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In:

Berman, Sidney K.; Leshota, Paul L.; Dunbar, Ericka S.; Dube, Musa W.; Kgalemang, Malebogo (Eds.), Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Biblical Studies : Interpretations in the Context of Climate Change, Bamberg : University of Bamberg Press, p. 11-15. 2021. DOI: 10.20378/irb-49839

Bookpart - Published Version

DOI of the Article: 10.20378/irb-94702

Date of Publication: 17.04.2024

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FOREWORD: AND STILL WE RISE – TOGETHER

Musimbi Kanyoro

Maya Angelou's poem "and Still We Rise!" inspires me. In 1989 when we launched the *Circle of Concerned African Theologians* (The Circle), our goal was to redress the dearth of theological reflections and writings by African women. Mercy Amba Oduyoye invited me to join her vision in 1988, and I answered "Yes," without hesitation and I am forever grateful to have been one of the handmaids who birthed the Circle. We named ourselves "the Circle" so that we could always widen the space to make room for one more. Writing and publishing were the two impact goals to measure our success. Three decades later, Circle members are to be found on every continent and our published works are used in many academic institutions and informal gatherings all over the world. We have by far surpassed the number of publications we imagined, and these are made up of books, articles, theses, dissertations, poems, newspaper clips, reports and more. Electronic publications and postings were never in our imagination then, but today, we are very present in social media.

Circle women are more than writers whose works are published. We have become "the Circle" of prophets, teachers, evangelists, advocates, philanthropists, and leaders in public and private sectors. We have occupied our place in previously male dominated theological and ecumenical institutions in Africa and beyond and we are ordained and lay leaders of our faith communities. Most important we have become friends with each other and together, we are disciples of justice for people and for the planet, earth.

So, if you ask me, am I satisfied that we have done enough to bring change? More than 50 years ago, Martin Luther King said: "there are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, 'when will you ever be satisfied?'" And he said, "No, no, no. We are not satisfied. We will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream." We too. The Circle will not be satisfied until we

have seen men and women work together and embrace gender equality and reject gender-based violence, discrimination and oppression of women. We will not be satisfied until we have seen all rights of women protected in every place; until we have realised the interconnection between saving lives and saving mother earth. And so, *We Still Arise!* This book is a testimonial of the ongoing journey of determination and resilience.

In October on 2018, I was in a meeting of Women World Leaders on Climate Justice in Bellagio, Italy. Each one of the 50 of us committed to do something about Climate Change. I committed to engage with Women Theologians and Women Scientists to promote women's leadership in Climate Change. It was therefore a most rewarding privilege for me to have the opportunity raise funding and also to dedicate my retirement gift from the Global Fund for Women to support the Circle Meeting in Botswana that enabled the peer review of papers that make this book. The first book of the Circle was "*Talitha Cumi*" Daughter Arise. This book is evidence that, we have stayed together, and Still We Arise!

The proverbial saying "we stand on the shoulders of those before us" is true to the Circle. Reading the contributions in this book clearly brings to focus the legacy of late World Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Professor Wangari Mathai and her lifelong advocacy for human rights and environmental protection. The theme "Mother Earth, Mother Africa and Religious Imagination takes me to the rural village where I was born and raised. I have written and theologised about this place and even done a TED talk about it. Today when I go "home", I find that the rivers which used to flow freely have dried and women and girls now walk longer distances to get water and they have cellphones.

The new paradigm is about imagining "women, water and technology". These three are very relevant to this very moment in the world where Covid 19 has redefined the entire world in a way that nobody imagined. Water has always been important, but it has been elevated to the highest-level with a pandemic whose best and only precautionary protection is to isolate and wash hands frequently with water and

soap. What does this mean for African women? African Women spend an average of 200 million hours per day collecting water. That comes to 40 billion hours a year. Imagine what could be accomplished in that amount of time. Imagine how many subjects' girls could learn: literature, science and languages. Imagine how much time women could engage in leadership in community and public life. Yet, it seems that these dreams are always pushed out of our imagination.

In my village, the rivers dried, and the mobile phone came. Business analysts actually say that water is more expensive as a commodity today than oil and gold. Financial markets have launched a water index and indeed are following water not only because it is a precious commodity, but also because it is a very limited commodity. Phones, Tablets and laptops have unleashed their own disruptions as they propagate beyond the city centres into rural village because of flash discs which access the Internet beyond city firewalls. The use of technology to connect is as urgent as never before exasperated by the Corona Pandemic lock down. So, taken together, water and technology for me are shapers of the future that the Circle must imagine hence forth. These commodities are going to define who drops out and who is inside. They are going to define where change is accelerated and where it is retarded.

The pandemic has been terrible for humans and good for the environment. Scientists tell us that the air is cleaner, the birds and animals are happier in their premises and the haze over the horizon is lifted and people are seeing the beauty they never saw before the pandemic. Yet the concern of the world is not to appreciate these changes and embrace them but rather the focus is being put on how we go back to all of the things we used to do which had not respect for environmental care and protection and often denied climate change. Leadership to reject the old ways needs to come from women and the Circle women are a resource to link faith and action to the choices we must now make by imagining and going into a new future. We need Science and facts to accompany our pragmatism and common sense

based on our experience. This is why I am engaged with women Scientist through Homeward Bound whose slogan inspires me; “mother earth needs her daughters”.

The urgent plea from Homeward Bound is that we must lead for the greater good; we must manage the planet as our home. The visionary goal is: by 2027, to equip a 1000-strong global collaboration of women with a background in STEMM to lead, influence and contribute to decision making as it shapes the future of our planet. Like the Circle, Homeward Bound (HB) is a groundbreaking, global leadership initiative for women with a background in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics and Medicine). Its three strategic focal points are: 1) I am willing and able to lead, 2) We are stronger together, and 3) We are taking actions with impact. The foundation of this initiative is an annual year-long leadership development program, which is facilitated by a global faculty of experts and environmental champions, and aims to increase skills in leadership, strategy, visibility and collaboration, while also broadening the scope of participants’ scientific knowledge. Each program culminates in a three-week expedition to Antarctica, one of the most ecologically sensitive and inspiring places on Earth that still stores $\frac{3}{4}$ of all the earth’s water.

Each graduating cohort of participants becomes part of a global network of like-minded women committed to demonstrating a model of leadership (collaborative, inclusive, legacy-minded) that will influence outcomes for men and women towards a healthier planet, and a sustainable future for us all. At the end of 2019, before travel closed down, I was invited to faculty and spent several weeks in Antarctica with 100 women with a STEMM background, chosen from some 36 nationalities and as many sciences, to be part of Homeward Bound, a ground-breaking global leadership initiative for the greater good. In Antarctica the cost of climate change is very apparent, even though the whole is still largely untouched by human hand.

At the same time, it is not impossible to see how this wholeness is endangered by what is happening in the world at large. We learned about the retreat of the glaciers resulting from global warming, the movement south of Adélie Penguins for whom the northern end of the Antarctic Peninsula is increasingly not cold enough, and about

the risk of contamination resulting from the exploding tourist industry. For me, as an African leader, it was a realisation that if we do not preserve this place, if we do not value its wholeness for Mother Earth, then the lion in the Okavango in Namibia will suffer with the sea lion in Antarctica, the elephants in Amboseli in Kenya will suffer with the elephant seals that inhabit this frozen wilderness.

The problems of climate change and the saving of our mother earth are complex. They are interconnected; and any solution that we choose must embrace broader collaborations across people, sectors, disciplines and even faiths. We know that the impact of a warmer planet will be massive. The changing patterns of weather affect food production, different ways in which diseases like malaria and respiratory illness spread in communities. We hear that because of weather patterns, the illness that we thought we were overcoming or had eradicated are coming back. We know of increasing deaths because of weather events such as floods, droughts, invasion of locusts and plagues etc. and all of these are contributing to populations dislocating and insecurity.

Decades ago, behavioral scientists adopted the term “wicked problem.” A wicked problem has many interconnected causes and seemingly conflicting solutions. This is where imagination and reimagination are called into place. For the Circle, 30 years is not enough. No, no, no. This volume celebrates God’s grace of bringing us as far. *And Still We Arise!*