (male) church leaders appear to have the stamina to attack homosexuals, but to lose their voices completely when the issue of violence against women is raised, she argues. Further, women who engage in sex work should not be demonised, as sinful structures push them into sex work. As Mungure writes:

There are stories of many women in our cities who are victims of prostitution and are chased by police officers for breaking the law. Society looks down on them as "social misfits" and they end up being victimized in various ways. Many have been condemned by society and called by all kinds of names because of what they do to earn a living for their families. But what or who is pushing them into prostitution? How can these factors be addressed? Above all, how can people see such a person for who she is rather than for what she is doing? Rahab was God's child, created in the

image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26–28), long before she became a prostitute. While a woman is condemned for being a prostitute, no one focuses on the men who have sex with her; at least in Africa, there is no name for a man who has multiple sexual partners (Mungure 2009: 76).

Adolescents and Young People

When she joined WCC-EHAIA in 2007, Nyambura prophetically called upon the initiative to prioritise working with adolescents and youth. Initially, she encountered resistance, since EHAIA had not invested in working with adolescents and youth. Nyambura kept insisting that Africa is a young continent and that any initiative that hoped to transform the continent had to invest in young people. She made the following telling observation:

...Africa has a youthful population with 2006 statistics showing that 44% of its citizen is 0-15 years old. Children are the most affected by HIV but the ones who receive the least attention both in terms of care and support with orphans being the most neglected. In other words, children stand at the bottom of the list of priorities. Sadly, nonetheless, young people (15-24 years) account for 45% of all new HIV infections yet they still lack accurate preventive information and access to youth friendly clinical and counseling services (Njoroge 2009).

Fortunately, her argument found resonance among many activists and there is a growing awareness of the urgency of investing in adolescent sexual and reproductive health and rights (ASRHR) for religious leaders. Nyambura herself has been at the forefront of ensuring that adolescents and youth are accorded space at international conferences and other settings. Further, she consistently cautions against religious leaders “talking to” adolescents and youth. Instead, she recommends, “talking with” adolescents and youth in order for religious leaders to acquire valuable information, knowledge and skills. Nyambura has supported many young women and men in their professional and personal endeavours as part of her commitment to the advancement of adolescents and youth.

Effective Leadership

The theme of leadership features prominently in Nyambura’s oeuvre. She considers leadership as facilitating and enabling others to achieve their

goals, or the team's set objectives. Effective leadership does not frustrate, dictate or exclude. Instead, it is interactive and supportive. Nyambura regards the Circle as providing a good example of leadership in Africa (Njoroge 2005). She considers Africa's multiple challenges as owing in large part to poor leadership. She is a firm believer in compassionate, servant and transformative/transformational leadership. This is leadership that is not interested in "power over," nor is it preoccupied with titles and being felt. Indeed, even as a "Reverend Doctor," and heading an important unit of the World Council of Churches, she has insisted on just being "Nyambura."

Nyambura contends that African women living with HIV have provided valuable leadership, yet they are often overlooked when models or stories of effective leadership are being narrated. This is because of the bias against women's leadership in general, and women living with HIV in particular. They are the "compassionate champions: the doers and leaders" (Njoroge 2012). Nyambura celebrates women's leadership abilities and calls upon men in various contexts to partner with women to transform families, institutions, communities, nations and the continent.

In the case of Africa, Nyambura bemoans the dearth of compassionate servant and transformative leadership. Patriarchy has left society imagining only middle-aged and older men as the legitimate leaders. This has led to the leadership potential of women and younger men/boys being stifled. Men in churches and other religions, religious institutions and in politics have not provided effective leadership, she avers.

Through her own ministry, Nyambura has demonstrated the relevance of the leadership stanza, "no success without a successor." Mentorship has been one of her buzz words. This has seen her collaborating with many young people, actively preparing them to take up leadership within institutions, in the church and society. Unlike some leaders who regard young, talented individuals as "threats," Nyambura regards them as competent leaders who must be given the right exposure and the opportunity to lead. Through connecting individuals and organisations, networking and facilitating, she has demonstrated effective leadership.

Stewardship

At a time when corruption and climate change threaten the created order, Nyambura has been a consistent promoter of stewardship of resources.

This implies ensuring that the resources that have been set aside for specific programmes, such as for HIV work, must be utilised efficiently and responsibly. Further, the whole earth must be looked after in a loving and caring way. Where some theologies promote the ethic of dominance, Nyambura promotes the theology of responsibility and actively contributes towards upholding the integrity of creation. Recognising the interplay between climate change and African women's vulnerability, Nyambura has encouraged religious leaders to increase their awareness of the major issues at stake. She bemoans the senseless violence against the environment (Njoroge 2008: 115) and admires the ecological activism of Wangari Maathai, founder of the Green Belt Movement in Kenya.

A Brief Overview of the Chapters

The Chapters in this volume are organised thematically. The first set of chapters can be located in the field of theology and biblical studies. Nyambura has been keen to ensure that the Bible (as well as the Quran and the unwritten sacred texts of African Traditional Religions) is unpacked critically and systematically in African contexts. For this to be accomplished, she has consistently called for transformative theological education, with women enjoying access to quality formation.

In the first chapter, Esther Mombo traces Nyambura's passionate commitment to women's theological advancement in Africa.

Using the theological category of lament and insights from Contextual Bible Studies, Fulata Lusungu Moyo then reflects on sexual and gender-based violence. She outlines Nyambura's theological vision in relation to women's health and well-being.

Musa Dube interrogates the ways of reading the Bible in the context of HIV and AIDS in the chapter "Living in the post-HIV and AIDS apocalypse", in which she calls "for frameworks of reading for the affirmation of life, justice, the body, sexuality and compassion among others." This chapter explores the impact of Christian faith communities identifying themselves with HIV+ communities.

Gideon Githinga, a college contemporary of Nyambura, chronicles the story of Nyambura during their college days, highlighting in the process, how those early experiences have shaped the person that Nyambura came to be, especially when it comes to her engagements with and in gender, struggling with the marginalized, especially in the global South.

Chammah J. Kaunda explores and highlights the critical contributions of Nyambura to Ecumenical Theological Education and focuses on her “ecumenical theological education vision for African Christianity, especially during her tenure as Global Coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education.” This chapter interrogates the work of Nyambura within the broader context of contextual theology that privileges the experiences of Africans in their journey with God.

Mary Getui reviews the book by Nyambura, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*. Central to this book, Getui avers that “there is a stake for Church people, scholars, theologians, ecumenists, feminists, cultural enthusiasts those engaged in the community, and people of good will in this publication.”

Wati Longchar, like Kaunda, explores the contributions of Nyambura’s contributions to theological education, however, from an Asian-Pacific perspective. The role of Nyambura in helping the institutionalization of theological education from the margins is critically interrogated and highlighted.

Lovemore Togarasei problematizes the Bible within the context of increasing instances of Gender-based violence in southern Africa and calls for a re-reading of the Old Testament as a response to Gender-based Violence. Togarasei observes that the Bible, especially the Old Testament, has been a sustainer of ideologies and practices that increase the vulnerability of women to GBV but can equally become a key resource in mitigating and working towards the elimination of GBV.

Gerald O. West tackles the all important subject of contextual bible study highlighting how it must be understood in the light of praxiological resources and interpretive resources. West engages with the ways in which CBS brings the Bible closer to the reading communities as it engages readers personally and collectively and within their lived realities.

Musa Dube in the chapter “Let there be light! Birthing ecumenical theology in the HIV and AIDS apocalypse” explores ecumenical theology or theologies in Africa. The chapter argues for a plurality of ecumenical theologies or as she puts it “a symphony of voices and movements, which are not always harmonious.” The chapter challenges the Church to re-imagine herself “as an HIV positive church”, and to engage the HIV and AIDS pandemic from the position of vulnerability or otherness.

Ezra Chitando, explores the reality of fatigue among people that have been involved in the responses to HIV and AIDs from the 1980s in the chapter

“We are tired of HIV, but is HIV tired of us?” ongoing reflections in African theology and religious studies.” In the chapter, Ezra interrogates new frontiers in the responses to HIV and AIDS including the dangerous developments around the meaning of healing among faith communities.

Gideon B Byamugisha, focusing on developments in Uganda’s responses to HIV and AIDS highlights the strategies that have been adopted for expediting the realisation of an Aids-free generation in Uganda. The chapter highlights the importance of contextual ‘life theologies’, lived spiritualities of love and applied ethics of hope in an effort succeed in HIV prevention and to ending AIDS in Uganda.

Mutale Mulenga Kaunda investigates the impact of an initiation rite for Bemba women, a rite that prepares women for marriage. In this chapter, Kaunda problematizes the *Imbusa* rite of passage, questioning whether this rite might be rightly construed as a double-edged sword that might be empowering and disempowering women at the same time, especially in the manner in which it prescribes the status of women in marriage.

Pauline Wanjiru Njiru, in the chapter “Grandmothers in Mai Mahiu, Kenya challenge Pastors on being Church” interrogates the encounters between grandmothers, whose children died of AIDS and who care for the orphaned grandchildren and pastors who represent the Church. The “grandmother voices” have been missing in most researches on HIV and AIDs, yet that voice when listened to, has the power to transform the way we understand “church”. The chapter interrogates how pastors can learn from the experiences of these grandmothers.

Sophia Chirongoma investigates how child marriages challenge the realization of Africa’s 2063 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals. This chapter also explores the role of religions in the perpetuation of child marriages, not only in Africa, but globally.

Godson Lawson and Ayoko Bahun-Wilson in the chapter “Children and Young people in the context of HIV in Togo” interrogate the factors that increase the vulnerability of children and young people to HIV infection and proposes strategies for mitigating these factors.

Sinenhlanhla Sithulisiwe Chisale investigates the approaches to sexuality in the context of pastoral responses to HIV and AIDS by Christian leaders, with special reference to Christian adolescents. The chapter investigates what approaches or frameworks are used by Christian leaders to address questions of human sexuality among adolescents who are transitioning from childhood to adulthood within an environment of HIV and AIDS.

Elizabeth Pulane Motswapong, “Re-reading and contextualizing Manu IX: 2,3-2: A Motswana woman’s perspective” interrogates the basis upon which Batswana men develop a sense of entitlement and ownership towards Batswana women, making reference to the Laws of Manu.

Elizabeth Vengeyi investigates how the Bible has been appropriated to subordinate, disempower and increase the vulnerability of women in an AIC, the Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe.

Lindah Tsara and Lilian Siwila investigate the patriarchal underpinnings behind the resistance by some apostolic churches to state-run clinics and hospitals, instead opting for makeshift clinics run by prophets and midwives in an AIC in Zimbabwe.

Revai E. Mudzimu - “Is docility powerless power? Shona women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights”, interrogates whether the docility publicly displayed by Kore Kore women in Zimbabwe is a manifestation of powerlessness or conversely a manifestation of powerless power in which agency is achieved under the guise of weakness.

Masiwa Ragies Gunda questions and interrogates the concept of Ubuntu and the Bible, problematizing how these affect the experiences of people on the margins of African societies, especially sexual minorities.

Kuzipa Nalwamba in the chapter “Life-Force: An African concept of spirit(s), relationality and wholeness” explores and reflects on the holistic African worldview as a relational, life-affirming theological and ethical model.

Catherine Wambui Njagi, “That all may live – the future of the wounded pastors” investigates the position and status of divorced pastors within the religious life of Christian communities.

Mwai Mwakoka “Churches and health” explores the history of Christian health care in Africa and the work of EHAIA and the quest for a health promoting church.

Dorcas Chebet Juma is opening the Festschrift with a poem dedicated to Nyambura and other daughters of Africa: “Nyambura –my shero – she rose – we rose”.

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