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## 10 | **Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe with an Emancipatory Reading of the Bible in the African Context**

*Joyce Damian Ngandango*

### **Introduction**

Rev. Prof. Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe is an ordained Pastor from the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Eastern and Coastal Diocese. She is the second woman to hold a high academic level of theological education as a Professor. She has worked hard-as an academic and has made significant contributions as a writer of books and articles concerning Africa and Bible, and particularly issues pertaining to the emancipation of women. There is considerable appreciation for her contribution to the contextual hermeneutics and Theological publications.

She is also a thoughtful and effective leader within the church and the community, having served in various positions and in different parishes and institutions, as will be described later in this paper. Since January 2020, Lyimo-Mbowe has been working exclusively as Executive Director of the Mindol Ecumenical Foundation (MEF) in Kitwe, Zambia. Since the inception of MEF in 1959, Lyimo-Mbowe is the first female Executive Director.

This chapter examines Lyimo-Mbowe's Theological concepts of the emancipation of women in the African and biblical context, focusing on the perceptions of female inferiority in biblical texts and some African traditional culture and how these affect the social transformation of contemporary women. This chapter discusses how Lyimo-Mbowe's work addresses gender issues, Biblical hermeneutics in the African context African culture and African theology, with special focus on African womanist theology. In general, Lyimo-Mbowe's interpretations of biblical passages are relevant to the biblical hermeneutics that support the emancipation of women in the African context

## Hoyce Lyimo-Mbowe

### *Early Family Life*

Lyimo-Mbowe was born in Moshi – Kilimanjaro Region - Tanzania. She is a tenth of twelve children in family of Rev. Jacob Isaack Lyimo and Mama Luise Naftael Lyimo. Her father was a Pastor who worked in different parishes of Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania, Northern Diocese. Her mother was a smallholder farmer entrepreneur. From an early age, her parents nurtured her faith and church experience by having her attend Sunday school classes and other related activities. In her childhood, she loved the work of her father as he was ministering in the church and admired the physical appearance of his pastoral robes. She says;

My father influenced my career choice. When I was young I loved the way my father appeared in his robe. I saw him looking like an Angel when he wore a robe during Sunday service, and without knowing that women were not allowed to be ordained to pastoral ministry, I said to myself, when I grow up, I want to be a Pastor, so that I can wear a robe and teach the word of God like my father<sup>1</sup>.

From this experience, she was inspired so that, after she grew up, she would become a pastor, but she did not know that the system of the church at that time would not allow that to happen. In her pre-teen years, she realized that women could not be Pastors and there were no female pastors in the evangelical Lutheran church in Tanzania in those days. “This reality raised many questions in my mind. I felt disturbed and it was like my dream has been killed.”<sup>2</sup> she says. Then she decided to share her feelings with her mother, as she explains;

“I shared my feelings with my mother. She encouraged me and explained to me how my dream can remain valid by doing other jobs in the church. She insisted that I should not give up, but work hard in school and have a successful completion of my studies, so that I qualify to work for the church in other profession.”

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 12/11/2022.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

From this experience and the words of encouragement from her mother<sup>3</sup>, she promised herself two things: **(i)** To read Bible as much as possible and try to get to know why women were not allowed to be Pastors, and **(ii)** To work hard in her school and studies so that she could qualify for church jobs and work with the church after studies. Since her childhood she participated in church activities by singing choir, composing poems, memorizing Bible verses and teaching other children who were present in the church. These practices continued in her secondary schools life, as the active member and leader of Tanzania Student Christian Fellowship.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Education back ground***

From 1980 – 1986 Lyimo-Mbowe attended the Mrieny School, where she received her Certificate of Primary Education. She then joined Marangu School from 1987 to 1990 where she received her Certificate of Secondary Education. In 1990 when she was in Form Four, she heard the good news that Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania had decided to ordain women in the ministry. She revived her first dream and determined to pursue her ambition. Therefore, she proceeded to her advance level studies from 1991 to 1993 at Korogwe Girls High School. After a successful completion of her studies, she reminded her parents about her ambition to become a Pastor like her father. Her parents supported her in all the required interview procedures and she was selected.

Moreover, as she was getting ready to join the Theological College – Makumira, she met the first female Pastors on different occasions. She was inspired by female pastors during that time in many ways, such as Rev. Anna Makyao, Rev. Joseline Njama and Rev. Joyce Kibanga. She always admired their way of handling challenges and their confidence and dedication to their ministry. Lyimo-Mbowe attended the 100th Anniversary Jubilee of the Northern Diocese, where Pastor Joseline Njama read the Word of God with confidence. This experience further inspired her, and kept the fire burning in her heart so that she concluded that she had made the right choice to start the process of joining Theological College.

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<sup>3</sup> Lyimo Naftael L., Mother of Rev. Prof. Lyimo Mbowe H.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Lyimo-Mbowe H. 12/11/2022.

In 1994 she commenced the theological studies and in 1999 she successfully completed her studies in Bachelor of Divinity program at Makumira University College in Tanzania. During this time, she continued singing in the College choir (Neema choir) and also was appointed as college parish worker. On completion of her studies at Makumira College, she submitted her thesis, titled *Seeking for Wholeness*<sup>5</sup>.

From 2001 to 2003 she pursued her Master of Philosophy in Theology program at the school of Mission and Theology Stavanger, Norway. Her research paper for master's Programme is entitled, "Moses Married to a Cushite Woman: An Exegetical Analysis of Numbers 12".<sup>6</sup> Her thesis was submitted to the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger in Cooperation with the University of Bergen – Norway.

From 2008 to 2009 Lyimo-Mbowe successfully completed the Germany Language Course in Bochum, Germany, and then commenced her doctoral studies in 2009. In 2014, she submitted her PhD dissertation on the Old Testament topic, "Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5" to the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität in Bonn, Germany<sup>7</sup>. Later for three years from 2015 to 2017, she was a Post-Doctoral Fellow working on the research programme, with a focus on the Maasai and the Bible at VID Specialized University - Faculty of Theology and Diakonia in Norway. From the findings of her research work she published a Book entitled "Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading" with VID Specialized University Stavanger, Norway<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (1999). *Seeking for Holiness*. A Thesis submitted to Makumira University College – Tanzania.

<sup>6</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2003). *Moses Married to a Cushite Woman: An Exegetical Analysis of Numbers 12*". A Thesis submitted to the School of Mission and Theology in Stavanger in Cooperation with the University of Bergen, Norway.

<sup>7</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2014). "Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5" to the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms Universität in Bonn, Germany.

<sup>8</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2017). "Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading" VID Specialized University Stavanger, Norway.

Lyimo-Mbowe was married to Rev. Daniel Mbowe on August 1, 1998, who has been very supportive in her ministry. She has learned much from her husband because he is senior, and he has been allowing her to work, travel, and study without restrictions. All these have contributed to her success.

## ***Publications***

### **Lyimo-Mbowe has published books and articles**

Lyimo-Mbowe (2015), in this book she shows that, both women and men were leaders since ancient times; however, few female leaders are reported. Deborah was one of the powerful female leaders in ancient Israel. This work explored the feminist expositions of the Old Testament in Africa, with focus on the context of the offices held by Deborah as narrated in the book of Judges Chapters 4 and 5. The exegetical part shed light on the role played by the female leaders among the Israelites. The feminist paradigms in Judges 4 and 5 demonstrate how female characters in these chapters constructed a way to disagree with what seems to oppress women and deny their leadership capability. The findings of this study determined that gender should not have an effect on leadership in general<sup>9</sup>.

Lyimo-Mbowe (2020), she is also the author of another book, which is a critical study of some effects of popular biblical interpretations in the context of an East African ethnic group, the Maasai. The book focuses on parallels between concepts of female inferiority in biblical texts and in Maasai traditional culture. It investigates some parallels and analyses their problems as they are conceptualized in popular Maasai biblical interpretation and how these affect the social transformation of contemporary Maasai women. The book aims at sensitizing readers of the Bible to popular interpretations of biblical texts that consciously, and more often unconsciously, function as a legitimizing force, which authorizes or reinforces socio-cultural structures that oppress women. However, it demonstrates the potential of reading biblical texts from

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<sup>9</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2015. *Feminist Expositions of the Old Testament in Africa (Tanzania) in the Context of the Office Held by Deborah in Judges 4 and 5*. Berlin: Logos Verlag.

emancipatory perspectives, both in popular and academic critical contexts. Also, this book demonstrates how some popular Maasai biblical interpretations contributed in academic works to the emancipation of women. Moreover, this work develops its own contextual hermeneutics approach of women's liberation known as enkitok. The new approach borrows some aspects from social fields and it has been employed in this work on some selected biblical texts<sup>10</sup>.

Lyimo-Mbowe (2021), she also published an article where she describes how Kimpa Vita, an African woman and an ordinary reader of the Bible, contextualized some concepts from scripture and critically analysed some church images in her days. She made an effort to analyse various religio-and socio-cultural parallels between her traditions and biblical texts as well as church practices. She appreciated the potential for emancipation in the Bible. Kimpa Vita was burnt at the stake in the 1700s for challenging the ambiguities of missionary Christianity and its seeming support for colonialism and even slavery in the Congo. Kimpa also suffered martyrdom because of her gender. The Kimpa Vita story is an African women's story<sup>11</sup>.

Lyimo-Mbowe (2008), she writes about the heated discussion within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT) on women's ordination during 1980s to the Pastoral ministry. Lyimo-Mbowe observes how it encountered various hindrances like culture, church traditions and Biblical verses. In culture she wrote about Patriarchal system in most of African communities. The way children were raised even women themselves felt inferior to men, they believed cannot be leaders but only men are born to be leaders. On church traditions all mission societies which brought the Gospel and established churches in Tanzania considered only men. But also on the Bible verses she wrote on the 12th Assembly of ELCT in Morogoro 1990 were by Theologians who were against women's ordination mainly used Biblical texts 1 Cor14:34 and

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<sup>10</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2020. *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading*. USA: Peter Lang Publisher.

<sup>11</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2021. Kimpa Vita: Contextualized Biblical Interpretation in *Breaking the Silence: A Collection of Research Papers by the Women Theologians on their Participation in the Church* (Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press) Chapter 2.

2 Tim 2:12. The verses insist that the ordination of women as Pastors is forbidden Biblically. She concludes by showing efforts been made by ELCT to fight against the discrimination of women in the church ministry, many positive steps which were taken to include women in the church ministry where women theologians are ordained<sup>12</sup>.

## **Working Experience as a Pastor**

Lyimo-Mbowe in 1999 was ordained as Pastor and worked for the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, East and Coastal Diocese in different capacities, served as pastor in charge of the different parishes as follows: the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania, Eastern and Coastal Diocese Magomeni Mviringo, Kijitonyama, Matumbi and Kipawa.

She has also served as District Pastor at Ilala - Eastern and Coastal Diocese of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania and Kinondoni District – Eastern Coastal Diocese of Evangelical Lutheran Church of Tanzania where she provided supervision of 20 parishes (with 20 Pastors, 20 Evangelists and 20 Parish Workers), 45 sub-parishes (45 Evangelists and 45 Parish workers). More than 30,000 people were parishioners and congregants of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania – Eastern and Coastal Diocese – Kinondoni District. Moreover, she served as Secretary for the Desk of the Christian Education where she oversaw Diocesan schools and, at the same time, coordinated the teaching of the Christian Education in all primary and secondary schools in Dar es Salaam and other areas of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Eastern and Coastal Diocese – Tanzania<sup>13</sup>.

From January 2018 to December 2019 she worked for Tumaini University Dar Es Salaam College as a Dean of Students, lecturer and

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<sup>12</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2008). ELCT/ECD: Encouraging and empowering those Who are There” in *It Takes Two: The Ordination of Women in the Member Churches of the United Evangelical Mission*, Edited by Gesine V. Kloeden-Freudenberg, Heike Koch, Brunhild v. Local and Sonia Parera-Hummel. Wuppertal: UEM Publisher, 204-209.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.



Chaplain. This University belongs to the ELCT-East and Costal Diocese (A Constituent College of Tumaini University Makumira).

Moreover, in her teaching duties, she has served as a Supervisor at Justo Mwale University, and Rock View University, Supervising Masters and PhD students. Lyimo-Mbowe has been serving as a Lecturer at Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation, teaching Old Testament and Christian Education.

Lyimo-Mbowe has also been influential as a Guest Lecturer at Heidelberg University in Germany, teaching Diaconia in the African context. She worked part-time at the Volkshochschule, Bonn, Germany, providing instruction in Swahili language, as well as orienting Missionaries and Experts as they prepare to travel to East Africa for work. Finally, she was Part-Time Teacher at Moshi Secondary School, teaching Christian Education, and at Lyakirimu Secondary School, teaching Swahili and Geography.

Lyimo-Mbowe has served on various boards, including international boards like; The Foundation Board of United Evangelical Mission, Member of the UEM Executive Committee, the UEM Council and Classical Religious Texts in Global Contexts.

## African woman

According to Ngandango 2021:87, an African woman is one who did not talk back to men, but must be silence to exhibit respect.<sup>14</sup> Taiwo writes that women are subordinate to men and that their roles are less important because they are confined within the family unit. It is the men who had the decision-making power, the wisdom and the knowledge to build the communities<sup>15</sup> (Taiwo 2010:215). Lyimo- Mbowe says:

Most African communities are Patriarchal. This reality led to the dominion of men over women. Men felt that they were the ones to lead,

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<sup>14</sup> Ngandango, J. (2021). The Contribution of women to the church growth in the Evangelical Lutheran Church-Iringa Diocese. *Breaking the Silence: A Collection of Research Papers by the Women Theologians on their Participation in the Church* (Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press) Chapter 6, p. 87.

<sup>15</sup> Taiwo, O. (2010). The Traditional Roles of African Women. Nigeria p. 210.

not women. Due to life system of many Tanzanian societies, and the way children are raised, even women themselves feel inferior to men. They believe that they know nothing and cannot be leaders; only men are born to be leaders<sup>16</sup>.

Hinga (2002) supports that there are social injustices experienced by African women because of Patriarchy in African communities. These lead to women being discriminated against their effort to be engaged in the communities in which they find themselves<sup>17</sup>

Most people would agree that women and girls are disadvantaged in life (Kabeer 2001)<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless, girls and women in Africa face unequal opportunities for education, less inheritance and ownership of assets, discrimination in employment and occupations, violence at home and in public spaces, and limited political representation. It is on this basis that the position of Bulkachuwa (1996:15) is clearly stated as it relates to the Nigerian Woman:

In many areas women are still regarded as possessions to be inherited, they are given no formal education as it was formerly considered more advantageous to educate a female child who is given out in marriage at an early age. They are forever under the control of either their husband or male relatives.... They cannot inherit or own property nor can they participate fully in public life and the decision-making process within their immediate community. They had no right over the children they bear and are mostly the victims of domestic violence....<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. 2008. ELCT/ECD: Encouraging and Empowering those Who are There" in *It Takes Two: The Ordination of Women in the Member Churches of the United Evangelical Mission*, Edited by Gesine V. Kloeden-Freudenberg, Heike Koch, Brunhild v. Local and Sonia Parera-Hummel, Wuppertal: UEM Publisher, 204-209.

<sup>17</sup> Hinga, T. (2002). African Feminist Theologies, the global village, and the imperative of solidarity across borders: The case of the circle of concerned African women Theologies', *Journal of feminist Studies in Theology* 18 (1), 79-86.

<sup>18</sup> Kabeer, N. (2001). "Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Emancipation." In *Discussing Women's Emancipation-Theory and Practice*. Sida Studies No. 3. Stockholm: Novum Grafiska AB.

<sup>19</sup> Bulkachuwa, Z. (1996), "The Nigerian Woman Her Rights and Obligations" in *Women Herald*, Vol. 8, 15-17.

add up to unambiguously diminished welfare and capacity to fulfill life aspirations. Gender matters for women, but it also matters for men.

## African Theology

The fathers of African Theology such as Mbiti (1969)<sup>20</sup>, Idowu (1973), and Mugambi (1991)<sup>21</sup>, among others, prioritized the definition of African Theology by offering an analysis and interpretation of the African culture in a dialogue with Christian faith. Such sentiments were strengthened by many conferences that were held to discuss the place of African Theology based on our context. An example of such a meeting was an African Conference of Churches meeting held in Abidjan in 1969, which defined African Theology as a theology that is grounded on the Bible and which speaks to the Africans mind set. However, this was as expressed in categories of thought which arise based on the philosophy of the African people. According to John Mbiti, the term “African Theology” means a theological reflection and expression by African Christians. For Muzorewa (1985), African Theology is an attempt to respond to a mandate to construct a biblically-based and relevant theology that speaks to the spiritual needs of the African people. African Theologians are in agreement that Western or Asian theologies do not touch the hearts of African believers because they are based on a religious language which is foreign to them.

Hence, there is a quest for a relevant African theology. For this reason, defining African Theology has become a cultural task that only African theologians could undertake.<sup>22</sup> Maseno says African theology fails at the level of normative reflection because it tends to uncritically promote social

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<sup>20</sup> Mbiti, J. (1969) "The Biblical Basis for Present Trends in African Theology", in *African Theology En Route*, 83.

<sup>21</sup> Mugambi, J.N.K. (1991). *The Future of the Church and the Church of the future in Africa*, in J.B. Chipenda, A. Karamanga, J.N.K. Mugambi & C.K Omari (eds). *The Church of Africa: Towards a Theology of Reconstruction*. Nairobi: A.A.C.C, 381-383. *European Scientific Journal*, March 2018 edition, Vol. 14, No.8, ISSN: 1857 – 7881 (Print) e - ISSN 1857 – 7431, 226.

<sup>22</sup> Muzorewa, G.H. (1985). *The Origins and Development of African Theology*. University of California: Orbis Books Publisher.

values that reflect the status quo and depict patriarchal cultural values<sup>23</sup> (Maseno 2020:44). Africa is important because traditionally African Theology laid an emphasis on the positive aspects in African community. This was because African theologians in the wake of liberation movements were very keen to see that the cultural heritage of their people was maintained and celebrated at all costs. To them there was a need to appreciate community in African culture and see to it that the integrity of African culture is upheld. However, in doing so, African theology turned a blind eye to what in African community is not worthy to be reclaimed<sup>24</sup>.

Waweru (2018) writes that the desire to define African Theology by Africans increased in the mid-20th century when African Theology as a theological discipline came into being. A wave of protest against negative colonial and missionary interpretations of the religion and culture in Africa was on the rise. Africans were more and more becoming aware that theology is a contextual phenomenon and, hence, they began to read the Scriptures using their mother tongue. This resulted in interpretations that were not in agreement with Western theology interpretations. African theology as a discipline was undertaken to shape Christianity in Africa by adapting and using African concepts and ideas<sup>25</sup>. According to Oduyoye, African women do not accept that African men's theology only should suffice for the entire faith community. Therefore, there ought to be a study of African Christian theology in the women-centered key. This is to be understood as what highlights women as actors, agents and thinkers<sup>26</sup> (Oduyoye 2001:10).

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<sup>23</sup> Maseno, L. (2020). 'African Women Theologies', in C. Kaunda and J. Gathago (eds.), *African Theology, philosophy, and religions: Celebrating John Samuel Mbiti's Contribution*. Lanham/MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 39-41.

<sup>24</sup> Maseno, L. (2021). *African Women's Theology and the Re-imagining of Community in Africa*. HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies 77(2), a6736. Retrieved on 8th March, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v77i2.6736>

<sup>25</sup> Waweru, H.M (2018). *African Theology in the 21st Century: Mapping Out Critical Priorities* Lecturer of Philosophy and Religious Studies. Kenyatta University, Kenya. <http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n8p213>. Retrieved on 20th December 2022. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/328026239.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Oduyoye, M. (2001). *Introducing African Women's Theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

## Women Emancipation

The word “emancipation” is defined as a process of freedom for others in society through challenging and changing the existing structures of power. It is inextricably linked to efforts or social schemes aimed at setting women free from all types of bondage and sociopolitical and economic exploitation (Onyx and Leonard 2000:115)<sup>27</sup>. The term “women emancipation” is thus generally used to refer to the process by which women in general and poor women in particular are made to gain access and control of all forms of resources in a nation (Mutume 2017)<sup>28</sup>. It is a movement which aims at ensuring freedom for the self-fulfillment and self-development of women, as well as equal access to domestic and community resources (Rochester 2013). Mujungu writes that the emancipation of women is a campaign to give women equal rights and status with men. At one time women could not vote. Now they can. At one time women could not own property. Now they can. At one time men could not be accused of beating or raping their wives. Now they can be accused. At one time women received inferior education and wages compared to men (and now?). At one time a man’s wealth went to his oldest son, not oldest daughter (Mujungu 2015:5)<sup>29</sup>

## An Overview of emancipation according to Lyimo-Mbowe

Lyimo-Mbowe sees that religion can facilitate liberation and development, but sometimes it can be used to reinforce the opposite (Lyimo-Mbowe

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<sup>27</sup> Onyx, J. & Leonard, R. (2000). Women, Volunteering and Social Capital, in J. Warburton, M. Oppenheimer (eds.). *Volunteers and volunteering*. Sydney: Federation Press, 113-114.

<sup>28</sup> Mutume, P. (2017). Women’s Emancipation in Africa – Reality or Illusion? A Case Study of Mbarara, Western Uganda by Thesis Pages Theology & Philosophy Series: African Theological Studies / Etudes Théologiques Africaines, Vol. 1, p. 228.

<sup>29</sup> Mujungu, K.R. (2015). The Impact of Women Emancipation and Socio Economic Development of Rwebisengo Sub-County - Ntoroko District Uganda. A Dissertation submitted to the College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Department of Political and Administrative Studies in Partial Fulfillment for the Award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration of Kampala International University, p. 5.

2021:4)<sup>30</sup>. She adds that Africans take the Bible seriously as long as they read it daily with high level of commitment following the instructions from the Holy Word of God, with others not only reading but also interpreting and contextualizing. This is supported by Oduyoye that the Africans women theologians, the bible is central in theologizing. However, the bible cannot be the only norm because, any interpretation of the bible is unacceptable if it does harm to women, the vulnerable and the voiceless,<sup>31</sup> (Oduyoye 2001:12). Due to this habit, Ukpong (2001:147-152) expresses reading the Bible in the African context as a diverse, complex and challenging process. His article declares that both the nature of "the Bible" and the nature of "the African context" contribute to the complexity of Bible reading in Africa as they lead to the development of their meaning (explicate), the endorsement of concepts, and the interpretation of them in action (practice). Reading the Bible in the African context is not a monolithic phenomenon.<sup>32</sup> He argues that the African context is a "social, economic, political and religious context that is complex, multifaceted, and often vexed." Also, when one uses the phrase "the context", it should be remembered that Africa has different historical periods, different geographical locales, different cultural groups, etc. Drawing a picture of the nature of reading the Bible in Africa cannot be exhausted but what has been said thus far should provide a vivid hint of how complex it is <sup>33</sup> (Ukpong 2001:147-152). This is supported by Lyimo-Mbowe in her article in the book *"It Takes Two"* that;

All the mission societies, which brought the Gospel and established churches in Tanzania, consisted of men. They educated and prepared only men for the Pastoral services. None of them showed interest in the

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<sup>30</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2021). *Kimpa Vita: Contextualized Biblical Interpretation in Breaking the Silence: A Collection of Research Papers by the Women Theologians on their Participation in the Church* (Printed by Moshi Lutheran Printing Press), Chapter 2, p. 4.

<sup>31</sup> Oduyoye, M. (2001). *Introducing African women's theology*. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press.

<sup>32</sup> Ukpong, J.S. (2001). New Testament Hermeneutics in Africa: Challenges and Possibilities. *Neotestamentica* 35(1-2), 147-152. [http://reference.sabinet.co.za/ez.sun.ac.za/webx/access/electronicjournals/neotest/neotest\\_v35\\_n1\\_a10.pdf](http://reference.sabinet.co.za/ez.sun.ac.za/webx/access/electronicjournals/neotest/neotest_v35_n1_a10.pdf) retrieved on 12/22/2022.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

ordination of women as Pastors. The whole church was familiar with male pastors only. Therefore, for many Christians, it is against church tradition to include women in the Pastoral ministry. Their former missionaries did not practice, did not even teach, that a woman could be a leader in the church<sup>34</sup>.

She also quotes an example in the Maasai tradition where men treat women (enkitok) as inferior to men counting them as mere children rather than adults, although most Maasai Churches are overwhelmingly female. She proposes the voice of Maasai women (inkituaak) are not silenced are to be heard in the church<sup>35</sup>.

Lyimo-Mbowe has many interesting stories of how has been responding to women rights in her work experiences. When she was working in the parishes and districts helped women when resolving family and marriage conflicts because some of them were harassed and bullied. She helped them to follow the right ways to solve their problems without disturbing their marriages. She empowered them to know their rights and how to get them. But also, she attached them with relevant people who can help their related problems. For example, if she found their problems needed a layer or counselor, she connects them with those experts. But did not help only women, also had time to educate men for the things went wrong with women, through her teachings men received and appreciated in a result their marriages stood up again and become strong. She do remember one time when she met a woman who had a big problem of injustice from her husband as pastor used her efforts and time to resolve it with some of family members but gained vain. So she took that woman and connected her with human rights staff, which fought for her and at last she got her rights.

But also, she has been advising girls who are interesting with theological studies. She remembers some of the female pastors from the

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<sup>34</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2008). ELCT/ECD: Encouraging and Empowering those Who are There” in *It Takes Two: The Ordination of Women in the Member Churches of the United Evangelical Mission*, Edited by Gesine v. Kloeden-Freudenberg, Heike Koch, Brunhild v. Local and Sonia Parera-Hummel, Wuppertal: UEM Publisher, 204-209.

<sup>35</sup> Lyimo-Mbowe, H. (2020). *Maasai Women and the Old Testament: Towards an Emancipatory Reading*. USA: Peter Lang Publisher.

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Eastern and Coastal Diocese had reached the stage of deciding to join the theological studies because of her advice and prepare them to have qualifications for studies. She has been a speaker in many women seminars and conferences concerning women empowerment in the community, their role in church and families. But also herself being a leader she has been a role model in the church, she has been receiving many testimonies from different people who were attracted with the way she was leading people in the congregation because they did not know if women could perform well like men. When she was promoted to be a District pastor she did well in her duties, many parish members wondered the way she was working and performing well on her job description.

Rev. Prof. Faith Lugazia can testify to this: in 2005 Lyimo- Mbowe as Ilala District Pastor was invited to attend the Synod meeting in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-North Western Diocese (Bukoba), to present the topic concerning family and Community issues for two hours. At that time this Diocese had not started and allowed women ordination. The Diocesan leader's, Bishop Elisa Buberwa and others invited her because they wanted the Synod members to know that women can do well as pastors since many of them were opposing the idea. So Lyimo-Mbowe taught them respectively the given topic, and said something about women ordination and motivated them that they are just wasting time for not ordaining women. After finishing the presentation, the synod members decided unanimously that "we have been so late in allowing women ordination!" They admired other Dioceses, which had reached the stage of trusting women to the district pastor position, not only that but also given Ilala District, which was at the Middle of the city of Dar Es Salaam and above all at White house, where potential state leaders attended services to a woman. Since that the synod meeting agreed to ordain women and on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2006, Alice Kabugumila, a Theologian woman who waited for thirty (30) years was ordained. Also Prof. Faith Lugazia was ordained in that day<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> Lugazia, F. (2015). Historia na Kazi ya Mchg. Alice Kabugumila Katika Kanisa, Yubilee ya Miaka Ishirini na tano tangu KKKT Kubariki Wanawake kuwa Wachungaji 1990-2015, p. 14.



## Her success in leadership

When Lyimo-Mbowe was appointed as District Pastor at Ilala, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania-Eastern and Coastal Diocese initiated the buying of land and they built the office for the district and she also bought land for school purposes. Also, when she went in Kinondoni District, they were hiring offices at Magomeni Parish, so she mobilized people and money and they bought land at Mikocheni area which had an old house, so they renovated it and turn it into an office. She also wrote the project for orphan children and opened the organization called SOWISE which was dealing with orphan children and widows. They did a wonderful job with women at Kinondoni helping children from poor families and orphans. They were collecting and meeting with children at Magomeni Parish where provided food, school materials, clothes, eating together during Christmas and Easter together with street children. They went further where wrote the proposal about having children home as a district where they got land which was donated by one family for orphanage center.

## Challenges

Lyimo-Mbowe faced direct challenges like rejection from parishioners: She did not know what was going on, but something happened as Mbowe reports:

One day a person came in my office to confess and apologize that he was speaking bad about me just because I was a woman pastor. He said that he planned to leave the church because of a woman has assigned to lead their parish. He felt as being neglected. He said, "I thought that the bishop has decided to abuse us by posting a female pastor, and not a woman but a girl to our parish. So, I was attending to disturb the worship service. But after following your way of leadership and the way you were leading the Sunday service I was surprise with your ability and at last I realize that I was very wrong to think that women cannot lead a church<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview with H. Lyimo-Mbowe on 22 Feb 2023.

So the person asked for forgiveness and he went to the pastor's office being accompanied by the church elder. That day he had a gift for Lyimo-Mbowe. It is special garment for women known as *Kitenge* in Tanzania.

But also, there was a person who decided to leave the parish when Lyimo-Mbowe was sent to one of the parishes in Dar Es Salaam. He decided to be following the affairs of parish from distance, waiting to hear how the parish was collapsing under the leadership of a woman. After one year of Lyimo-Mbowe's leadership, he experienced the opposite, instead of the parish going down as he expected, the parish was flourishing and he decided to go back to the same parish. He also decided to ask his brother to accompany him to the pastors' office so that he can confess and apologize for leaving the parish for one year, due to his negative attitude toward women.

More over when she was working as a district pastor Lyimo-Mbowe says,

I do remember in one meeting one person stood up and said; "when I heard that a female pastor is appointed to lead our district, I thought we are finished! I thought that the Diocese has decided to despise us by bringing a woman to our district. I thought nothing will go on- no more development. But in fact, what you are doing is more than what men have been able to do in our district for many years, and therefore, I would like to say sorry and please forgive me and pray for me that God will not punish me for having such a negative attitude towards women."<sup>38</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Lyimo-Mbowe's emancipatory reading of the bible in the African context is very unique because it researches whether biblical texts are oppressive or liberative to African women. It is a call of her paper that the voices of Christian women are not silenced. It brings forward an interpretation of bible which facilitates the elimination of discrimination against women. Her theology of emancipation demonstrates the potential of reading biblical text both in popular and academic critical contexts. The work also develops its own contextual hermeneutical approach of women liberation from an African cultural perspective. She lays the foundation with social action, which has the goal of bringing Jesus-centered social

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with H. Lyimo-Mbowe on 22 Feb 2023.

transformation. She adds two important values, unity and solidarity, which result in a participatory approach that brings together the oppressed and oppressors to discuss their challenges from the Biblical point of view and find solutions together. Lyimo-Mbowe has raised her voice for the future generation to know the past and current situation for the women as whole but also women Pastors.

Lyimo-Mbowe emphasizes that the church should stand on its position of being a voice for the voiceless and should intensify efforts toward the emancipation of women and help to stop all socio-cultural structures that oppress them. She encourages the future work by African women Theologians by saying, women still have a long way to go, unceasing prayers for our church, encouragement and empowerment to those who are already in the system in much needed ways. Women in all positions have to work hard and prove to the community, that women are as talented as men. This reality should be revealed through achievement of women in various sectors. All in all, women are able and can perform like men and more than men. The important area is following the regulations, policy and the constitution of the respected institution. A shift in paradigm and strategies is also required from which serious consideration of positive Biblical authorities on gender equality should be taken as powerful tools for the inclusion of women as co-leaders in the church. She insisted on reading the Bible in an emancipatory way without oppressing others as long as we are created on the same image of God as Genesis 1:27.

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