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Ezra Chitando, Esther Mombo & Masiwa Ragies Gunda (eds.)

## THAT ALL MAY LIVE!

Essays in Honour of Nyambura J. Njoroge



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Exploring Religion in Africa 7

edited by  
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## NYAMBURA – MY SHERO – SHE ROSE – WE ROSE

*Dorcas Chebet Juma*



1. *She is black and so beautiful,  
you daughters of Africa  
She is as strong as the tower of babel  
Her eyes are the eyes of a dove  
Her Voice My Strength - her voice – our voice  
Do not gaze at her because she is dark,  
The powers and principalities of patriarchy have gazed on her.  
The sons of our mothers were angry with her;  
they made her keeper of our vineyards,  
but her own vineyard she has not kept!  
Nyambura –My Shero – She Rose – We Rose*

2. *Should I be like one who is veiled?*

*Whose voice is mute – when my Shero has risen?  
Nyambura my Shero - If you do not know,  
O fairest among women,  
I will follow the tracks of your footsteps,  
and graze my thoughts beside my Shero's steps  
I will shout in the mountains –I will tell it on the hills  
I will whisper on the valleys – and shout on the rooftops  
Nyambura –My Shero – She Rose – We Rose*

3. *The voice of my Shero – She rose –we rose!*

*Look! There she comes, leaping upon the mountains,  
bouncing over the hills. Look! There she stands  
As a voice to the voiceless, behind the scenes,  
gazing in the frontlines, there she is looking through the lattice.  
When she speaks –they listen –when they listen she speaks!  
She says to me: “Arise and come away; the winter is past,  
the rains are over and gone. The time of singing has come,  
and the voice of the voiceless will be heard in our land.  
It is time to blossom, Arise, come away” - She says!  
Nyambura –My Shero – She Rose – We Rose*

4. *O daughters of Africa! Nyambura my Shero – She rose – we rose  
let me hear your voice; it is time to celebrate her voice our voice,*

*She says to us – lets Catch the foxes,  
the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards—  
for our vineyards are in blossom.”  
Nyambura's Voice is our voice! Until the day breathes  
and the shadows flee,  
Speak, Sing, Whisper, Shout, Scream  
Nyambura Our Shero – she is altogether admirable.  
Nyambura is our beloved, She is our friend,  
O daughters of the world! How graceful are her feet  
Nyambura –My Shero – She Rose – We Rose*

(Based on the Song of Songs)

## FOREWORD

It is my singular honour and privilege to write this foreword to a volume honouring my long-time colleague, co-worker, co-activist and sister in faith, Nyambura J. Njoroge. I have known Nyambura for many years, having interacted with her well before sharing our time at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. Throughout all these years, Nyambura has remained a dynamic, focused and visionary woman of faith who does everything “with passion and compassion.”

When the faithful women at the tomb asked the question, “Who will roll away the stone?” (Mark 16:3), they were raising a question that women in successive generations have reflected on. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter, the Circle), where Nyambura is one of the founders and one of the leading members, has responded by saying, “we will roll up our sleeves and roll away the stone ourselves.” Nyambura and other sisters have been unrelenting in seeking to remove oppressive religious, cultural, political and economic practices that prevent women and girls from enjoying life in its abundance. As one of the leaders of the Circle, I can declare with confidence that by calling religious institutions to take women’s issues seriously, we have made a difference in Africa and globally. Nyambura’s contribution to this cause is outstanding.

The theme of this volume, namely, *abundant life for all*, speaks directly to the key concerns of the World Council of Churches (WCC). For example, through the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace, the WCC is inviting churches to join together with others in celebrating life and in concrete steps toward transforming injustices and violence. The Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace calls for communities of faith to work for gender justice. It mobilises churches to collaborate with others to work towards a world where all may have life, and life in abundance (John 10:10). Nyambura’s own life, activism and theological stance mirror this commitment to *the fullness of life for all*. In her ministry with churches and church related institutions, especially in theological education, Nyambura has contributed a great deal in creating spaces of partnerships and networks. She has accompanied and mentored young theologians as they find their feet in academia and ordained ministry.

I am impressed that many younger and emerging African women theologians have contributed to this volume. Promoting women’s theological education has been one of Nyambura’s deepest passions. Over the years,

she has supported, inspired and cajoled women in different contexts to take up advanced theological studies. As part of her commitment to mentorship, Nyambura has edited a number of publications that feature the work of African women theologians at the early stages of their careers. These works are being utilised in theological and religious studies in Africa and globally. She has demonstrated her commitment to the Circle's approach to leadership as facilitating and enabling, rather than leadership as dominance.

On behalf of the WCC and on my own behalf, I warmly commend this volume to you. It addresses the central themes in Nyambura's long and productive ministry. This timely and rich volume represents yet another milestone in the WCC's quest to promote relevant and life-giving theology in Africa and beyond.

ISABEL APAWO PHIRI

*Deputy General Secretary  
World Council of Churches*

# INTRODUCTION: THAT ALL MAY LIVE!

*Ezra Chitando, Esther Mombo, Masiwa R. Gunda*

## Introduction

Nyambura J. Njoroge<sup>1</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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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# THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND WOMEN<sup>1</sup>

*Esther Mombo*

## Background

The aim of any form of theological education is to equip people to preach good news effectively, through word and deed. Theological education is crucial for the ministry of the church and it must be contextual and relevant to the realities and needs of the people it is to serve. In some contexts, theological education for ministerial formation has been commercialized such that it is no longer the monopoly of the church to offer it, but it is offered in other settings including secular and universities. And paid for by individual churches. There are still instances where it is organized by the church in an institution that is catered for by the church. Both ways have implications on who has access to theological education and what openings are available for ministry. This has been a subject of many conversations and scholarship, especially in Africa where the church is growing fast, but the training of leaders is not commensurate with the training of the leadership of those churches.

## Introduction

In the Global Survey on Theological Education conducted between 2011 and 2013, in preparation for the World Council of Churches Assembly in Busan, several aspects were considered, including curriculum, financial and gender disparities, innovation in different theological schools.<sup>2</sup> The summary of the findings gave a number of positive results for theological education, especially on the training of men and women. The report indicated that ‘that the number of women students is growing faster than the number of men students—or declining slower than the number of men

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the storytelling/narrative character of this chapter, references are used sparingly.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.globethics.net/web/gtl/directory>

students'<sup>3</sup> it is in this context that the work of Nyambura Njoroge, the subject of this book, is discussed.

To discuss the topic of theological education and women it is important to use Nyambura's own voice discussing her own theological education as captured in this narrative.

'All classes were taught by expatriate staff except African Tradition Religion (ATR) and denominational studies, in my case Presbyterian tradition. In my view, both subjects were treated with less vitality! All lecturers were male. As a result, all our studies lacked rigorous scrutiny of the patriarchal-colonial-missionary-hierarchical theology, beliefs and practices in the churches and theological institutions (most then bible schools and pastoral institutes) in Kenya and Africa, since we had students from other African countries. Despite being located at the heartland of what was once known as "white highlands" with stretches of tea and pyrethrum plantations and the BATA shoe factory not far from the market where I shopped regularly, nothing prepared me for the ministry with people living in extreme poverty and indignity as a result of colonialism and oppressive government machinery in independent Kenya. Nor was I prepared to minister in the urban or the rural-urban cities, towns and slums of Kenya in the 1980s, yet all my six years in the parish were in Nairobi city, mostly what was known as African quarters in colonial Kenya. Never were we taught about violence in the family (extended African family and polygamous marriages) Christian or otherwise, in the manse and in the church hierarchy in all my classes. Especially and in particular, nothing was taught about emotional violence that is experienced by women in church and ecumenical ministry as well as in theological institutions, which are still very male dominated after 30 years of graduating women with theological education, at least in Kenya.<sup>4</sup>

The narrative above describes theological education forty years ago when theological education was organized and sponsored by the Church to train and equip its leaders, mainly for the ordained ministry. The finances for theological education came from organizations in the West, the majority of faculty members were also seconded to teach and paid for by the churches in the West and most curricula reflected a different context, thus dealing with other realities. However, in the past twenty years there has been a remarkable change in most institutions, especially those run by mainline churches in a number of ways. Firstly, there is little or no funding for theological education from donors. The face of faculty in some of

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Nyambura Njoroge interviewed by the author, 16/03/2011.

the schools is largely African. Secondly, the purpose of theological education is not confined to ordained ministry, but it inclusive of other ministries and there is a phenomenon of the lay ministries by people who are theologically trained. Thirdly, most of the theological schools have changed to become private chartered universities or are working towards becoming so. As chartered universities, many former theological seminaries in Africa began to struggle with how to produce leaders who could serve in the society that had many challenges.

Twenty years ago, HIV became the hermeneutic through which the theological curriculum in Africa was constructed. HIV brought to light all the issues that the curriculum had failed to deal with forty years ago, with Nyambura's narrative above raising some the major issues. These issues included gender relations, the negative issues of culture, economic disparities and how they impacted men and women differently, violence against women and many more.

From further narratives by Nyambura, one notes how she chose to work with theological educators and students to change the situation in theological education. These excerpts from her speeches bring to light her vision of theological education and much more on the theme of 'that all may live.'

'In my view, the seeds of ecumenical vision begin to grow and germinate when we begin to inquire critically about our calling as people of faith who hunger and thirst for God's reign and presence while taking seriously our social location and reality. How can we be co-workers with Christ in sustaining life in such a violence and death- infested context? Ecumenical vision has to do with our wrestling with God and God's word and the forces of Death that surround us.

Ecumenical theological education refers to a holistic approach to theological education and ministerial formation. One that must take seriously the spiritual, ministerial and ecumenical formation of women and men whose main objective is to work with churches and church related institutions for the purpose of preparing and equipping Christians for the building of the body of Christ and the reign of God on earth (Ephesians 4:11-16).

This means education, which delves into matters of right relationships, economics, food empowerment, justice, peace, truth, love and care for the wellbeing of the whole inhabited world., for these are the things that per occupied Jesus in his mission.

It is education that includes the creation of relevant and contextual theologies and ethical value systems that will empower Christians to overcome

all life–destroying forces which have rendered Africa a continent of senseless violence and untimely deaths.

A holistic approach in theological education inevitably leads to interdisciplinary methodology, for there is no way we can engage in matters related to poverty, for instance, without being in dialogue with economics.

If we have learnt anything from liberation theologies (women’s theologies included) is that the bible talks about economics, which requires us to have the right tools for critical biblical and social analysis. On the other hand, dismantling patriarchy an interplay of sociology, anthropology, psychology, literature, biblical / cultural hermeneutics and theology is necessary.<sup>5</sup>

In her ministry, Nyambura has provided space and opportunity for theological schools in the paradigm-shift. This paradigm shift included a process of engendered theological education for most institutions. The process of engendering theological education was a way of critically evaluating theological education with the view of creating a space for all people to be theologically empowered. Engendering theological education included a revision of the philosophy, theoretical framework and content of the curriculums. It also focused on methodologies and approaches to theological education that were holistic and interdisciplinary.

Through engendering theological education, normative western theological models, African patriarchy and male centered theology were challenged with the view of proposing inclusive, affirming and relevant models for a meaning-full life of faith. Engendering theological education stressed dialogue, openness, grace and willingness to learn and to discern God’s will and truth in every context. This was one way of doing theology differently from how Nyambura experienced it in her own theological formation.

The process of engendering theological education provided space for reviewing old curricula and also preparing for new ones. The phenomenon of integrating contemporary issues such as gender, HIV & AIDS, disability, human rights and others. etc., into the theological curricula was increasingly being adapted. The production of new curricula brought to the centre the gender lenses in the teaching of theology. It demystified the perception that gender issues were a western construct or importation. It is in this regard that the language of mainstreaming gender was adapted in the preparation of the curriculums in some of the institutions. The

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<sup>5</sup> Nyambura Njoroge; ‘The way forward: sustaining the Ecumenical Vision in Eastern Africa in a context of Growing Isolationism.’ Keynote address at the Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa (ATIEA) 40th Anniversary. 07 April 2002.

struggle against HIV & AIDS was recognized and was part and parcel of the teaching of theology. The response to HIV & AIDS pandemic required all people to be theologically, religiously and spiritually sensitized so that they could be motivated to seek life in abundance.

In the beginning, it was hard to prepare and teach units in HIV or to mainstream the study because there was little or no literature on the subject. After a short period of time, literature in the area of HIV grew and continues to grow. This literature was from individuals and groups writing from different perspectives. The writing by women from the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians who in their Third Pan African Conference dedicated their research and writing on HIV & AIDS generated literature that continues to inform the teaching of HIV. Further, the literature by the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA), a project of the World Council of Churches that Nyambura has had the opportunity to head, has continued to inform theological colleges and faculties of theology. Musa Dube, the first Theology Consultant for EHAIA, developed the premise of teaching HIV not as a unit on its own, but one that would cut across the teaching of all theological subjects. The book, *HIV/AIDS and the curriculum: methods of integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological programs* was one of those texts that became a reference book<sup>6</sup>. Written by different scholars from different perspectives, the book provided for ways of mainstreaming HIV so that no student graduated without having to dialogue with the multifaceted issues of HIV. With this new look, theological education moved from abstracts studies to facing the realities of people in the society.

## Creating Partners and Alliances

Among the gifts of Nyambura in her ministry and theological education in particular has been creating partnerships and alliances so that all may have ways of working with each other and for the good of all. In an interview, she notes that:

We need to create strong partnerships and alliances that will facilitate an ongoing process of destroying the deep roots of gender-based violence and

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<sup>6</sup> M. W. Dube, *HIV/AIDS and the curriculum: methods of integrating HIV/AIDS in Theological programmes*. Geneva: WCC, 2003.

dismantling all pillars, systems and structures that uphold patriarchy, sexism and all other social injustices in place. The partnerships need to take place at different levels in ways that will enable us to make maximum use of the resources available. Furthermore, we need passionate, committed and bold leadership if indeed we will together facilitate restoration of human dignity and empower children, girls and women who have suffered abuse, violence, humiliating and indignity.<sup>7</sup>

In the narrative above, Nyambura continues her call and plea for wholeness of life by dealing with the issues that bring about death. This she does by calling upon people and institutions to partner because there is strength in unity. The partnerships took various forms and two were directly significant for theological education, namely, first, the Women Deans' meeting and second, the Tamar Campaign.

### **The Women Deans' meeting**

It had been observed that in all denominations the numbers of women doing theology were increasing and even where there was a decrease, the women's numbers were decreasing slowly. This has not just happened, but several things have contributed to the steady increase and the reasons vary from one institution to another and also from one denomination to another. In 2003, the WCC's Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE), organized a meeting for the women deans' meeting in Bossey. The numbers across the continents were; few in some countries and none in other countries. In some countries the women were not deans but served in some capacity in the theological and/or Bible School. The relationships created in this forum continued to impact theological education in various ways, especially mentoring the young women in taking up theological education and leadership in the church and church related institutions. This meeting was participatory dealing with issues that impacted women as leaders in theological institutions. Topics such as different models of leadership, finance, mentoring, networking, survival strategies, research, writing and publishing were covered through presentations and workshops. The sessions of sharing experiences were significant to us women who were isolated from each other and being leaders in spaces that were largely male. The meeting was empowering and affirming to the women leaders in theological education as it contributed to other ways of navigating the

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<sup>7</sup> Nyambura Njoroge interviewed by the author, 16/03/2011.

spaces as pioneners. Out of these meetings friendships and alliances were formed though which many women journeyed the spaces with confidence. In my case I formed friendships that contributed a great deal to the growth and development of younger theologians. My friendship with Dr. Jenny Tepaa then Dean of St. John's College Auckland, was established and we journeyed together in many other forums on theological education especially in the Anglican Communion. Together with other Anglican women theologians we created the Global Anglican Theology Academy (GATA) as 'A Project to Make a Difference by Advocating for and Enabling Women's Leadership in the Anglican Communion'.

## **Tamar campaign**

Don't my brother, do not force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this weekend thing (2 Samuel 13:12)

In 2005, the WCC ETE organized a Tamar campaign workshop at Jumua Conference Centre in Limuru, Kenya. The aim of the workshop was to create space for theological institutions, women in church ministry and the Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA) to discuss the topic of gender-based violence, especially sexual and gender-based violence. The Tamar Campaign model is based on the story of Tamar who was raped by her half-brother, Amnon (2 Samuel 13: 1- 22). It was founded by the Ujamaa Centre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Through this conference, the Tamar Campaign was launched in Kenya the same year. it was again another context where networking and alliances were formed in strengthening theological education. The theme of the conference being Gender based violence, the space was ideal for leaders in theological education to find ways of talking about this topic in sacred spaces and empowering students of ministry to be able to name it and seek ways of dealing with the vice. In commemoration of this event, the participants planted trees known at the time of writing as Tamar Trees. Like trees growing to form a shelter, they have become a constant reminder that life should be lived in wholeness.

These are not the only trees associated with Nyambura Njoroge. There are two other sets of trees through which partnerships and collaboration is experienced. In 2014 the Circle St. Paul's University (SPU) Chapter celebrated 30 years of the ordination of women in Kenya. In the ecumenical journey of the ordination of women in Kenya, Nyambura was the first

woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian Church. Lucia Okuthe was the first one to be ordained in the Anglican Church. The occasion which brought women from different parts of Africa, who shared their stories towards ordination and leadership in the church. Speaking at the 2014 celebration, Prof. Mercy Oduyoye observed that;

African women have been active in Christian ministry for more than a quarter of a century. We remember where we have come from, thinking of the roads we have walked, the prayers we have prayed, discerning the hand of God in these journeys, being confident of God's faithfulness and seeking guidance for the roads ahead.

To mark the occasion the women planted trees that is a reminder of the growing ministry of women in the service of God and humanity. Through the efforts of Nyambura and other sisters in the Reformed Church of East Africa, one of the partners of St. Paul's University, ordained their first women in 2018. Among the women who were ordained are those who had done theological education because of engendering theological education. This made it possible for them to be theologically empowered; a theme that Nyambura advocated for and worked for. Some of the grants received were through Nyambura's the efforts.

## **EHAIA Trees**

In 2015 Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy held a meeting at St. Paul's and to mark the end of the meeting, they revisited the Tamar Trees and the Circle Trees. They added a set of trees to mark 15 years of the Tamar Trees because they also discussed issues of HIV and sexual and gender-based violence. In her keynote address, Phumzile Mabizela observed that;

In our attempts to respond to the current challenges of sexual violence, we must remember that the use of sacred texts is an important avenue to be explored. With CBS, we have managed to conscientise the church and service providers on the reality of sexual violence and its consequences.<sup>8</sup>

The different sets of trees are a beautiful sight to behold. As well as their beauty, they tell a particular narrative on the issues that have continued to affect society and how they should be central in teaching space, especially

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<sup>8</sup> These trees were planted during the WCC-EHAIA IRG meeting at the occasion of commemorating 15 years after the planting of the Tamar Trees.

for those who hold leadership positions in the society and are expected to speak out against issues that destroy life. Trees are associated with peace and prosperity, and permanency.

## **A member of the St. Paul's Circle Chapter**

Nyambura is a founder member of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians from the 1989 meeting in Accra Ghana, supported the growth of chapters in her efforts to empower and affirm women in theological Education. When the Circle chapter of St. Paul's was inaugurated in 1999, she became one of the members in the Diaspora. She attended Circle chapter meetings when she was in Kenya. In times of joy and pain the Circle chapter identified with her and journeyed with her. One of these times is when she lost her First-born Son Njuguna on 7th November 2008 when the members met and prayed with her and also attended the memorial service of her son.

The chapter sent invitations to her for meetings even when she was not able to attend. She would however send her greetings and a word of affirmation. In one of her letters entitled 'God is faithful,' she wrote:

God is faithful. God's mercy and steadfast love is forever our promise and heritage. Since we have not gathered like this since the death of my beloved son Njuguna on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2008, I want to take this opportunity to thank each one of you for the support and encouragement that you extended to my family. I am writing this piece because God is faithful, otherwise I do not know how I would have made it this far. I never cease to marvel at how God works in mysterious ways and continuously give us assurance that indeed we are daughters of a loving and caring God.

The path we have chosen to follow has never been an easy one. That is why the reason we need one another as we journey on. We need to listen and seek God's wisdom for one another's needs. We need to be there for one another despite the distance.

Many are the challenges in our path, but we are determined to overcome any onstacles ahead of us. Many of our people live in poverty. Many of our children, sisters and brothers endlessly seek gainful employment. Some of us, may be, are unhappy in our places of work and we wonder if we made the wrong choice in undertaking theological studies. Countless are our needs and wonderings. However, as I always say, God does not eat Ugali or Chapati! God is faithful, God is just.

I believe theology seeks to promote human dignity, justice, peace and fullness of life.

Therefore, I continuously ask myself what am I doing with all the theology I know as a theologically trained woman and as one who is called to serve in the church and the ecumenical movement. When I am called to give account of my faith and my calling, what will I say? What do I say today? My sister, what do you say? How are we giving back to our communities as individuals and as a community of women who have been privileged to study theology?<sup>9</sup>

Her commitment to the SPU Chapter is in word and deed and she is known to be a member in the Diaspora. Because of being committed to the Circle, she has continued to be an inspiration to the young women theologians some of whom chose to study and write about her. Rev. Magdalene Chepkirui wrote her Bachelor's project entitled 'The impact of Theological Education on the ministry of women: A Case of Nyambura Njoroge. She noted how Nyambura had been inspired as a pioneer and how she chose to impact others in the ministry by providing her experience for others to learn about ministry.<sup>10</sup> The many women in the Ministry and in theological academia, who have completed their Master's, PhD's and others who are continuing to study, Nyambura is a household name. The Chapter has experienced God's faithfulness in different ways but in the numbers of women in high level church leadership and others serving in different spaces in the country. It is though the spirit of Nyambura for mentorship and networking that has contributed to this growth.

## The Unnamed Graduation Speaker in October 2009

Despite being a significant graduate of SPU, having Nyambura as a Graduation Speaker proved to be a real challenge. Choosing a Graduation Speaker involved students and a committee of the university. Groups would propose names and the university would choose the speaker. Among the names that were proposed by the students, especially the graduating classes, was Dr. Nyambura Njoroge. It took a few nominations before the Council endorsed the name. In October 2009, she was invited as the Graduation Speaker and an official invitation was sent and she accepted. All the preparations went on and on and it was proposed that she planted a tree. This would have been ideal as she was familiar with tree

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<sup>9</sup> Nyambura Njoroge: 'God is faithful, Alumni and Circle Members, /St. Paul's University, Limuru, Kenya 27<sup>th</sup> August 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Rev. Magdalene Chepkirui Bachelor's dissertation 2013. St. Paul's University Library.

planting sessions at SPU. In 2005 she had been part of the group that had planted the Tamar Trees, as noted above. The tree planting ceremony was turned down at the last minute, even though the Administration had prepared the trees. The reasons for this action were not clearly stated but they included the fact that the speaker of the previous graduation had not planted a tree and he was also an alumni of SPU. According to this argument, it would be awkward for the University to have Nyambura plant a tree. While this may not be convincing, there were complexities with her as the Speaker at this particular graduation ceremony and further research may reveal the deep patriarchal complexities of the context.

The graduation ceremony went on as planned and within the ceremony, Nyambura gave her talk. The norm is that the speaker is introduced by the Chair, the Chancellor of the University. For Nyambura, no one introduced her to speak. The Master of Ceremony who was a faculty member announced that it was time for the Speaker and Nyambura stood to speak. Nyambura went to the podium and introduced herself then gave her speech on the topic, *‘Christian Leaders of Integrity: Who Can Find?’* She based her talk on the story of King David, Bathsheba and Prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 11 & 12).

As Christians, as baptized people of God, we are not expected to be preoccupied with self-preservation, ME, ME, ME. Rather, we are expected to uphold the values that are life-giving in the community and that bring glory to God. Our eyes, ears, minds and hearts must be focused on the “least of these”. We are sent to minister to the citizens of this continent — the majority who happen to be children and young people under the age of 18 years old and among them millions of orphans, citizens who happen to be among the poorest in the world, millions are HIV positive and others are sick with TB, Malaria and others are dying from preventable, manageable and/or treatable diseases while others are malnourished beyond rescue. Our different kinds of professions and ministries, including the training ministry at St. Paul’s, must give priority to the “least of these” if we are to press forward with boldness and integrity.

As Christian leaders of integrity we must ensure that their potentials are developed to the full, their dignity restored, their humanity and life protected and the image and likeness of God (as female and male) is affirmed and celebrated. In other words, we must not play politics with people’s lives, we must speak the TRUTH, stand for the TRUTH, witness for the TRUTH and we must strive to be on God’s side and the ‘least of these’.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Nyambura Njoroge: Graduation Speech October 2009, SPU.

The graduation speech was delivered with such eloquence, passion and courage. She spoke with a conviction and an understanding of the context. She used scripture to back up her arguments and to challenge the graduands and those present. The graduands were delighted with the speech and gave very positive comments. This was the same with the community at large. The mystery of her not being introduced was raised and no reason was given, other than it was an oversight. The omission was so glaring that one would wish to look into further reasons for this omission.

As an ethicist, she raised issues of integrity in leadership; a theme that she has held in the other talks, as well for those who are serving in leadership. Like some theological papers she has presented, and others quoted extensively in this essay, the theological themes of the dignity of life remain key. The affirmation of life in all its forms has remained central. In the graduation speech she offered a challenge to the leaders present in the ceremony and those who were moving into leadership to be leaders of integrity. This meant being bold to challenge the issues that destroyed life of the people they were leading.

How come the theme of leadership is one she chooses to talk about?<sup>3</sup> In a paper entitled, 'Faithful and fruitful leadership,' she locates leadership in her family narrative.

In my professional ecumenical journey, I find myself deeply focused on the theme of leadership. This year is particularly exceptional as I celebrate 25 years of my ordination to the ministry of Word and Sacrament on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007. The topic of leadership seems to captivate me for reasons not well known to me. Probably because I grew up in a home of two church and community leaders who were critically aware of their Christian vocation. As I rewind my childhood tape, I have fond memories of my parents (now among the living-dead) faithful and fruitful leadership. This is not to say that my parents did not have weaknesses and/or make serious mistakes in their lives. But as I struggle to understand my Christian vocation, I find myself drawn back to their ministry and words of wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

In this paper and others, she discusses leadership in the context of African realities that destroy life, and the church or theological institutions are not spared either:

Unfortunately, this includes theological institutions and programmes that are meant to educate and mentor faithful and fruitful leaders. We have women and men in the church leadership who plot mischief, do not reject

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<sup>12</sup> N. Njoroge, 'Faithful and fruitful Leadership,' Unpublished paper, 2007.

evil and do not fear God therefore we should not pretend that bad and weak leadership only exists in the political and economic arena. We must not shy away from the bitter truth that churches in Africa face leadership crisis. Most importantly, we must name, honour and emulate those who demonstrate faithfulness and fruitfulness, however few they maybe. Not for the sake of putting them on a pedestal but for the sake of affirming the power in the human spirit that is radiated in their convictions and life-giving actions. These are women and men of all ages and in different walks of life who are the bearers of hope, courage and vision in a very challenging context.<sup>13</sup>

In the context of bad leadership as a challenge for the church, Nyambura indicates that “The church is a grassroots institution usually well-structured at different levels in both rural and urban settings. Therefore, it is not an impossible task to identify women and men who have stood for truth, justice, peace and fullness of life. We are searching for people with a human spirit that is committed to fighting injustice, devaluation and dehumanization.” Africa is in urgent need of models of leadership styles that will help the church to break the chains of conspiracy, secrecy, silence and complacency when evil deeds subvert God’s mission of making all things new. The discussions on leadership and themes that destroy life were true in the time that she wrote as they are true today in the church and society at large.

## Theological Education

Anytime I contemplate making a move or major decision in my life and especially in the ministry, I literally wrestle with God. I suppose I am not alone in this. I am sharing my story to say, I believe it is always good to look back and identify what kind of spiritual footstools we are standing on.

Reflecting on her journey in ministry and how her parents were instrumental, Nyambura talks about wrestling with God. Indeed, she has not only wrestled with God but with contextual realities that affect the people of God. From Nyambura’s voice through the writings, one locates her passion for theological education. For her, theological education is relevant if it is open to all people in society, a programme that is strong in mentorship and addresses contextual realities of life.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Nyambura's work on theological education spans from curriculum development to faculty development. A curriculum of theological education had to be inclusive of all issues in society. As the Programme Executive of Ecumenical Theological Education at the World Council of Churches, she maintained that the young especially women were supported to start and complete their studies. Across the world there will be testimonies of women and men who were supported to complete their theological studies. Women who have completed their PhD's and are in the faculties of theological education in recent past were among the many who were supported through different financial support programmes.<sup>14</sup> The intentionality to mentor and to give voice to those whose voices were muted were brought back to the centre in Ecumenical Theological Education. Mentorship in theological education was to provide space for the learners to gain skills for ministry and to mentor others.

As well as the support for different individuals, Nyambura led the way in the development of a new curriculum for theological education, which had to be revised and renewed to empower leaders for prophetic ministry within the church. Due to Nyambura's keen interest in contextual realities, issues such as conflict resolution or transformation and peace-building, political and economic transformation, human rights and democratization and interfaith dialogue were included in some of the curricula for theological institution. The inclusion the broad spectrum of courses into the theological curricula would help to equip contemporary church leaders with the necessary skills for managing the day-to-day issues of the modern church and society.

The real and profound curricular changes were the inclusion of HIV & AIDS, gender and disability studies in the curriculum. These were not stand-alone issues, but they were interconnected. They became the lens through which theological education and the church was perceived. Theological Education that was inclusive of these issues prepared leaders who challenged the issues that were life threatening. Working as Programme Executive of the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy, a programme of the World Council of Churches, Nyambura continued to work with theological educators on the issues of HIV and Gender. While people

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<sup>14</sup> In Kenya, for example Dr. Dorcas Nodoro, Dr. Regina Kinuthia, Dr. Catherine Mwihiya, Dr. Lydia Mwaniki, Dr. Dr. Irne Ayalo, Dr. Dorcas Chebet, Dr. Mary Tororeiy, Dr. Catherine Njagi, Dr. Vella Ngaina, Dr. Cicily Mbura. This "cloud of witnesses" multiplies when one undertakes a similar analysis throughout the continent.

were living longer now with the availability of anti-retroviral therapy, there are other challenges of HIV that are life threatening. For instance, there was now the challenge of faith healing that led some people to give up on their medication. This was a challenge that the theology curriculum now has had to deal with. There has been progress among churches on Gender and Disability issues, but more remains to be achieved. Changes in theological education curriculum is not a one off, but constant review is required as there are many emerging issues in all aspects of society. For example, with the COVID-19 global pandemic and crisis as experienced in 2020, the need to prepare religious leaders to respond to emergencies and disasters has become acute.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have seen the voice of Nyambura when articulating her passion for life affirming issues. Her writings bring to light the challenges that she has wrestled with in her professional life. They also highlight opportunities and challenges that her life journey posed to her. She has indeed remained firm in her conviction that all must have life, and have it in abundance (John 10:10).



# CALLED TO LAMENT INJUSTICE AND PROPHECY EQUALITY, JUSTICE, PEACE AND HEALING FOR ALL – HONORING REV. DR. NYAMBURA NJOROGE –

*Fulata Lusungu Moyo*

## Introduction

“My dear sister, our God does not eat ugali. Even when she seems silent, she still hears. I do not know why he is not speaking to you right now, but I am trusting with you that when the right time comes, we will be able to hear what she has to say on this matter .... Let us not grow weary of walking together and accompanying each other!”

This is one of the typical conversations during long walks taken with my Circle sister, Rev Dr Nyambura Njoroge in this beautiful Swiss city of Geneva. Our lamentations as concerned African womanist theologians have been full of deep theological reflections, ethical musings, activist raging as mothers, sisters, aunts and African daughters. They have always emerged from the reality of African women’s resilience and agency for transformation. Together, we have become:

Run sisters, pregnant with passion for justice  
Mothers who transform our pain into prophecies for change  
Our lament loud and clear  
Challenging the ecumenical mediocracy  
How many tears have we cried?  
How many tears do we still cry?  
You of great faith –  
Will they listen and break the silence with you?  
Yes, sexual and gender-based violence is an injustice!  
The seed to HIV, an incubator for AIDS  
It is about abuse of power, not so much about sex  
For sex is about mutuality and being-at-one-ment, a beautiful gift from  
God.  
... Sssh...sssh ... sssh...sssh.....  
Sssh! What? Mental health? Why talk about such the unspeakable?  
Mental health is real – it is a killer –let’s break the silence around it!  
Destroy its sting nurtured by the conspiracy of silence

Can't you see and hear the groans of so many struggling with it?  
 It has no gender, no race, no class, no age, nor creed  
 Whether rich or poor, it envelops  
 It drowns its victims into bottomless holes of hopelessness and drowning  
 anxiety  
 Yet many people vow to silence  
 Run sisters, we refuse to be silent about this silent killer  
 Break the silence, break it, and together lets birth hope beyond the pits of  
 hopelessness!

This narrative is for the Sapphire Jubilee celebration for Nyambura, the daughter of a midwife and a granddaughter of a single mother who refused to bow to patriarchal suppression and silencing through the expectation of marriage and chose to raise her children as a single mother. It uses the story of Hagar as a sexual slave exploited by Abram through the agency of Sarai, her mistress and owner (Genesis 16:1-6, 21). I read this biblical narrative as an African eco-womanist theologian and ethicist using the lens of daring activism for gender justice and peace with no sexual and gender-based violence. The focus is on women as agents of resistance and transformation for gender justice and peace. The story of Hagar is transposed with the story of my own mother, Ellina Nyaphakati, a two-times-child bride.

These are narratives of sexual and gender-based violence that place the story of Hagar as part of the account of the commoditisation of girls' (women's) bodies in human trafficking and sexual enslavement. For this latter placement, the story of the trafficking of Indian girls by the church's mechanisms, captured in the November 2018 news quoted below, brings Hagar's story to the present realities, thus making the past present, in this continuum of the often-normalised violation of girls and women's rights. With these narratives of the 'unspeakable', I will use the concept of 'straight-talking' as an important prophetic gift, though often disparaged in contexts where justice and peace remain rhetorical – because it is often easier to yield to the temptation of political correctness that safeguards the fetishism of power, domination and exploitation.

## Lamentation as prophetic activism

Lament is a demonstrative, strong, and corporate expression of deep grief, pain, sorrow, and regret. Lament and repentance deal with issues of the heart. They pave way for outer change. Lament is a personal and corporate

response to many things: evil, sin, death, harm, discrimination, inequality, racism, sexism, colonization, oppression, and injustice. It is about mourning the painful, shameful, or sorrowful situation, about confessing sin and complicity and sorrow, about calling God to intervene and to change the situation lament is about offering thanksgiving and praise to God, knowing that God will intervene and bring change, hope, and restoration (Ji-Sun Kim & Hill, 2018: 43).

According to Grace Ji-Sun Kim and Graham Hill, lament is both an expression of regret, a mourning for the past as well as the move towards repentance, justice and transformed life. Balu (Charles) Savarikannu (2018), situating his reflections within the biblical laments of Jeremiah, deals with the questions of whether Jeremiah's anger and grief are a representation of God and the prophet's community. He quotes McConville's argument that Prophet Jeremiah's laments are a genuine expression of the prophet's life and experience, as well as being a part of his prophetic vocation. For, "in the laments one sees the prophet's identification with the plan and purpose of God for the nations. The prophet does not lose his identity when he becomes a paradigm for the suffering of the people and for the suffering of God" (Savarikannu, 2018:9).

Like Walter Brueggemann, one can mourn the loss of lament as a common and embraced "form of speech and faith" within the ecumenical movement. When it comes to confronting and redressing abuses, wrongs and inequalities, including those expressed in gender, sexual and racial injustice in the practices and witness of the ecumenical circles, the language of lamentation is often resisted. It is as if unity has to be achieved even if it is at the sacrificial altar of justice and the richness of diversity. Often those who dare to be prophetic in denouncing such cheap conceptions of oikoumene are stigmatised against as 'trouble causers'. The use of storytelling often helps to create a safe enough space for ecumenical conversations involving difficult issues that would otherwise fall in the ecumenical purview of 'taboo' discourse.

## **Breaking the silence: The church, human trafficking and rape**

The News Minute<sup>1</sup> of Sunday, November 04, 2018 told a difficult story about the church's conspiracy of and to silence and its involvement in the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.thenewsminute.com/article/girls-sold-european-churches-bishop-franco-case-keralas-nun-story-91054>

commoditisation of girls' and women's bodies for money, cheap labour and sexual exploitation. The following is an excerpt of the appalling narrative:

Nearly half a century ago, Father Cyriac Puthenpurackal, who was in charge of an independent diocese in Ettumanoor in Kottayam district, was accused of "exporting" more than 800 young Catholic girls from Kerala (India) to Germany in what came to be known as the "nun-running" scandal of the 1960s and early 70s. The girls, who mostly came from poor (and illiterate) families, were apparently under the impression that they were going to be trained as nurses or teachers; but they actually landed up doing domestic work in the (Catholic) convents of Germany. ... Only after they reached Germany did they realise they had been lured under false pretences, and that the German convents had actually paid money to get them over to do manual work. The money went into the pockets of the priests, and the families did not even know they had sold their daughters. ... The girls came from a village in Kottayam. ... They trusted the Father implicitly when he said they would be trained abroad, and would get good jobs when they returned. ... Their passports were confiscated when they landed, and they were treated like bonded labour (just like nuns are treated). ... Nuns in Kerala are not treated on par with the priests. When they enter the convent as brides of Jesus, they are expected to pay a dowry to the church. ... Many of them work as teachers or nurses in the institutions run by the church. The salaries they get are confiscated by the Motherhouse. While their living expenses are taken care of, they have no spending money, and many of them depend on their visiting relatives to give them a little extra money. ... The convent has a kind of stranglehold on the nuns as years of living inside the cloister makes them unprepared to face the outside world. Also, since the discipline of obedience is drilled into them, they cannot escape the clutches of powerful Bishops, Priests and Mother Superiors who could turn out to be predatory. ... In 2009, Sister Jesme, who had spent more than 30 years as a nun, left the convent. After she came out, she wrote a book called "*Amen*", about the oppression nuns face within the convent. Writing from her own personal experiences, she described sexual misconduct on the part of priests as well as nuns. She said she was sexually harassed by a Mother Superior of a convent. .... She described how senior priests preyed on novices. ... Sister Jesme's book caused a furore and senior Church officials dismissed it as a "book of trivialities." Even her family abandoned her. ... The convent turned her out without any money though she had served them for thirty years. She was labelled a prostitute by some Church officials. ... The nuns are now learning to speak for themselves and ask for justice.

This story is not uncommon, especially within the cultural shift of breaking the silence around sexual and gender-based violence. Within the ecclesial spaces, breaking this kind of silence has had its own challenges. The fact that the discourse around the Roman Catholic child sexual abuse cases has almost monopolised the media has sometimes caused the simplistic reduction of such abuses of power to sexual deprivation that vows of celibacy imply. How can one argue that the Roman Catholic priests that are allegedly connected to paedophilia and other forms of sexual violence do so because their vow of celibacy denies them sexual expressions of love? What then would be the explanation for those sexual abuses perpetrated by pastors, priests and other religious leaders whose religious call does not involve the vow of celibacy?

Over centuries, pastors and religious leaders have sexually preyed on those that they have power over – the vulnerable and trusting! For sexual violence has more to do with power abuse and exploitation rather than deep sexual connection as a holy and beautiful gift of God. So, breaking the silence against such abuses of power is crucial, but it has to be done in ways that can lead to repentant, transformative and restorative justice. Storytelling can be therapeutic in a context where injustice and violence are lamented as sin that a just God despises. Sister Jesme’s experience of rejection and derogatory naming is an example of the cost of courageously breaking the silence around sexual and gender-based violence. It takes the empowered prophetic voices such as Sister Jesme, the ‘straight-talkers’ to courageously acknowledge such exploitative blasphemy, and call the community to acknowledge and share the knowledge of such violations so as to lead to repentance and transformation. This can then lead to the flow of justice and peace as important streams of the gospel of life in all its fullness for all.

In March, 2011 when the Archbishop of Canterbury launched the Tearfund research report *Silent No More*<sup>2</sup>, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was represented by the programme executive for Women in Church and Society (currently known as Just Community of Wo/Men<sup>3</sup>).

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wewillspeakout.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Silent-no-more-FI-NAL.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> I use Wo/Men (S/He, Fe/Male) as gender inclusive terminologies that defy the binaries of women and men, She/He, female and males to inclusively talk about humanity in all its diverse gender identities. For a richer discussion on this, see Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Congress of Wo/men: Religion, Gender, and Kyriarchal Power* (Cambridge, Feminist Studies in Religion Books, 2016).

The discussions that followed affirmed the urgent need for churches to be part of the prophetic movement of breaking the silence that often has nurtured sexual and gender-based violence in church and society. This launch also led to the establishment of the We Will Speak Out (WWSO)<sup>4</sup> coalition. The *Silent No More* report was an honest representation of how churches have responded to sexual violence. “In many cases the church has remained silent, where the church has spoken out, it has often led to increased stigma towards survivors. If the church is to fulfill its mandate to protect and serve the vulnerable, it now has to rise to that challenge. This is a challenge for the church not just in Africa but throughout the world, for sexual violence is present everywhere.” (*Silent No More*, 2011:7, 9). In a nutshell, this report laments the churches’ role in perpetuating a culture of silence and its failure to respond to the sexual and gender-based violence. It also makes headways in suggesting how the ecclesial untapped potential can be released to contribute to the prevention of sexual violence and the reduction of its impact.

It would not be far-fetched to argue that the #MeToo campaign was one of the midwives that contributed to the nativity of the WWSO in 2011. The Anglican Communion could see the warning writings on the walls of its sanctuary, even though many sexual abuse scandals were not yet out. The #MeToo campaign, which was birthed by Tarana Burke<sup>5</sup> as early as 2006 was not as vibrant then as it has become recently. Yet the move to break the silence had begun and the church needed to do a serious stocktaking within its communities and structures regarding its contribution and response to sexual violence. The church had to courageously acknowledge its unfortunate role as both perpetrator as well as enabler of the culture of sexual and gender-based violence. It had to start telling its story.

As part of the church that is taking baby steps in breaking the silence, let me tell you a story of child-marriage, one of the major expressions of sexual and gender-based violence.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.wewillsspeakout.org/resource-type/updates/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/arts/tarana-burke-metoo-anniversary.html> [accessed 10/05/2019].

## Sarai and Hagar, Nyajere and NyaPhakati – Child marriage

From her shared stories of childhood, my mother Elina NyaPhakati, a baptised and committed member of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP), Livingstonia Synod, must have been born in 1920/21. Since her father had gone to work in the mines in South Africa as part of the TEBA<sup>6</sup> agreement, her grandmother who took her in did not send her to missionary school, except for the first three classes of primary education. She could hardly read nor write in her mother tongue of Ngoni-Tumbuka. To run away from dehumanising poverty, she eloped with her first young love at 13 years old. When her comparatively young husband went to join mine work so as to gain enough resources before building a family with my mother, his cruel uncle<sup>7</sup> forced my mother to run away, back to her family. In the name of family honour, her older brother subjected my mother to domestic violence. The frequent beating and abusive words continued and played the role of convincing my mother to 'accept' my father's insistent proposal for marriage. She was 15/16 when she married my 39/40-year-old father<sup>8</sup> as his third wife<sup>9</sup>. My father wanted a younger wife who could give him more male children after both his first and second wife gave him two daughters and only one son. As a third wife she was given to the custody of his second wife so as to serve her demands. In 1937 she conceived a baby boy but ended in miscarriage when her mistress and co-wife employed someone to physically abuse her. With advice

<sup>6</sup> For details on the <https://www.uj.ac.za/library/informationresources/special-collections/Documents/TEBA%20History.pdf>; [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/ed\\_protect/protrav/migrant/documents/presentation/wcms\\_422411.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/ed_protect/protrav/migrant/documents/presentation/wcms_422411.pdf) [accessed on 13/05/2019].

<sup>7</sup> Her husband known by his family name, Ncumayo, was raised by his mother's family in a patrilineal family system. This means that his mother did not marry his father, so she was a single mother still living in her village of birth. It is not clear whether when Ncumayo married my mother as his child-bride his mother was still in the village or not.

<sup>8</sup> My father was a member of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian but because of being polygamous he was not allowed to participate in full communion, including not partaking of the Holy Communion. So, he decided to found an independent church known as the *African Abraham Church* and he remained its overseer and senior pastor until his death in August 1989. My stepbrother, Wilnerd Mbano was supposed to take over, but the members of the church decided to transfer the headship to another family away from the Mbano family. This church accepted polygamy based on the teaching that Abraham, the father of Christianity through its Jewish roots, was polygamous. Otherwise, it is trinitarian like the reformed theological basis from which it broke.

<sup>9</sup> My father's first wife was suffering from post-partum depression and therefore was no longer part of my father's household soon after my mother joined the household.

from her, my mother was banished from his household as a murderer of his unborn son.

Similarly, Hagar must have been quite young when she was trafficked from Egypt, enslaved and owned as property. Reduced to being a possession, Hagar was forced to be a child 'bride' to a man much older than her own father, so as to rescue her mistress, Sarai, from childlessness. When she conceived, she was then accused of despising her mistress. She fled from her angry mistress only to be returned by God's Angel back to enslavement. However, fourteen years later when her mistress had her own son in her old age, Hagar and Ishmael (God hears) were banished.

## The God Who Sees and Hears

Probably, Hagar, like my mother, Elina, might have found herself expecting a child at a teen age as a concubine or second wife of a man much older than her – probably the age of her own father. When Hagar and my mother were banished and my mother was threatened to be speared by my father, it was the sense of God seeing what they were going through and hearing their cry that kept them sane amidst so much suffering. Banished and alone in their wilderness of pain and suffering, they were able to meet the God who sees/hears and heals away from the women who had power over them! Like Sarai, the enslaving mistress who did not offer accompaniment to Hagar, so did NyaJere not accompany my mother towards healing. My mother was 'trafficked' and 'enslaved' at 15/16 by my father and his wife who gained custodianship over her, even though in her (my mother's) mind she convinced herself that it was her choice to go with him and submit to NyaJere's 'ownership'.

According to the International Research Center for Women (IRCW), one third of girls in the so-called developing world are married before the age of 18 and one in nine girls are married before the age of 15. If present trends continue, 150 million girls will be married before their eighteenth birthday over the next decade. Girls living in poor households are more likely to marry before the age of eighteen than girls in higher income households. Girls with higher levels of schooling are less likely to marry as children. Girls who marry before the age of eighteen are more likely to experience "domestic" violence. A variety of religions, including Christianity, are associated with child marriage in different countries throughout the world.

Even though Hagar’s narrative comes from 2000 BCE, juxtaposing her story with my mother’s helps to bring this ancient story close to home in the present. The misconception that heterosexual marriage is what God wills for every girl and woman has meant that questions of age and even ethical principles that characterise such marriages have not been prioritised, except if such are necessary to the advantage of the man marrying such a girl or woman. Such misconceptions are sustained by an understanding of a god, who himself is an imperialist patriarch and enslaver. A god who commanded total submission of wives to husbands, and commanded husbands to love their wives like a slave owner loves his human property. This understanding was based on colonial, imperial and enslaving readings of texts such as Ephesians 5: 22-26:

Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Saviour. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word<sup>10</sup>

Why is it that this kind of reading does not include verse 21: “Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ”? Such a concept of God cannot help liberate girls and women from the violations and enslavement of child ‘marriage’.

Returning to the narrative of Genesis 16: 1-6, some of the Contextual Bible Study questions that can help bring liberation for the wo/men readers can include the following: How does the modern sexual trafficking violations embody such a story? How do family realities of poverty, lack of education and misconception of “being owned” contribute to the vulnerability of girls? What hermeneutical tools can transform such sacred texts into resources for gender justice and peace with zero tolerance for violence against women and girls? Apart from the theology of hope enshrined in personal revelations of God, what hermeneutical tool can be used so that such hope also spurs violated girls, women and their religious communities to actively be agents of their own transformation? What role do older women in the lives of these girls play? What resources can be used for the

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed discussion on Ephesians 5:21-33, see Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Commentary, Volume 50: Ephesians*, (Collegeville/ Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2018: 83-122), Fulata L. Moyo, “Reading Ephesians 5:21-26 as an African”, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, *Wisdom Commentary*, 101-102.

accompaniment of the violated girls and women so as to address the trauma caused by their experiences of exploitation? What resources do churches have that can help call perpetrators to the acknowledgement of their sin, and lead them to repentance and transformation?

For the World Council of Churches' (WCC) initiatives aimed at addressing sexual and gender-based violence, it has been the reading of such sacred texts using the Contextual Bible Study methodology gender justice (feminist/womanist) hermeneutics that has liberated communities to break the silence around such taboo issues. These readings have been a strategy within the advocacy processes of awareness raising and policy making, including the Transformative Masculinities and Femininities process, the gender training for religious communities to be able to participate in holding their governments accountable to the defence of women's rights by submitting faith based organisation (civil society) reports regarding existing international mechanisms, including treaty bodies like the Convention to Eliminate all forms of Discriminations Against Women (CEDAW) and Universal Periodical Review (UPR), as well as other UN mechanisms with country plan of actions to ensure gender perspectives to peace-building resolutions, such as UNSCR 1325 (resolution on Women, Peace and Security). WCC has also pioneered the Thursdays in Black campaign for a world without rape and violence, which has become the heartbeat of the ecumenical movement's activism against sexual and gender-based violence. Rev Dr Nyambura Njoroge has been one of the pioneers of all these above interventions for gender justice, human dignity and peace with no sexual and gender-based violence. She has been a straight-talking prophet! I lift up my breasts in an ancient ritual of blessings that my distant relatives the Lozi women of Zambia used and hopefully they still use.

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# LIVING IN THE POST-HIV & AIDS-APOCALYPSE<sup>1</sup>

*Musa W. Dube*

## **Background**

The global HIV & AIDS epidemic has been a context of great suffering: stigmatization, death, grief, orphaned children and impoverishment. It is an attack on life and its quality. Moreover, the most marginalised groups such as women, homosexuals, youth, blacks and the poor have been at the centre of the storm of the epidemic. With millions death, and other millions living with HIV, and with millions of orphaned children globally, the epidemic has been an apocalyptic event that raises significant theological questions. Who is God? Where is God? Does God care? The same questions are asked about Christ by communities and individuals who are living with HIV & AIDS. How then should we read the Bible in such a global context? This chapter will share the imperative to read the Bible in the context of HIV&AIDS, which calls for frameworks of reading for the affirmation of life, justice, the body, sexuality and compassion among others.

“There will be no end of AIDS without ensuring respect and dignity of all people, equity in access to health services and social justice,” Prof Françoise Barre-Sinoussi, AIDS 2014 International Conference.

## **Introduction**

During the last two weeks of July 2014, the city of Melbourne welcomed the red-ribbon community of researchers, medical practitioners, activists, people living with HIV, key populations, NGOs, Faith-based and community-based organisations. I attended the International AIDS Conference for the first time. Melbourne took upon its body the spirit of the AIDS global village that gathered in this city—hanging the conference banners around its streets, some on its city trams, giving red-ribbons in some of

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<sup>1</sup> Initially presented at the Niblett Memorial Lecture, 15 November 2014, Sarum College, Salisbury, SP1 2EE, Wiltshire, UK. Subsequently revised and updated.

its shops, holding special services in their churches, among others. Altogether, about 13 600 delegates gathered from 200 countries, while as many as 6000 are believed to have visited the HIV & AIDS Global Village, that was set up at the conference. It was the 20th AIDS International Conference, since HIV was medically discovered in 1981. As its theme underlined, the conference sought to “*step up the pace*” in so far as committing to all work that seeks to halt the devastating impact of HIV on the global community. It sought to mobilise recommitment to the objective of ensuring that “no-one is left behind,” given that “HIV response has always been about universal access — about non-discrimination and about working with affected people with commitment.” Accordingly, one of the outcomes of the 2014 International AIDS Conference is the Melbourne Declaration, which underlines that “non-discrimination is fundamental to evidence-based, rights-based and gender-transformative response to HIV and effective health programs.”

We remember the families and friends of those who perished in the **Malaysian airline MH 17** as they sought to bring their contributions to the 2014 AIDS International Conference. We are grateful for all that they did for the global community through their work. May they rest in peace. Above all, may their spirit of commitment to eradicating AIDS continue in us. In the past thirty-three years of living with, and in, the global HIV & AIDS epidemic, it has been an apocalyptic event of multiple angles for us. It revealed that our health is interconnected and that we cannot separate ourselves from the health of those who are suffering. It has also revealed that good health is interlinked with social justice. When the most marginalised members of our earth community, those who bear the brunt of inequalities in our societies, such as the youth, women, blacks, LGBT individuals, and the poor became the most infected and affected, a portrait emerged. The latter highlighted that HIV & AIDS is an epidemic within other social epidemics, which demands that we should attend to the virus in our social bodies with equal seriousness of attending to the HI virus in our biological bodies. Living as we do now, in the post HIV & AIDS Apocalypse,<sup>2</sup> we bear upon our memories the burden of our knowledge: that which has been revealed to us by the epidemic as we seek to be part of healing our relationships and our world.

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<sup>2</sup> Although I have used the phrase, “post-HIV & AIDS,” I do not mean “after-HIV & AIDS.” Rather the term is used as in other “posts” such as in postcolonial, which means “since the beginning of the HIV & AIDS epidemic.”

## Red-Ribbon Texts

So, what does it mean for the Bible and its readers to bear the burden of the HIV&AIDS red ribbon movement? What happens when the biblical texts are read in the light of the red-ribbon texts? And what are the challenges that confront us? Do biblical texts have any role to play? The red ribbon-texts are stories of living with HIV & AIDS in the global community in the past three decades, since the virus was medically discovered in 1981. There are stories of a virus that enters the body, eating away its immunity, leaving the body unprotected against any minor and major infection, leading to opportunistic infections, that is AIDS. The red-ribbon texts are stories of suffering bodies that are subjected to further stigma and discrimination, for allegedly their immoral status and sexualities (Heath 2005:11-18). We often find that those who are affected and infected by HIV & AIDS are those who are already on the margins of society due to race, class, gender, ethnicity, profession, religious affiliation, age or sexual orientation. The red-ribbon texts are therefore stories of massive suffering, stigma and discrimination, massive death, grief, orphaned children, children born with the virus, widows, as HIV eats away both the immunity of individual and communal bodies. Those of us who have lived and worked within the past thirty-three years, have been witnesses of HIV & AIDS' devastating impact on the global community. We have seen the HIV & AIDS apocalyptic event happening in our own world and in our time. Since 1981, AIDS has resulted in an estimated 36 million deaths. Today it continues to be the leading cause of death globally, even though infection rates have declined in recent years due in part to more widespread access to treatment, there still are approximately 6300 new infections occurring everyday. According to the joint United Nations Programme on HIV & AIDS, in 2018, 37.9 million people globally were living with HIV. Further, over 36 million people have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the epidemic. In sub-Saharan Africa, four in five new infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years are in girls. Young women aged 15–24 years are twice as likely to be living with HIV more than men.

## Where is God?

### Searching Around the Exodus, the Cross & Graves

To read the Bible in the post HIV & AIDS apocalypse is therefore, to be intertwined with millions of suffering bodies, to encounter millions of dying bodies, to confront millions of discriminated people. It is an act of gathering the courage to look up millions of graves that litter our time and memories that happened in the last three decades of our existence and work as we seek a different reality. It is to be seated in a place where the boundaries between life and death have seemingly collapsed where we have become dead with the dead. While we seek to rise from our graves our birth pangs are too long, as we try to midwife ourselves to another plane of being. To read the Bible in such a context is to centre the body and all that reduces its life, as well as to search for the resurrection power that must resist all the forces of death that deny the body its life. In the words of Exodus 3, it is to desperately seek a God who sees the misery of the oppressed; a God who used to hear their cries, a God who used to come down to liberate the oppressed. But just as one seeks to encounter such a compassionate and liberating God, the red-ribbon texts bring one to the crucifixion boulevard, where with the voice of Jesus one cries out, “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

Crucified on the HIV & AIDS cross, going up the Calvary road, the weight is too heavy. We fall. We fail going up the Calvary road, but there is no return ticket. Here at the foot of a crucified Christ, there are millions of voices that cry out: “My God, my God! Why has thou forsaken me? But there is no answer. People and communities affected by, living with and dying from HIV thus ask, “Is there a God? If there is a God, does God care? Where is God?” Perhaps God has come down and gone down together with the 36 million people who have suffered and died of AIDS - many of them stigmatised, discriminated, rejected and shamed. Perhaps God is down there listening to their cries of misery, seeking their resurrection. Perhaps God died with those who died of AIDS. Reading the Bible in the HIV & AIDS context is the art of standing in this space of hopelessness, suffering, death and search for resurrection power. It is the art of joining other various disciples and organisations to search for answers and to work for the healing of individual and communal bodies invaded by the virus.

## **With No Extraordinary Power: “So Now Go, I am Sending You”**

While the question of “where is the liberating and healing God” remains pertinent, it is important to remember that the liberating God of the book of Exodus does not only see, hear and know the misery of suffering. Rather, the liberating God also calls for earthly leadership in working out the liberation of the oppressed. Hence, Exodus 3:9-10 tells us that God found Moses busy with his daily duties and disrupted his career saying, “The cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.”<sup>10</sup> So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.” Naturally, Moses gave valid excuses - he was a mere shepherd, a small man, how could he confront the awesome power of Pharaoh? With no extraordinary power, he was sent to take up leadership in the liberation of the oppressed, using, among other things, the rod in his hands. What is in `your hand'? It might be a mere pen, pencil or a book, but it may be an instrument of healing and liberation.

## **Combating HIV & AIDS with Biblical Weapons**

What do professional biblical interpreters such as scholars, faith leaders and the laity have to do with HIV & AIDS? It is, after all, a virus that eats up the immunity of the infected individuals, which must, perhaps, be rightfully addressed by medical professionals. Yet because HIV & AIDS is a social injustice driven epidemic, that is, it evidently attacks groups that are already marginalised and disempowered such as women, black people, youth, injecting drug users, undocumented immigrants, sex workers and LGBT communities; thus, spirituality has a role to play. This is because the impact of HIV raises spiritual questions calling for spiritual healing. These groups are likely to get infected, have less access to affordable drugs and quality care. Biblical reading should and does have a role to play in the struggle to reduce the impact of HIV & AIDS. Consequently, it has been underlined in the 2014 International AIDS Conference that “there will be no end of AIDS without ensuring respect and dignity of all people, equity in access to health services and social justice,” (Barre-Sinoussi 2014). The Melbourne Declaration, “No-one left behind” has been

adopted for the same reasons. The medical cure may remain elusive, although the scientific community is working tirelessly and has made impressive achievements, but there is a social, spiritual, economic and political healing to be delivered to millions of people whose bodily and communal immunity is under daily attack from lack of human rights, spiritual rights, economic or sexual rights. While biblical/theological professionals and faith practitioners may not necessarily deliver a cure to infected bodies, they can deliver healing through being in solidarity with marginalised and vulnerable communities in seeking their human dignity, rights and spiritual healing.

### **My Story: Taken and Turned Away**

As a biblical scholar who began to do her graduate academic training in 1988, my training began at a time when the world was already living with HIV & AIDS. However, it seemed then that it was a medical issue that needed the attention of the scientific guild than theological tools. So, for my seven-year graduate education, which ended in 1997, I never learnt anything about reading the Bible in the HIV & AIDS context. There were no such courses, neither did I think there was anything amiss. However, I had personally begun to deal with HIV & AIDS that was devastating my country (Botswana). With friends, family and colleagues suffering and dying, I began to write prayers and songs about HIV & AIDS, more as a form of dealing with my grief, since I was studying abroad at the time, away from family. I was hoping to be able to sing some of the songs with my old interdenominational choir upon my return home. I had graduated in an illustrious university where my skills had been sharply crafted as an academic biblical scholar. I had an agenda to grow my research, along with my training. In short, I had not realised that HIV & AIDS would demand more from me, like Moses, who was called away from his career of being a shepherd to confront something new and unrelated to his skills. Becoming an HIV & AIDS scholar was a call to expand the horizons of my engagement beyond the academic guild to include faith, civil and developmental communities and key populations.

By the end of the 1990s, the HIV & AIDS epidemic was at its height in my country. People who had been living with the infection were beginning to die, orphans were growing in millions and many families were caring for terminally ill relatives. The infection rate was in the range of 30% among

the young reproductive age groups in my country. HIV & AIDS drugs were so expensive then that our governments hardly spoke about treatment. I was going around with my duties as a University lecturer, teaching Gospel Narratives, Johannine Literature, Pauline Epistles from a narrative, feminist, postcolonial, historical criticism and the like. Outside campus, I was busy with my activism, trying to raise churches' awareness about HIV and putting up an educational documentary video on the plight of orphans. In other words, my research and teaching were not part of addressing HIV & AIDS. When it finally dawned on me, it was a crisis moment. I was teaching a huge class on the Gospel Narratives in an auditorium, and I suddenly wondered why I should continue teaching if half of my students might be dead in the next decade and if my teaching could not assist my students to stay alive in the HIV era. I also had a crisis with the content of the gospels, for Jesus went around healing every known disease for free, while our context of HIV & AIDS was such that there was no healing, and the drugs were unaffordable.

This crisis on the meaning and relevance of my career led me to make changes. I began to mainstream HIV & AIDS in my research and teaching. Everything was experimental since I had not done such work before and I could not find any book from the library on biblical interpretation in the HIV & AIDS context. For my teaching, I asked my students to carry out field work from their communities and families on passages that feature Jesus' healing power over incurable diseases. They were to enquire about the meaning and relevance of such passages in a context where there was no healing and where drugs were unaffordable and where infection was a sure ticket towards death (Dube 2005). Students brought back their findings from fieldwork research and shared them through class presentations. The result was breaking the silence and the creation of space to talk about an issue that affects all of us, which was nonetheless, often swept under the carpet. Among the major theological findings from the fieldwork was that communities insisted that gospels remain relevant, since Jesus' healing of all people and all diseases underlined that healing is God's will for all.

From these beginnings, through the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians and through the Ecumenical HIV/AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), we began a journey of searching for answers. What was there in the Bible? How was the Bible part of the problem and how could biblical interpretation assist with breaking the stigma and discrimination, pro-

mote prevention, quality care, access to affordable treatment and promotion of justice for all? For the most part, churches were okay with giving care to the sick through their hospitals, hospices and community care projects; but this was not good enough since stigma, discrimination, prevention and access to treatment was not addressed. The first major task was confronting HIV and stigma.

## **Jesus is HIV+:**

### **Breaking the HIV & AIDS stigma and discrimination**

HIV and stigma and discrimination meant that individuals, families and communities who were affected and infected with HIV did not receive compassion and services of care and support. Rather, they were marginalised, feared and regarded as sinful people who were getting what they deserved. Since it was groups who were already marginalised and oppressed in their particular communities and the global context such as women, black people, youth, men having sex with men (MSM), injecting drug users and sex workers, who bore the highest infection, HIV & AIDS seemingly legitimised prevailing stereotypes and added to their marginalisation. In turn, the stigma and discrimination meant that these groups were hindered from using available public services such as HIV & AIDS counselling and testing, orphan social support services and relevant information. Most importantly, high prevalence of HIV & AIDS among these groups highlighted that HIV & AIDS was and remains a social injustice driven epidemic.

Reading the Bible for breaking the HIV & AIDS stigma and discrimination thus needed a framework that demolished the discriminatory walls of “us and them” and the promotion of the dignity of all. It was imperative to regard infected bodies as part of our social bodies, to identify with them rather than to distance ourselves from them. Both Christology and ecclesiology of identification provided a framework of reading for liberating inclusion. Jesus’ habit of spending time with the marginalised and oppressed was evoked to challenge Christian communities to rethink their judgmental positions. In the HIV & AIDS context, the Jesus who said, “you saw me naked, imprisoned, hungry, homeless ...” (Matthew 25) would say, “I was HIV+” and you did not, or you welcomed me (Dube 2008 and Messer 2004). Such a characterisation of Jesus underlined that he could not be separated from the marginalised and that those who did

so, were not only violating such groups, but discriminating against Christ himself. Of note, in this radical self-identification of Jesus with the 'Other', is that he did not worry about their morality. For example, the morality of prisoners and the crimes they may have committed were not his concern. All he knew was that such groups were on the margins of society and they needed to be accompanied, empowered and affirmed. Jesus' identification with the marginalised was a call for justice to be served to them. It was his proclamation of the good news to the poor and oppressed and the declaration of the jubilee year (Luke 4: 16-22).

The Pauline theological description of the church as the body of Christ, made of many parts, provided a helpful language (1 Cor 12: 26). Paul held that if one member of the church suffers, we all suffer. Accordingly, if some members of the church are living with HIV and some have died, we are an HIV+ church. The assertion that the body of Jesus was HIV+ was a shocker in earlier times, especially to Bible readers who associated HIV with immorality. Nevertheless, such a biblically based framework of thinking served the purpose of creating a constructive space of compassion, identification, activism and owning up among Christian communities. It assisted members to realise that HIV was not, and is not, out there among the so-called immoral individuals, rather it is among all of us. Both the body of the church and Jesus Christ were HIV+. Along with such a theological framework, of reading, the presence of HIV + positive priests, such as Rev (later, Canon) Gideon Byamugisha, the first African priest to publicly declare his HIV+ status, was of tremendous help in deconstructing claims to holiness, which manifested themselves as HIV & AIDS stigma and discrimination.

With such a framework of thinking, other texts such as the book of Job (Stiebert 2003, Masenya 2003 and Nadar 2004), the healing of lepers (Mark 1:40-42) and the prophetic tradition (Masenya 2003 and Dube 2003) could be read constructively to discourage stigma and discrimination as well as to promote compassionate accompaniment and justice. The book of Job seemed to be a powerful criticism against the theological frameworks that associated illness with sinfulness, just as Jesus (John 9) also discouraged such perspectives (Kgalemang 2004).

## God the Creator of Life: Embracing HIV Prevention

If the Christian faith communities identified themselves with HIV+ communities, such solidarity would create a space of reading for HIV prevention. The earliest approach to HIV prevention was the popular ABC - abstain, be faithful and condomise. It centralised the body and its sexual needs. To engage the church constructively in the ABCs of HIV prevention, one needed first, a theology of the sanctity of life. AIDS' claim of millions of lives, its creation of millions of orphans and its cause of suffering, its attack on life and its inequality was a violation of God's creation. The creation framework of Genesis 1 was thus, important for highlighting that all life was created by God and it was good. The creation framework also provided several theological perspectives that discouraged any form of discrimination, namely, that all people were created in God's image, blessed by God to be fruitful and to have access to the resources of the earth regardless of their gender, sexuality, race, or ethnicity. HIV prevention was thus consistent with maintaining the sanctity and human rights of all. The creation framework affirmed the body together with its various needs.

Yet the ABCs of HIV prevention were linked to sexuality, which created a special challenge since most Christian communities did not have a language to speak about sexuality of any form. Second, their association of HIV+ people with sinfulness was based on various sexual taboos such as adultery, fornication and same-sex sexual intercourse. Consequently, many church leaders were happy to insist on AB, that is, abstinence and being faithful to one's spouse as the answer to HIV prevention. The condom was often left out, for it was suspiciously held to promote promiscuity among young people. It was mostly admissible among discordant married couples. Searching for a method of reading the bible for discussing human sexuality and its link to power was particularly challenging. It took me a while to come up with, until I started scrutinising the sexual practices of biblical characters.

## The Bible, Sexuality and HIV & AIDS

I remember one particular time that hit me hard on reading the Bible for HIV & AIDS prevention. Kim Groop from Finland had written to say he was organising a short course in Namibia on the theme of "Theology

Combating HIV&AIDS.” He wanted me to come and teach an intensive course on “The Bible, Sexuality and HIV & AIDS” for a week, so I went about studying the biblical families in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament for their sexual practices. I was not so much looking for laws such as “thou shall not commit adultery or divorce your wife”. Rather, I was searching for examples of the sexual practices of biblical families. I read on Abraham and Sarah and found out about Abraham going in to Sarah’s maid and then disposing of her and their child, Ishmael. I read of fire and brimstone poured upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and Lot and his family running away, and about his wife turning to look back. I read about Lot getting drunk twice and each time delivering a stellar sexual performance that impregnated his daughters in two consecutive nights. I read about Jacob and his two wives and the two maids given to him by each of his wives. I read about the Levite of Judges 19, who gave his concubine for mob rape and then cut her up in twelve pieces in the morning. I read about how Tamar, the desperate widow dressed up like a sex-worker and how her father-in-law Judah could not resist doing business even if he did not have money! I read about Tamar, the daughter of David, who was raped by her step-brother and how David kept quiet about it. I read about David watching the nakedness of Bathsheba, desiring her body, summoning her for his sexual satisfaction, impregnating her, orchestrating the death of her husband and marrying her. Bathsheba never expresses her feelings. Did she, as Leonard Cohen, a musician, will have us believe, play the sexual heroine who tied David to the kitchen chair, broke his throne, cut his hair and drew a Hallelujah from his lips? I read about Solomon and his many wives and concubines. Of Esther and all the young virgins that were collected from the empire, brought in, groomed and lined up, one virgin a night to the king’s bedroom. Of Ruth and Naomi, struck by death and poverty, planning how Ruth should show up in Boaz’s threshing floor and lay her warm body against his feet (genitals). Boaz was trembling, when she commanded him, “Cover your servant with your skirt!” I bet he was happy that night, judging by the amount of barley he gave Ruth in the morning.

The point is made. The attestation for abstinence or faithfulness among the biblical heterosexual families was very thin. I thought to myself, is this the Bible? Did the post-Mosaic law biblical characters ever read Exodus 20.14, “Thou shall not commit adultery...?” Although I was shocked by this discovery, for me the point was clear, we are saved not by our works,

but by grace. David, for all his glaring ethical limitations, was still described as a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22). If God could overlook the "sexual limitations" of the heroes and heroines of faith, why should church leaders in a death-dealing epidemic insist on sexual purity than embark on the preservation of life? We needed to read the Bible for the preservation of life, of families, of communities. We needed to re-read the Bible for building justice-loving families and communities, for it is in such a context that individuals and families are more likely to be able to make effective choices for protecting themselves.

The moment came and I was in Namibia, Paulinum Theological Seminary, packed with an ecumenical student group from various countries. They had come to my class to learn about "The Bible, Sexuality and HIV & AIDS." The sub-text was that the Bible offers good examples, supporting sexual faithfulness in marriage and abstinence for those outside marriage. What could I do with these biblical stories depicting not so perfect sexual practices? They depicted multiple concurrent partners, incest, rape, violence, sexual violence, commercial sex, seduction, fornication and adultery — it was all there in the scripture, practiced by the giants of faith. I divided the students into groups and gave each group three of these stories. The task for each group was to:

- Take their given story and read it in the contemporary context of the HIV&AIDS global epidemic.
- Dramatise the stories for presentation in the classroom.
- Tell the stories of the silenced groups or characters (powerless members) by helping us to hear their feelings and experiences.
- Show how each member of their story would be vulnerable to HIV infection.
- Discuss the factors that make some members unable to protect themselves.
- Make suggestions on how to protect all members of our families and communities from the epidemic (open class discussion).

Students went to work with their passages and engaged their cellphones and laptops and brought to class interesting dramatic shows that were infused with modern technology. We began to listen to Sara and Hagar, to Lot's daughters, to Jacob's wives and concubines, to Tamar the raped virgin, to the dismembered body of the Levite's concubine, to Bathsheba, Naomi and Ruth, to the voices of those burning in the Sodom and Gomorrah fires, until we reached Esther. There were many, if not hundreds, of young girls. We journeyed with one virgin at a time, as they entered the

King's bedroom, spent the night there and emerged in the morning, neither as queens nor virgins, but heading to the second harem for life. We listened to the cry of each virgin in the bedroom of the king. There were screams of terrified young girls. Then we heard their sobs in the morning as they exited and headed to the second harem. We followed them there and heard their lifetime stories. We could have gone to Broadway in New York City and stayed there for a year with the stories of the numerous virgins of the book of Esther, sacrificed for the king's sexual pleasure — no, sacrificed for taming Vashti, so that every woman should know that a man is a king in his house. Aagh, we fast forwarded to Esther, the winning queen. Or was she? We listened to her. She hardly saw the king, after all, the king's second harem was fully packed with those young girls who did not win the queenly crown but interested the king's passions. No, we dared not go to Solomon's family — that would make a lifetime of musicals on Broadway.

The engagement with these stories highlighted that indeed homophobia kills — it kills those who are feared and discriminated against (his interpretation of the story of Sodom Gomorrah followed on its persistent cultural perspective, which is not supported by the text)<sup>3</sup>. They helped us to understand that as long as families and the communities still harbour violence, discrimination and inequalities, it is clear that the virginity (abstinence) of Tamar, Lot's daughters or the Esther virgins (or young people); the faithfulness of Bathsheba, Esther or Sarah (or married women in general) and Ruth's and Tamar's economic poverty (or poor people in general) could not effectively protect them from HIV infection if they lived in such a contexts. The stories made clear to us that as long as patriarchy gave men excessive power, the likes of Abraham, Judah, David and King Ahasuerus would not only be infected, but they would also spread the virus in their families and communities, thereby underlining the need to revisit patriarchal and heterosexual masculinities in order to construct redemptive ones (Chitando and Chirongoma 2012). The stories highlighted that members of our families and communities who are denied justice have

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<sup>3</sup> Genesis 19 is a story about gang rape and sexual violence against strangers. It is not a story about homosexual relations. However, over centuries sodomy, a term drawn from these stories, has been used to legitimate discrimination and violence against homosexuals. The tradition that associates with Genesis 19 with homosexuality is too strong, although it is not supported by this passage.

already been sinned against, the unjust structures that they inhabit make them vulnerable.

## Conclusion

There are many other forms of reading the Bible in the HIV & AIDS context. They include the liturgical approach (Dube 2003b), the Tamar campaign, which focuses on centralising the rape of Tamar (2 Samuel 13:1-22) to highlight sexual violence (West and Zondi-Mabizela 2004), interrogating dominative and destructive masculinities (Chitando and Chirongoma 2012) and highlighting the plight of widows (Ruth & Luke 18: 1-8). Reading the Bible in the context of the post HIV & AIDS apocalypse involves more than just the academic guild. It involves conversations with People Living with HIV, faith-based communities, developmental communities, NGOs, human rights movements, key populations, scientific communities and governments. It occurs in a multiple-disciplinary setting, that calls for leadership and scholarship that is socially engaged and transformative. Reading the Bible in the HIV & AIDS context seeks to participate in healing the world and birthing resurrection to a world that has been invaded by the disruptive HI virus.

To read the Bible in the global HIV & AIDS context is, therefore, to be willing to accept that God might be calling us to make God's presence known through our professional leadership, even if we do not know how, to join the search for answers and the birthing of healing and resurrection from all forces of death in our global community.

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# **THE REV. DR. NYAMBURA J. NJOROGE: REFLECTIONS BY A COLLEGE CONTEMPORARY**

*Gideon Githinga*

## **Introduction**

This chapter seeks to unveil the genesis of the contributions of the Rev Dr Nyambura J. Njoroge as a leading African woman theologian and a renowned good scholar. Since one's early beginnings shape what they become in future, this chapter reflects on what her contemporaries saw as her dynamics in relation to what she would contribute to church and society.

Nyambura and the author of this chapter entered what was then St Paul's United Theological College, Limuru, as the first-degree scholars on the same day in January 1978. The theological college has since then become St Paul's University. She was single and the author of this chapter was married. As the only Kenyan female student in the college, she was accommodated at the married students' quarters. Her apartment, which she was to share with the only other female student, a Ugandan refugee, was adjacent to ours. My wife and I were then her next-door neighbours.

Nyambura was sponsored at St Paul's by the Presbyterian Church of East Africa [PCEA], the Church that nurtured my wife, Mary's, spiritual formation. Mary together with some of her siblings had been baptized by Nyambura's father, the Reverend Daniel Gitogo Githinji. This relationship made Nyambura, and the two of us close friends and when she needed family warmth our door was opened for her. Our relationship in this set-up made me know Nyambura probably better than the majority of our 1978 classmates. I had come to learn that Nyambura was the last born in her family of nine daughters and that she had no brother. Many of our contemporaries who had known the family saw Nyambura as the "son" in the family. This stance was to be portrayed in her class of seventeen students, sixteen males and one female. Like any of her contemporaries, she was prepared to overcome a number of hurdles, the first one being in the pioneer degree class.

## Enrolling as the First-Degree Class

St Paul's United Theological College had been planning to start a degree class for quite some time. This had been tried nine years earlier in 1969 with five students, but the class was discontinued presumably for lack of competent lecturers and qualified students at the time. The highest qualification that the College had been offering was the Makerere Diploma in Theology sponsored by Makerere University in Uganda. After this there had been the assumption amongst the students that a degree program would be unmanageable. The class was to be determined to ignore the perception that the degree programme was too difficult to be undertaken. But in 1977 under the Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa [ATIEA], St Paul's in Kenya and Makane Yesu Theological Seminary in Ethiopia started planning to start their first class of Bachelor of Divinity degree. Makane Yesu opened their doors in September 1977 and St Paul's in January 1978. For us to do same examination, St Paul's had to adjust its academic calendar to start their academic year in September of 1978. We, therefore, had to forego our holidays in our first year to catch up with Makane Yesu. The requirement to enter into this new programme was either two 'A' level passes, or a diploma in theology, or had passed a degree entrance examination or had a first degree in another discipline. The class was, therefore, quite a mixture. Nyambura had been a secondary school teacher and a graduate of Kenya Science Teachers' College.

Everybody engaged in the programme was anxious of what would be the final outcome. This was the time that the country had very few institutions of higher learning. There were therefore only few graduates in Kenya then, many having attained their degrees overseas. There were no local theological institutions offering degrees and anyone seeking this level of education was to seek admission either in the American or European universities and seminaries.

The 1969 failure of St Paul's to continue with the degree class in its first attempt created psychological fear amongst the diploma and certificate students. The students in Nyambura's class started getting discouraging messages from the rest of the student fraternity. Due to the discouragement they got from the rest of the students, this class was determined to work very hard. There was no time for leisure. We had to sacrifice the college *Kamukunji*, a platform where students used to meet between the library and the students' halls of residence to release their tension, by discussing their lecturers and even their church leaders. They also spent

much time discussing the new programme which majority of the regular students maintained that it would never succeed. These discouraging talks isolated the class from their counterparts and could only find its solace in the library. The members made sure they all completed their assignments in time and did thorough study.

On their part, the lecturers worked very hard to ensure that their first-degree class succeeded. They did not want to give failure a chance as had happened nine years before. They gave a lot of assignments and made sure that their examinations were tougher than they previously gave to regular certificate and diploma students they had been used to examine. They maintained that they did not want to create high hopes by giving generous grades. They maintained that what mattered most was the final grade which would be given by external examiners. Apart from the expatriate lecturers, many whose background we did not know, the rest had not taught undergraduate students. Some were even first-degree holders and by university standard were not qualified to teach undergraduates. It was thus serious work for both students and staff.

Nyambura and the rest in her class were to fight the myth that others started the programme and failed to succeed. There had been a *Kamukunji* saying that, even if one worked very hard, they could never get anything above 40% in any given examination. The first Church History paper proved those who discouraged others wrong. There were 50s and 60s in the paper and this fallacy was overcome. The members of the class proved that low grades were mainly as a result of failure of the students in the regular classes to work hard.

But this was not so with Introduction to Biblical Hebrew. Everybody in the class failed our first attempt. We were left wondering whether it was the failure of our lecturer or that the examination was very hard or the paper was wrongly set. In our second attempt every student doing the paper passed. The members of the class fought together to the extent of testing each other before the real examination came. They worked in great collegiality. Every hurdle that was overcome became an encouragement of what lay ahead. There was no room for Nyambura to distance her male counterpart in all the academic struggles.

This was the educational wilderness that Nyambura found herself in; the only female student competing with sixteen men. This must have been a culture shock for her. For her to overcome the hurdles both in and outside

her class, she was to wear a brave face and be like any other male counterpart in her class. Nyambura's boldness was to lead her beyond her class and even St Paul's.

## All Eyes Focused on Nyambura

There were areas that Nyambura was to go alone. She was the pioneer PCEA woman to undertake theological studies. She was to become the first woman minister in this second largest non-Roman Catholic Church denomination in Kenya. The debate of ordination of women was at its highest in the 1970s and 1980s. In the United States of America, especially in the Episcopal Church, the debate went hand in hand with women liberation's and women's rights. Feminist theology was taking centre stage. The PCEA had taken a brave move to admit women to the holy orders, even before its Anglican counterpart. Nyambura was aware of all this. The move was through the approval by the PCEA General Assembly in 1976 after a long debate. The promoter of the debate and the debate itself has been well documented by the late Very Rev John Gatu, the first African General Secretary of the PCEA. During the endless debate on whether the Church should pioneer all other denominations in Kenya, both Catholic and non-Catholic, he recommended to the Moderator and the Senior Clerk of the General Assembly to open the general debate to all the non-commissioners [or invited observers as well]. According to Gatu, one woman stood up to address the Assembly: "Mr. Moderator, it is not our intention to be equal with our male counterparts. There is one thing that a man can never do, but it is the pleasure of women, the joy of suckling a baby. That is our special quality. All we are requesting is for the church to avail us the opportunity to serve the church, sometimes in ways which no man can ever do."<sup>1</sup>

As Nyambura continued with her studies, she was still reflecting on this debate which was no secret to her as her own father was a member of the Assembly. She must have been discerning beyond the rest of us because she was to become the first woman to be ordained by her church and all eyes would be focusing on her. She had been considering how she could serve the church 'sometimes in ways that no man ever do.'

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<sup>1</sup> See John G. Gatu, *Fan into Flame: An Autobiography* [Nairobi, Moran Publishers, 2016], p.150.

Nyambura's father, the Rev Daniel Githinji Gitogo had nine daughters and no son. Nyambura was the ninth daughter and the last born. According to the Kikuyu tradition a man who never got a son in his first marriage was to go for a second wife and try his luck with the second or third wife. And this is one of the causes of polygamy in Africa and among the Muslims. But being what Daniel was, he could not go against his faith and his calling as a committed Christian and as an ordained minister. Therefore, he had given up on the possibility of having someone from his flesh and blood to serve in the priesthood.<sup>2</sup> Daniel must have been among those who said a big 'amen!' when the woman in the general Assembly contended that there is something women could give which men could not.

The desire of her father having someone from amongst his children joining priesthood must have provoked Nyambura to offer herself for the church ministry. She was indirectly giving satisfaction to the father by demonstrating that what a son can do, could also be done by a daughter.

The story that Nyambura has lived confirms that gender is not a limitation when it comes to serving God and humanity. Like what has been said about the seventh son of Jesse, David, God does not look at the age or the appearance of an individual. She was to become a David in Rev Daniel Githinji's family. She was to spearhead women priesthood in the PCEA. Nyambura was therefore swimming against many tides but was determined to succeed.

## **More Strides: Attendance of International Conference, a Wedding and an Examination**

Back to her class at St Paul's and the college fraternity, Nyambura was surrounded by many male students, both married and single. All the single students were mature as traditionally the church may not admit anyone for theological training below the age of twenty-one years. One cannot deny the fact that so many eyes were attracted by the only Kenyan single lady in the college. But thankfully or unfortunately for the prying eyes, Nyambura had already been engaged to Engineer Mbugua Njoroge. The fact that Nyambura had not taken a vow not to marry. The wedding plans could not be deterred by the fact she was joining the holy orders. She

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid. John G. Gatu, p.149.

joined the college and went on with her wedding plans as this was not unusual for students joining ministry.

At the same time, being the only PCEA woman undergoing theological training and now a notch higher than the rest, Nyambura was to represent her church at an international women's conference in Europe a few weeks before her first year's examinations. Three key issues were simultaneously happening in Nyambura's life: an international women's conference and probably the first exposure to Europe with all the culture shocks that go with it; a wedding that did not only involve the two individuals but also members of the marriage candidates' families and in extension the church, and of course, the first-degree examination that had been creating much anxiety amongst the candidates due to the pressure already mentioned above.

I am not privy to the discussion in the women's conference, but this was an indication that Nyambura was in future to represent women in the international fora. This was the time that discussions on women liberation were in top gear. African women in particular needed liberation from the men dominated societies. This included polygamy where sometimes the girl child had no freedom to marry the man of her choice and was sometimes forced to become second or third, fourth, or even tenth wife to the one man. This was during the time that some societies denied the girl child right to education for after all she would be married away.

The church too could not escape the blame in relation to women's freedom, including the freedom of joining the ordained ministry. The women had been ignored in church governing organs whilst they comprised over sixty per cent of the church attendance. Many women too had been indoctrinated by Pauline theology that women have no right to stand before men to address them. They had been enslaved by their own beliefs as they are always directed to elect men in church policy making organs. The conference must have addressed how women could free themselves from both cultural and religious beliefs that enslave(d) them. In this conference, Nyambura was an ambassador, not only of the Presbyterian women, but all other African women, both in church and society. It was time to discover what women can give that which men cannot give.

The wedding baggage ordinarily is very engaging in our African context. It is not normally a one-time event. It involves in-depth discussions and negotiations by the members of the two families. In this case the subject

of discussion was Nyambura and Njoroge, her future husband. It was difficult to know where Nyambura got all the time that her presence was required as she never missed classes during this crucial time.

The third hurdle that Nyambura was to overcome during her at St Paul's was the ATIEA examination. This is an examination that came with a lot of anxiety both amongst the students and the lecturers. For the students, the ghosts of the failed class of 1969 were still hovering around. The regular students were still discussing in the *Kamukunji* about the possibility of a massive failure. Furthermore, for the reasons that are discussed above, we entered the programme in January and the year's examinations were coming in July, a record seven months. The class had gone without holidays save a two-week Easter break. But for Nyambura, the two issues discussed above made it more agonizing to her than the rest of the class.

On their part, the lecturers were not ready for failure. I believe this was not the team that saw the whole class drop the programme almost ten years earlier save the late Rev David Philpot, a Church of Scotland missionary who had been there since 1950s. Philpot was the Academic Dean of Studies who had great hope with the new class. The lecturers had given the class lots of assignments and were hopeful that this time round they would succeed. They were, however, careful not to give any students very high grades to avoid students becoming overconfident.

Apart from the Introduction to Biblical Hebrew discussed above, there had not been any other mass failure in a subject. The few who did not pass one or two papers, were able to pass upon their second attempt. The second and the third years' examinations were less challenging. The first year's examinations had already given the class confidence that there was nothing impossible. All the seventeen students were able to graduate with a Bachelor of Divinity degree. That notwithstanding, no student scored a first class or upper second division degree. Fifteen out of seventeen earned a lower second class [between 50% and 59%] and only two got a pass. The first observation here is that the members of this class worked very closely and applying same discipline by not entertaining non-issues to class and removing the myth from the rest of the college fraternity that degree work was so difficult. The second observation was that the lecturers who were now members of the ATIEA did not want to create over confidence amongst the students. In most cases, the external examiners had proved more generous in awarding better grades than St Paul's examiners.

Nyambura still had another hurdle to jump. Their first child, Njoroge, was born a few days before her second year's examination. Thank God that she did not have childbirth complications. She alone knew what she was going through, but it could not have been easy for any mother. Despite all the hurdles that Nyambura went through during her time at St Paul's, she was among the first five best students in her final grade. I believe St Paul's experience is what made Nyambura what she was later to become, namely, a serious scholar and ecumenical leader.

The academic challenges that this pioneering class underwent including the pressure from the rest of the student body really had made the class feel isolated. There was a common notion that even if the class excelled within the Association of Theological Institutions in Eastern Africa fraternity, the degree would not be recognized by the Kenyan government. But one Anglican bishop, the late Rt Rev Bishop Sospeter Magua, Bishop of the Anglican Diocese of Mount Kenya South, the then chairman of the college's Finance Committee, kept on encouraging students from his Diocese that the BD was not a government programme but was intended to enhance theological development in the church. In his diocese he contended that he would pay his graduate clergy the same salary as those graduates working in the government institutions.

Notwithstanding Bishop Magua's encouragement, nearly all the first graduates felt that they would find accreditations by pursuing further theological training in accredited institutions in the West. The church did not find it difficult then to sponsor graduate students as Master's degrees took a shorter period than Bachelor degrees. Furthermore, European and American churches and institutions had generous scholarship grants in the 1970s and 1980s.

After serving our respective churches for between three and five years, one was qualified for a recommendation for further studies. The author of this chapter may not be able to trace where each of his classmate went to study, but at least ten of them attained both Master's and doctoral degrees, five in America and five in Western Europe, giving St Paul's BD its credibility. Nyambura was sponsored by the PCEA to study in the prestigious Princeton University in New Jersey, USA. She eventually did her Masters in Theology and a Doctor of Philosophy [PhD] in the same discipline. I may not be having the statistics, but it is likely that this first class produced the highest percentage of doctoral degrees amongst its members in St Paul's history. The effort toward achieving higher theological

studies can only be attributed to the discouragement that Nyambura and others were confronted with by their colleagues in Certificate and Diploma classes. Anyone who went through these hard times becomes an encourager to those afflicted by discouragements in various forms of life. Nyambura thus became I believe the first Kenyan and among the first African women to attain a PhD in Theology. And as she represented the Presbyterian women in an international forum while she was still at St Paul's, she was now to become a women's voice in both church and society through the World Council of Churches.

### **The Cosmopolitan Nature of St Paul's**

During Nyambura's time at St Paul's, the College was very cosmopolitan. We had students from Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Sudan, South Africa, Mozambique, West Germany, United Kingdom and United States of America. This cosmopolitan nature was brought about by several factors: First, there was the ecumenical nature as every student had been sponsored by the various Protestant denominations that trained there, whether local or international. Second, the College was then said to be the most prestigious and popular theological institution in Eastern Africa. Third, there had been political crises mainly in Uganda and Mozambique. A good number of the international students were therefore refugees from the region.

Each of the above factors impacted any student who went through St Paul's then. In 1949, the College that had been owned by the Anglican Church invited the Presbyterian Church of East Africa and the Methodist Church of Kenya, both of British origin, to come and train together. The number of students who were enrolling for theological training was minimal and was only prudent for the three denominations to train together for mutual assistance. Later in 1955, the College became a United Theological College of course through a memorandum of understanding. At this time the college was open to inviting other denominations with common theological orientation, especially from those churches which were members of the National Council of Churches of Kenya [NCCCK].

This ecumenical nature of St Paul's assisted the graduates and their denomination in narrowing down some of the historical differences that had existed between them. Every student was assigned a church to attend to

experience how that church performed their services and even to participate on sermon delivery, whether that was one's denomination or not. Denominations alternated in conducting Sunday evening communion services in the College chapel. Any graduate of St Paul's would not have any problem later in serving in a participating denomination that was not their own. This was one of the uniqueness of Nyambura's theological formation. African scholars came to learn that some of the differences that various denominations had imported through the Western missionaries could be dealt away with. They were to be cautious against propagating the same differences when they graduated to serve the wider church and society in their respective countries. This was the fulfillment of the dream by the Church Council of Kenya, the precursor of the NCKK that had advocated for a united Kenyan church during the early years of the last century. Later, all the chief executives, the general secretaries of the NCKK were to come from the three main partner denominations. A good number of St Paul's graduates have taken active roles in ecumenical organizations such of National Council of Churches of Kenya, All Africa Council of Churches [AACC] and the World Council of Churches [WCC]. This could have been the genesis of Nyambura's passion to work with the WCC.

One may argue that St Paul's had become popular because of the balanced theological training that it gave to its graduates. There were lecturers sponsored by the Anglican Church, the PCEA, the Methodist Church of Kenya and the Reformed Church of East Africa. During Nyambura's time at St Paul's there were more expatriate lecturers than their local counterparts. The nationalities of the students have already been mentioned. This culture mixture brought about new insight to each of the students most of whom had come from their local homogenous cultures.

Students were to tolerate each other's cultures, however, complicated some may have appeared to others. For example, it is anathema for certain Kenyan communities to eat certain types of meat. In our small gardens which the college was allocating to married students, our greatest enemy was a small mammal called the porcupine. They used to eat up the crops which were meant to supplement students' food supply. Some Kenyans used to trap them, kill them and throw them away or even bury them. For our Mozambique counterparts, it was their delicacy. Whoever was lucky to catch one, he had to invite other members of their community to share the meat from the small mammal. This demonstrated a lot of love

between them. This is just one example that members of St Paul's community were to learn from each other's culture. The members learnt even to carry each other's burdens and also to appreciate each other's culture. Students had truly become members of one body where if one part suffered the rest of the body was to respond to the pain.

## **The Refugees Factor**

Among the foreign students were refugees from Uganda and Mozambique. Kenya since the 1970s has been a refuge to a number of countries in the Eastern African region thanks to its relatively democratically elected governments. It has two of the world biggest refugee camps at Kakuma at the Kenya/Sudan and Dadaab at the Kenya/Somalia borders respectively. Both camps provide education to the children who have fled their countries with their relatives. There are also those who took the opportunity to seek college education, some of whom found their way to St Paul's. Their life in college and in Kenya was relatively more comfortable compared to their war-torn states. Because of its deep spirituality, St Paul's offered compassion to the refugees when they shared their horrific experiences with their Kenyan and international counterparts. Some, especially from Uganda, would receive news of the deaths of their relatives.

Some of these experiences occurred when one Ugandan student failed to return in college after an official term break. When he came back, he was summoned by the Principal in his office and was given a suspension order to go back 'home'. The news of his suspension reached the General Student Body [GSB]. This was an official body that addressed issues of students' welfare in college. The senior student convened a GSB Executive Committee comprising twelve elected members which decided to go and see the Principal to persuade him to reconsider the decision to send the refugee student home. This was during the time when the country's military dictator, Idi Amin Dada was targeting Christian leaders.<sup>3</sup> The Principal refused to meet these student representatives. They passed the message to the GSB who in turn demanded that the Principal should come and address all the students. He was unwilling to discuss the matter of the student in question with anybody. This caused all the students to boycott classes in solidarity with the refugee. The darkest moment came

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<sup>3</sup> The Archbishop the Church of Uganda' Jenani Luwum was murdered around this time.

when the Principal convened a meeting of the College Council Executive which was to be chaired by the Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of Mount Kenya South mentioned above who was also the Chairman of the College Finance Committee.

There had been reports that the students had gone violent and had broken the library windows and had cut the college telephone wires. All these were fabrications and none of the Council members had sought to verify the truth. All the students were summoned to the main hall at 4 pm and the Council had decided all the students were to go 'home' and report to their respective church leaders. By the time the students came out of the hall, police officers were at every corner of the college, especially around the library which allegedly had its windows broken. The police officers were however calm as they had not witnessed the alleged violence and did not push anyone to moving out.

But unlike any other Kenyan institution, the situation was to become very complex. A good number of the students' wives were either teachers in the neighboring schools or nurses at Tigoni Hospital or doing secretarial or banking jobs in Nairobi and were all to arrive home after 5 pm. There was a host of school going children from the married students who normally returned home with their parents. None of these persons were St Paul's students but they were to be punished with their husbands and fathers respectively.

But the worst scenario was with the international students, among them American, German and British, and from other African countries named above. Those who had embassies in Kenya went to their respective foreign offices in Nairobi to seek for help. All the Mozambican students all of whom happened to be Methodists went to the Methodist Church of Kenya's leadership and were all hosted at the Methodist Guest House, a three-star hotel.<sup>4</sup> The majority of the Ugandan students had been sponsored by the African Evangelistic Enterprise [AEE] and were to seek help from the organization's office in Nairobi. The suspended student now enjoying the sympathy of all the others had been sponsored by AEE. Efforts

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<sup>4</sup> These refugee students later boasted that the two weeks accommodation at the Methodist Guest House was a God-given opportunity as they had never dreamt of being in such a prestigious hotel.

by GSB to send fourteen of its members to persuade its General Secretary to intercede for the student were rendered fruitless.<sup>5</sup>

But it took a very short time for the Council members to realize that the Principal was wrong and had not given them the real truth. When the Bishop of Mount Kenya South summoned his eight students for interrogation, he ended the subject by saying to his students: “We have realized that even the Principal can be wrong, go back to college and complete your studies so that you can come and serve God.” All the other church leaders ordered their students to go back to college unconditionally.

Nyambura was a student leader and had been engaged with all the pleadings for compassion over her fellow refugee student who had been between a rock and a hard place. At home his people were dying and in a Christian college, he had been sent away. The suspension of the Ugandan refugee must have impacted her to later work on the plight of the refugees and the marginalized in the World Council of Churches and to insist on justice and abundant life for all.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the Rev Dr Nyambura Njoroge’s early beginnings. Her calling to the ordained ministry from a family of an ordained father and six sisters was a fulfillment of a dream of a father who had longed to have a son so that one day he would be a priest. His daughter was to fulfill the dream and not a ‘son.’ Nyambura was later to wear the face of a son during her early theological training in a male dominated institution.

Nyambura’s discouragements at St Paul’s made her create a hard skin towards achieving the highest level of academia. This led her to joining the prestigious Princeton University for her master and doctorate degrees. She became the first woman PhD holder and one of the world’s leading scholar.

Nyambura, having been sponsored by the PCEA, both at St Paul’s and in America, was to become the greatest gift that her Church was to give to

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<sup>5</sup> The General Secretary was a former classmate of the Principal and instead of interceding for his sponsored student he decided to discuss the list of all the fourteen emissaries who had gone to see him. The emissaries’ list was to be given to the Council with the recommendation that they all should be expelled from St Paul’s.

the world. Through her, many young scholars, especially women, were to enjoy generous scholarships from the WCC.

Training in a cosmopolitan college with all its complexities at her early beginnings exposed Nyambura to hard times, some of which were to shape her future engagements in church and society. Being the only Kenyan woman in a male dominated institution and observing the refugees' struggle got into her psyche. This was to become a motivation in her engagements in gender, struggling with the marginalized, especially in the global South. I hope this chapter has thrown some light to some of Dr Njoroge's early beginnings that prepared her for her future engagements in the global political and economic developments.

# NYAMBURA J. NJOROGE'S ECUMENICAL THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION VISION FOR AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY<sup>1</sup>

*Chammah J. Kaunda*

## Introduction

Nyambura J. Njoroge is one of the most significant and courageous African women theological voices in 21<sup>st</sup> century. This chapter utilises Njoroge as a *lens* to conceptualise what is seen as her main concern of her ecumenical theological education vision for African Christianity, especially during her tenure as Global Coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education (hereafter, ETE). The second aim is to investigate what she saw to be significant and how that has continued to influence her theological thinking through her writings. The investigation is divided into three main sections. First, I provide a brief biographical account of Njoroge. In the second section, I evaluate some of the main projects that she supported in Africa. In the third section, I analyse some of the emerging theological themes in the light of Njoroge's theological thinking on theological education.

## Njoroge, a “Lamenting Woman Theologian”

Nyambura Njoroge (2002:53), whose first name literally means “the-rain,” is one among the most influential African women theologians with an innate ability to articulate a vision of African Christianity that is firmly anchored in African religio-cultural heritage and within critical issues of peace, justice, and dignity without losing its historical roots and ecumenical dimensions. Njoroge has lived up to her name as a theological blessing to the church in Africa. She perceives her theological voice as a lamentation, a tool to decolonise the mind from internalised exploitation and oppression as women and as Africans (2002:51). At the foundation of her academic life has always been an insatiable craving and a search for a “life-

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<sup>1</sup> This chapter is based on my doctoral thesis in African Theology, completed in 2013.

transforming and life-giving ethics” for an “empowering and liberating ministry” (2008b:114). Kenyan born, Njoroge has had an experience of “a lifetime of firsts,” including being the first African woman to study at St. Paul’s United Theological College (now St. Paul’s University) located in Limuru, Kenya and at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary in the US (Hill and Melton 2009). She was the first woman to be ordained to the ministry in the Presbyterian Church of East Africa in 1982, and the first African woman to receive a doctorate of philosophy (PhD) from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1992 and the first ordained African woman to earn a PhD in any theological field (Hill and Melton 2009). She is one of the founders of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) (Njoroge 2001d). Njoroge worked with the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), in Geneva, Switzerland, before serving as the first woman Global Coordinator of the ETE of the World Council of Churches (WCC), a position she held from 1999 to 2007, whereupon she moved to her position as Coordinator of the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA) (later, Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy), of the WCC.

Through her critical reflection on African Christianity, Njoroge has shown the crucial role that the church must play in the transformation of Africa through a critical engagement between the religio-cultural and social, political and economic context of the contemporary African experience and the gospel promise of liberation, justice, peace and abundant life for all members of the African Christian community. Njoroge’s ecumenical vision is pinned on the view that ecumenical theological education is a foundation to interpreting and understanding how Africans are travelling with God their Creator and Source of Life in the church and world entrenched in strife and life-denying forces. In a bid to articulate her ecumenical vision, Njoroge has written extensively on African women’s theologies and ethics, ecumenical theological education, sexual and gender-based violence, HIV & AIDS, gender and sexualities. Her (2008b:118) ecumenical vision is based on collaboration with theological educators and students to critically examine the way the church and community leaders can be prepared for a broader range of ministries both for the ordained and laity. She (2013:39) believes African religious leaders must be equipped to engage effectively with contemporary issues such as “HIV, sexual reproductive health and rights, abortion, barrenness, ageing, and sexuality” for “all issues that complicate the struggle for life after birth, dignity, justice, and

peace.” She (2013: 39) laments, however, that “such personal issues remain at the periphery of the priority lists of churches, theological institutions, and ecumenical organisations.” Placed within the broader perspective of African women theological methodological/pedagogical reflections, Njoroge offers a critique of power relationships along the lines of gender, class, race, and sexualities as mutually defining and reinforcing systems of oppression which form matrices of power and domination.

### **Sustained Attention and Support Emphasis**

Njoroge has done a lot for African theological education. Some of the projects she supported have had a tremendous contribution not only across Africa, but internationally. As ETE director, she supported the Circle, but also took a keen interest in strengthening African women theologians and students in theological institutions (Kanyoro 2002:25). She enabled the Circle women to travel for theological conferences and consultations. Njoroge (2013: 40, 42) has also assisted in curriculum development of gender and theological education in Africa. She argues for a critical mass of students to have opportunities for “transformative learning”, “as well as visionary and transformational leaders” “to engagement in God’s mission for justice, peace, and struggle for life.”

This approach is described as a “Journey of Hope” which began with a consultation Njoroge organised and supported at Kempton Park, Gauteng, South Africa in 2002 which was jointly planned with the Council-wide Framework for Special Focus on Africa. The objective of the consultation was to “reflect and critically evaluate theological education and ecumenical formation in Africa and, to formulate together strategies for action” (Njoroge 2002:1, WCC 2002:2). The consultation pondered on the question: “what kind of theologies and ethical value systems inform and help shape the church, Christianity and ecumenism in Africa?” (Njoroge 2002:2). According to Njoroge (2002:1), the consultation was informed by the WCCs concern about how church leaders were being equipped for their ministry, mission and ecumenical involvement. In addition, since the eighth General Assembly in Harare in 1998, the WCC had made Africa a special focus of programmatic activities until the next Assembly in Porto Alegre in 2006. The consultation was developed from the;

Journey of Hope, which took a crucial step with the Harare Covenant of Africans both from the continent and the Diaspora at the WCC 8th (Jubilee) Assembly held in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998, called for “a new vision of life for our people in Africa and for the rest of the world”. This vision was also an affirmation of the Johannesburg dream expressed by Africans in May 1997 which called “for creative unity and solidarity among Africans; the elimination of all dividing walls and structures of enslavement; reconciliation and healing of human brokenness; and responsible management of human and natural resources in the spirit of Pan-Africanism (WCC 2002:2).

The Harare Covenant called for “unity and solidarity” of Africans both from the continent and the Diaspora. In the quest to respond to the question mentioned above, the delegates developed an elaborate and concrete outline of commitments as part of the Plan of Action. These commitments, which were projected as being long term, were developed at five levels with critical declarations, each beginning with the phrase “we commit ourselves to ...” Njoroge, through the ETE, until 2007, made an excellent contribution to the implementations and achievement of many of these commitments (Werner 2010:287). Werner (2010:286) narrowed the commitments to those that have made a noticeable impact since the consultation:

**First**, the Circle had received encouragement for the participation of women in theological education and research and for their voices to be heard more. Isabel Phiri (2005:37) noted that it is from this consultation that the Circle embarked on the process of rethinking the theological education in Africa. Njoroge, through the ETE, assisted in curriculum development for gender and theological education and the call for mainstreaming gender issues in theological education. Some theological institutions in Africa have taken up the challenge of mainstreaming gender issues in their curricula; for example, the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics of the University of KwaZulu-Natal offers post-graduate studies in Gender and Religion.

**Second**, the commitment focused on public health to take on board concerns such as violence, HIV and other dreaded diseases. Gender issues, the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) and ecumenism have become a major concern of the ETE-based initiative for mainstreaming HIV & AIDS in theological education in Africa, a programme which is now carried forward by EHAIA of which Njoroge herself has served as the Programme Executive. “EHAIA promotes HIV competence among

churches and works with theological institutions to integrate and mainstream HIV into theological curricula as well as addressing the root causes of the pandemic” (WCC 2018). This programme led to the formulation of a multi-sectoral approach to education and research on effective ways of fighting HIV & AIDS (Njoroge 1999-2007:3). Musa Dube served as the WCC HIV & AIDS Theology Consultant for Africa from 2002 to 2003, and has been instrumental in the curriculum formulation and training of people for HIV competence in sub-Saharan Africa. The mainstreaming of HIV & AIDS in theological education curricula is perhaps one of the most crucial achievements in the history of theological education responding to this issue (see Dube 2003b; 2003c). The HIV & AIDS curriculum that was formulated has been translated in Spanish, French and Portuguese (Njoroge 1999-2007). While these achievements reveal significant progress, as Ezra Chitando (2010:243) is careful to point out: “there is still a lot of work to be done before theological institutions in Africa become HIV competent.” Chitando, who succeeded Dube as WCC HIV & AIDS Theology Consultant, has focused on how issues of masculinities and sexualities play a key role in the spread of HIV & AIDS in Africa. The curriculum has made a significant contribution to contextualising and theological institutions relevant in their response to African needs.

**Third**, the commitment to address the concerns of people with disabilities such as incorporating signed language subjects in theological curriculum has been vigorously applied by the Ecumenical Disability Advocates Network (EDAN) in cooperation with the ETE/WCC. As Samuel Kabue (2010:232), Consultant/Executive Secretary for the EDAN has affirmed, the EDAN saw the need to focus on theological institutions as the most suitable approach towards conscientising students and engaging the churches about people with disabilities. Njoroge worked in partnership with the EDAN to promote curriculum development. This too has been translated into Spanish, Portuguese and French (Njoroge 2006:7). This curriculum led to the introduction of a two-year Master’s in Social Transformation (MTS) at the *Université Protestante au Congo*. The global significance of these two curricula demonstrates that Africa has reached a stage where African Christianity is seen to have something significant to share with the global ecumenical family. Africa is becoming a global theological womb.

**Fourth**, the commitment was “supporting and encouraging the networking of all TEE institutions in Africa in their efforts to sharing materials and standardising their qualifications.” This commitment has also been

taken up by the formation of the All-Africa Theological Education by Extension Association (ANTEEA) (see Mabusuki 2010).

As can be observed, Njoroge perceives the need for African theological education so as to enhance life and facilitate the creation of a humane-community within which justice and equality are enshrined as basic rights. In fact, through the initiative of both Njoroge and Musimbi Kanyoro, a section within St. Paul's University library was developed and equipped with books on feminist theologies and other related subjects (Njoroge 2001d:257). Through this effort, the library has become one of the best theological libraries in Kenya. It was also during her time as Global Coordinator of the ETE that the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa introduced the Gender and Religion Programme at postgraduate level.

**In summary**, it is through such projects that Njoroge endeavours to promote the WCC agenda for African theological education. The questions that arise are: by supporting such projects, what kind of theological education does Njoroge envision for Africa? In other words, what is Njoroge's theological understanding of the function and purpose of theological education? Building on these questions, the next section will explore Njoroge's theological vision for an African theological education that promotes the principles of justice, peace and dignity in an African Christian community.

## **Ecumenical Theological Imagination**

The aim of this section is to articulate Njoroge's theological vision for an African theological education by analysing the emerging themes from the kind of projects she supported during her period as the Global Coordinator of the ETE and as Programme Executive, EHAIA. A thematic approach in light of Njoroge's written work is utilised with a view to giving a concise view of her theological vision for an African theological education. Of the many themes which can readily be identified from Njoroge's sustained sponsored projects, three in particular will be discussed.

## **An Appropriate Curricular**

One of the main concerns emerging from above is the need to create an appropriate curriculum for transformative learning in African theological education. Njoroge spent considerable resources and energies in trying to develop appropriate curricula. She is convinced that the dominant content of the curricula reveal the kind of theologies that are shaping and influencing the destiny of the African continent. Njoroge (2004:87) believes that the twenty-first century context of Africa demands an ecumenical theological curriculum that includes a critical evaluation of what exists in all areas of study currently offered. The question is: what kind of ideology should shape an ecumenical theological curriculum?

She has always believed that transformative ecumenical education is one of the most critical sites through which God has been leading “Africans to peace, justice, and dignity, as more Africans are enabled to address the oppressive structures that have condemned millions to lives of misery and suffering” (Njoroge 2013:40). She envisaged ecumenical theological education and resources as significant in enabling theological institutions to make informed decisions about what should be included or dropped from their teaching curriculum. Njoroge (2004:87) argues that the curriculum that is most needed is one that enables theological institutions to explore the causes of pain and suffering in the lives of African people and seek to identify what can bring life to people during destruction and death. According to Njoroge (2004:87), such a curriculum takes seriously the pedagogy of the oppressed and education for critical consciousness while affirming its biblical, theological and spiritual orientation consistent with the mission of God. The curriculum will have to pay critical attention to gender issues, leadership models, people with disabilities, HIV & AIDS, sexual and gender-based violence, refugees, the poor and the many other challenges present in Africa. Such a curriculum implies that contextualisation must take these existential challenges seriously. Njoroge (2004:99) further argues that an appropriate curriculum for ecumenical theological education should be both deconstructive and constructive and must utilise a variety of disciplinary tools. Put differently, Njoroge calls for a curriculum that can utilise feminist and liberationist theories to help foster justice, peace, dignity, freedom and responsibility in Africa (Njoroge 2004:100). Njoroge (2001d: 255) urges that theological education must ensure a fresh and critical engagement with socio-cultural critiques that leave no stone unturned in an ecumenical search for healing, wellbeing

and fullness of life. For Njoroge (2004:100), space must be given to baptised members of the church to fashion the curriculum under the guidance of trained leaders and theologians. That said, Njoroge does not give space to interreligious dialogue in the formulation of the curriculum. This raises a question: In recognising the religious plurality of Africa, should theological curriculum create a 'diaspace' (dialogue space) with other religions?

This implies more than just introducing a new curriculum or adding some few new courses to the old ones. Instead, it demands a paradigm shift about African theological education. Njoroge calls for rethinking curricula and pedagogical assumptions in most theological institutions in Africa, by not only contextualisation of curricula, but by also appreciating and strengthening women's leadership among theological educators in each theological institution in Africa. This implies that creating an integrated curriculum should go hand-in-hand with developing gendered theological educators with contextual mind-sets. The creation of new curricula will yield very little results with the same brainwashed male-shaped theological educators.

## **'Doing' Theology**

Njoroge early in her theological work made a shift from theology as an abstract noun to theology as a verb. For her, theology is something religious people do rather than what they merely think. It is interactional work that goes along with being a religious person. Religious people are always performing theology even when they do not take time to reflect on their daily experiences. Njoroge (2000, 1997b) calls for a critical orientation toward a liberating and transforming theological education when she criticises African male theologians for their uncritical retrieval of African culture and their failure to include the voices of African women in liberation and inculturation. As with many African women theologians (see Phiri 1997b:68), Njoroge's African womanist theological perspective initially emerged as a reaction to the exclusion of African women's experiences in patriarchal society. Njoroge (1997b:77) argues that by taking the religio-cultural plurality of Africa seriously, the Circle decided to embrace African women with various religious orientations and ideologies to be part of the sisterhood of 'doing' theology. Njoroge (1997a:8, 1997b:77) de-

lineates that doing theology is a way of “participation and exploration, emphasising the activity that produces theology.” In other words, it is the struggle with God’s word to find meaning in meaningless circumstances, as African Christians confront the systemic socio-political and economic powers and principalities that continue to deny them life. This emerged from an understanding that as the situation changes so is the way theology is conceptualised. Theology is no longer seen as a complete and established body of knowledge that must be handed down to students. Instead, theology is an activity of a given community that demands that emphasis be laid not so much on thinking as on doing. Doing theology focuses not so much on abstract and ontological ideas emerging from the past generations. Instead, it finds its locus in addressing current life-threatening/destroying and life-affirming/giving issues. Consequently, authentic theological education emerges from within the womb of a given community and responds to the existential challenges of that particular community. Despite this new orientation of theological education, Njoroge (1997a: 9-10) highlights three issues that have not been addressed adequately. First, the purpose of theological education is to help students in their quest to “learn to be human.” Njoroge feels that African Christians have not yet learned to be truly human, for when one looks at the extreme violence that has been perpetuated on the continent, it is doubtful whether theological education is making any difference whatsoever. Second, African Christians have not been taught how to do theology or how to seek to live as Christians in their context and by applying their minds and faith to their problems in the light of a global agenda. Instead, the African church has perpetuated a soul-saving theology inherited from its Western missionary progenitors, which disregards societal challenges. Third, awareness has not been created to reflect that by participating in doing theology, the masses in the church engage in the event of producing theology, which theologians craft systematically into academic language. The implication of this is that, constructing and living theologically is a shared communal process. In this process, both lay people and theologians as members of a given community are involved, in various ways, in articulating a theology for their community. It also implies that all learning is contextual in the sense that it is historically, socially and culturally situated and responds to such a context.

Njoroge (2001c:240) believes that the most important resource that is most often overlooked and undermined in theological education is that of

the people in the community. Indeed, sometimes theologians are in danger of living as if they are not members of any community. To counter this, Njoroge (2001c:237) proposes a holistic community-based approach, especially in the context of HIV & AIDS, which is based on encouraging people to undergo “self-scrutiny, discovery, repentance, healing and growth.” This model demands a critical, social, ethical, cultural, theological and biblical reflection and analysis of the daily realities of the community through critical encounters with them as *subjects* of their life and not *objects* of study. In other words, doing theology is based on cultivating holistic interdisciplinary theological ways of looking for solutions in Africa. Therefore, Njoroge (2008a:226) argues for the urgent need to provide a holistic interdisciplinary approach to the multiple existential challenges the African continent is facing. While interdisciplinary perspectives must be stressed upon, it is also important to highlight that the approach is limited in the sense that it does not give theological education the power to transcend the boundaries of academic disciplines or embrace their integral nature. This is important because the challenges being experienced in Africa are not confined to any single discipline.

## New Ways of Doing Theology

In calling for disentangling theological education from its colonial entanglement as an abstract scientific project, Njoroge (2001c:254) laments that the process of creating a new theological thinking in Africa has been long overdue. She (2013: 40) opines that African theologians “are not alone in asking critical questions, providing transformative learning, and rethinking the whole question of understanding and experiencing faith” and social challenges. The current existential challenges in Africa are screaming in the ears of the African church to construct its own theological discourse, which will inspire Christians to speak words that affirm life by subverting and resisting theologies of death. In her call to rethink theology from the underside of modernity, Njoroge (2001c:254) stresses the point that;

Even long before the scourge of HIV/AIDS, dare I say that creating new theological thinking is long overdue? For so long, many churches in Africa have been living with imported theology, which does not speak to the fears and hopes of the people ... I am here begging for a theology that will help us ask critical questions about our inactivity or wrongdoing ... a theology that will creatively help us to retell our story of colonization, cultural and

religious imperialism, people's resistance and struggle for land and freedom to the point where we say no to injustice, exploitation, globalization and senseless death.

In short, the theology that Njoroge is calling for emerges and finds its locus in the concrete existential experiences of African people. Njoroge (2008b: 118; 2005a: 29-46) believes that theologians stand to gain if they pay critical attention to the lived experiences of people who have made a significant difference in ending suffering and restoring dignity in seemingly hopeless circumstances. In the view of Njoroge (1999:54);

Building on communitarian ethics means taking into account African methods of sharing information and passing on knowledge, for instance, singing, storytelling, folklore, proverbs/sayings and rituals, which would reaffirm cultural values that give sense of belonging and meaning to people.

It is in this context that she demands a transforming theological education that can facilitate social transformation in Africa. Njoroge describes the process of such transformation in five crucial steps. First, it must take the mission of God seriously as the liberating response of God to Africa. Such a mission is God's agenda which comes to us through the life and person of Jesus Christ (Njoroge 1994: 21). This mission demands a partnership between women and men as the substratum for "participation and community building where mutual love, justice and respect for all life are the building blocks" (1994: 30). Njoroge (nd: 3) argues that there is an urgent need for Christian leaders with wisdom and deep insight into what is going on in communities and are involved in self-retrospection and theological reflection on God's vision of a just and equitable African Christian community enshrined in the biblical promise. This is crucial, especially because the struggle for contextual theological education and theological thought has already begun to bear fruit on the African continent. Njoroge (nd: 4) reveals that in the last two decades, there has been a small, yet significant group, of African theologians who are the product of the contextualisation of theological education; stepping in to provide important leadership in addressing the HIV pandemic, violence, globalisation and in developing contextual theologies and teaching in new and creative ways suited to the context of Africa. In Njoroge's view, unless theological education finds its locus in developing leaders for Africa; the quality, effectivity and empowering of leaders for the church and society at all levels will remain inadequate.

The second crucial step is that theological education will need to include the voices of African women. African women, through the Circle, have written articles and books on women's experiences and perspectives in African religion and culture, affirming its life-giving practices and criticising its destructive elements. Njoroge (1997b:80-81) contends that in order for theological education to become more liberating in Africa, it must affirm and ensure women's full participation in both studying and teaching theology, otherwise the "truth will remain hidden, and the life-affirming African theology is doomed to fail." Indeed, theological education will benefit significantly if it takes the voices of African women theologians seriously. This raises several important questions: to what extent are the books written by African women theologians utilised in various theological institutions in Africa? Are there some empirical studies that have been conducted across the continent to investigate the number of theological institutions that use, as part of their theological material, the literature written by African women theologians? In what ways is African theological education encouraging the use of these materials or making them available in various theological institutions?

In the view of Njoroge (1996a:12, 1996b:9), unless theological education helps to facilitate building an inclusive community which takes the concerns of children, the poor, women, sex workers, gender and sexual orientation communities, and the neglected at heart, theological institutions will continue to produce men and women who are gender blind and who have no compassion for the excluded and oppressed. Njoroge (1997b:83) firmly calls for a "justice-oriented" theological education which will take into account everything that keeps women economically and sexually exploited, culturally dominated, and politically alienated. What is being underlined here is the need to encourage and empower African women to study theology by finding ways and means of raising theological scholarship grants for them because funding seems to be the most critical hindrance. Justice demands that theological institutions in Africa respond to the needs of women, their experiences and perspectives in such a way that they are taken as core values in shaping theologies, teaching and research methodologies, and in the way of doing theological education (2005a:41). The third crucial step for African theological education is found in the theological response to HIV & AIDS. For Njoroge (nd: 2), this requires the church in Africa to make a 'U-Turn' in the way it has addressed or not addressed this crucial issue. She sees HIV & AIDS as a disease that thrives on multi-dimensional social injustice at every level. "It is an epidemic

within the social epidemic of injustice” (Dube 2003a: vii). This means that theological education must confront the issues of HIV & AIDS in an activist manner. In this, Njoroge argues for the need to address the violent legacies of bad theology in order to envisage a theological education that can help in creating a new future. Njoroge (nd: 2) argues that theological institutions are the sites of struggle against existential challenges in Africa. Njoroge recognises the efforts of small groups of theologians and pastors who have worked hard to formulate ecumenical HIV & AIDS curriculum for theological institutions in Africa and later in regard to the TEE methodology. Njoroge is of the view that this needs to be properly addressed within the broader social injustices of violence, human rights abuses, racism, poverty, child abuse, gender inequality, ageism, classism, ethnicity, international injustice, and sex-based discrimination among other social injustices. By so doing, theological education will be crucial in facilitating ways in which the community of faith can become aware of the importance of food security, healthcare, human rights and the human dignity of the majority of African people who live in the constant struggle of such existential needs. It must also engage in peace-making and the transformation of the African church from the house of oppression and languishing for women, to an inclusive household of God, free of sexism, exploitation and oppression (Njoroge 2001b:81).

The fourth crucial step that African theological education must take is towards issues of persons living with disabilities. There is an urgent need for African theological education to be inclusive, sensitive and relevant to persons living with disabilities both in the churches and society in general (2001a:7). Njoroge stresses that ministry with and for persons living with disabilities is not an option but is an integral part of the life and mission of the church. This is why theological institutions must be in the forefront of promoting and supporting the work of EDAN. For Njoroge (2001a:9), addressing concerns voiced by persons living with disabilities means being critically engaged in the societal and political issues of the day. Hence, persons living with disabilities must be seen as the people of God who need to be prepared for the mission of God in the world.

The fifth crucial step is the search for ecumenism in theological education. Promoting ecumenical learning seems to be the most difficult task of African theological education. Njoroge (2003:34-40) acknowledges the daunting nature of the task by identifying six challenges and obstacles for ecumenical learning as follows: (i) the art of teaching ecumenically; (ii)

relevant and contextual theological literature; (iii) stewardship and ecumenical leadership formation; (iv) teaching about faith and economy; (v) mainstreaming other major issues affecting African people; (vi) mentoring and networking. Njoroge argues that the majority of theological institutions in Africa are yet to conceptualise the meaning and implications of ecumenical learning. This raises the important question: to what extent are theological educators in Africa familiar with the concept of intentional ecumenical learning?

One can contend that with the mushrooming of Christian universities in Africa, ecumenical learning will become crucial for doing theological education. Even though intentional ecumenical learning may not yet be taking place, the majority of these institutions are ecumenical in their teaching staff which can act as platforms for envisioning intentional ecumenical learning. Njoroge (1998:10) contends that the multi-dimensional existential challenges of contemporary Africa hold some of the keys to empower and encourage “churches to engage in mutual learning processes not just within the same denominations but ecumenically.” In the view of Njoroge (2001d: 306), ecumenical theological education “is a holistic approach in recruiting, nurturing, guiding, equipping, training and preparing” students for “a life of faithfulness in God and critical engagement in the church and the world.” Njoroge (2001d: 316) believes that ecumenism is not an option but a gospel imperative, rooted in the Scriptures and yet demands to be conceptualised within “African culture, religion and the stories of African people, their struggles for liberation, freedom, justice, wholeness and life.” Similarly, Emmanuel Katongole (1998:39) has called for African theological education to take African people’s “story seriously, as a socio-political ideology, capable of mobilising creative social goals and possibilities, as well as engendering a distinctive and alternative social praxis.” Two questions from this discussion can be raised: in what ways does African theological education take seriously the stories of African people? What kind of theological education can take seriously the stories of African people?

For Njoroge, African theologians must wrestle with the meaning of ecumenism from the experiences and perspectives of African people. Yet, ecumenical theological education must not be seen as “an end in itself but a means of systematically and intentionally enlightening and educating” the whole people of God for God’s mission (Njoroge 2003:34). Njoroge (2005b:235) believes that it is only through ecumenical theological educa-

tion that the African church will be able to overcome “the captivity of narrow confessionalism” and liberate theological education from its erstwhile narrow theological reflection. Njoroge (1995:23) adds that ecumenical theological education is also important for addressing the African disease of dependence on Western systems which permeates all spheres of African life. In addition, there is a need for ecumenism in confronting the many challenges that face Africa today. Njoroge has managed to demonstrate that identity and personhood are gained through the struggle for social transformation and liberation. Hence, the task of theological education is to motivate people to understand their situation and ecumenically work together to experience the liberating and transforming Word of life. Nevertheless, Njoroge is yet to develop her ecumenical theological education vision in addressing the central issues of economic development theory in Africa which are “the balance between industry and agriculture, the best way to finance social expenditures, improving trade relationships between industrialized and industrializing countries, incentives for private producers, how to create jobs and the trade-off between the incomes of this generation and the next,” capitalist liberal free market and so on (Fitzgerald 2008:257). The question which arises is therefore, important: does African theological education create leaders that give theological support or justification to the neo-liberal economic system that is denying fullness of life for the poor?

While this agenda might seem too demanding of theological education, to neglect these more practical issues will have serious consequences on the rest of the challenges confronting the African continent. A viable theological education has a responsibility to evaluate the ways in which the economies of African countries affect the quality of life in the continent as a whole. As Katongole (1998:38) observes, African theological education must be aware and critique not only the political forces but also the church for there are Christian practices “which make it impossible for Christians to be good consumers in a liberal capitalist economy.” Secondly, Njoroge also generalises about the concept of ecumenism in its obscuring of the African religio-cultural symbols and metaphors. In short, she has not given adequate attention to the contextual grounding of the ecumenical imperative for African theological education. It is my contention that every ecumenical imperative needs contextual metaphors for expression and it is these metaphors which are the embodiment of social transformation. Thirdly, one would have liked to see how ecumenism can help African people deal with the current ecological crisis. The question

is decisive: how does the 'care for creation' become incorporated into theological education and thereby develop theological students as eco-activists for the whole of the created order? Fortunately, many African communities are culturally protective towards creation. Yet, how can intentional ecumenical learning take advantage of that culture in the quest for protection and care of creation?

## Conclusion and Methodological Observations

The chapter has demonstrated that Njoroge's vision of African theological education is more than just a call for recuperating the link between Christian faith and historical realities of African Christians. Instead, it is a call for an alternative African community that celebrates the full humanity of women and men. A critical concern for *life itself* is seen as a criterion for analysing social challenges. Njoroge calls for a theological education that bears witness to the truth of the Christian gospel, through which the incarnation promises to establish a kingdom in the midst of the people of God with justice, peace righteousness and wholeness. Njoroge's vision for an African theological education that promotes justice, peace and dignity for African Christian communities can be summarised as follows: **First**, it acknowledges the critical need for the contextualisation and genderisation of theological education and theological educators as the first step. **Second**, theological education must respond to existential challenges facing the African continent in a multi-sectoral and narrative way. There is no possibility of over-emphasising other existential challenges for they are all interwoven in a social web of injustice. **Third**, Njoroge's view is unmistakably missiological in intent, centred as it is in the *missio Dei*. She believes firmly that the *missio Dei* should be based on a partnership between women and men for the liberation and transformation of society. **Fourth**, she holds an intentional ecumenical vision. Theological education that promotes the principles of justice, peace and dignity should be ecumenical by nature otherwise it cannot help African Christians realise a community built on equity and justice and affirm the dignity of every individual. **Fifth**, it is based on an interdisciplinary approach. It was also highlighted that the interdisciplinary perspective does not transcend the problem of artificial boundaries of academic disciplines. Instead, it only opens the way of dialogue among disciplines while retaining their distinctiveness. It is significant, therefore, that theological education will not only

uphold interdisciplinary scrutiny, but also embrace a more integral approach that brings coherence to academic disciplines. Theological education must come out of the confinement of isolationism and narrowness on theological discourse and transcend the boundaries of disciplines through a more integral approach (this is unavoidable because of the cognitive nature of pluralism, languages, ethnicities, religions, denominations, etc.) in order to give viable solutions to the critical existential questions that African Christians are struggling with in their daily lives.

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**BOOK REVIEW: KIAMA KIA NGO:  
AN AFRICAN CHRISTIAN FEMINIST ETHIC OF RESISTANCE  
AND TRANSFORMATION,  
ACCRA, LEGON THEOLOGICAL STUDIES SERIES, 2000**

*Mary Getui*

In the call for contributions to this volume, Nyambura Njoroge is described as a leading African woman theologian, ethicist, activist, administrator and ecumenist. Other attributes mentioned of Nyambura include scholar, one who is engaged in the community, a contributor to African women theologies, HIV & AIDS theologies, ecumenical theological education, children's theologies, theology and disability, theology and sexual diversity and other themes. Nyambura is also described as being consistent in her call for life giving theologies and effective leadership in Africa.

Her book, *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation* captures many of these attributes and concerns of Nyambura. The outstanding ones are the place and contribution, and challenges of the African Christian woman in church and society within Africa - a context riddled with oppression, domination, discrimination, control and dehumanization's; gender dynamics in the church and society; leadership; ecumenism; and community engagement. Under-scoring these concerns and attributes is the double-edged impact, namely resistance and transformation.

The book arose out of Nyambura PhD dissertation at Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey, USA. This is commendable effort in that a book, rather than a dissertation, reaches many more people. Again, a dissertation takes an academic format while a book is reader friendly. A book can also be described as practical, touching on the lives of the people, even at grassroots level. The book is a demonstration of Nyambura as a scholar who translates theory to the practical. Notably, it is based on primary field research, with the voices of some of the pioneer adherents of the Presbyterian tradition in Kenya, as well as reference to

records, songs, symbols and projects in line with the centrality and value of orality and symbolism in the African context.

The book is published in Africa, which makes it accessible and hopefully, affordable, considering that many books by Africans and on Africa but published outside the continent are beyond the reach of many. Further, it is the second, which is a feat, in the Legon Theological Series, a project by the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches. The series is intended to be characterized by Africanis, which concerns a theological perspective that is informed by the history, cultures and issues as well as the hopes and fears of Africa. This book therefore meets this criteria, thus it is relevant and applicable to Africa.

The content of the book is broadly women's ethic of resistance and transformation with focus on the Woman's Guild of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, Kenya. The community of interest are African women, represented by the *Agikuyu*. This focus reflects the unique place and contribution of African Christian women in the church and in society. Nyambura brings out several theological issues such as women's view of God, women in Church and society and how women are viewed by men on these and other issues. She also mentions some men who and how they have accompanied the quest of the Woman's Guild. The book is hence a worthwhile resource on feminist theology, and on the dynamics of the relationship between men and women in church and in the wider society.

Nyambura highlights that one issue that the Woman's Guild stood against right at their inception in the 1920s is female circumcision. This is a rite of passage that has deep cultural, social, religious and even economic significance but which also raises equally deep human rights concerns. By raising this issue, Nyambura confirms that she is consistent in her call for life giving theologies. This book serves well for those of the school of thought that that initiation rites are irrelevant, as well as those of the school of thought that considers that (aspects of) these rites serve a useful purpose in nurturing and moulding the participants, even in the contemporary times.

A critical concern for Africa, indeed the world over is leadership. Nyambura, who has been consistent in her call for effective leadership in Africa, investigates the organizational structure of the Woman's Guild to establish how it empowers or hinders women's participation in the life of the church, and by extension participation in society. Basing on the Woman's Guild this book offers useful insights on leadership.

The book also brings out Nyambura the ecumenist. While her focus is on the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, she is generous in acknowledging the contributions and place of non-Presbyterians not only in her own personal and career growth but also generally in the history and journey of Christianity. She makes references to the history of ecumenism in Africa and summarizes the contribution of ecumenical bodies such as National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and Pan Africa Christian Women Assembly (PACWA).

Nyambura proposes a theoretical model that she considers useful for the Woman's Guild to emulate to empower and broaden the African Christian women's agency and ethic of resistance and transformation in Africa. She bases the model on *Kamiriithu* Community Educational and Cultural Center in Kenya. Two factors for choosing this center are first, that the center had done a thorough analysis in analyzing their social context and developing practical strategies for transforming the situation and secondly, the community was initiated and constituted in the immanent process of self-determination and resistance by men and women at grassroots level. This model is applicable for the individual and other agencies that are concerned and interested in promoting life to its fullness. This recommendation would be used as an illustration of Nyambura the activist. Such a proposal is bound to rock the boat as it were- it is borrowing from the secular for the sacred! It is borrowing from grassroots for the church and for the Guild.

The pioneers of the Woman's Guild were ready to break out of the silence, fear and invisibility that had served to perpetuate the dehumanizing and injustice inflicted on women for such a long time. At the turn of the 21st century, Nyambura followed the footsteps of these pioneers by writing this book- she is among the pioneer female theologians to speak out fearlessly and visibly on the issues covered in the title of this book. These issues remain relevant two decades down the line for the African Christian Woman, the African Christian Female Theologian, and the African Woman at the Grassroots and the church in Africa have lessons to learn from *Kiama Kia Ngo: An African Christian Feminist Ethic of Resistance and Transformation*. 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.



# TRANSFORMING THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE IN THE MARGINS

*Wati Longchar*

## Introduction

It is a great honour for me to contribute an essay in honour of my long-time friend and colleague, Dr. Nyambura Njoroge, with whom I worked in strengthening ecumenical theological education in Asia and the Pacific. Realising that the future strength of the ecumenical movement and church lies on how much the churches invest on theological education, we tried to highlight communities who were excluded from the ecumenical table and accompany theological associations in institutionalising some key ecumenical issues such as peace and justice, HIV, disability and to strengthen regional ecumenical networks. In this chapter, I would like to highlight the importance of transforming theological education for marginalised people.

Theological education plays a key role in the life of the church and society. It is encouraging to see various theological institutions making serious attempts to respond to the changing demands of society by offering various degree and diploma programmes, and organising workshops and consultations on life cutting-edge issues. We also see initiatives such as the Commissions on Women, Commission on Dalit/Indigenous Concerns and Contextual Theology among others to meet the contemporary challenges of the church and society. The initiative on new patterns of theological education, the promotion of ecumenical relationships between the seminaries and the churches, and the empowerment of women and marginalised groups, are some of the noteworthy areas. We can see that subaltern and other related fields have brought about significant changes in theological education. But the question is: Who decides the content of theological education? Whose experience, perspective and location are taken as the norm?

## Some Issues Challenging us Today

A hundred years ago, the centre of Christianity was Europe. Today, Christianity is declining in its former heartland and increasing significantly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Although some Christians still live in the Americas and Europe, they claim a smaller share of the total Christian population worldwide today. It means that the majority of Christians live in non-western world today. David Barrett's *World Christian Encyclopedia*, estimated that there are now about 2 billion Christians in the world, that is, one-third of the world population. Given current demographic expectations, it is projected that in twenty years, more than half of Christians will live in the non-Western world. It is said that there will be a considerable shift in global Christianity's centre of gravity. Though the majority of the Christians live in the non-western world, we still follow the western theological education system. One would say that theological education content and pedagogy are still shaped by the Enlightenment paradigm of Euro-centric modernity which is deeply rooted in the conquest of nature and the demonisation of others, especially ethnic or indigenous people and marginalised<sup>1</sup> communities. Most of the theological teachers are products of this paradigm and we do not see significant change in the teaching and learning process in our academia. Can this paradigm liberate people in the margins? Does it provide sufficient scope to integrate the voices and needs of marginalised people?

Where do most Christians in the non-western world live? The majority of the people who embraced the Christian faith are marginalised people – indigenous or ethnic people, dalits and people from the lower strata of society. The majority of the people in the margins live and struggle in the rural or semi-rural places. Can a few middle class educated theological educators, educated in the west and mostly living in cities, decide the content and pedagogy of theological education for rural people? For marginalised people?

What is the core purpose of theological education? Are we going to focus on producing exclusive denominational leaders who would act as priests

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<sup>1</sup> It refers to people have been generally referred to or seen as recipients or objects of churches' mission. People in the margins have been the victims of churches' missionary expansion and theologies that took shape amidst colonisation and legitimized historical processes of discrimination and oppression of the weak and the vulnerable.

of their particular denomination? Do people in the margins give importance to denominational interests? Whose interest are we teaching in theological schools?

## Theological Education and People in the Margins

I want to make a few critical references on the Enlightenment education paradigm, which we still uphold, to show that we need a new paradigm of theological education to integrate the voices and experiences at the margins and bring transformation in the life of marginalised people in rural and semi-rural contexts.

1. It is a fact that the present education system in Asia, as well as in the global south, is an integral part of the colonial legacy. The main purpose of education during that time was to produce clerks to serve in the colonies. The content of the courses was designed to maintain the privilege and power of the colonisers and the subjugation of the colonised, and to produce generations of people who will never question or challenge the ruling elite, but simply accept unjust relationships. The education system has been developed in such a way that students are not challenged to think otherwise. Students were expected to memorise what they were told and they were rewarded for reproduction of what they were taught. Thus, it negates creativity and critical thinking.<sup>2</sup> Students were also not given the choice to think differently. We still follow a modified form and continue to operate within the Enlightenment framework, giving more importance to classical traditions. This is one of the reasons why graduates mainly seek white collar jobs. Education is designed to make students faithful employees of the master, but does not help students to think, “how many people can I empower to make rural people’s lives better?” The increasing number of unemployed graduates in the global south is an integral part of colonial education system.
2. We need to acknowledge the fact that the present crisis of unemployment among young people is a product of the colonial education system. The unemployment problem is not so visible in those so-called

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<sup>2</sup> Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird, “Beginning Decolonisation,” in *For Indigenous Eyes Only: A Decolonization Handbook*, eds. Waziyatawin Angela Wilson and Michael Yellow Bird (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2008), p. 1.

“developed” countries. What is happening in the global south? The higher literacy rate means a higher unemployment rate. It takes fifteen years for students to earn their first degree and parents also spend a large amount of money for their children’s education. Yet, after obtaining degrees, many join the “depressed club”. The number of unemployed young people is alarming. How can we expect people to live in peace and harmony when there is a high rate of unemployment? How can we expect that there will be no corruption and insurgency movements? The insurgency movement is flourishing and becoming like an industry in some countries. Everywhere people are fighting for resources and it will continue if we do not change the current education system. Theological graduates are also roaming around without jobs. Why should we have a theological college if we do not contribute towards solving growing unemployment? A college or a university should contribute towards generating jobs and sustainability.

3. Theological education is becoming like a free market in Asia. There are more than a hundred colleges in metro cities like Seoul, Manila, Jakarta, Chennai, Bengaluru and Yangon. Even in Nepal with about two hundred thousand (2 lakhs) Christians, there are about thirty theological colleges in Kathmandu city alone. Dimapur is a small city in Nagaland, but there are about forty-five theological colleges! Do we need so many theological schools? Is this trend not a serious problem? Who are the people teaching in these colleges? Most of them are graduates of the main-line Protestant theological schools. Sadly, some of the institutions demonise other cultures and religious traditions, ignoring contextual realities of people in the margins.
4. The present dominant pedagogy in theological education tends to focus more on cognitive advancement, giving prime importance to transmitting philosophical and theoretical discourse of elitist traditions and resources. That is why our theological curriculum is overloaded with classical theology, history and biblical interpretations. Subjects on social transformation of the rural masses are not given importance. Many people still think that studying theology in the west is superior. Of course, they may have better facilities, but that does not mean that they offer more relevant theological education for our context. The western model, content and pedagogy of education is not a solution in all contexts.
5. Upholding the western university system as normative, the other forms of education are relegated as primitive and not important for

academic pursuit. Cognitive assessment – examination centred, syllabus controlled, and sheltered/protected campus-oriented education is an important aspect of the dominant education system and this system alone cannot bring transformation among the marginalised communities. It is a sad reality that the present accreditation or affiliation criteria of theological associations or universities are geared towards protecting the interest of the elitist system and hierarchy of power.

6. The general assumption is that theology cannot be done without philosophy. The ethnic/indigenous traditions are not regarded as philosophically deep enough to articulate theology; and are not valuable resources for doing theology and contain no value for doing God's mission. Indigenous people and other marginalised groups are looked down upon socially and their spiritual traditions are branded as pagan, heathen, barbaric, savage, idolatrous, primitive, unnatural, uncivilised, irrational, abnormal, evil, demonic and inferior. Though a significant community of the Christians in Asia and the global south are indigenous people and other oppressed communities, most of them come from rural places. They are forced to study dominant classical theology which has almost nothing to do with their ministerial context and their lived experiences. We teach our students something which is alien to them. People are enslaved by the classical-philosophical model of doing theology. This is the reason why indigenous and other marginalised people's ways of being are threatened and they are on the verge of losing themselves. Can an education system that has demonised them for centuries transform them? How can such a value system give a sense of dignity to them if we do not make a radical departure from the present education system?
7. One of the major concerns of theological institutions is to equip people to serve the poor, powerless and exploited communities, or people who are victims of injustice. But many theological graduates are not interested in serving in the rural places; sadly, many young people are not interested in pastoral ministry, and are more interested in materialism. Strangely, theological graduates who cannot get an opportunity to work in urban contexts or white-collar jobs are looked down upon as incapable and cannot compete with other colleagues. The rural place is seen not only as backward, but also as a place of punishment. This is one of the reasons why we have many theological graduates who are not employed, or unemployable in rural settings. The proliferation of theological education in urban places is also an integral part

of this education system. Today, graduates are happier unemployed in urban areas than being employed in rural places, whereas people in the rural places are facing lack of leadership and service. Most of the indigenous people live in rural or semi-rural contexts, but graduates are not given adequate preparation to deal with the problems of rural masses. There is a serious defect in the present education system. The mushrooming of colleges, prayer centres, house churches, NGOs, schools, and colleges in urban places is a manifestation of such a phenomenon. Theological education and Christian ministry are becoming an elitist urban biased profession. What has gone wrong with our theological education and with the general education system? Where is the morality and commitment in today’s education system?

Graduates are not interested to serve in the rural areas because of wrong content and orientation, thus, there is need for a paradigm shift from the present system to a more progressive theological education. A few examples may be cited as follows:

### Current Approach Area of Integration

Strong interrelationship between Theology and Philosophy; elitist classical tradition; cognitive development; limited practicum.	Strong interrelationship between Theology & Social work – Development approach; margin’s tradition; community development; practicum emphasis.
Compartmentalised/disciplined degree- oriented approach	Integrated/interdisciplinary skill-oriented approach
Spiritual formation in protected campus	Spiritual formation amidst secular world
Scope of job is mostly limited to church or church related works, especially priestly function to perform rituals.	Scope of the job is not only limited to church and church-related works, but also can serve as community organisers, rural development workers and creative entrepreneurs upholding Christian values and principles.
Graduates prefer to serve in urban contexts; rural is seen as a place for punishment.	Graduates prefer to serve in rural context; rural is seen as the place where God has called to serve.

The above critical comments should not let us to assume that we should discard the Enlightenment education system altogether. One cannot deny the fact that the present university system has made a tremendous contribution to doing theological research and praxis in the lives of people and the church globally. Its contribution towards scientific and critical thinking drawing on philosophical resources is highly commendable, and we need to integrate some of those tools in our context. However, western thinkers are highly critical today that the Enlightenment paradigm of imparting scientific knowledge rooted on the conquest of nature, demonisation and exploitation of peoples in the margins at the expense of market expansion has caused much damage to the world. It has inflicted tremendous pain on marginalised people, and the natural environment on which we are dependent. They struggle to correct this one-sided paradigm and alternatives are explored.

### **Why the Margin's Voice and Experience in Theological Education?**

The CWME-WCC mission document, "Together Towards Life" (TTL), is a groundbreaking theological work. The emphasis "FROM *the margins*" makes this theological affirmation different and significant. Mission is no longer seen from the centre of power to powerless, but from the powerless to the power(ful). This calls us to think and do mission differently. We need to look for new wineskins to preserve the new wine. We need a new church structure and ministerial orientation. This demands a new framework of theological education and pedagogy. The present paradigm is not adequate.

"FROM the margins" is a clarion call that theological education will be incomplete without peoples in the margins; it is not only an issue of priority, but a theological imperative. The incarnation of God in Christ Jesus took place among people at the margins. People who gathered or followed Jesus were people outside of the power structure. They were people without any political power, nor religious authority; women, children and poor people like the shepherds who were landless and who did not have any legal protection and from whom the rich people refused to buy even milk and vegetables. The wise men, strangers in Jerusalem, who brought precious gifts to Jesus, refused to be subjected to empire obligations. They were asked by the empire to report about the birth of Jesus. Instead, they

left by another route to Galilee to protect the life of Jesus.<sup>3</sup> In short, people who welcomed Jesus were those outside of the power hierarchy; these people were not allowed to enter the temple and did not have any political influence. Jesus was not born in a palace, but in a manger, a ragged cowshed, an open and unprotected place. The people who were missing during the birth of Jesus were the rich men, rich women, the king, queen, prince and princes, high priest and priests, nobles and other high officials. The birth of Jesus was astonishing, threatening news for those decision makers. They never expected that God would be revealed among the lowly people. God chose the ‘margin’ – the people on the underside of history – to inaugurate God’s reign for bringing justice and peace. This is the biblical witness. Today those people who have been excluded from the dominant power structures are:

- disabled people whose presence is seen as a burden to their family and society; whose gifts and potentialities are never acknowledged, while they are seen as objects of charity, sinners and cursed by God;
- LGBTIQ people who are seen as those with psychological and mental imbalance, being abnormal and indulging in sinful same-sex relations and acts;
- people living with HIV who are seen as drug abusers, sexual abusers and cursed by God;
- indigenous people who are denied their culture, spirituality and land; their homelands, their language and for survival amidst displacement and dispossession; being the poorest communities in their own land and whose culture, customs, rituals, sacred shrines, places of worship, sacred music, ceremonial dresses, traditions, and handiwork are commodified for commercial purposes; and who cannot compete within the dominant capitalist market system;
- migrant workers who are exploited for maximum profit and forced to perform dirty and dangerous work without social security;
- farmers, labourers who survive by selling their labour in the scorching sun and rain;
- dalits who suffer socially and religiously as the lowest group of the caste system bearing the stigma of untouchability, and whose touch, shadow and sight pollutes the people of other castes;
- women who are treated as inferior, subordinate beings whose bodies are commodified as mere objects of enjoyment and pleasure for others.
- black people who are struggling against the cultures of racism that consider them as *inferior* and *unworthy* – *deny* them the right to live with *dignity* and deprive them of “*life* in all its fullness.”

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<sup>3</sup> See for detail see my article “Rerouting mission and Ecumenism in Asia” in *They Left by Another Road*, Wati Longchar, *et.al.*, eds (2007), Chiangmai: CCA, pp. 187-198.

God's voice from the margins is distinct. They need to be heard and their vision of life should form the basis of theological education for their transformation. We need a new theological framework, language and practices to accommodate their yearning for life. The gospel writer records the story of the rich man and Lazarus. The parable is about two persons – one in the “Centre” – the rich man; and the other one in the “Margin” – Lazarus (Luke 16:19 ff.). Where and in whose context do we hear God's voice? Where do we locate theological education? Lazarus, on being subjected to miserable inhuman conditions knew what it meant to be thirsty, hungry, in pain and to beg in front of someone's gate without dignity. The rich man who was partying and having sumptuous meals everyday could not understand Lazarus' pain. Similarly, the rich who are protected by an unjust power structure cannot understand the pain of the indigenous and other marginalised people in our society. Individuals who are not in a position to understand the suffering of the people cannot bring solutions to the people in pain. Operating from the vantage point of those on the margins unveils creative possibilities for new understandings of mission and hope for the future of humanity. Margins are really the partners of God in realising fullness of life. In the biblical account, we encounter God who chooses the poor. God does not opt for the poor out of paternalistic compassion, but in order to make clear that God stands in solidarity with those who are sinned against, the victims of all systemic injustice, those who are taken advantage of, and those made vulnerable. Indeed, the mission of God that Jesus understood and pursued was a mission of realising the reign of God with those considered the last and the least, the sinners and outcasts. Indigenous people, women, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups who have been marginalised for centuries have the epistemological privilege of knowing what affirms life and what denies it; what helps communities and what hurts them; what contributes to their well-being and what circumvents it. From the margins, they bring first-hand knowledge of the suffering that accompanies exclusionary practices as well as unmask the forces that work against God's will in the world.<sup>4</sup> Through their lives and struggles for life, they hold forth what God wants in the world while also bringing a reservoir of hope, resistance, and perseverance that is needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of God.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A draft WCC document on “Mission from the margins,” a process initiated by Just and Inclusive Community, October, 2012, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, p. 1.

The change can take place only when marginalised people raise their voice and theological education is located in their context.

Theological education must, first and foremost, address the concrete local problem affirming global vision. In other words, we need to train leaders who can discern the signs of the times and be prophetic leaders in the given context. It demands rigorous scientific research and critical thinking, yet it must be pastorally relevant, applicable and spiritually nourishing education. Academic pursuit, not from the elitist-dominant perspective but from the margin-dominated perspective, is the need of the hour. Life-engaging and transforming theology is to be practised from the experience of marginalised people.

Though the majority of Christians in Asia (also in the global south) are indigenous, we have not liberated ourselves from the classical and philosophical model of doing theology. We teach our students on material which is alien to them. In fact, we are enslaved by the philosophical model of doing theology.<sup>6</sup> Since the indigenous value system and other dominated traditions do not come under the scheme of the dominant power value discourse, they were discarded. This is the reason why their ways of being are threatened and they are on the verge of losing as people with rights and identity. How can we be liberated and give a sense dignity to marginalised people if we do not make a radical departure from the dominant education system?

## The Needs of Peoples in the Margins

The needs of the peoples in the margins are different from those who live in urban contexts and the affluent world. Marginalised people need transformative theological education. We can affirmatively say that the present curricula and pedagogy will not bring social transformation and dignity among the marginalised masses. Theological education must prepare leaders to serve among marginalised people. The leaders need both social and spiritual transformative skills. The people in the rural and semi-urban settings do not need only speculative and grant classical philosophical narrative construct of theology. They need a theological education that promotes and emphasises:

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<sup>6</sup> We also should note that theological students are decreasing in the West due to the lack of contextual realities.

- spiritual nurturing or spiritual formation for social transformation,
- contextual and community centred transformative Bible reading method,
- transformative theology,
- de-colonising critical thinking skills,
- multi-economic community development skills,
- community organisation skills,
- social development,
- human capacity enhancement skills,
- protection of land and resources,
- productive and sustainable use of land,
- preservation of culture,
- peace education,
- gender justice,
- health, healing and wholeness,
- human rights and justice,
- preservation of music and dances from objectification and marketisation,
- preservation of identity, customary laws, language and traditional wisdom.

People in the margins need church leaders who are committed and skilful; who can nurture the community not only spiritually but also can transform community life. Therefore, we need to design courses to train:

- Leaders who are committed to transforming the country and the world at large
- Leaders who are committed to serving both in the rural, semi-urban and urban contexts
- Leaders who are fully equipped to address the problem of rural and urban masses, both spiritually and physically
- Leaders who can be a force for social change
- Leaders who are capable of various multi-task-skills such as farming, health care, marketing and prophetic preaching
- Leaders who can enable people for transformation
- Leaders who can transform the life of the rural poor
- Leaders who can interpret the Bible and communicate effectively to the concrete life situation of the people
- Leaders who are able to discern differently and act differently, locating in the context of the margin and challenge the dominant enslaving power
- Leaders who can handle administration efficiently
- Leaders who can organise people's movement for change
- Leaders who are equipped to help people in times of crisis – person, family and community.

Does the present dominant education paradigm provide this scope? No, it does not and there is hardly any scope in the present education system. For example, if a course is designed on ethnic/indigenous theology, the dominant community will not register for it unless it is a mandatory course. The same applies to feminist theology; male students will not register the course. Some teachers from the dominant communities who teach the course also do not take it seriously. Instead of empowering the students, some teachers disempower them. Many graduates do not aspire to serve in rural and semi-rural places. There is something wrong in the system! Therefore, we need to do it differently and to intentionally integrate God's voice from the margins. A college or university focusing on an alternative model located in the context of the margins can bring a positive transformation in society.

It is a great challenge for us to study religion from a transformative perspective and also reverse the education system emphasising on "transformation" of rural masses and of the poor community. Theological colleges can take critical steps to decolonise the elitist system of education and it is here that theological education can make a decisive and significant contribution for the transformation of our society.

## **Content of Theology Education**

Marginalised communities need a community oriented and transformative theological education that is academically, and yet passionately, emotionally, practically, pastorally, and prophetically related to and involved in the concrete problems and needs of the people who face religious violence, armed conflict, displacement, corruption, unemployment, violation of human rights, and continued oppression of minorities, patriarchy, gender discrimination, violence, stagnation of the church, demonisation of their traditions, cultural practices, poverty, human trafficking, substance abuse, lack of development or one-sided development, forced conversion and re-conversion, empowerment training for both surrendered and active freedom fighters (undergrounds) and other forms of exclusion and discrimination faced by marginalised people, persons with disabilities, people living with HIV, LGBTIQ, farmers and migrant workers. People are caught up with many problems and issues due to long years of isolation, for example:

- Colonisation of our culture, history
- Colonisation of our mind
- Identity crisis
- Tribalism/Majoritarianism
- Racism
- Lack of infrastructure development
- Lack of economic independence and self-reliance
- Poverty
- Political instability
- Prosperity theology
- Spiritual bankruptcy
- Corruption, moral degradation
- Generation gap
- Unemployment
- Environmental crisis
- Urban-rural divide
- Mass migration to cities in search of jobs
- Idleness of young people
- Migrant workers.

## Conclusion

Though we appreciate the great legacy of dominant theological education, we realise that uncritical acceptance of the dominant education system has contributed significantly to the destruction of self-esteem, other-worldly spirituality, detachment from the world, devaluation of cultural knowledge, and imposition of the belief that marginalised or rural folk traditions and ideas are more inferior to those of the mainstream. We also realise that the present theological education has not contributed enough to economic self-reliance, political justice and social justice. Rather, it promotes spiritual arrogance, elitist attitudes, prosperity spirituality, negative attitudes to rural masses and their cultural heritage, power consciousness, unemployment, consumerist lifestyle, lack of contribution to social transformation, urban-elite consciousness and spirituality, and so on. It is time that we look for an alternative model with a global perspective, yet intentionally located in the context of the margins where people are struggling for economic justice and rights; struggling to liberate themselves from poverty; for land rights and development; struggling with dependency on government; identity and cultural preservation and transformation of rural communities.

Therefore, colleges must design a theological curriculum to produce committed persons rooted in liberative religious and Christian traditions, who are hard-working, self-sufficient, truthful, courageous, skillful community organisers and spiritual leaders. The present elitist philosophical, meditative and anthropocentric education system – does not address these issues. A paradigm shift from this elitist education system to a transformative movement oriented theological education of the poor and marginalised is, thus, crucial and imperative for us. This reversal is possible only when theological education is located in the context of the margins. It is here that theological colleges should take the courageous stand and endeavour to make a difference among the people.

# RE-READING THE OLD TESTAMENT WITH CHRISTIAN MEN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA IN THE CONTEXT OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE: A PROPOSAL

*Lovemore Togarasei*

## Introduction

The Bible forms the basis upon which Christians think about and practice their religion. Thus, even their thinking of and (unfortunately) practice of gender-based violence (GBV) is to some extent influenced by their reading of the Bible. Indeed, our suggestion of the re-reading of the Old Testament (OT) in the context of GBV, assumes already that just a reading of it may be a source of GBV. Togarasei (2013a) has discussed how Christian men's understanding of male headship of families promotes GBV. In a study in Namibia, Hubbard (1998) established that men justified spousal abuse by quoting the creation story of Adam and Eve and the interpretation that women need to submit to men. Thus, some critics (e. g. Wanjiru and Chitando 2013) think that instead of being 'good news,' the Bible has caused havoc on the African continent. A few other examples of the havoc it has caused are worth mentioning here: the use of the Bible in the dispossession of African resources, particularly land, the use of the Bible to justify apartheid and the contemporary use of the Bible by gospreneurs<sup>1</sup> to financially and socially exploit fellow Africans.

Although the whole Bible can be accused of causing havoc in Africa, when it comes to GBV, the OT part of the Bible is the major culprit. Writing in 1984, Phyllis Trible identified four texts from the OT that she described as "texts of terror." We discuss these below. Trible's description of these four texts can be extended to most OT texts. Be that as it may, the Bible still holds tremendous influence in Christian practice in southern Africa. It is, therefore, important for scholars to rethink Bible interpretation for social transformation including such issues as GBV. Indeed, a number of

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<sup>1</sup> A term used to describe the contemporary young preachers of the prosperity gospel for their own benefits (see Togarasei 2013).

scholars are doing this. For example, Gillham (2013) underlines the Bible's teaching on gender complementarity, while Togarasei (2013a) defines male headship in a way that promotes love and peace in Christian marriages. As shall be discussed later, feminist scholars have suggested other ways of engaging the Bible in light of GBV. Compared to all other biblical methodologies, feminist criticism has done more in taking the Bible from its world of more than 2000 years ago to the world of the contemporary reader. More work, however, needs to be done to address texts that seem to provide Christian men with a 'divine/scriptural' justification for acting violently against women, among them those that Tribble calls texts of terror.

In this chapter, I shall, therefore, identify some of the texts in the OT that have been read in a way that fuels GBV. Using a biblical theological approach and an appreciation of feminist criticism, the aim of the chapter is to suggest a reading approach that promotes gender equity and equality. The proposal is aimed at men as perpetrators of GBV in light of the view that gender equity is only achievable when both men and women are empowered intellectually, economically and socially. The chapter acknowledges important steps that governments at international, continental and national levels have taken in legislating<sup>2</sup> against GBV and also the efforts and resources put in educating women about their rights. However, as Gillman (2013) has also correctly observed, ". . . legislation alone will continue to prove powerless to stem the tide of violence and discrimination" and a focus on educating women only is not adequate. Thus, besides legislation and educating women on their rights, there is need to equally educate and empower boys and men on the rights of all and the importance of peaceful coexistence in families and societies. Herein comes the role of the church and the importance of biblical interpretation for social transformation. But before making the re-reading proposal, it is necessary to define our scope of GBV, to consider some statistics on GBV that justify the need for mitigation and to consider how the texts have been read by other scholars.

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<sup>2</sup> Most southern African countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the SADC Declaration on Gender and Development (1997) and its Addendum on Violence against Women and Children, the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women and have in their constitutions embodied the principles of gender equality and equity. Several of these countries have developed specific acts of Parliament like the Domestic Violence Act and the Children's Act (e. g. Zimbabwe and Botswana) which address GBV.

## Gender based violence and its extent

By definition, GBV is “violence against women based on women’s subordinate status in society.”<sup>3</sup> Generally, the term is used as a synonym for violence against women. This is mainly because GBV is rooted in gender inequality. It is also given many other names such as “wife abuse, marital assault, woman battery, spouse abuse, wife beating, conjugal violence, intimate violence, battering, partner abuse” (Poling 2003:9). I need, however, to point out that while the overwhelming victims/survivors of violence are female, there are also increasing cases of men facing violence from women. There are chances that in the years to come we shall deal with ways of mitigating violence against men by women. But for now, the reality is that it is many women who report GBV, and we should focus on this.

The chapter treats GBV as any act or threat by men or male dominated institutions that inflict physical, sexual, or psychological harm on a woman or girl because of their gender. Such acts include domestic violence; sexual abuse, including the rape and sexual abuse of children by family members; forced pregnancy; sexual slavery; traditional practices harmful to women, such as female genital mutilation, bride price-related violence; violence in armed conflict, such as murder and rape; and emotional abuse, such as coercion and abusive language and professional gender related segregation such as the denial of female ordination in churches. Trafficking of women and girls for prostitution, forced marriage (especially in some African Initiated Churches), sexual harassment and intimidation at work are additional examples of violence against women. The chapter also observes that GBV does not only take place in families; neither is it limited to individuals. Rather, GBV occurs in both the ‘public’ and ‘private’ spheres. Thus, we can talk of perpetrators of GBV as individuals as well as institutional structures, including national laws. Further, we observe that such violence does not only occur in the family and in the general community, but sometimes it also occurs through state policies or the actions of agents of the state such as the police, military or immigration authorities. Generally, GBV happens in all societies, across all social classes, with women particularly at risk from men they know.

Gender-based violence is the most pervasive human rights abuse. On average, three in every five women experience GBV in southern Africa. In

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/advocacy/modelsessions/what\\_is\\_GBV.PDF](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/advocacy/modelsessions/what_is_GBV.PDF).

Botswana, for example, the *Gender Based Violence Indicators Study* (GBVIS) published in 2013,<sup>4</sup> noted that 67% of women reported experiencing some form of gender violence in their lifetime. 29% of the women who participated in the study said they had experienced intimate partner violence in the past year. However, only 1.2% of these women reported cases of GBV to the police. This suggests that the levels of GBV in Botswana are much higher than has been recorded. It may also indicate that women are not confident that their grievances will receive redress, confirming our suggestion that sometimes GBV is perpetrated through weak structures of governance. The study, however, suggested that women may not be aware of their rights or are too fearful and powerless to assert them. In a review of literature on gender-based violence in 2008, the Population Council gave the following statistics of GBV in the sub-Saharan African region:<sup>5</sup>

- In Zambia, 27% of women who had ever been married reported being beaten by their spouse/partner in the past year; this rate reaches 33% of 15–19-year-olds and 35% of 20–24-year-olds. 59% of women reported having ever experienced any violence by anyone since the age of 15 years.
- In South Africa, 7% of 15–19-year-olds had been assaulted in the past 12 months by a current or ex-partner; and 10% of 15–19-year-olds were forced or persuaded to have sex against their will.
- In Kenya, 43% of 15–49-year-old women reported having experienced some form of gender-based violence in their lifetime, with 29% reporting an experience in the previous year; 16% of women reported having ever been sexually abused, and for 13%, this had happened in the previous year of the study.
- In rural Ethiopia, 49% of women who had ever had partners had experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, rising to 59% ever experiencing sexual violence.
- In rural Tanzania, 47% of women who had ever had partners had experienced physical violence by an intimate partner, while 31 per cent had experienced sexual violence.

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<sup>4</sup> UNFPA, [countryoffice.unfpa.org/botswana/.../GBVIndicatorsBotswanareport.pdf](http://countryoffice.unfpa.org/botswana/.../GBVIndicatorsBotswanareport.pdf), accessed 21/09/2015.

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/AfricaSGBV\\_LitReview.pdf](http://www.popcouncil.org/pdfs/AfricaSGBV_LitReview.pdf)

Violence against women is even more prevalent in politically unstable states such as in Zimbabwe in the past decade or so. RAU (2011) chronicles acts of violence against women in Zimbabwe showing that culture, patriarchy, politics and religion are the factors behind high rates of GBV in the country. It is not only in Africa where GBV is prevalent. Studies conducted elsewhere, for example, by Minnesota Agents for Human Rights, show that it is a persistent and universal problem occurring in every culture and social group.<sup>6</sup> GBV is therefore, a universal phenomenon. In the USA, J. N. Poling (2003:1) says one in every one-half of all girls and women is physically or sexually abused at some point in their lifetime. He also notes that battering causes 35% of all emergency room visits by young adult women.

In line with the argument of this chapter, it is important to note that in all the contexts of violence cited above, Christianity commands a high following. WCC estimates put Christianity at about 80% of the total population in most sub-Saharan African countries ([www.oikumene.org](http://www.oikumene.org)). Worldwide, estimates are that Christianity has around 2.1 billion adherents representing nearly one-third of the world's population and is therefore, the largest religion.<sup>7</sup> It then logically follows that a number of perpetrators of GBV are Christians. In all the contexts as well, there are very good laws to deal with GBV, with some countries such as Botswana having clear-cut GBV management policies from reporting to clinical treatment and legal redress. However, GBV cases remain high, with many of them going unreported. As mentioned earlier, it is clear that legalisation on its own does not fully address the problem. We, therefore, suggest that the use of Christian teaching may take us a long way in mitigating it. But before suggesting ways of mitigating GBV using Christian values, we need to note that the major source of Christian theology (the Bible) presents problems. The first approach in using the Bible to address GBV is to accept that it is in itself (particularly the OT we are focusing on) a factor in encouraging GBV.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/advocacy/modelsessions/what\\_is\\_GBV.PDF](http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/svaw/advocacy/modelsessions/what_is_GBV.PDF)

<sup>7</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity\\_and\\_domestic\\_violence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_and_domestic_violence)

## Gender-based violence in the Old Testament

Among many reasons suggested for the prevalence of GBV in Africa, religious and cultural reasons have topped the list.<sup>8</sup> In churches, the Bible has been described as a “weapon of mass destruction” (Wanjiru and Chitando 2013:245). Some men who perpetrate GBV justify it on the basis of their own reading of the Bible (Togarasei 2013a). The OT provides many of those texts used for justification of GBV as divinely or scripturally sanctioned. Texts that seem to justify GBV in the OT can be classified in two different ways: texts that are explicit on violence against women and texts that present women in a way that promotes violence against them. I shall discuss a few examples under each of the two categories of texts.

### Texts that are explicit on violence against women

Among these texts are those that Tribble calls ‘texts of terror.’ Tribble discusses **the first text** of terror as the Genesis account of Hagar, the maid servant of Sarah (Gen. 16-21). In this story we encounter serious emotional abuse of the servant. Gender, race and power are at play in Hagar’s abuse. We find the hand of another woman behind this GBV.<sup>9</sup> As Tribble (1984:11) correctly observes, in the eyes of Sarah, Hagar is an instrument, not a person. Sarah acknowledges that her barrenness is caused by Yahweh, but what the deity had prevented, she wanted to accomplish through Hagar, whom she sees just as a childbearing instrument. Hagar represents the stories of many abused young women in southern Africa who suffer at the hands of married men and women, often due to their social and economic statuses.

**The second text** of terror that Tribble discusses is the story of the rape of Tamar in 1 Sam. 13:1-22. The story recounts the sexual abuse of a young woman by a person she trusts, her own brother. This is a story that triggers painful memories in the minds of many in southern Africa. Cases of girl child sexual abuse by known close family members abound in our

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<sup>8</sup> For some causes of GBV see, Togarasei (2013a) and Wanjiru and Chitando (2013).

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 16:6b is explicit about Sarah’s abuse of Hagar as it states, “Then Sarai dealt harshly with her...” The Hebrew word translated “dealt harshly” in the RSV also means afflict, harsh treatment or torture. There is no doubt that this is what we call GBV in contemporary parlance.

societies. For want of protecting the ‘name’ of the family, many such perpetrators are not reported or if reported, the cases are later withdrawn by family members.

**The third text** of terror explicitly showing violence against women in the OT is found in Judges 19:1-30. Tribble (1984:65) says the following about the story:

The betrayal, rape, torture, murder and dismemberment of an unnamed woman is a story we want to forget but are commanded to speak. It depicts the horrors of male power, brutality and triumphalism; of female helplessness, abuse and annihilation. To hear this story is to inhabit a world of unrelenting terror that refuses to let us pass by the other side.

The story shows how often GBV is perpetrated to protect the interests of men. This woman, whose name is not mentioned (a possible indication of her supposed ‘worthlessness’), is murdered and dismembered in the name of religion and to protect male ‘dignity’ as the Levite states, “And I took my concubine and cut her in pieces, and I sent her throughout the country of the inheritance of Israel; for they had committed abomination and wantonness in Israel” (Judges 20:6). The story also shows how GBV is a result of men’s contest for power. This is reflected by the response of the men of Israel who wanted to revenge the killing of the unnamed concubine. Women and children bear the brunt of males’ quest for power and domination.

**The fourth and last ‘text of terror’** identified and discussed by Tribble is that of the unnamed daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11:29-40. It is not surprising that the violence shown against this girl seems to have been undermined as the tradition has been to remember Jephthah for his demonstration of faith and fidelity to Yahweh.<sup>10</sup> Religion here plays a role in the violation of women. Together with the other three other texts, these are texts of terror. They, indeed, present horrific stories and, as John L. Thompson (2001:3) correctly observes, their horror is compounded by the apparent refusal of the biblical narrator to add a single word of condemnation or moralism or even explanation. The Bible’s stark silence may actually heighten the impact of these sad stories. Consciously or sub-consciously, a Christian man who reads these stories may be influenced to think of women as means to men’s ends.

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<sup>10</sup> Jephthah is remembered as an exemplary judge (Judges 11:7).

### *Texts that present women in a way that promotes violence against them*

Besides the texts that explicitly show violence against women, the OT generally presents women in a way that promotes violence against them. These are too many to mention in a work of this nature. We shall, therefore, limit ourselves to a few examples. We begin right at the creation. Although the first creation story presents God as creating both a man and a woman at the same time (Gen. 1:26-27), Jewish and Christian traditions have chosen to highlight the second creation story that presents a woman as having been created after man as a helpmate when God noticed the loneliness of the man. In this story, the woman is not at the centre of God's plan of creation, as she is only created from the rib to address the man's loneliness. Following this line of interpretation, women are, therefore, considered to be of lower status compared to men both biologically and socially. As Mary J. Evans (1983:14) observes quite candidly, this text teaches the subordination of the woman in four ways: her creation after man, her creation from the man, her being named by the man and her description as a helper.<sup>11</sup> No wonder, the same tradition continues to interpret the 'fall of humanity' in Gen. 3 as a result of a woman, Eve, who gave in to the tricks of the serpent. With this fall, the tradition goes, came male domination, death and pain to the world.

From Eve, the OT also presents other women in this negative light. Women are portrayed as promiscuous and leading men into sin. The books of the law generally present women as unclean, especially due to the menstrual cycle and childbirth. For example, after giving birth, a woman is considered unclean for double the period if she gives birth to a girl as compared to a boy (Lev. 12:4-5). Coupled with the fact that they were not circumcised (the physical mark of Israel's covenant with God), women could not be appointed priests and in the Jerusalem Temple, they sat in the outer court separated from men and further away from the priests (who were men) and the Holy of Holies. Even most of the attributes of God are masculine.<sup>12</sup> Although feminist scholars have highlighted some feminine attributes of God found in the OT,<sup>13</sup> their views are not common in communities of faith.

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<sup>11</sup> Evans (1983:15-17) shows the fallacies of these arguments. However, in Christian circles the traditional interpretations have continued.

<sup>12</sup> God is the Father (Hosea 11:1), the Shepherd (Prov.23), a Husband (Hosea 1-3), among many other male attributes.

<sup>13</sup> For example, God as Lady Wisdom in Proverbs (Mills 1998).

Throughout the OT, women are considered, not in their own right, but in relation to the man under whose authority they were placed: from the father to the husband and to the son. As Evans (1983:24) observes, women were generally regarded as possessions of men, which explains why adultery and divorce laws are found in the category of property laws in the OT. Generally, women were seen as child-bearers, thus, even in New Testament times, the author of 1Timothy (2:14-15) says women will be saved through childbearing.

The historical books of the OT are not an exception in presenting women in ways that would promote GBV. They also contain many texts that can perpetuate GBV. An example is the story of David and Bathsheba in 2 Sam. 11. As J. Cheryl Exum (1996:19) argues, Bathsheba is portrayed as the object of sexual desire and aggression. This is how some men involved in GBV view the bodies of women.<sup>14</sup> The story echoes themes that we are quite familiar with: men's abuse of power and privilege to violate women at workplaces, in schools, in church and such other institutions where men use their power to abuse women sexually. Exum (1996:21) explains the violence in this text:

... only five actions - three on David's part and two on Bathsheba's part are minimally described. He sent, he took and he lay: the verbs signify control and acquisition. In contrast, only her movement is described: she came and she returned.

Thus, Exum is correct in arguing that the narrative is set in a context of aggression and violence. A man reading such a story by a man who was beloved by God (2 Sam. 7:16ff) would surely feel nothing wrong with behaving in the same manner that David did.

In the historical books, as in many other OT stories, the rape and humiliation of captive women is taken for granted (Judg. 5:30, Lam. 5:11, Amos 4:2-3, 7:17). In the case of wars, married women are the major victims of death, while unmarried ones are forced to marry the murderers of their mothers and sisters. Thus, besides the rape of Tamar that we discussed under texts of terror above, there are several other texts on the wanton raping of women often as men strive to demonstrate their powers. The rape of Dinah (Gen. 34), and of David's ten wives (1 Sam. 16:21-22), the abduction of the dancers of Shiloh (Judg. 21:19-23), are examples.

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<sup>14</sup> Musa Dube (2007) provides a detailed discussion of men and women's bodies in contexts of HIV & AIDS.

Apart from these real cases of violence against women, the OT also uses figurative/metaphorical language in which God himself perpetrates violence against women. This does not come out as clearly as it does in the book of Hosea where God is the husband and Israel his wife. Like a typical violent man whose wife has cheated him, God says,

Therefore, I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season, and I will take away my wool and flax, which were to cover her nakedness, Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one shall rescue her out of my hand (Hosea 2:9-11, RSV).

Exum (1996:105) captures the GBV in this text accurately:

The punishment for sexual ‘transgression’ or ‘wantonness’ is sexual abuse, which is also crudely fantasized in terms that conjure up the atrocities inflicted upon women prisoners of war. It is a male’s job to restrict the female’s freedom/wantonness and to punish the woman whose behavior brings dishonor upon him. God here seems to accept GBV if it is assumed justified by women’s guilt.

Isaiah uses the same language against women (57:3-13), as does Jeremiah (4:20, 22:20-23, 2:33-3:20, 13:22). The most abusive language is found in Ezekiel where it is insinuated that unfaithful women should be put to death (16 and 23). The texts appeal to female fear of male violence in order to keep female sexuality in check (Exum 1996:110). In Lamentations (1:8-10), the woman even blames herself. Here, “the rape imagery builds upon the correspondence between body and temple and between genitals and inner sanctuary” (Exum 1996:111). These texts use language that places blame on women. This is a perspective developed in detail by Caroline Blyth (2010) when she interprets the story of the rape of Dinah. “She asked for it” is one of the titles of her chapters.

The texts we have analysed tell the story of GBV in the OT. In fact, in reading the OT, readers come across men’s stories. Apart from a few women who play some roles of prominence in their own right, the majority of the women facilitate the men’s stories. This is exemplified in the story of Moses (Exum 1996:81). In the early days of his life, women dominate his life: the midwives, Moses’ mother, his sister, Pharaoh’s daughter. However, all of them fade out of the picture as Moses’ story develops. Unfortunately, these OT texts continue being influential, especially in communities that look up to the Bible for ethical principles and moral guidance. The texts teach men to exert their authority and women to be submissive. Male abuse becomes a means of correction, thus promoting GBV. How then should such texts be read and retold among men in our

communities of faith? Before proposing a reading approach, let us first consider how feminist scholars in particular have proposed to deal with the texts.

## **Some suggested re-readings for GBV mitigation**

Feminist scholars have put a lot of effort to come up with suggestions on how to deal with the above discussed texts for gender equity and equality. There is, unfortunately, no consensus as to the proper response to the Bible's engraved patriarchy. Feminist responses range from those who believe the Bible to be the Word of God and that should be interpreted for gender justice to those who think the Bible is so patriarchal that it cannot be reformed.<sup>15</sup> In fact, four approaches to re-reading can be identified from the works of feminist scholars. We discuss these below.

### **Re-reading by refusing to read the Old Testament (or the Bible in general)**

This is an approach taken by radical feminist scholars such as Mary Daly. For Daly (1985), there is no freedom for women in the whole Judeo-Christian tradition. With her declaration, "If God is male, then the male is God," Daly problematises patriarchy which she describes as a creation by men to serve the interests of men. For this reason, she believed women cannot get liberation from the Bible. Similarly, Daphne Hampson (1990) asks why anyone should have interest in these OT stories that have caused such harm to women.

### **Re-reading by only highlighting those texts that present women in good light**

This approach is sometimes called soft feminism. Instead of rejecting the biblical texts, this approach seeks positive roles of women in the Bible to identify with. Scholars such as Mary Evans (1983) take this approach. They

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<sup>15</sup> This is also a result of the nature of feminist criticism. As M. Jacobs (2001) correctly describes it, feminist criticism is complex, multifaceted and diverse that it is perhaps proper to speak of 'feminisms.'

focus on positive roles of women like Sarah, the mother of nations and Deborah, who became a judge.

## **Reading against the Bible**

This is the most common approach used by feminists to read the Bible for gender justice. According to this approach, biblical texts should not be taken as authoritative texts with universal meaning. Rather, “...they should be read against the grain of their patriarchal rhetoric and their traditional interpretations, that is, with suspicion and resistance” (Jacobs 2001:85). This reading interprets against the narrator, plot, other characters and the biblical tradition that have shown women neither compassion nor attention. Exum (1996:82) calls it, “...a reading strategy that would expose and critique the ideology that motivates the biblical presentation of women.”

## **Reading the Old Testament to learn what not to do**

This is an approach taken by those who want to continue with the tradition of valuing the biblical texts as the Word of God. The approach takes the ‘texts of terror’ as teaching Christian men what not to do. For S. Gillman (2013) the texts show the effects of sin following the fall in Genesis 3. Before the fall, Adam represented caring and responsible manhood, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh . . .” (Gen 2:23-24). He says it was only after the fall that the husband, in response to God’s punishment, was to rule over his wife. Texts of terror should, therefore, not be read positively, but negatively as results of sin. This kind of reading, according to Ewusha (2012), will produce a real man (redeemed manhood) from God’s original design of manhood.

## **Re-reading the Old Testament texts for Gender-based Violence mitigation: our suggested approach**

Some approaches discussed above, border on the rejection of the Bible in addressing gender inequality and the resultant GBV. This would be completely unacceptable in faith communities where the Bible continues to

be considered the Word of God and, therefore, the basis for ethical principles and moral guidelines. We, therefore, have to re-read the OT texts of terror with the believing community in mind.

The approaches by feminist scholars have also focused mainly on how women should 'read' the Bible without engaging men. As we mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it is not quite helpful to continue empowering women to know their rights and resist GBV without involving men in the process. Educating women on their rights without educating men to respect women's rights may actually exacerbate GBV. Men in Christian communities need to be exposed to ways of reading 'texts of terror' for gender justice. We suggest an approach to be used in what has come to be called Contextual Bible Study (CBS). CBS is, so far, the best approach for using the Bible for social transformation in communities of faith (West 2011, Wanjiru and Chitando 2013). Wanjiru and Chitando (2013:247) define and describe CBS as follows:

...methodology entails reading the Bible within the community setting, acknowledging the equal status of all readers of the text and reading the text closely (and slowly) to understand the dynamics within the text. CBS approaches the text as a resource that can contribute towards social transformation. It facilitates questioning and problematising the dominant and socially accepted interpretations of the text. One may therefore, argue that CBS is in fact subversive: it equips the community to challenge the status quo and to envisage new realities.

We suggest CBS for engaging men to read the Bible for gender justice because the approach respects the Bible as the Word of God. It, therefore, respects the Christian belief in the centrality of the Bible as the source of teaching. For reading 'texts of terror' for GBV mitigation, we suggest that the reading should begin with an acknowledgement that GBV was a problem in the OT, as it is in our societies today. There should be a serious consideration of the historical, cultural, religious and all other important contexts from which biblical texts arose and developed.

There should also be an acceptance that biblical texts are active stories with a bearing on our contemporary societies. Guided by what is of interest to women and girls, the re-reading should, therefore, be unapologetically interested. Accepting its subjectivity, the re-reading should declare its interest from the onset. The interpretive interests should be, among others, to save and promote life, to seek justice for all and to promote love and peaceful co-existence of all human beings, including the whole of the created order. It is suggested that in the process of re-reading, men should

replace the violated women of the OT with the names of their daughters, their mothers, their wives, women friends or any other women close to their hearts.

## Conclusion

Gender-based violence is the most prevalent human rights abuse found across different societies. It is an evil that needs to be addressed from different angles. In this chapter, we have considered how the Bible contributes to GBV as it bears several texts that seem to present God as justifying violence against women as a form of punishment for their wrongdoing, or God as not punishing men who perpetrate violence against women. The chapter has presented how feminist scholars have interpreted these texts. It has demonstrated the need to involve men in re-reading OT texts for GBV mitigation. Arguing that legislation against GBV is not enough to address the problem, the chapter concludes that, considering the influence of the Bible in shaping Christian beliefs and practices, it is important to continue thinking of Bible reading approaches that can help construct redemptive masculinities.

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# CONTEXTUAL BIBLE STUDY AND/OR AS INTERPRETIVE RESILIENCE

Gerald O. West

## Introduction

Contextual Bible Study as it has developed within the Ujamaa Centre for Community Development and Research over the past thirty years has been focussed on systemic change. Contextual Bible Study (CBS) has been formed in the intersections of South African Contextual Theology, South African Black Theology, and African Women's Theology. What is common to these forms of African theology is that they are all committed to systemic or structural analysis and change. What the South African *Kairos Document* (Kairos 1985) referred to as "Church Theology" has its focus on individual and personal change, while what the *Kairos Document* referred to as "Prophetic Theology" has its focus on structural or systemic change. CBS Prophetic Theology, but it is a form of Prophetic Theology that is produced by collaboration between ordinary African Christians and socially engaged African biblical scholars and theologians. It is *how* Prophetic Theology is produced that makes it Prophetic Theology. In this essay, which is dedicated to the life and work of one of the champions of Contextual Bible Study, Nyambura J. Njoroge, I will discuss the significance of 'how' theology is done, and why the process of doing Prophetic Theology offers resources for forms of interpretive resilience.

## From People's Theology to Prophetic Theology

The Revised Second Edition of the *Kairos Document* (1986) makes an important distinction between 'people's theology' and 'prophetic theology'. It states:

It should also be noted that there is a subtle difference between prophetic theology and people's theology. The *Kairos Document* itself, signed by theologians, ministers and other church workers, and addressed to all who bear the name Christian is a prophetic statement. But the process that led

to the production of the document, the process of theological reflection and action in groups, the involvement of many different people in doing theology was an exercise in people's theology. The document is therefore pointing out two things: that our present Kairos challenges Church leaders and other Christians to speak out prophetically and that our present Kairos is challenging all of us to do theology together reflecting upon our experiences in working for justice and peace in South Africa and thereby developing a better theological understanding of our Kairos. The method that was used to produce the Kairos Document shows that theology is not the preserve of professional theologians, ministers and priests. Ordinary Christians can participate in theological reflection and should be encouraged to do so. When this people's theology is proclaimed to others to challenge and inspire them, it takes on the character of a prophetic theology (Kairos 1986: 34-35).

The *Kairos Document* states that there can be no Prophetic Theology without a "people's theology." This is the starting point of the Ujamaa Centre's work. We begin with the lived reality of local African communities as it is embodied within them. This is the 'raw material' of Prophetic Theology and CBS is a process that enables the "people's theology" to become Prophetic Theology. In the following section I will briefly elaborate on the resources and processes that are constitutive of CBS.

## **CBS resources and processes**

CBS includes two kinds of resources, praxiological resources and interpretive resources (West 2015). Praxiological resources inhabit the cycle of praxis, which is the movement from action to reflection, and then action to reflection, in an ongoing life-long process. This process is given shape by three moments which are 'See-Judge-Act'. 'See' is focussed on a careful and critical analysis of the lived reality of a particular context. 'See' is done by organised local groups who share a reality and who analyse this reality together, with a particular emphasis on the experience of the most marginalised sectors within this reality. 'Judge' is the next moment in which the analysed reality is compared to what God intends for our lived reality. Does the lived reality conform to God's kin-dom "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10)? If not, then the praxis process shifts into the next moment which is 'Act'. The 'Act' moment is about transformation and change (West 2016b). If the lived reality does not match God's vision for earth, then we must act with God to change the lived reality. When we

have acted to change the lived reality, we must continue with the praxis cycle, reflecting again on our action and what transformation it has brought and what more needs to be done. The 'See-Judge-Act' process begins again.

'See-Judge-Act' provides the overall shape to the praxis of CBS but there is a second important component of the praxis of CBS which is facilitation. Facilitation is focused on enabling every participant to feel safe and to have the opportunity to participate fully. Facilitation is committed to what is known as 'group process', which includes breaking participants up into small groups in which they will feel safe and in which they feel free to participate. If 'See-Judge-Act' is the wheel of praxis, then facilitation is the oil of praxis that enables the wheel to turn.

A third component of the praxis of CBS is the 'infrastructure of faith'. CBS is a form of praxis that exists within the faith of a particular community. Faith is often taken for granted, particularly in African contexts, but it is a vital component of CBS. CBS is experienced within faith-full liturgy whether formal or informal, including singing, praying and other faith-full rituals. If 'See-Judge-Act' is the wheel and facilitation is the oil, the infrastructure of faith is the air of CBS. Without it there can be no life.

These are the three praxiological components of CBS. The interpretive resources of CBS are located within the praxis of CBS. CBS draws on biblical scholarship because biblical studies offers methods with which to access the detail of the Bible. CBS slows down the reading of scripture (Riches et al. 2010: 41), creating opportunities to re-read (and re-read again) scripture carefully and closely. In this way participants become attentive to the detail of the text, noticing dimensions of the text that they have not 'seen' or 'heard' before. For all of us our theological frameworks determine what we 'see' or 'hear' in scripture. What CBS does is to disrupt our theological frameworks by enabling us to see the disruptive and potentially redemptive detail of scripture.

I draw from two examples to illustrate this point. The first example is that a CBS on Matthew 6:9-13 focusses on the detail of 'the Lord's Prayer', noticing how the prayer emphasises economic factors like "kingdom", "bread", and "debt". What, we are invited to ask, is the connection between these economic factors. The prayer Jesus teaches his disciples has a clear structure: "Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (verse 10). Our Bibles have a full stop at the end of this sentence, but if we changed the full stop to a colon, we could see more clearly how

the prayer is structured. After the colon we are told what reality would be like if God's will was done and God's kingdom had come on earth. Everyone would have bread for each day (verse 11). More importantly, everyone would be released from their debt, enabling them to retain their land and so to feed themselves and their families and contribute to their communities (verse 12). This a prayer about radical economic change (West 2017a). Yet, because of our Church Theology we do not see this but by focusing on the detail of this biblical text we disrupt Church Theology and enable the biblical text to connect with our lived realities and to construct a Prophetic Theology.

The second example comes from CBS work on HIV. For many years the Ujamaa Centre has worked with groups living positively with HIV. Our work has brought us slowly to the end of the book of Job, where God says to Job's friends "My wrath is kindled against you and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has" (42:7). Remarkably, God affirms how Job "has spoken of me" and condemns his friends for not speaking "of me what is right" (42:7). The friends have made it clear that God is punishing Job, which is why Job is suffering. To them Job is being punished and they do not understand what he has done to warrant that punishment. Job rejects this claim arguing that there is no direct link between his suffering and what he has done. In Job 42:7 God affirms the theology of Job and condemns the theology of Job's friends. This is a singularly important detail in the context of HIV but there is an equally important detail to be illustrated. God instructs the friends to offer a public sacrifice and to ask Job publically for forgiveness for their false theology (42:8). In 42:11 we see the impact of these public acts because "Then there came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had known him before, and they ate bread with him in his house; they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the LORD had brought upon him; and each of them gave him a piece of money and a gold ring". Those who had stigmatised and discriminated against God believing like the friends that God was punishing Job now embrace him and draw him back into community. The detail of this text makes it clear that theological change leads to social change. As Job's friends and community recognise the need to change their theology of retribution, they are enabled to embrace a theology of restoration (West 2017b).

The details of scripture disrupt 'settled' theologies, enabling 'new' and contextually relevant theologies to be born. Biblical studies offer us the

tools or methods for identifying such details but before we reflect more fully on the usefulness of particular biblical studies methods, it is worth indicating here that the example from Job is instructive for it is a good example of how the Ujamaa Centre understands its CBS work. We believe that in African contexts, theological change is required for social change. Without a change in theology with respect to HIV, for example, there will be no social change with respect to HIV. If there is theological change, then there will be social change. I will return to this understanding of our work more fully in the subsequent sections. At this stage I would like to draw detailed attention to the different ways in which biblical studies methods offer access to the details of scripture.

The second type of resources that CBS offers are interpretive resources. CBS is a collaborative alliance between ordinary readers of the Bible and socially engaged biblical scholars. A significant set of resources that socially engaged biblical scholars bring to this interpretive alliance are biblical studies methods. CBS works with each of the three primary categories of biblical studies methods which are thematic-semiotic, literary-narrative and socio-historical.

Thematic-semiotic methods are close to how ordinary readers usually engage the biblical text, recognising and resonating with the themes and signs that emerge from particular texts and that cut across the Bible as a whole. CBS begins with this recognition and resonance for every ordinary Bible user can participate in this kind of interpretation. We often begin a particular CBS with the question, "Listen to this biblical text. What is the text about?" This question invites every participant to identify and share with others what they 'hear' from and 'see' in the text. There is no 'wrong' response to this question. A thematic-semiotic entry point is egalitarian, enabling everyone to have a voice, and enabling every 'voice' of scripture to be heard.

CBS then does what Riches et al (2010) refer to as slowing the reading process and CBS does this by using literary-narrative methods to discern the literary dimensions of a text. Biblical texts all have a literary structure, a rhetorical texture that careful reading can identify, and many biblical texts belong to narrative genres thus, providing plenty of narrative detail to be identified through narrative methods. For example, in our work on the contestation between Jesus and the Jerusalem temple leaders in Mark's gospel, we offer a set of questions that draw attention to how Mark 11:27-13:2 is structured, focussing on the narrative 'setting', which is the

Jerusalem temple throughout this unit, and the narrative's 'characters', all of whom dialogue with Jesus (West 2011). A common question we use with narrative biblical texts is, "Who are the characters, what do we know about them, and what are the relationships between them?" Ordinary readers can and do use a question like this to generate a detailed literary-narrative analysis of the text if given adequate time. Indeed, ordinary readers recognise literary-narrative detail that scholar readers do not. For example, African ordinary readers recognise that important aspects of the story of Joseph (Genesis 37-50) depend on an understanding of a polygamous family with one father and many mothers (West 1994).

Literary-narrative methods often generate questions from CBS participants about the historical and sociological realities of the world from which biblical texts emerge. Thus, socio-historical methods have an important role in CBS provided that they are not used as the starting point of CBS. Socio-historical methods must follow thematic-semiotic and literary-narrative methods. If used at the beginning of a CBS, they silence ordinary readers, giving too much interpretive power to the socially engaged scholar. However, if used in response to thematic-semiotic and literary-narrative interpretation, they have the potential to offer additionally important detail about the biblical text. For example, in our CBS on the temple narrative in Mark (referred to above), we ask the question: "What was the role of the temple in first century Palestine during the time of Jesus?" This is the fifth, not the first question (West 2011: 439). This question follows three literary-narrative questions, and it is these literary-narrative questions that arouse the participants' interest in aspects of the world that produced Mark's gospel.

CBS then comes to a conclusion with a return to thematic-semiotic resources, but, after an array of literary-narrative and possible socio-historical questions. After the in-depth engagement with the detail of the biblical text that literary-narrative and socio-historical methods facilitate, participants 'take' the most contextually pertinent details and combine them into a thematic or semiotic 'interpretation'. This is an act of appropriation which in turn leads to an action plan because the goal of CBS is bringing about change.

A 'slow' re-reading of scripture draws participants to details of a biblical text that they may not have noticed before. The detail, we believe, has the capacity to disrupt the normative theologies through which the Bible is usually read. For the reason that normative theologies are often theologies

that marginalise certain sectors of society such as people living with HIV, details that disrupt such theologies have the potential to contribute to the formation of more contextually relevant and more life-giving theologies. For example, theologies of stigmatisation and retribution are disrupted by the detail from Job 42:6-11 mentioned above, allowing the people's theology of those living with HIV to draw on the detail of this text and to construct redemptive prophetic theologies.

The Ujamaa Centre uses the praxiological and interpretive resources described above to build interpretive capacity for resistance to dominant theologies. For example, theologies of retribution in the context of HIV often result in death. Nevertheless, Jesus has come so that HIV-positive Africans might have life and have it abundantly (John 10:10), so it is vital that theologies of redemption challenge and contend with theologies of retribution. Prophetic theologies are theologies of resistance and hope in contexts where the dominant theologies are theologies of retribution and condemnation. In the following summative definition of CBS, we emphasise the systemic dimension of social change. This entails that Contextual Bible Study is a collaborative praxis in which the already present Bible is re-read communally and critically within a faith-full setting. The reading is drawn from local interpretive resources of particular organised communities of the poor and marginalised and the critical interpretive resources of socially engaged biblical studies working together for systemic social and theological transformation.

However, over the thirty years of our work, we have come to recognise a more modest goal. It would seem that we have discovered through participant feedback that our work with them has enabled them to re-turn to church.

## **Interpretive resilience**

During the late 1990s when the Ujamaa Centre, under the leadership of our colleague Bongi Zengele, began CBS work with people struggling to live positively with HIV, many of them had been pushed out of their churches because of stigmatising theologies of retribution. They found a safe and sacred refuge within CBS. However, having worked with what became the *Siyaphila* support group for a number of years, Bongi Zengele and I took our reflection (as part of our praxis) into focus group discussions with them. We were interested in the difference CBS had brought

into their lives. We were particularly interested in what difference CBS had made to their own interpretation of the Bible. It soon became clear that CBS had reconnected HIV-positive people to their Bibles (West 2016c: 377-392).

Over the decades that we have worked together with the *Siyaphila* support group there has been informal and formal reflections on how *Siyaphila* support group members related to their Bibles. The dominant metaphor used to describe the experience of most members with the Bible prior to their joining the *Siyaphila* support group was one of distance. The Bible was far off and at a distance from them (West and Zengele 2006, 57). Related to this image of distance was the image of place. The Bible was located in particular places, for example in the homes of their parents and grandparents, but predominantly in the church. As one person expressed, the Bible “was opened and closed in church” (West and Zengele 2006: 57). Yet, another related image used was that of belonging, the Bible belonged to others. For most of them, the Bible belonged to the minister/pastor/priest. The Bible belonged predominantly in the hands of religious professionals (West and Zengele 2006: 57).

Additionally, prior to their participation in the *Siyaphila* support groups, the Bible was linked to the metaphor of relative silence. As one member put it, the Bible required a preacher to make it speak. The Bible was a holy book and could therefore, only be made to speak by those whose task it was to do so (West and Zengele 2006: 57). As another person also said, it was a book ‘handled’ by others. In fact, this person reported that she had been expressly forbidden to touch the Bible because she was HIV-positive and therefore, regarded as unclean. Only ‘holy’ people could handle the Bible. When the Bible was handled by such ‘holy’ people it was used as the word of God to directly talk to the HIV+ people and to condemn them (West and Zengele 2006: 57).

There was also general agreement that the Bible was not about ordinary life and certainly not about an HIV-positive life. As one person said, the Bible “is just a book, talking about things that do not touch me”. She felt that she was not permitted to bring her questions or her reality to the Bible. It was ‘about’ other things, holy things that were unrelated to her context (West and Zengele 2006: 57-58).

All of these predominantly negative associations with the Bible were positively transformed by their membership to the *Siyaphila* support group. What was far from them had now been brought close to them; what had

no place in their lives now had a place within their lives; what belonged to others now belonged to them; what had nothing relevant to say to them now spoke directly to their condition; what could not be touched or made to speak by them or for them was now in their hands, they could ask their questions of it, and they heard it speaking to them directly; what had brought judgment, stigma, and discrimination now brought healing, hope, and life (West and Zengele 2006: 58).

The Bible was no longer far off. It engaged them personally and as a group; it dealt with the daily concerns that constituted their lives. As one of the participants admitted, the Bible affirmed that she was made in the image of God and offered her support in her inner struggles (West and Zengele 2006: 58). In new and refreshing ways, the Bible now belonged to them and as one of the participants said, she now ‘owned’ a Bible and she was aware of how much the Bible was used selectively in church by the church leadership (West and Zengele 2006: 58).

One of the most startling changes was that the members had come to see that the Bible dealt with real life issues. They had been amazed to discover that the things that were happening in their own contexts concurrently happened “in the Bible” (West and Zengele 2006: 58). The many connections between their lives and the Bible astounded them. Closely related to this new understanding was their sense of control. Through the participatory CBS processes, they realised that they did not need anyone else to interpret the Bible for them for they could interpret the Bible for themselves. Another aspect of this control was the sense that they could interrogate the Bible. As one of the members stated and drawing on her experience of the Job Bible studies, the Bible itself gave her permission to ask hard questions of the Bible and even God. This was especially empowering for it enabled her to talk back at those who used the Bible to say that HIV is a punishment for sin. She could now affirm that God loved her, and she could now talk about the process of interpretation. Affirming these comments, another member told the group that she had actually felt secure enough in her newfound sense of ownership of the Bible that she had confronted her own pastor about the way he was using the Bible against people like her (West and Zengele 2006: 59).

CBS had empowered *Siyaphila* members to resist their churches’ biased use of the Bible. Such an outcome speaks to how we as the Ujamaa Centre understand the goals of our work. We work to resist doctrinaire ‘church

theologies' (Kairos 1985) of stigmatisation, discrimination, and retribution, and we aim to construct 'prophetic theologies' of acceptance, inclusion and redemption. However, as I have indicated, for many CBS participants there is a more modest goal.

As the *Siyaphila* members told us, CBS had given them the resources to engage directly with their church leadership. What became clear was that this engagement included elements of resistance and resilience. While they were resisting dominant interpretations of the Bible, they were also re-entering the church space, a space from which they had been driven out. CBS had also given them the necessary resources for an interpretive resilience through which they were able to reoccupy their place in the church.

This understanding of our work has been supported through external evaluations of the Ujamaa Centre. In the 2010 external evaluation, the evaluators include the category titled "Unplanned Impacts" which records how CBS has contributed to capacity building in five related areas, which are, understanding of God, self-confidence, integration of faith and life, reintegration and respect within their families and an inclusive space within churches.

To begin with, participants reported that their "faith had been strengthened or that they had learned something new about God through their participation in the programme" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 20).

In addition, "A number of people reported that they, or people they knew, had experienced increased self-confidence and self-esteem and/or greater understanding of themselves" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 40). Through CBS resources, participants had, in the words of one participant, "been able to uproot the misconceptions and myths that clouded my judgement and tampered with my faith" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 40). A specific example is "how the CBS programme has helped women to realise they are important and valuable and have a legitimate role to play in terms of land issues" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 40). There was also recognition that CBS praxiological resources had been appropriated with participants reporting "how involvement in the programme had equipped them with skills, particularly networking, listening, reading, writing and presentation skills. Several people attributed their subsequent employment in various fields directly to the skills and confidence they had gained through the Ujamaa programme" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 26).

To add on, participants reported a new awareness of the relevance of the Bible to contemporary situations (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 40). CBS work had enabled them to see a new link between the social and the spiritual, and they admit that they are now more responsible and are able to help other young people speak out on issues affecting them, especially HIV and economic matters (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 16-17, 25). CBS has also equipped participants to have meaningful interactions with their families and some participants report that their families have more knowledge and understanding about [gender-based] abuse through the involvement of participants. In some cases, this has had a direct impact on family relationships. As one respondent explained, "In my family we are aware of such things and we are careful". Another participant stated "because of me, the family is at peace. I'm like a problem solver" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 20). Similarly, with reference to the economic CBS work that we have done, two unemployed young people spoke about receiving new respect from their families because of the ideas they were sharing from workshops and their involvement in community activities and in the words of another participant, "I have been able to discuss deeper things with my family that I have been unable to do before . . . I have begun to involve my family more often" (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 26). There was a recurring reference to how CBS work had contributed to participants' gaining new respect within their families (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 26).

Another development from CBS work is that one minister explained his realisation that he had been interpreting scripture to suit his own needs and that his sermons needed to become more balanced (Cossa, Mkhize, and Strydom 2010: 25). The minister recognised the need to make his church more receptive to those whom it had previously excluded.

Based on the 2010 external evaluation report, it has become clear that these five areas of "unplanned impacts" have altogether contributed to forms of resilience that in turn have enabled the reintegration of social sectors who had been marginalised by faith communities (including families and churches). Having noted these "unplanned impacts" we asked the external evaluators, five years later, to pay attention to factors like this. They managed to do this and so our reflections on the notion of 'interpretive resilience' have become clearer as we have begun to discern the contours of 'interpretive resilience'.

In the 2015 external evaluation report, some participants made direct links between the dignity they experienced within CBS work and their yearning for similar acknowledgement of their dignity within their churches. We learned that many [women] participants spontaneously commented on the experience of being respected when they are used to being judged, blamed and ridiculed for their different conditions. They spoke of feeling rejected by the church and finding it valuable to find acceptance from a church-based position [such as the Ujamaa Centre]. This led to a restored sense of dignity and self-worth as reported by participants (Msunduzi 2015: 25-26). For these women, CBS has remained a safe and sacred site in their interactions with the Bible, given that “these things [referring to 2 Samuel 13:1-22] are not read in churches, they are being hidden” (Msunduzi 2015: 26). While these women still felt disrespected in their churches, others used the resources of CBS to build their capacities to return to their churches. Part of this was because CBS trained ministers had changed how they used the Bible and now used Ujamaa Centre resources, such as the Worker Sunday materials in their church services. Ministers reported of how unemployed people spoke movingly about their plight during these services (Msunduzi 2015: 28). This is significant given how the unemployed often feel stigmatised by their families and churches (Gwala 2007). AIC pastors spoke of how they do not have capacity, and of how the work with Ujamaa has provided a platform to strengthen the capacity of the clergy (Msunduzi 2015: 30). This kind of capacity building is the core business of the Ujamaa Centre. As one respondent put it, the clergy have changed how they preach, and the gospel has shifted because of the training (Msunduzi 2015: 31). The work of the Ujamaa Centre is to ‘shift’ Church Theology’s understanding of the gospel.

Accordingly, part of what has enabled marginalised sectors to re-turn to their churches is because of how the church has changed. When theological systems change – when what is ‘good news’ (the gospel) shifts – the church becomes a safer place for marginalised sectors. But another part of this return to church is also because CBS participants feel scripturally confident and equipped to return to their churches.

It is clear that CBS resources contribute towards “emotional healing” and “individual agency” (Msunduzi 2015: 33). These are according to the 2015 external evaluation report, “additional outcomes” (Msunduzi 2015, 33) and they are key components of resilience. Having become “community resource people” and having contributed to “capacity building” within their communities (Msunduzi 2015, 34), some of the participants have

become church resource people, returning to their churches with CBS interpretive resources. The 'outcome logic' (Rao and Kelleher 2005) of this development is explained by the external evaluators as follows:

Reaching the most marginalised and vulnerable people > The most marginalised and vulnerable people experience acceptance and a non-judgemental attitude from educated theologians (Ujamaa facilitators) > There is a shift from self-blame to understanding contextual factors contributing to their vulnerability > Increase in confidence and individual agency; increase in group solidarity and cooperation > Mobilisation of community action; marginalised people become resource persons for others in the community (Msunduzi 2015: 45).

What this does not capture fully is how some of most marginalised and vulnerable return to their families and churches bearing interpretive gifts, gifts of interpretive resilience that enable them to find a place within sites that have stigmatised and marginalised them. What follows is a brief case study of interpretive resilience within both the family and the church.

### **A case study of interpretive resilience: a sexuality CBS**

The advent of HIV has created a significant space for working with local faith-based communities and organisations in the related areas of masculinity and sexuality (West 2016a). In its work on sexuality, the Ujamaa Centre has established a collaborative relationship with the Pietermaritzburg Gay & Lesbian Network.<sup>1</sup> Among the workshops we have done together has been a series of workshops in 2013 which included church leaders from the KwaZulu-Natal province and members from the Gay & Lesbian Network. The workshop was constructed in two related phases, the first phase provided a baseline measure of participants' experience and perceptions of homosexuality. During this workshop one of the activities was a CBS on Genesis 18-19, which located the infamous Genesis 19 within its literary context, reading Genesis 18-19 as a single narrative (with various sub-plots) (West 2016a). The CBS concluded with participants committing themselves to forms of 'action' (Act) that they had agreed upon in their small-group work in response to their engagement with the CBS, an integral component in the See-Judge-Act process of CBS.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.gaylesbian.org.za/>

This first phase workshop was followed some months later with a second phase. The introductory activity of the second phase workshop was a report by each participant on what ‘actions’ they had undertaken in response to the CBS on Genesis 18-19. Each participant reported on what they had done. When the process of reporting was complete there was an interruption as the Gay & Lesbian Network’s video operator asked if he too could present a report. As facilitators, we in the Ujamaa Centre were intrigued. The young self-identified gay man had not wanted to participate in the CBS itself during the first phase of the workshop activities. We had offered him the opportunity, but he had declined indicating that he was not that interested in ‘religion’. His role was to film aspects of the workshop for the Gay & Lesbian Network. He was a persistent but self-effacing presence throughout the workshop. His request to offer an ‘action’ report was, therefore, unexpected. However, we readily welcomed him to share with the group.

He told us that he had paid careful attention to the CBS, filming the plenary sessions and some of the small-group sessions. He said that his apprehensions about ‘religion’ in general and the Bible in particular had slowly begun to dissipate as he watched and listened. His experience with religion and the Bible ever since he had been open about his sexuality was of stigmatisation and condemnation. On the other hand, his observation of the CBS on Genesis 18-19 had given him a reason to reconsider. He had found the CBS as ‘empowering’ as had the other participants.

During the first phase, a number of the gay, lesbian and transgender Christian participants had shared how they had become alienated from their churches and the Bible. But, when the small groups reported back after the CBS, participants shared how, by re-reading this story through the CBS process had given them another perspective on the Bible. One participant said this CBS “takes away the power of the text over us as homosexuals, for we are told that homosexuality is the reason for the destruction of Sodom; we are told that we pose a threat to the church, that we will bring destruction on the church”. Another participant explained, “Many have left the church because of this text”, while yet another participant clarified, that in her context, “Everyone claims to know what this text is about! It will not go away; it must be re-read”. Other participants asked, “Why is it that we have not questioned the interpretation of this story?” Still others wondered, “Perhaps this re-reading enables us to go back to the church”.

Significantly, some of the participants appropriated the re-read biblical text as a resource with which to confront the church: “The church is like Sodom, just as the men of Sodom wanted to subject others to their power, so the church wants to subject us to its power. Re-reading this text reminds us to question each and every text; God himself will come down to judge the church, just as God himself came down to judge Sodom!” This theme was taken up by others, who asked, “Could not this text, as it is interpreted by Ezekiel and Isaiah and Jesus, be read as a story about receiving and welcoming homosexuals into our churches?”<sup>2</sup>

Amidst all this sharing in the first phase workshop, our video operator had not said anything. Yet, as we were to discover when he asked to share during the second phase, these responses by his comrades confirmed his own re-appropriation of Genesis 19, the classic anti-homosexual proof-text (Gagnon 2001: 78, Lings 2013: 241). He told us how he had returned home after the first phase CBS and had used the same CBS with his mother. His mother is a devoted Christian who loved him dearly but who worried that God might condemn him for being gay. Her acceptance of his sexuality was tempered by her theological apprehension. So he went home and worked through the CBS with her. The effect was profound, he told us, with tears in his eyes, for she now understood Genesis 19 (within its literary-narrative context) in a new way recognising that this text (and God) did not condemn him. Our corporate, collaborative re-reading had offered an antidote to the toxic interpretations of this text that characterises the reception history of this text in African faith communities and families. Through CBS, he had found interpretive resources with which to engage directly with the theological world of his mother, negotiating an inclusive theology for their home. And many among his comrades from the Gay & Lesbian Network have found interpretive resources to engage with their churches.

## Conclusion

We are coming to understand more fully how our CBS resources, both praxiological and interpretive, make a contribution to building capacity for

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<sup>2</sup> I recorded these contributions with the permission of the group, taking notes on the powerpoint version of the CBS publicly so that everyone could see what I was writing and could confirm that I had recorded their comments correctly. They wanted to be heard and they wanted their responses to the CBS to be shared with others.

interpretive resilience. There are clear indications from participants that they are able to return to their families and faith communities, re-establishing a place within these important social domains from which they had been marginalised. We are working with the notion of interpretive resilience that emphasises the agency of CBS participants as they do what Ungar (2008) refers to as to “navigate” and “negotiate” CBS resources, integrating what is useful to them as they build their interpretive resilience so that they are able to re-turn to their families and churches.

Some, as we have seen, do more than resiliently subsist within their families and churches. Some use their interpretive resilience with the Bible to ‘rework’ and even ‘resist’ (Katz 2004, 152) dominant interpretations of the Bible. Though interpretive “reworking” and “resistance” are the primary terrain within which the Ujamaa Centre works, we have come to recognise the importance of interpretive “resilience” as a necessary capacity for a re-turn to family and church that so many vulnerable and marginalised sectors yearn for.

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# LET THERE BE LIGHT! BIRTHING ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY IN THE HIV & AIDS APOCALYPSE!

Musa W. Dube

## Introduction: Singing in the Mass Choir

The African Church is a community of believers who are ethically guided by the teaching of Jesus Christ, African indigenous morals, various church traditions, continent wide and international human rights instruments. One of the outstanding Christian ethical injunctions is to love one's neighbour as one loves themselves. Christ's teaching also underlined the ethic of compassion and solidarity by stating that believers should see Christ in all the under-privileged and marginalised members of their communities and be moved into transformative solidarity (Matt. 25:1-43). Planted in African soil, the African church is also grounded in its *ubuntu*<sup>1</sup> ethics that teach us to welcome and respect all members of the community and strangers (Murove 2009:9 ) As a young girl growing up in the village, I knew that my value and beauty as a person, and of any other person, is not dependent on my looks, colour, height, money, ethnicity, the size of our family, house, or the car that we drove, rather, it was dependent on my capacity to welcome and respect people in the family, community and all strangers. In the *Ubuntu* ethical thinking, one's identity is performed through the capacity to consistently make room for the Other in their space.

Recognising the importance of ethics to Nyambura Njoroge's ministry, in this chapter, I seek to contribute to ethical reflections in African ecumenical theology. Similar to other scholars' views, I believe it is clear that there is no one ecumenical theology in Africa, instead, there is a symphony of

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. On various elaborations of *ubuntu* philosophy, see Munyaradzi F. Murove; ed., *African Ethics: An Anthology of Comparative and Applied Ethics* (Pietermaritzburg: UKZN Press, 2009). For perspectives that seek to depatriarchalise Ubuntu see, Ezra Chitando, "Do not tell a person Carrying you that- S/he Stinks": Reflections on Ubuntu and Masculinities in the Context of Sexual and Gender-based Violence and HIV;" in Elna Mouton, et. al. *Living With Dignity: African Perspectives on Gender Equality* (Stellenbosch: Sun Press, 2015), 269-284.

voices and movements, which are not always harmonious<sup>2</sup> (Phiri and Nadar 2005:8-15). The African church and its ecumenical bodies are extremely diverse (Amanze 1999). Using a theatre analogy, a huge jazz orchestra constitutes the African ecumenical theology, and to state the obvious, many more are in the audience listening to the band and many others are not interested in the show. The African church can range from the ancient Ethiopian Coptic Church to the current mushrooming neo-Pentecostal movements (Kalu 2008).

With such an ancient mass choir in the theatre of African ecumenism, who is listening? I believe this question brings to the fore the question of ethics. In other words, whose ecumenical African theology are we singing/constructing/birthing and for what purposes? Whose interests are served by the ecumenical theology that we construct in or that emerges from the diverse faces of the African church history? Given that the subject of African ecclesiology and consequently, its theology, is the big elephant in the house, we the ants can only proceed by naming its various parts: the elephant is a long white bone (an ivory tusk), the elephant is a huge flappy rug (the ear); the elephant is a long tube (its trunk). As one voice in the mass choir, I cannot pretend to sing all voices, although I might sometimes be heard speaking in the definitive, claiming that, this elephant is one long bone and mine is just that, an attempt to name one characteristic of African ecumenical theology and its ethical frameworks. The part that I seek to elaborate is the HIV positive church, which, in my view, is the apocalyptic script that calls us to new ways of being church and doing theology.<sup>3</sup> Although it is just a part, not the whole, it is indeed a part of the whole. The whole cannot be without all its parts.

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Brigilia Bam, "Women and the Church in (South) Africa: Women are the Church in (South) Africa." In Isabel A. Phiri and Sarojini Nadar, eds, *On Being Church: African Women's Voices and Visions* (Geneva: WCC, 2005), 8-15. theorises the Circle of African of Women Theologians, which is Africa wide, and other women movements as a "creation of a new model of Church and society in Africa," 11. Indeed the whole volume represents African women definitions, experiences and visions of being church. Longwe (2019) also addresses this theme in the context of Malawi. See also Gideon Byamugisha et al. *Is the Body of Christ HIV Positive: New Ecclesiological Christologies in the Context of HIV Positive Communities*. Delhi: ISPCK; 2012, presenting new models of being church and ecumenical from the perspective of HIV & AIDS.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. For my earlier review of various theological responses to HIV & AIDS see, Musa W. Dube, "Go tla Siama, O tla Fola: Doing Biblical Studies in an HIV & AIDS Context," *Black Theology: An International Journal*, Vol 8/2 (2010), 212-241.

This chapter has three assumptions which I seek to outline up front concerning the state of the African theology, ecumenism and ethics in the context of HIV & AIDS.

**Firstly**, as said above, that ecumenical theology in Africa (Amanze 1999) is a hybrid enculturated dish that is constituted through biblical faith, baked in African cultural soils and struggles and in its membership in the international community (Antonio 2006). This cultural soil consists of indigenous beliefs, worldviews and ethics, which are also informed by international human rights-oriented instruments. The African church, its theology and ethics are also informed by various struggles for liberation which include the struggle against colonial oppressions (Dube, Mbuvi and Mbuwayesango 2012), racism, international economic injustice, national poverty, patriarchy, anthropocentrism, heteronormativity, military violence and HIV & AIDS<sup>4</sup> (Botha and Andinach 2009).

**Secondly**, it is my premise that HIV/AIDS has been an apocalyptic text for the African continent, revealing the horror and violence of our ethical deficit structures, thereby making an urgent call for the new Earth to come and dwell with us (Chitando 2009). An “apocalyptic text inevitably calls us to dream and to work for a better world” (Dube 2008:12). Consequently, the book of Revelation, with all its amazing images of violence, suffering and death, ends by saying, “Behold, I saw a new heaven and earth coming to dwell on earth.” (Rev. 21:1a).

**Thirdly**, the African ecumenical theology that I seek to sketch in this paper is that of the “HIV positive church”<sup>5</sup> (Byamugisha, Raja and Chitando 2012) and the “ethics that it proposes/serves to the ecumenical movement” (Klagba and Peter 2005). According to a 2013 special report issued by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, UNAIDS, the number of HIV positive people in Africa receiving anti-retroviral treatment in 2012 was over seven times the number receiving treatment in 2005, “with nearly 1 million added in the last year alone. The number of AIDS-related deaths in sub-Saharan Africa in 2011 was 33% less than the

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. See Gideon Byamugisha et al. *Is the Body of Christ HIV Positive: New Ecclesiological Christologies in the Context of HIV Positive Communities*. Delhi: ISPCK; 2012, which brings together some of the significant theorists and theologians of the HIV positive theology.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. several books on ethics and HIV&AIDS that have been produced, including Charles Klagba, ed. *Into the Sunshine: Integrating HIV/AIDS in Ethics Curriculum* Eldoret: C.B. Peter, 2005.

number in 2005. The number of new HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa in 2011 was 25% less than the number in 2001.” In my country (Botswana), as it will be in others, 95% of pregnant women who need ARVs receive them successfully preventing the parent to child infection. Indeed, the past three and half decades of facing AIDS have demonstrated the compassion and resilience of the human spirit at all levels because no rock was left unturned to face AIDS. So, significant achievements have been made and amazing human solidarity has been demonstrated. I confess that although it can be said that we are living in the post HIV & AIDS era in the sense that HIV & AIDS have increasingly become more manageable than a death sentence, I am haunted by the landscape of its yesteryear. I am haunted by those who died and our ethical responsibility to them. I am haunted by the HIV & AIDS apocalyptic text and what it reveals to us as the African church and the world that has lived with HIV & AIDS. Before we turn to the HIV & AIDS epidemic, there is need to have an overview on ecumenical theology in Africa.

## **Enculturated: Ecumenical Theology in Africa**

The church in Africa was planted in the African cultural worldview and was nurtured by the same. As Mercy A. Oduyoye asserts, “what we in Africa have traditionally believed of God and the transcendent order has shaped our Christianity” (Oduyoye 2004:18). All Bibles that were translated into African languages and every sermon preached in indigenous African languages is already cast in the African cultural understanding and worldview (Yorke and Renju 2004). African theology and ecumenical fellowship were thus interreligious, from the start. Undergirded by *ubuntu* ethics, African Indigenous Religions (AIRs) have been welcoming to Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and various other religious beliefs. According to Mercy Oduyoye, AIRs often mediate peaceful existence between different religions in the African context. Citing an example of Islam and Christianity, she holds that “religious maturity, traditional hospitality to the stranger and the sacredness of blood ties have enabled the adherents of these two faiths to accept the other’s right to exist and in the family context to share each other’s festivals” (Oduyoye 2004:18). Rarely, if ever, do we have wars of religious intolerance ignited by followers of AIRs towards people of different faith among their societies. Many black

Africans are interested in learning from the faith of the other and becoming converted to the other, without necessarily disavowing their Indigenous formation, although many of our so-called World Religions often denigrate AIRs.

This interreligious character of African theology forms the base and foundation of its ecumenical theology. African theologians in the past forty years have been at work describing the enculturated theology, its various stages of enculturation and purposes (Antonio 2006:1-28). While historical annals amply attest that colonial Christianity was not necessarily welcoming to AIRs <sup>6</sup>, African theologians consistently show that AICs have been welcoming to Christianity. Consequently, African Indigenous churches have been widely studied for championing an interreligious theology that appreciated and used the wisdom of both religions. Neo-pentecostalism, which has been described by some researchers as demanding that its African members should “make a complete break with the past,”<sup>7</sup> is said to mimic the colonial church than the historical AICs. Be that as it may, the jury is not yet out concerning contemporary charismatic churches and AICs. Some researchers have pointed out that their materialistic theology of health and prosperity, their focus on casting out spirits <sup>8</sup> and their disavowing of heavenly-focused theology are thoroughly nurtured and groomed in the laboratory of AIRs (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007a: 65-86). In short, African Christian theology is inevitably interreligious ecumenical theology, whether such a stance is expressed negatively or positively. We need perspectives on African interreligious theology from other religions, such as Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam. But as far I can see it, AIRs are welcoming religions that make space for various faith perspectives that come to tabernacle among their communities in the African continent. Their capacity to welcome various religious beliefs into their

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<sup>6</sup> Generally, missionaries hardly had any appreciation of African Indigenous Religions as their letters, records and books overwhelmingly attest: See for example, Dachs, A. J. ed., *Papers of John Mackenzie*, Johannesburg: (Witwatersrand University Press, 1975) and Robert Moffat, *Missionary Labours and Scenes in Southern Africa* (London: J Snow, 1842).

<sup>7</sup> The phrase was popularised by, Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil: Religion and Modernity Among the Ewe in Ghana* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999) to describe neo-Pentecostal perspective towards African Indigenous Religions.

<sup>8</sup> See Kwame Asamoah-Gyadu, “Pulling Down Strongholds: The Evangelicalism, Principalities and Powers and the Pentecostal Imagination,” *International Review of Mission* Vol. 96, Nos 382/383 (2007), 306-317.

social body without resorting to discrimination and violence is a great ethical asset. It has facilitated and midwived peaceful ecumenical spaces in our communities and for African Christian theology, so much that we rarely think about their contribution to ecumenical interreligious co-existence. It follows that the ethic of *Ubuntu* shines better here in the formation of the African interreligious relations.

## The HIV & AIDS Apocalyptic Script and the Ethical Kairos

Turning to HIV & AIDS, it barely needs description for African churches and people. Although it was, and still is, a global epidemic, the African continent has had a lion's share. Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>9</sup> alone accounted for an estimated 69% of all people living with HIV and 70% of all AIDS deaths in the year 2011. According to the joint United Nations Programme on HIV & AIDS (UNAIDS), in the year 2018 (the latest data available), 37.9 million people globally were living with HIV. To add on, 32 million people have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the epidemic. In sub-Saharan Africa, four in five new infections among adolescents aged 15–19 years are among girls. Young women aged 15–24 years are twice more likely to be living with HIV than men. In these three and half decades we have expanded old cemeteries, opened new cemeteries, bought more coffins than we dare to remember nor to forget. The trail of tears from our homes to the graveside has been so frequent, so much that the boundaries between the living and the dead became thin and blurred. The texts of HIV & AIDS are inscribed upon our bodies, etched upon our memories and spirits. The African continent and its church bears upon its social, economic and political body the wounds of the HIV & AIDS epidemic.

The HIV & AIDS epidemic is an ethical Kairos, forcing us to ask the question: “how can/must we live together?” Overt thirty-five years of struggling to reduce and arrest HIV & AIDS with marginal breakthroughs compared to the efforts invested, it soon became evident that it is also an ethical issue that underlined fractures in the foundations of our relationships, socially, culturally, economically and politically and called for re-evaluation. The HIV & AIDS epidemic was consistently forcing us to examine critically “what we ought to do and what we ought not to do”

(Chukwu 2002:38). Both the strategies of combating the spread of HIV & AIDS and their failure, or minimal success, underlined that the HIV & AIDS epidemic is also an ethical question. At first, the world said to prevent HIV & AIDS is as easy as ABC—Abstain, Be faithful and Condomise. The responsibility to arrest the spread of HIV was left in the hands of individuals and their moral agency. Behaviour change was, and still is, flagged desperately. If only people could change their behaviour of drinking alcohol, having unprotected sex, having multiple concurrent sexual partners and if only our young people can delay their sexual debut. If only people could use the condom correctly and consistently. If only married couples could be faithful to one another. If only! The strategy of behaviour change depended on individual moral agency to save families, communities and nations. Although there were many different reasons that gave rise to stigma and discrimination, those who were HIV negative began to see those who were HIV positive as morally lacking individuals, who were supposedly failing to abstain, to be faithful or to condomise in the sexual activities. Such a perception snowballed into a plethora of other social evils, aptly named by Gideon Byamugisha as SSDDIM, that is, Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Mis-action (Byamugisha et al., 2012:130).

HIV & AIDS was an ethical storm, generating multiple questions and yielding few satisfactory answers.<sup>10</sup> On the issue of disclosing or not disclosing, for example, there were numerous questions, such as; is it acceptable for a doctor to test a patient without his or her consent? Should the positive individual disclose his status to his partner and caregiver, or keep it as his or her privacy? Should it be compulsory for all couples preparing to get married to get an HIV test and disclose to one another, or does an individual have the right to keep his or her status private? On the subject of marital relations, some of our questions were: should an HIV positive husband insist on having unprotected sex with his wife, because he married her and paid *lobola*? Should he insist on a baby even if both husband and wife are positive (prior to the availability of antiretroviral therapy)? Concerning motherhood, we had such questions as; should a pregnant woman choose not to take an HIV test, and risk infecting her

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<sup>10</sup> Every aspect of HIV&AIDS featured ethical questions. Some of theological works exploring ethics include, James Amanze et al, *Christian Ethics and HIV/AIDS in Africa*. Gaborone: Bay Publishing, 2007; Musa W. Dube, “Let us Change Gears! Ethical Considerations in the HIV&AIDS Struggle,” in Musa W. Dube Shomanah, *The HIV@AIDS Bible: Selected Essays* Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2008.

unborn child? Should an HIV positive mother avoid breast feeding to minimise infecting her child and risk disclosing her status and facing stigmatising neighbours? Should HIV positive people have children at all? Concerning youth and single people, we debated; Should we give condoms to school going teenagers, to save their lives or will such an act promote loose sexual morality? Should all sexually active people, regardless of marital status, condomise or should married women live out the marriage vow; “until death do us part” to its tragic end? On the subject of access to treatment, there were questions such as, should pharmaceutical companies keep drugs unaffordable, while people are dying in millions? Should we give anti-retroviral drugs to Africa, since they may not have sufficient medical facilities to manage them and risk creating new mutations of the virus? The list of questions is endless. At every turn of the HIV & AIDS epidemic, there were moral questions. Rose Graham thus spoke of “The Moral Forest and AIDS” (Graham 2003:52-69). The moral forest became ever so thick that it then became necessary to construct counter slogans, by reminding people that “HIV is not a moral issue, it is a virus”! (Byamugisha et.al. 2012).

The situation was critical and how we answered these ethical questions was urgent for multiple reasons, three of which I wish to state. Firstly, HIV/AIDS was claiming millions of lives with each year that was passing. These millions were more than just faceless statistics. They were people: our children, siblings, parents, relatives, friends, churchmates, workmates, neighbours and our very selves. Secondly, HIV/AIDS was primarily attacking groups that were already vulnerable, the marginalised groups in our societies. These include black people, wherever they were found in the world, women, youth, children and LGBT communities. Thirdly, those who were HIV positive were subjected to stigma and discrimination. The stigma and discrimination was practiced within families, churches, communities and the workplace, thereby inflicting on top of physical pain, social and spiritual pain, and sometimes this translated into both social and physical death.

Be that as it may, the HIV & AIDS era was an apocalyptic moment that threw new light on individual and communal ethical capacities (Dube 2008: 99-122). It threw light, exposing the making of our social structures and how they impacted people and their capacity to make decisions and to implement them. For example, while the messages of individual and communal behavioural change were preached widely, using various media sources and huge resources, the educational campaign often yielded

very small dividends. In fact, the more the message was spread, the higher the statistics of infection, death, rape and orphaned children. Eighty% of women who were infected were married and had been faithful to their husbands; the women were also sexually abstinent virgins and nuns who were raped and infected. Men and boys carrying condoms in their pockets did not always use them lest they demonstrate unmanly fear, while some did not have access to condoms. Many men who needed to undergo voluntary counselling and testing to become eligible for treatment either used their wives to check their status or preferred to die than check their status and face the possibility of being pronounced HIV positive! Pharmaceutical companies were not logically moved by the death of millions for they still preferred to sell for profit than to give patent rights for the production of cheaper and affordable drugs. Churches, bodies that were supposedly communities of compassion and healing did not automatically come out as welcoming institutions that live by the rule of “love your neighbor as yourself” or “when you see the sick identify Christ in their faces.” The church was not automatically a stigma and discrimination free space (UNAIDS 2005). Similarly, our *Ubuntu* founded African families and communities proved to be less welcoming than the demands of their communities (Gaie and Mmolai 2007).

Patriarchy is a system that empowers men socially, economically and politically. It supposedly socialises men to protect their nations, women, and children, and for public leadership. In every single year AIDS was killing more people than all the current wars combined. It was thus, worse than war. We needed our men to rise up to the challenge and do the job of protecting their nations, families, women and children against the virus (vanKlinken 2011). Some few good men did. But we all know that the patriarchal ethic of brave and protective men could not hold up. It could not measure up. Our men could not stand up to the challenge in a collective movement. They failed to accountably and programmatically proclaim “We the African men do hereby solemnly swear that no member of our family and nation shall ever get new infection with HIV. We are heading to and working for zero infections!” The HIV war had a very few brave men in its army. Consequently, children and virgin girls were either raped or enticed by grown up men into intergenerational sex through the use of cash, cars, clothes and cellphones (Chilisa, Tsheko and Mazile 2005). It is well attested that many men were scared and hoped to rid themselves of the virus by ‘loading’ it in babies and teenage girls through the so-called myth of virgins who can cleanse a man’s blood (Weinriech and Benn

2004:34). Contrary to patriarchal socialisation, such men were not brave, courageous or protective in the face of HIV.

The protective patriarchal man had lost his moral accountability so much that married women and virgins were in a worse situation than sex workers. Research and books began to be written on *Risky Marriage* highlighting that, “it’s better to be single” (Browning 2014:9-20). The ‘sacred family,’ that is the heterosexual monogamous marriage, was openly shown to be unsafe. What is the use of such a patriarchal system to anyone? Confessing on behalf of his fellowmen, Chitando admits, “We African men have struggled to provide compassionate leadership in our homes, religious organisations, professional institutions and nations...we are heavily implicated in sexual and gender-based violence and HIV (in Mouton 2015:280)” Chitando has undertaken the project of “detoxifying aggressive masculinities” (in Mouton 2015:280) by calling for redemptive masculinities (Chitando and Chirongoma 2012). The point being made is that HIV/AIDS has been an apocalyptic event that revealed to us our biggest ethical deficit. It was a light that was turned revealing our blindness, revealing the ethical deficit of our concepts, structures, institutions, policies and theologies. It revealed deficit. Our moral deficit was not, as some were prone to think, due to “Among those amongst us who were living with HIV” (Chitando 2007)<sup>11</sup> but on the larger world, in the communities, churches, families, the industry, economic structures and our international relations.

The above ethical questions are still ringing in our ears and to resolve them there was a demand for an expensive programme that called for community gathering and discussion of all sorts on the global and local stage. It necessitated formation and reformation of communal ethics that was characterised by workshops, seminars, conferences and consultations (Byamugisha et. al 2012:128-146; Weinriech and Benn 2004:98-104). The HIV & AIDS struggle became an ecclesiological and ecumenical moment as churches needed to think together and act together (WWC 1997).<sup>12</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> I am indebted to Ezra Chitando, *Living with Hope: African Churches and HIV/AIDS Vol 1*, (Geneva: WCC, 2007), for the inclusive and non-discrimination phrase, “those among us living with HIV & AIDS.”

<sup>12</sup> The very earliest response in a form of Consultative study group resulted in the book, WCC, *Facing AIDS: The Challenge, the Churches’ Response: A WCC Study Document* (Geneva, WCC, 1997); second milestone in the mobilisation of ecumenical movement resulted in the drafting of The Action Plan, and the formation of Ecumenical HIV/AIDS

questions such as, what does it mean to be a church in the HIV & AIDS era; what kind of church do we need to become; what kind of theology should support the church ministry to God's people in the HIV & AIDS era?, became crucial. The African church began to construct a different theology, possibly with different ethics.<sup>13</sup>This is the theological framework of an HIV Positive Church.

## Foundations, Characteristics and Ethics of the HIV Positive Church

Much theological work has already been done on presenting the church as an HIV positive body of Christ (Byamugisha et al 2012:128-146). This construction of the HIV positive church rose independently among different scholars and activists in different places (Gunner 2007:24-32). They were united by their confrontation with the HIV epidemic, stigmatisation and discrimination from the larger society, and drawing from images of Christ who identifies with the marginalised (Matt. 25:1-43) as well as the Pauline image of the church as the body of Christ that is united in pain and joy (1 Cor. 12:26). The HIV & AIDS positive church in Africa is also founded on the ethic of *Ubuntu* that teaches us the very best way to be human is to recognise, respect and welcome the Other (Murove 2009:61-110). In recent times, Ezra Chitando has built up on the framework of an HIV positive church by elaborating its multiple theological and ethical bases, but above all, underlining the accountabilities of an HIV positive church. He describes how the HIV positive church can and should become an HIV competent church, in terms of its capacity to respond adequately and effectively to the epidemic (Chitando 2007). An HIV & AIDS

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Initiative (EHAIA) which was to facilitate the implementation of the Action plan amongst African churches and the global ecumenical family.

<sup>13</sup> African HIV & AIDS theology was generated by various scholars at different places, but the bulk of it was generated through Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative (EHAIA), where such productive names as Ezra Chitando, Nyambura Njoroge, Musa Dube, Sue Parry, Charles Klagba, Hendrew Lusey and Ayoko Bahun-Wilson were the leading facilitators on conversations around faith and HIV & AIDS. The Circle of Concerned Women Theologians that adopted HIV & AIDS research as its focal research for seven years (2002-2009), generating at least six volumes; was the second forum that generated continent wide conversations often in collaboration with EHAIA: The INERELA was also an important space for generating HIV+ theology, although their work tended to focus more on training and mobilising churches to be compassionate and healing communities.

competent church needs adequate theology and informed responsive action (Chitando 2007). Chitando has described the HIV competent church as an action-oriented body which is characterised by “quick feet,” “friendly feet,” “warm hearts” “anointed hands” and “sharp minds.” (Chitando 2007). According to Chitando, “African churches need friendly feet to journey with individuals and communities living with HIV/AIDS, warm hearts to demonstrate compassion, and anointed hands to effect healing” (Chitando 2007). This chapter builds on these ongoing theological developments to elaborate the character, theology and ethic of the HIV positive church.

***As an HIV positive church, the African church chooses to identify with the Other, who is vulnerable, who is marginalised, stigmatised, discriminated and oppressed.***

To be an HIV positive church is to center the Other, to hear the voice of the Other, for the prophetic voice of the church stands a much better chance by listening to the voice of the Other amongst us (Koblanck 2005; World Vision International 2009). The Other are those among us who live with HIV in their bodies, in their families, in their communities and nations. They are the least of those who constitute the face of Christ amongst us. The HIV positive church is the wounded bride of Christ. She lives with the deadly virus upon her body and bears the marks of its opportunistic infections. She has experienced stigma and discrimination in her own home and among her family members. She is a church that knows suffering, death, grief. She is an orphaned and caregiving grandmother, and a midwife for a positive life. She embodies the least of these (Matt. 25:1-43). Through life stories and voices of the Other, The HIV positive church is critically aware that most of our theology, ethics, structures and institutions have severe limitations in guiding the human dignity of all, especially our vulnerable members. The HIV positive African church is, therefore, a listening church. It is characterised by its commitment to ensuring that the Other is not subsumed under ethical systems that exclude their interests. The HIV positive church identifies with the marginalised, not so they can speak for the oppressed, but so they can make the church a space where the entire marginalised can be heard and listened to. It is a space where the stories of the oppressed can be told and be heard; a place where their dreams for liberation can be articulated and implemented.

The HIV positive church has read the apocalyptic text and understood that the capacity of the church to preach a liberating salvation is dependent on hearing the prophetic voice of the Other. According to Gideon Byamugisha, the stories of people living with HIV have shown the church that we need to dispense with SSDDIM, that is, Stigma, Shame, Denial, Discrimination, Inaction and Mis-action (Byamugisha et.al. 2012:130).

To be an HIV positive church is to live with the virus in your body. It is to understand and work through exposure. The exposure highlights your vulnerability. It is your identity as an immune deficient church that positions you<sup>14</sup> to stand a better chance to be a church. According to Don Messer, “the starting point of this mission is admitting that ultimately we are all HIV-positive: As long as we deny our own vulnerability and risk ... then we best step aside (Messer 2004:27-38). Messer underlines that, “by accepting that we are all HIV positive, we affirm both the sovereignty of God and our solidarity with our brothers and sisters in Christ” (Messer 2004:32). To be an HIV positive church that lacks immunity is, therefore, to be that body that is equipped to bear and catch every infection that comes around, and to be in a constant fight against opportunistic infections. The exposure also takes down all your defenses as an HIV positive church, and forces you to be unsettled and unsettling. Constant rethinking, evaluation and monitoring become integral for your survival. To be an HIV positive church is to walk the Damascus road, where harsh light strikes your eyes, and you hear God calling “Church! Church! why are you persecuting me?” just when you thought you were laboring for God and defending the interests of God.” The irony! It is to be a church that acknowledges that sometimes, if not many times, you lose it. Harsh light falls on your eyes and you experience temporary blindness in order to regain new sights. To be an HIV positive church is to accept the light that has fallen upon your eyes in the HIV & AIDS era exposing you, showing that your structures and institutions, policies, theologies and ethics are founded on faulty and sinful foundations that betray the quality of life on God’s Earth. You thought you knew that every person is made in God’s image and how to love your neighbour; how to receive a stranger; you thought you had Ubuntu, you thought you had experienced grace; you thought you had and gave justice; you thought you were a strong protective man; you thought you had strong moral families that protect children and women. But, now you have been exposed.

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<sup>14</sup> The use of “you,” direct address in this paragraph is a deliberate rhetorical device.

Now, as an HIV positive church you know better. The light has come upon you striking you with temporary blindness so that you can see. The temporary blindness was meant to shock you out of your blindness and enable you to see what you need to see. You are humbled. You have been exposed to harsh light so that scales may fall off your eyes. Harsh light has brought you to a place of acknowledgement that you need to work for a holistic liberation. The apocalyptic text has revealed to you that social oppressions are interconnected, and that true liberation should handle all forms of oppressions, exclusions and marginalisations. Oppressions based on human creations such as anthropocentrism, poverty, patriarchy, racism, gender-based violence, heteronormativity, international economic injustice and oppression, youth and child disempowerment and marginalisation of people with disabilities. The revelations of the HIV & AIDS apocalyptic text has shown you that oppressions are interconnected. You have been shown that to proclaim the gospel of liberation, the salvation of the gospel of Christ, you must address all forms of oppressions, within the society and institutions. You need to seek and work for ethical structural and communities to enable individuals to exercise their moral agency. HIV/AIDS has underscored that African ecumenism should focus on the building of justice in the African continent. According to Byamugisha, an HIV positive church should seek to SAVE, that is, promote, “Safer practices; Access to treatment and Nutrition; Voluntary, routine dogma-free counseling and testing and Empowerment of children, youth, women, families, communities and nations living with, vulnerable to, at risk of and affected by HIV & AIDS (Byamugisha et.al., 2012:240).

### ***An HIV positive church is a healing community.***

The African church, and the global church as a whole, have received revelation that societies that do not give human dignity and empowerment to all its members are deadly societies. Healing is that capacity to see the image of God upon every member of our society and to work for the recognition all members of our world at all levels of the society. Such a healing church no longer discriminates against its members on the basis of gender, race, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age or disability. Such a church lives and works out its mission in God’s created community, celebrating the sacredness of all members. Healing is to ensure that every member of our society is given the space to flourish in this our divine Earthly home. An HIV positive church subscribes to the ethic of compassion as it seeks to

be in solidarity to bring about healing. The compassionate acts of the HIV positive church seek to midwife justice, and justice for all, it moves through transformative solidarity. Consequently, J. P Heath holds that, “God has allowed HIV to heal the Church, to force us to become Christian” (Heath 2005:31).

***The HIV positive church is also a woman and children positive church.***  
(Chitando & Chirongoma 2013)

Such a church no longer co-habits with patriarchy, nor does it seek to forge ecumenism on the basis of sacrificing the humanity of women on the church altar. It is a church that recognises that the African church is a woman church in numbers and ethically. A woman and child positive church recognises that women are the church and the church is woman, the bride of Christ. It recognises that African women embody the face of the least of these. As Brigalia Bam points out:

the first challenge to mention here is that women bear the brunt of all crisis that African nations are faced with—HIV/AIDS, POVERTY, WAR, VIOLENCE, Genocide — HITS WOMEN hardest. In this sense, African women are the bearers of the cross alongside the crucified Lord. The first challenge facing churchwomen in Africa are all the challenges facing the continent put together. This is a mammoth challenge (Phiri & Nadar 2005:14).

As the face of the least of these, women in our churches are Christ among us. Accordingly, a woman and child positive church recognises that African women embody the performance of hospitality, healing and compassion among us. As Mercy Oduyoye points out, the ethics of an African mother are supreme and the mother is supreme. According to Oduyoye “women in Africa exercise motherhood against all odds, the quality of sense of duty and fulfillment and achievement that must go with determination to see another person become human, cannot be associated with poverty of understanding about the value of humanity” (Oduyoye 2002:58). Other organisations, such as UNICEF have recognised the centrality of the woman by adopting the slogan: “Educate a woman, educate a nation,” and the assumption that a child who has a mother is not an orphan even if she does not have a father. Oduyoye thus insists that African mothers are “co-creators with God and imitators of God’s management of creation (Oduyoye 2002:58).” Nyambura Njoroge exhorts us that “from here on, as we preach the good news in the whole world, we will do

better to remember HER story and to build on her legacy of compassionate deeds” (in Chitando & Chirongoma 2013:31).

### ***The HIV Positive Church remembers those who died in the HIV & AIDS storm.***

It remembers those who suffered long and died waiting for medication. It remembers those who died alone stigmatised and discriminated by family, friends and neighbours. It remembers those who could not even dare to tell their stories and those who dared to tell their stories. It remembers those who died feeling condemned for immorality. It remembers the children who were born with HIV and did not have access to medication and the stigma they faced and the love they received, or the love they did not receive. It remembers the efforts of volunteers, activists, planners and caregivers for standing in the gap. All their stories, told and untold, remain a testimony, calling for the creation of life-affirming structures, institutions, theologies and ethics in our communities and world. The HIV positive church ensures that those who died did not die in vain. It remembers. It is a church that wears the red ribbon, a church that celebrates World AIDS Day in all the days of its year. It ensures that their lives can continue to bring salvation for the living. The HIV positive church recognises that the dead are the living dead and that the living are the dead living. Together with Christ they intercede for us, praying that we should be into the ministry of creating healing relationships, communities and nations; we should be into the multiplication of compassion, justice, grace and love. These ethical commitments to build justice-loving communities through listening to the Other who has been marginalised among us should be the basis for being the church and for our ecumenical agenda in Africa.

### **Conclusion: Towards a New Heaven and Earth**

The apocalyptic event of the HIV & AIDS epidemic has revealed ethical deficits at all levels of the society. The need to birth a new heaven and new earth is imperative. Like the elder and prophet John, we have seen the horrors of oppressive dragons and we need to see the New Earth, coming out of heaven and God coming to dwell with us. During the many years

of living with HIV & AIDS, numerous ecumenical conferences, workshops, seminars, and consultations were held to address our ethical deficits and the need to birth communities, structures, policies, theologies, economic and international relations that were welcoming, nurturing, healing and compassionate, where individuals will be empowered moral agents within their communities. The HIV & AIDS era was thus, an ecumenical moment that necessitated the imagination of the new church and new communities. A theological base was needed to midwife the birth of a welcoming, compassionate and healing church. On listening to the voices of those among us living with HIV & AIDS, we were led to see an HIV positive church coming out of heaven, coming down to dwell with us on Earth. By naming and recognising ourselves as the HIV positive church we seek to take the stigma amongst ourselves, to close ranks, to make no room between “us and them”, to welcome Christ among us.

***To be an HIV positive church is, therefore, to remain positive, to live in hope and work for hope. It is to subscribe to positive living.***

It is to bear the hope for life. It is to insist on the journey of birthing, co-creating with God and midwifing the process of birthing life with God. It is to subscribe to the ethic of resurrection. The ethic of resurrection calls for commitment to resisting all forces of death that negate life and reduce its quality. An HIV positive church is committed to working towards birthing qualitative life among its members, communities, nations and in the global village. The HIV positive church knows that to preach and bear the good news of the liberating salvation, the church cannot work in isolation, for the church remains in the world and it will not be taken out of the world (John 17: 15). It must work with other stakeholders in their particular locality, nation and within the global communion. As Nyambura Njoroge has kept reminding us, networking, collaboration and ecumenism are the hallmarks of an HIV positive church. The HIV positive church lives in the resurrection power, seeking to perform multiple resurrection acts against persisting opportunistic infection; against oppressive structures and theologies that emerge and mar life on God’s beautiful Earth. The resurrection power of Christ is the energising spirit that refreshes the HIV positive church to maintain its prophetic voice; to remain in search of healing and justice and in transformative solidarity with the Other. The HIV positive church stands with the elder John declaring that:

I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 I also saw the holy city, a new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, God's dwelling is with the human race. God will dwell with them, and they will be God's people, and Godself will always be with them [as their God]. 4 God will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there shall be no more death or mourning, wailing or pain, [for] the old order has passed away. 5 The one who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Then he said, "Write these words down, for they are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me, "They are accomplished. I [am] the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. (Rev. 21: 1-5)

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# **“WE ARE TIRED OF HIV, BUT IS HIV TIRED OF US?” – ONGOING REFLECTIONS IN AFRICAN THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

*Ezra Chitando*

## **Introduction**

Nyambura Njoroge’s passion for, and contribution to, the transformation of theological education in Africa is significant. As Global Coordinator of Ecumenical Theological Education (ETE) and with the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (later, Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy), (EHAIA), Nyambura has been central to the task of ensuring that theological education addresses the felt needs of Africans in particular and the global South in general. Combining a sharp intellect, stubborn activism, sensitive leadership and unrelenting commitment to justice, she has been a major force in the trenches where effective responses to HIV have been fashioned and implemented.

Nyambura has refused to be the typical bureaucrat who would be safely ensconced in the global capitals, directing operations from a distance. If anything, she endured burn out and emotional distress by coming to the coal face of the struggle. In EHAIA workshops, as well as activities organised by other partners, she came face to face with the vagaries of HIV in Africa and the global South, even as she had encountered these in her own setting in life. Way into the night after official proceedings, she would listen to harrowing narratives of stigma and discrimination from women and girls. In workshops, she came face to face with patriarchy in its overt and subtle forms. She would challenge her fellow religious leaders to privilege the voices of lay people, as they would be equipped to be more effective in their ministry by hearing firsthand from life and blood human beings. Even as some partners, particularly from the global North, succumbed to the weariness accompanying the HIV response, she never gave up the struggle, consistently energising her colleagues and fellow activists to remain on course and press on. She is the embodiment of one of the key words in HIV response, namely, “resilience”.

### *The Setting: Weariness in a Persistent Struggle*

There is fatigue around HIV in most parts of the world. The epidemic has been around since the mi-1980s in most contexts. In the eyes of some, particularly decision makers in the global North, the availability of anti-retroviral therapy has made the epidemic a manageable one (although many people continue to die from AIDS). For some people, including those who have made financial investments in addressing HIV, it is now time to move on to the next global challenge. In many organisations, HIV has been “mainstreamed,” that is, it has been included in everything else to the extent that it is no longer visible!

For Nyambura, the decision to reduce funding for HIV at a time when HIV remains a real challenge, particularly in Africa, is counterproductive. Her central argument has been that African governments have generally reneged on their responsibility towards the health and well-being of their citizens. How could they outsource the lives of their citizens to funders outside the continent? Thus, for Nyambura, it remains crucial for African governments to mobilise resources to ensure that their citizens have a fighting chance in life. Such a move would not only be about the practical struggle for better lives, but would also contribute towards recovering the continent’s dignity. Nyambura has fiercely opposed the dependency syndrome in which Africa continues to carry the begging bowl to the global North. She writes:

The church (the whole people of God, not just the theologians) in Africa has to wrestle with the damage created by the negative image of the ‘dark continent.’ Africans have internalized this negative image which has nurtured dependence in many aspects of our lives. Dependence has caused a lot of hardships and misery in Africa, a thing that ecumenical theological education needs to address. Dependence has distorted the image of Africa and African humanity. We should be able to affirm our humanity which is created in God’s image (Njoroge 2008: 70).

Sadly, although the world is tired of HIV, HIV itself is not yet tired of wreaking havoc on humanity. The *UNAIDS Factsheet for World AIDS Day* (2018) indicates that in the year 2017, 940 000 people died from AIDS-related illness. Further, 1.8 million people became infected with HIV.<sup>1</sup> In particular, infections are rising among adolescents and youth. Young

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<sup>1</sup> UNAIDS, Fact Sheet, World AIDS Day 2018, 2017 Global AIDS Statistics, p. 1. Available at [http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/UNAIDS\\_FactSheet\\_en.pdf](http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf). [accessed 02/12/2018].

women and girls continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV. Factors that drive the epidemic, including poverty, gender inequality, stigma and discrimination, poor health infrastructure, skewed global economic patterns, migrant labour and others remain firmly in place. Years of activism have not transformed the world into a sea of justice and equality. Heteronormativity continues to influence programmatic interventions and non-normative sexualities remain marginalised in responses to HIV. Below, I reflect briefly on some of these factors. What remains clear, however, is that even if a cure for HIV would be found today, the factors that sponsor it remain active and will continue to haunt Africa.

Although the formula that poverty causes HIV has now been retired, it remains true that poverty is a major factor in vulnerability to HIV, as well as to efforts to respond to it. Poverty has remained a reality in most African contexts, forcing girls, young women and even some grandmothers into sex work. The reality that hunger kills in a short space of time, while AIDS takes much longer before it kills has left many women risking their health and well-being in sex work. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) has been consistently prophetic in exposing the impact of poverty on African women and has sought to give women the space to articulate their concerns (Ayanga 2016).

Despite some progress, particularly in ensuring girls' access to primary education, and women's access to higher education in Africa, gender inequality remains a painful reality. Globally, men continue to wield undue influence in the different spheres of life. Although there have been some notable changes due to women's empowerment, it remains true that being born male increases one's opportunities in one's lifetime, while the opposite is generally true for one born a woman. After all the activism, marches, conventions and laws, it is sad having to concede that women and girls in Africa must continue to strive to overcome formidable odds. In a recent study analysing data from different African countries, Azuah *et al* reached the following conclusion:

In many African communities, females are not allowed to be in school. Families preferred to invest in boys' education than in girls'. Women were also not allowed to do major economic activity and had less ownership of lands and assets. In fact, in traditional Africa, a married woman is considered as the legal property of her husband. Ideally, a real democratic system should allow voluntary individual participation in politics, without any sentiments about gender, to optimally benefit from the potentials of women in social and political life. This idea negatively impacts on the well-being

of women, and the development of their children is also impacted negatively. The inequality observed across all countries encourages subjugation; dependency of females on male folk, killing entrepreneurship zeal thereby orchestrating poor quality of life, denying women their meaningful contributions to household, community and nation's development (Azuah *et al* 2017: 6).

Other factors that increase vulnerability to HIV, such as harmful cultural practices, migrant labour, stigma and discrimination remain very central, even as considerable progress has been achieved. This is the frustrating dimension about the overall response to HIV: whereas there are clear signs of progress (Kurian 2016), there is also evidence of apathy and fatigue. When announcements of success are made, such as the increased access to treatment, some activists feel that the worst is over. However, this is dangerous, as HIV/AIDS remains an existential threat in Africa. It is within this context that research and publication on HIV continues to be undertaken in Africa.

### ***Elaborating and Expanding the Discourse: Ongoing Research and Publication on HIV in African Theology and Religious Studies***

A number of informative reviews of research and publication in the area of HIV in African Theology and Religious Studies have been undertaken (see, among others, Dube 2009; Haddad 2011; Njoroge 2012 and, Chitando 2009 and 2013). Consequently, this chapter will not seek to repeat the major issues that have already been raised in earlier publications. Rather, the chapter will concentrate on highlighting some of the ongoing research and publications in the field. The chapter will pay particular attention to the elaboration of themes that were raised in the earlier engagements. Further, the chapter will draw attention to some of the themes that require urgent attention from researchers in African theology and religious studies.

## **Treatment Adherence and Faith Healing**

The theme of healing has always accompanied reflections on HIV & AIDS. The urgency of this theme has been due to the challenges around the quest to discover a cure. However, with the rapid expansion of African

Pentecostalism from the 1990s and the upsurge in African Prophetic Pentecostalism, this has become a key issue. At stake is the reality of prophets who claim to have received divine power that enables them to defeat HIV & AIDS completely. They claim to achieve healing “in the name of Jesus!” (Chitando and Klagba 2013).

The area of religion and treatment adherence has attracted considerable reflection. It is emerging that, despite the availability of antiretroviral therapy, a significant number of people living with HIV are defaulting on treatment. They would have been told to abandon their medication as a “sign of faith.” This theme is attracting a number of scholars and activists. It confirms the capacity of religion to pose as a barrier within the overall response to HIV, even as it has served as a viable mobiliser in many instances. Thus, the role of traditional healers and Pentecostal Prophetic healers requires further analysis. The impact of medical pluralism, namely, traditional, faith healing and biomedical systems on access to treatment must be researched on, in a more robust way (Mashobela *et al* 2017).

Younger researchers in African theology and religious studies must invest in innovation and find systems that enable people to derive maximum benefits from medical pluralism, without endangering the lives of people living with HIV. Without subscribing to exclusivism, it should be acknowledged that anti-retroviral therapy has been a notable success in the treatment and management of HIV. Although it has side effects, it has played a major role in prolonging life. Emerging researchers can contribute towards building models that can promote maximising the benefits of medical pluralism, while simultaneously reducing the challenges associated with the phenomenon.

It is also strategic for students and scholars to pursue the extent to which exclusive faith healing claims feature across the different forms of religion found in the region. Although the emerging and youthful prophets within Pentecostalism have attracted greater attention, there is need to broaden the scope and investigate how other religious figures, including those from African Traditional Religions, African Initiated Churches and some personalities from the mainline churches are making exclusive claims to faith healing of HIV. Interacting with religious leaders on how to uphold medical pluralism while adhering to antiretroviral therapy has become an urgent undertaking. To this end, the resource, *Treatment Adherence and Faith Healing in the Context of HIV & AIDS in Africa: Training Manual for*

*Religious Leaders* (2019) by the World Council of Churches, is a very timely resource that must be utilised extensively in the region. It provides helpful insights into how religious leaders can provide guidance on the issue of faith healing in the context of HIV. By maintaining that there is no contradiction between faith healing and the use of anti-retroviral therapy, the resource proposes a creative approach towards HIV treatment.

## **Religion and Gender**

The theme of religion and gender in the context of HIV remains well subscribed. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) has led the way in this field. The challenges that they have continued to draw attention to, particularly the appropriation and deployment of religion and culture to keep women in a subordinate position, remain intact. These have been complemented by reflections on the need to mobilise men in the response to HIV. Therefore, the gender agenda continues to be relevant in the context of HIV.

## **Sexual and Gender-Based Violence**

Sexual and gender-based violence, as well as trauma, generate considerable interest among scholars. Whereas the initial outcry against sexual and gender-based violence by the Circle had been dismissed as alarmist by some male scholars, it has become clear that there is an ongoing need to probe how religion, culture and gender socialisation increase women's vulnerability in the wake of HIV. Emerging scholars have examined the extent to which religious ideologies have been (ab)used to justify sexual and gender-based violence, thereby increasing vulnerability to HIV.

## **Adolescents and Youth**

The emerging trend where HIV infection is increasing among adolescents (particularly girls, but also young women) has also generated interest amongst some scholars. This has led to nascent theological/religious studies reflections on the status of children, adolescents and youth in families and society. Further, there are initiatives that seek to understand how children, adolescents and youth can lead the response to HIV in religion

and society. Given the sheer demographic significance of youth, particularly in Africa, there is potential for this theme to grow in influence.

Although the number of postgraduate students writing on religion and HIV has decreased, the theme continues to invite further reflections. Whereas critics might call for freshness, it is clear that most of the factors that drive the epidemic have not been challenged in decisive ways. Networks of theological/religious studies institutions that address HIV might no longer be as active due to funding challenges and the movement of scholar-activists, but studies on religion and HIV continue to be undertaken.

One critical area that requires further investment is that of adolescents and youth living with HIV. At its height, the HIV epidemic was predominantly about the death of young parents and the phenomenon of children orphaned due to AIDS. There was a lot of investment in orphan care. Now, many children who were born HIV positive have matured and there is need for families, churches, communities and institutions to provide effective counselling and guidance to this special group of young people.

## **Key Populations**

Despite the contestation around the concept, key populations have emerged as a significant variable in the overall response to HIV. Whereas many religious leaders in Africa continue to oppose same-sex relationships, the reality is that if the refrain of “leaving no one behind” is to be implemented, there is need to engage with the lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) individuals and communities. Another significant group is that of sex workers. Religious leaders in Africa are being challenged to overcome stigma and discrimination and find ways of working with sex workers to respond to HIV.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, there may now be need to undertake additional second order reflections on the interface between religion and HIV. What have we learnt about the role of religion in the response to HIV? When is religion given to pathological performance and prophetic practice, where the former expresses the negative impact of religion and the later captures the

positive role of religion in society? (Orobator 2018: 100). How can the relationship between religion and HIV inform reflections on religion and development, for example? What are some of the lessons learnt from the work on religion and development for curriculum transformation? These and other questions confirm that studies on religion and HIV can have relevance beyond themselves in many ways. Nyambura's quest for African theology and religious studies to address the lived realities of Africans continues to be witnessed as scholars seek to face the challenge of HIV and other forces that seek to deny abundant life to Africans.

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# **THAT ALL OUR YOUTH MAY LIVE FREE FROM AIDS!**

## **MODELLING A THEOLOGY OF LIFE, A SPIRITUALITY OF LOVE, AND AN ETHICS OF HOPE**

*Gideon B. Byamugisha*

### **Abstract**

The greatest honour that would please Nyambura J. Njoroge (and other Champions of Long term Hope against AIDS like her) is seeing the 'End of AIDS' by the year 2030, contributed to by untiring labours of love, unwavering faith and resilient hope from African theologians, ethicists, activists and ecumenists. This essay seeks to highlight how that kind of 'untiring love, unwavering faith and resilient hope' movement is unfolding in Uganda and the kinds of contributions that will be required from all those Champions of Long-term Hope who seek for effective approaches to achieving social justice, holistic salvation and sustained freedom from AIDS in Eastern Africa; and to see how these can evolve and be strengthened through affordable youth education, integrated skills training and holistic empowerment.

### **Introduction**

On Tuesday the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2017, His Excellency the President of Uganda Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, launched the Presidential Fast Track Initiative (PFTI) to end AIDS as a public health threat in Uganda by 2030. The following day, HIV positive, negative and discordant Noblests and Champions of Long-term Hope from all walks of life: academia, civil society and Networks of People Living with HIV, the faith community and healthcare education and the cultural sector convened at the UNICEF Headquarters Building in Kampala. The conference was meant as a platform to brainstorm how they could use their own personal experiences, professional expertise and their theologies, spiritualities and ethics of life, love and hope, to achieve several goals some of which are listed below:

- Safe behaviours and practices
- Access and adherence to treatment and good nutrition
- Voluntary, routine and stigma sensitive counselling and testing
- Empowerment of the most at risk, including children and youths, most vulnerable families and the most AIDS impacted/challenged communities and community groups (SAVE)

The meeting was also meant to find ways of reducing stigma, shame, denial, discrimination, inaction and mis-action (SSDDIM). Reducing was recognised as a statistically significant contribution to implementing the Presidential Initiative to fast track the end of AIDS.

At the end of their deliberations, the gathered Noblests and Champions of Long-term Hope tasked the author and the Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO) ministry to lead them in developing a Campaign that would make a statistically significant contribution to implementing the presidential initiative. There were three major strategies that were adopted to achieve this goal.

**The first strategy** had to do with re-energising the Champions' involvement and the Noblests' contributions to engaging men in HIV prevention and in closing the tap on new infections, particularly among adolescent girls and young women. Champions and Noblests were also meant to be re-energised in accelerating the implementation of 'Test & Treat' so as to attain 90-90-90 targets, particularly among men and young people. It was also an imperative for Champions and Noblests to be re-energised in consolidating progress reports on eliminating mother-to-child transmission.

**The second strategy** was to re-strategise our messaging and communication for holistic skilling against preventable disasters and distresses, controllable diseases and deaths. Re-strategising was also required in the long-term involvement of faith communities, educational institutions and the cultural sector in ending and sustaining the end of AIDS, its drivers, facilitators and sustainers.

**The third and final strategy** involved the mobilisation of internal resources to complement the National AIDS Trust Fund (ATF) and the One Dollar Initiative (ODI). These resources would be mobilised so as to ensure financial sustainability for HIV & AIDS prevention response by scaling up the necessary community resource partnerships, leaderships and championships.

Since that initial Noblests' and Champions' meeting, a series of meetings and engagements by Champions from various sectors and at different levels have helped to draft a campaign strategy dubbed KIKI EKIGANYE<sup>1</sup>. The campaign strategy is systematically structured with a conceptual framework, goals and targets, a mobilisation song /hymn and an interfaith liturgy on ending AIDS, gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual/reproductive ill-health.

We have also participated in the regional launch of the fast-track activities which was coordinated by the Uganda AIDS Commission. We developed an introductory course in Contextual theology, Spirituality and Ethics for youths and young adults as a way of encouraging compassionate love, domestic resource mobilisation, commitment to the fight against AIDS, gendered violence and sexual/ reproductive ill-health. We also started the pilot project on interfaith liturgy and prayer service with the youth from FOCAGIFO Hope Institute, their chaplains, school directors, parents, guardians, community leaders, societal governors, cultural custodians and gatekeepers. This pilot project is based in Jinja – Kalori local community, Katooke town, Wamala Parish, Nabweru Division, Nansana Municipality and Kyadondo County.

Finally, we have also reached consensus on the resource mobilisation target and have agreed to involve three million Champions of Long-term Hope to raise one hundred and eighty billion Uganda shillings (almost USD 60 Million) in 60 months. This money will assist in scaling up affordable youth education, integrated skills training and holistic empowerment. We also hope that the money will contribute to ending AIDS expediently and in a smarter and more effective manner. As HIV positive, negative and /or discordant Champions and Noblests, we are committed to enhancing our partnerships for scaling up affordable education access for youths, their integrated skills training and their holistic empowerment to enable them to contribute to socio-economic transformation and to ending AIDS faster, smarter and better.

In this noble labour, we are collaborating with their faith leaders, spiritual mentors, educators and trainers, cultural custodians and gatekeepers, societal governors and community leaders. The work will be done in the

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<sup>1</sup> Luganda and Popular Youth language for “*What, In Your Opinion, Is Preventing You/US from Faster Progress, Better Results or More Convincing Victory?*”

most burdened districts in the Central Region<sup>2</sup> before scaling up to other regions of Uganda.

In this endeavor we also refer to the transformative power of the theologies of life, the spiritualities of love and of holistic education models. We deploy the African philosophies of '*Obuntu Bulamu/Ubuntu*' (Civility/Humaneness), '*Harambe*' (Come and Contribute in Unity, Love and Solidarity) and '*Bulungibwansi*' (for the Holistic Health and Holistic Good of the Community)

We place these philosophies and strategies in conversation with the global ethic of solidarity and communitarianism so as to scale up community resource partnerships, leaderships and championships. These help to increase the levels of involvement and domestic funding for educating, training and empowering young people. We hope that the employment of these philosophies will also achieve holistic safety and security, health and peace, prosperity and spiritual fulfilment.

## **Winning the AIDS battle together in Uganda and for Central Region youth: Experts call for special attention to the most affected districts**

The Central Region stretches from Lake Kyoga to Lake Victoria and borders Tanzania in the South. The region is inhabited by mainly Baganda people but is host to almost all the other ethnic groups of Uganda and beyond. The Uganda Districts Information Handbook (2011-2012) lists twenty-four districts by name and page as the ones that make up this region<sup>3</sup> and the Uganda National HIV & AIDS Strategic Plan 2015/2016-2019/20 records the region as one with the highest HIV prevalence in the country (10.4%) This is in comparison to the National HIV Prevalence of 7.3% (Uganda AIDS Indicator Survey, 2011). The Districts of Masaka, Rakai, and Lyatonde were reported by the 2016 Uganda Population HIV Impact Assessment (UPHIA) as posting the highest percentage of people living with HIV in the country (8%). The districts in Central 11 of Luwero,

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<sup>2</sup> Buikwe, Bukomansimbi, Butambala, Buvuma, Gomba, Kalangala, Kalungu, Kampala, Kayunga, Kiboga, Kyankwanzi, Luweero, Lwengo, Lyatonde, Masaka, Mityana, Mpigi, Mubende, Mukono, Nakaseke, Nakasongola, Rakai, Sembabule & Wakiso.

<sup>3</sup> Uganda Districts Information Handbook (Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 9<sup>th</sup> edition 2011) pages 189-259.

Nakasongola, Greater Mubende and Mukono came third (7.6%) followed by other highly burdened districts in other regions, in the fourth position (7.2%).

## **The need to raise, multiply and sustain our domestic funding levels**

One of the key elements in HIV prevention and ending AIDS in Uganda but particularly in the Central Region, is to multiply our compassionate love and domestic resource mobilisation commitment. This will help in tackling structural sustainers, addressing behavioural drivers and increasing affordable education, integrated skills training and holistic empowerment for young people. This empowerment of young people remains inadequate to this day.

## **The need for strengthened benchmarking**

Another issue that calls for contributions from the Champions of Long-term Hope wishing to see effective approaches to realising social justice, holistic salvation and sustained freedom from AIDS is the need for strengthened baseline benchmarking, monitoring and reporting on 'HIV Prevention & Ending of AIDS' messages, sermons and activities among the most at-risk adolescents and youth, the most vulnerable families, the 'most AIDS impacted' communities and community groups and the most AIDS burdened districts. They have up to now remained sub-optimal<sup>4</sup> in relation to multiplying, saving and reducing SSDDIM so as to make statistically significant contributions to implementing the PFTI.

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<sup>4</sup> Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO) World Philosophy Day Remarks by Rev Canon Prof Gideon B Byamugisha On Utilising the Transformative Power of Religious Love and The African Philosophy of Bulungi Bwansi to Scale Up Community Partnerships Necessary to End AIDS, GBV and Sexual /Reproductive Ill-health (FOCAGIFO Hope Institute Jinja-Kalori, Katooke: Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> November 2018).

## **Supporting young people to be saved from holistic disempowerment and persistent vulnerability**

According to the Uganda AIDS Commission,<sup>5</sup> youths' behavioural change choices and decisions of self-protection from HIV infection, sexual exploitation and violence continue to be hampered by some of their cultural realities, religious theologies and socio-economic environments. These quite often lead to less than optimum levels of SAVE and persistent SSDDIM.

This double deficit leads to high-risk behaviours and non-voluntary actions that young people are involved in. These include but are not limited to:

- Early sexual debut, defilement, rape and other forms of sexual abuse
- Multiple sexual relationships that are as unsafe as they are unlawful
- Low individual risk perception
- High prevalence of STIs
- Low utilisation of antenatal care services
- Low uptake of safe male circumcision services
- Suboptimal use of and adherence to ART
- Emotional distress, psycho-social depression, spiritual grief, deviance and/or religious apathy

As Champions of Long-term Hope who wish for effective approaches to realising social justice, holistic salvation and sustained freedom from AIDS, we are being called to invest in supporting the youth to overcome holistic disempowerment and persistent vulnerability.

## **Need for more materials and messages which are 'youth friendly', 'holistic life and health compliant' 'spiritually sensitive' and 'ethically appropriate'**

The limited availability of information, education and communication (IEC) materials and messages that are 'youth- friendly' in their cultural, religious and educational settings is still a challenge for accelerated 'HIV Prevention & Ending of AIDS' among persons, families and communities served by districts in each sub-region. Also, according to some of the most

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<sup>5</sup> Uganda AIDS Commission National HIV & AIDS Strategic Plan 2015/16-2019/20 (Kampala: UAC, 2015) page vii.

respected religious leaders and HIV educators, generally in Uganda and in particular the Central Religion, relaxation has taken over when young people hear that HIV prevalence as well as AIDS deaths have gone down. It is also important to note that because of lack of information, the misrepresentation of AIDS related sermons on HIV prevention and treatment continues to be a problem. Lack of adequate information also means that betrothed couples and pregnant wives and their husbands have not been sufficiently and continuously reminded and encouraged to go for counselling and testing so as to avoid the transmission of HIV to their unborn children. The lack of information also means that uncoordinated mainstream media messages are circulated, and these end up confusing the people and communities at risk. These uncoordinated messages do not pass the quadruple test of being culturally appropriate, by speaking to the African cultural philosophies mentioned earlier. The messages would also fail to be spiritually and ethically sensitive to issues of stigma, discrimination, abstinence, chastity, faithfulness, self-control, and life defending love. The messages from the media may not always be educationally empowering and scientifically accurate.

## **Maximising engagement of current and potential Champions of long-term hope**

HIV positive and negative youths, as well as HIV positive, negative and discordant men, women and leaders in the faith, education and cultural sectors are not optimally engaged in the affordable youth education interventions, integrated training skills programmes and holistic empowerment efforts to help in fast tracking HIV prevention and ending AIDS faster, smarter and better<sup>6</sup> There is need for their increased engagement in ‘providing hope, dignity and holistic empowerment’ to people, families and communities living with, vulnerable to and burdened by HIV.

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<sup>6</sup> Uganda National Prevention Committee Meeting Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> March, 2018, Mr Joshua Kitakule IRCU Secretary General on *Re-engaging Religious Leaders in HIV Prevention : Word From the Secretary General The Prophetic Voice* (Kampala: Inter-Religious Council of Uganda/Religions for Peace, May 2013) Issue No 3 Volume 3 page 3, See also *Stigma and Discrimination Threaten The Positive Living Drive; Fast Tracking the HIV/AIDS Response Through Religious Leaders & Cultural Leaders Taking The Lead Against HIV/AIDS in Uganda* AIDS Commission Uganda AIDS Commission *The Noble Battle : 25 Years of Learning, Service & Success* ( Kampala: UAC, 2018) pages 62-63; 84-85 & 86 (respectively).

**Wanted:****New methods of analysis and new forms of data collection**

Although a number of strategies have been used since the 1990s, including the famous ABC strategy<sup>7</sup> that helped countries and communities to gain great ground against AIDS, the pandemic ‘still rages on - unrepentant and unapologetic’<sup>8</sup> and the ‘noble battle’<sup>9</sup> to get to zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS related deaths faster, smarter and better<sup>10</sup> remains in the fast-track mode!<sup>11</sup> It is within that community leadership context of tackling and ending both the enduring HIV/AIDS epidemic, its behavioural drivers, bio-medical facilitators and structural sustainers; that ‘holistic life and health - focused’ educationists, theologians and ethicists, faith community leaders and cultural gatekeepers, social scientists and ‘structuralists’ have argued for the adoption of types of interventions and forms of inquiry. These interventions and forms of inquiry will be effective in doing the following things:

**Tackling.** Tackling the HIV risk and vulnerability realities of power and gender, religious beliefs, educational levels, socio-cultural and socio-economic challenges. There is also need to tackle issues to do with representation and involvement of the most at risk, most vulnerable, the most burdened and most impacted community groups in policy formulation, national planning, programme implementation, resource training, messaging and communication, budgeting and resource allocation and accountability. Tackling is also crucial when it comes to community leadership and societal governance for sustained and sustainable health and safety, equity and justice, peace and security and holistic prosperity.

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<sup>7</sup> Abstain, if you cannot **Be** faithful, if you cannot - use Condoms.

<sup>8</sup> Wilson Muyinda Mande Adoption of Communitarian Servership in Controlling HIV/AIDS Among the Youths in Nkumba Business Journal (Entebbe: Nkumba University) Vol 17, 2018 page 215 & Wilson Muyinda Mande The Possibility of Communitarian Servership as an Ethic of Leadership Power for The Church of Uganda in Paddy Musana, Angus Crichton & Caroline Howell (Eds) The Uganda Churches and The Political Centre (Kampala: Ngoma Ecumenical Publishing Consortium, 2017) pages 171-191.

<sup>9</sup> Uganda AIDS Commission, The Noble Battle: 25 Years of Learning, Service & Success (Kampala: UAC, 2018).

<sup>10</sup> UNAIDS *World AIDS Day Report 2011* (Geneva: UNAIDS, 2011).

<sup>11</sup> Uganda AIDS Commission/Presidents Office *Presidential Fast-Track Initiative on Ending HIV/AIDS in Uganda: A Presidential Handbook* (Kampala: UAC/Presidents Office, June 2017).

**Ensuring.** It is important to ensure that that all citizens have equal access and participation in the power structures of their societies generally and particularly those societies and communities most at risk and heavily burdened by HIV & AIDS.

**Tracking.** It is also important to track the progress made in domestic resources mobilisation, inclusiveness of highly impacted and deeply vulnerable groups in community responses. Tracking must also be done on the local leadership's involvement in the prevention of new HIV infections, transmissions and illnesses, as well as AIDS related deaths.

**Curbing.** This involves ending new HIV infections, transmissions, AIDS related illnesses and deaths among the population.

Professor Wilson Mande in particular recommends the adoption of an Ethic of Communitarian Servership as one of the most appropriate and most effective in controlling HIV & AIDS among the youth of Uganda because of its emphasis on mutual, moral and responsible communal action which is aimed at achieving holistic, sustained peace, prosperity and well-being for all. The Ethic of communication also promotes and upholds communal values for the common good. It also provides guidance and participation in critiquing, improving and upholding established standards and traditions for social goals. An ethic of communication mediates peace, promotes unity, dispenses care, helps one to exercise their autonomy and cultivates personal intergrity for the health and wellbeing of self, family, community and the larger society. It further promotes the safety of individuals through cooperative practices and virtues of solidarity. It offers long-term sustainability and intergenerational justice while at the same time encouraging active and informed citizenship. Finally, an ethic of communication provides a good balance between individual happiness, interests, self-actualisation, self-fulfilment as well as that of our families, communities and countries.

As early as 1992, Uganda resolved that the most effective battles and the most sustainable victories against HIV & AIDS would require a multi-sectoral approach<sup>12</sup> that brings on board faith communities, cultural institutions, people living with HIV, civil society organisations, the media, central government, local government, the private sector, parliament, researchers, the academy as well as AIDS development partners. From the perspective of both the religious and cultural leaders, it was agreed that

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<sup>12</sup> Uganda AIDS Commission, *The Noble Battle: 25 Years of Learning, Service & Success* pages 23-24,33-35

taking the lead against HIV & AIDS<sup>13</sup> was necessary and combining our efforts could be more effective in gaining victory over the epidemic. It would be even more decisive if we employ effective strategies against stigma and discrimination towards people living with or affected by HIV & AIDS. Other strategies would include increasing awareness, fighting prejudice, improving youth education, increased testing and treatment, resource mobilisation, denouncing socio-economic behaviours and cultural practices that put people at risk, tackling cultural beliefs that prevent women from negotiating safe sex and interrogating and transforming the societal beliefs and religious dogmas that prevent men from actively participating in the fight against and prevention of HIV & AIDS. Another strategy would be halting and ending new HIV infections and transmissions using the transformative power of the theologies of life, the spiritualities of love and the holistic models for youth training and empowerment.

In the Church of Uganda's vision 2025 strategic plan, almost all the seven core values for mobilising the Church of Uganda for work of service and the values of Godliness, integrity, selfless service and unconditional love<sup>14</sup> bring out the best in the cultural and faith community contributions to ending AIDS.

## **The religious and cultural imperative in ending AIDS in Uganda**

Contextual 'life theologies', lived spiritualities of love and applied ethics of hope and community are very central to our efforts to contribute to HIV prevention and to ending AIDS in Uganda. The reason for this is that Ugandans especially families in the Central Region are ultra-religious. The table below highlights this point by providing the statistics on religious minded people in Uganda.

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<sup>13</sup> Uganda AIDS Commission, *The Noble Battle: 25 Years of Learning, Service & Success* pages 84-86.

<sup>14</sup> Vision 2025: *Provincial Master Strategic Plan 2016-2025* (Kampala: The Church of Uganda, 2016) pages 20-23.

### 'Religious Minded' Populations in Uganda<sup>15</sup>

Religious Group	Population %	Population Total (2010 Figures)	Annual Growth
Christian	84.74	28,639,121	3.4%
Moslem	11.49	3,883,213	3.6%
Ethno-religionist	2.65	895,606	-1.4%
Hindu	0.35	118,288	3.9%
Baha'i	0.30	101,389	3.3 %
Non-religious	0.47	158,843	4.2%

These statistics show that if the HIV & AIDS epidemic in Uganda continues to be a big challenge, then it is substantially a challenge to the religious mind and heart of religious groups. It is a challenge to their status quo, theological scholarship and spirituality, and a challenge to their ethics and pedagogy as HIV risk and vulnerability continues to demand contextual exegesis, applied social analysis and a lived and modelled 'spirituality of love' that is holistic.

Thankfully, the holistic spirituality and leadership example shown by various institutions have been both redemptive and liberative against HIV & AIDS. Some of these institutions include active dioceses, churches, mosques, Christian councils, Muslim councils and various interfaith and ecumenical initiatives. The former chairpersons of the Uganda AIDS Commission who were in their own right, religious leaders, spiritual mentors and rigorous thinkers, have also demonstrated exemplary leadership. The Uganda Network of religious leaders living with or personally affected by HIV & AIDS have played an important role in demonstrating holistic spirituality and leadership. The work of Champions of long-term hope who are people of faith among HIV positive, negative and discordant Ugandans cannot be ignored. Finally, the life enhancing and health transforming programmes facilitated by the Inter-religious Council has shown that informed and attuned theologies of life, spiritualities of love and ethics of hope can be both redemptive and liberative in the fight against HIV & AIDS. The fight against HIV & AIDS is more effective when both the believers and their leaders are moved to think about and to holistically act

<sup>15</sup> Jason Mandryk *Operation World: The Definitive Prayer Guide to Every Nation* (Colorado Springs/ Secunderbad, 2010) page 840-841.

on the very meaning of human life and God's holistic purposes for individuals and communities.

Our religion and HIV experiences in Uganda have shown us that we need moral norms, spiritual values and religious ethics based on selfless service, empathic love and empowering grace. These values should be seen as binding to all of us that grow, live, work and serve among the most at-risk adolescents and youths, the most vulnerable families, the most 'AIDS impacted' communities and community groups, the most 'AIDS challenged' towns, the most 'AIDS burdened' districts and the most 'AIDS oppressed' countries, regions and continents of our common globe.

## Conclusion

We can and we will end HIV & AIDS and all our youth will be able to live free from new HIV infections, transmissions, illnesses and AIDS related deaths. Yet, for this great reality to happen faster, smarter and better, the 'love of God' and 'love your neighbour' canon laws become a theological call, a spiritual duty and an ethical leadership demand upon every current aspiring leader who is involved in halting, reversing and eventually ending AIDS at individual, family, local community, district, country level and beyond. This command to love holistically and resiliently becomes an all-important civic urgency, a local community engagement responsibility and a cultural morality demand upon all of us citizens, leaders and visitors alike. This moral demand becomes even more urgent if Nyambura Njoroge, the youth in her family, her community and her continent are to have joy in a world without AIDS by 2030. Indeed, living in Uganda without AIDS demands that faith leaders and congregations as well as the cultural gatekeepers and educators of young people repeatedly stress, untiringly model and unwaveringly live this moral maxim, spiritual virtue and civic principle of '*Obuntu*', '*Ubuntu*', '*Obuntu Bulamu*' which dictates that:

- One should think, say, and theologise about, behave towards and/or treat others as one would like others to think, say and theologise about them (**positive or directive form of the Divine Canon Law**).
- One should not think, say and theologise about, behave towards and/or treat others in ways that one would not like others to think, say and/or theologise about them (**negative or prohibitive form of the Divine Canon Law**).
- What you wish, pray, behave and will upon self, you wish, pray, behave and will upon others (**empathic or responsive form of the Divine Canon Law**).

This law differs from others based on the *'quid pro-quo'* which goes along the lines of *'I give so that you will give in return.'* It is, instead, a unilateral leadership duty, unconditional leadership responsibility, and unwavering leadership commitment to the safety, health, peace, prosperity, well-being and holistic fulfilment of the *Other* without expecting anything in return.

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# WOMEN'S STATUS IN MARRIAGE AMONG THE BEMBA OF ZAMBIA

*Mutale Mulenga Kaunda*

## Introduction

I was introduced to the name Nyambura Njoroge when I was studying toward my BTh Honours degree at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2011. Through my studies, I have been constantly reflecting on her writings and engaging with her passion for African women's status in their cultures, marriages, religions and their empowerment in the time of HIV & AIDS. Six years later, I got the opportunity to meet her when I was at Bossey Ecumenical Institute while attending a three-week interreligious peace summer school. Our engagements and collaborations were strengthened at the Council for World Missions and Evangelism Conference in Arusha Tanzania after I gave the opening keynote address in March 2018. The support I received from her and various other women across the globe was immense.

Nyambura's works exude a passion for African women's status within their cultures, religious spaces and society as a whole. Reading her works brought to me the realisation that Nyambura is an example of an African feminist mentor. She represents the values of relationality and solidarity, values which are expressed in our African Communities where older women walk the path with younger women teaching them the ropes of life in any given situation<sup>1</sup>. These values are further influenced, developed and encouraged within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians which Nyambura not only espoused but also embodies. Having achieved so much as an African woman gives me hope that many African women have the same potential when given a place to stand. Although this chapter focuses on Bemba women of Zambia, I know that Nyambura is passionate about African women across the borders and passionately works toward their liberation.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Bemba people of Zambia, an older woman who mentors younger women, especially on marital issues, is known as *nachimbusa*.

This chapter is set to explore the *imbusa*<sup>2</sup> teaching among the Bemba people and its effects on the status of women in marriage. Mercy Oduyoye (1995b:11, see also Tamale 2005:9) has argued that in Africa, ritual practice is intricately linked to practically every aspect of life: marriage, birth, puberty, death, mourning, politics, war, social roles, religion, kinship structures, identity construction and so on. The connection between ritual and the status of women in marriage is one of the more controversial issues which have been discussed by African women theologians (Oduyoye 1995b:134). I want to explore the various ways in which the marriage ritual is used both as an oppressive and empowering resource. No institution could be considered more significant to Africans than marriage. This high regard and perception of marriage as sacred is what necessitates performance of rituals in which Bemba women were perceived as *cibinda wa ng'anda* (head/owner of the house) in pre-colonial Bemba society (Kaunda 2010:6). This is why it was and still is important for women to be taught by their seniors before marriage on how to live as married women. A young bride is taught by older women for a month or two weeks before her wedding (it used to be longer (six months) in the pre-colonial era).

In a desire to gain a better understanding of the connection between the status of Bemba women in marriage and the marriage ritual, this chapter focuses on one particular cultural initiation rite among the Bemba of Zambia, namely *imbusa*. When one speaks of *imbusa* among the Bemba people, this is clearly understood to signify one of the rituals that have persisted and is resilient through centuries as a tradition of marriage initiation. At the core of this elaborate socio-cultural institution is *banacimbusa* (mother of sacred emblems to be handed down /bearers of traditional teaching aids/symbols), whose role is to mentor young women *muntambi ne fshalano* (time-honoured social values) “in a wide range of sexual matters, including pre-menarche practices, pre-marriage preparation, erotic instruction and reproduction” (Tamale 2005:9). In a sense, the young woman receives instructions on how to keep her marriage. She is taught how to treat her in-laws and especially her husband. Without undergoing *imbusa* teaching, a bride is seen as unfit to handle marriage and she can never become a *nacimbusa* and can never be invited in a place where the *imbusa* teaching is taking place because she is *chitongo* (untaught or uncultured). During *imbusa* teachings, every married woman shares her

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<sup>2</sup> *Imbusa* are sacred emblems/visual aids handed down to Bemba brides before the wedding.

knowledge with the young bride, through their experience of marriage, Bemba women offer experiential guidance to the young bride in preparation for her marriage. The institution of *imbusa* has in many ways exhibited resilience and tenacious adaptability in the context of modernisation and globalisation, but has also shown continuity in the different contexts of the Zambian Diaspora.

This chapter begins with a brief explosion of *imbusa*, explicating the significance of the ritual among the Bemba people. A short historical evaluation of the institution of *Imbusa* is then provided. Finally, the role of *imbusa* within Bemba society is discussed.

### **A Brief Exposition of the *Imbusa* Ritual**

The *imbusa* ritual is also often referred to as *ukuombela ng'anda* (ritual performance for a viable home) which follows after *ukucindila icisungu* (dancing for the wonder of initial menstruation) recognised by Bemba, known as women's rituals. Njoroge (1997) demonstrates that when attention is not paid to women as intrinsic beings, the destruction of their God-given identity and human dignity is imminent. *Imbusa* was initiated to give women that power to go through life being assertive and in solidarity with other women and to hold on to their identity as heads of homes among the Bemba. This is the Bemba women's identity that has, however, suffered some scars due to misrepresentations and misinterpretations along the way. The ritual is in schematic or naturalistic forms of paintings; *imbusa* teaching is taught through songs, proverbs, pottery, paintings and dance. Mushibwe (2009), writing on the Tumbuka people of Zambia, affirms that the Bemba speaking people of the Northern part of Zambia use schematic forms of drawings during the initiation ceremonies. The common drawings of pictures and models called the *imbusa*, an artistic array of a variety of symbols, models and drawings using the three colours red, black and white, can never be understood unless *banacimbusa* or *uwaombelwa* (a woman who has gone through the teaching) explains them. Victor Turner (1969:7) rightly affirms that "it is one thing to observe people performing the stylised gesture and singing the cryptic songs of ritual performance and quite another to reach an adequate understanding of what the movements and words mean to them". Mushibwe (2009) observes that these secrets are well guarded by all women who have gone through *imbusa*. Mushibwe feels that this is what ensures the reproduction of the

women's own suppression and reinforcement of male superiority. Lillian Siwila (2011:18) cautions Mushibwe's point above when she states that:

The teaching on secrecy in marriage is so intense that some of the proverbial songs sung for the bride during the wedding are to tell her to keep secrets in her marriage. As much as this helps to keep the integrity of the community and the marriage, this teaching has also contributed to the silencing of women even when there is abuse in the family.

Siwila further argues that this culture of silence among women is so strong in Zambia that it has contributed to the oppression and suppression of women. However, Mushibwe (2009:118) generalises and argues that "throughout Zambia, and in all its ethnic groupings, cultural traditions continue to relegate women to inferior roles". Mushibwe feels that while good morals are taught with "crafty intention" and there is nothing wrong with some of the roles or skills such as respect for the elders or good eating habits and so on, nevertheless, to train women to consider the opposite sex as superior subjects upon whom they can depend, and themselves as inferior objects, has psychological implication that can lead to the development of a subordinate temperament in married women that respects the opposite sex with veneration. For Mushibwe, this kind of socialisation or teaching could lead to inequality and lack of reproductive freedom for the woman. There is some truth in Mushibwe's argument, because among the Bemba people, the woman is taught not to expose marital problems to outsiders, however, there are procedures taken should there be grievances in the marriage. Firstly, the woman has to speak to her marriage mentor, *nacimbusa*, regarding the grievances and there is time to iron out issues. In fact, elsewhere, I have noted that:

Interestingly, Rasing (2001: 50) had years earlier noted that Bemba women were agents of their own sexuality as they would question a husband if they doubted their husband's fidelity and would take him to a traditional court if they were not satisfied with his response before, they would sexually satisfy him (Mutale Mulenga Kaunda 2017:29).

Yet Mushibwe (2009:129) seems to suggest that the ritual be done away with because it "could have a negative impact on the attitude of the female child towards her academic education". This suggestion seems to give an inferiority status to the ritual and side-lines the significance of *imbusa* as the basis of Bemba cultural identity. Contrary to Mushibwe's subtle analysis which produces a model that depicts *imbusa* as a tool for the socialisation of women to docile obedience, some sympathetic anthropologists

and theologians (see for example Hinfelaar 1994, Rasing 2001, and Kaunda 2010) argue that *imbusa*, in the pre-colonial and missionary Bemba culture was the basis of gender balance. Rasing (2001:58), writing on *imbusa* initiation, has argued that “gender division concerning work was neither strict nor static, but changed depending on the situation”.

For Rasing, Bemba women were not made ‘invisible’ by *imbusa* but by the impact of colonial rule and Christianity. Earlier existing gender relations changed to a significant extent, especially with regards to matrilineal and matrilocal organisation of Bemba society. In fact, Rasing (2001:23) argues that the Western stereotyping of *imbusa* teaching as “expressions of internalised oppression of women”, was based on wrong assumptions. Rasing (1995:15) feels that the *imbusa* ritual “does not denote inferiority as represented by some analysts to mean before the introduction of Christianity into Zambia”. David Schoenbrun (2004:254), writing on “gendered themes in early African history”, observes that “the study of matrilineal societies, especially in this part of central Africa, has been very important for undermining the view of universal male dominance”. Indeed, it helps to unveil the ways in which this “hegemony remained partial and contested” (Wright 2004:413). In this sense, Mushibwe’s (2009:110) argument that a ritual such as *imbusa* “involves manipulation and canalization” of women into subservient roles in marriage is not entirely accurate. What may be substantial is the fact that Bemba women are both custodians of traditions and at times have been “agents of their own subordination” (Rasing 2001:13). Nevertheless, the ritual “has much potential to help improve and safeguard life, and with this in mind, it may need improvement and development (Fiedler 2005:8). It is this awareness that necessitates that an empirical inquiry is done in order to hear the views of the women who have undergone the *imbusa* teachings.

## The Nature of the *Imbusa* Teaching

During *imbusa* teaching, “almost every article used, every gesture employed, every song or prayer, every unit of space and time, by convention stands for something other than itself. It is more than it seems, and often a good deal more” (Turner 1969:15). Rasing (1995) reveals that *imbusa* is a symbolic activity which is taught through action, language, and images to explain and affect the Bemba world-view and specifically what it means

to be an adult and a married woman in the community. *Imbusa* itself refers to both the drawings on the walls and the clay models or pottery that are moulded on the floor (Corbeil 1982). These drawings and clay models which include dots and stripes are worked in three colours: red, black and white (Mushibwe 2009). This observation was made much earlier by Audrey Richards in her book on the *Chisungu* initiation ceremony among the Bemba people in 1956. According to Richards (1956, see also Rasing 1995), the first colour is red which represents the menstrual blood (*Kumweshi*), it is a warning and couples are taught not to have sexual intercourse during this period. The wife has to put up a symbol of red beads in the bedroom for the husband to know that she is menstruating. The second colour is black which represents death and sickness in the family, a time when again, couples are to abstain from sex for fear of death. This colour is also associated with the pubic hair which should not be disposed of carelessly after shaving<sup>3</sup>. Within the rite, there is the teaching on how a wife should shave her husband. Brides are told that they need to shave their husbands' pubic hair. Rasing (1995) argues that this instruction is attached to the pottery drawing of a razor and soap, meaning that a woman has to shave her husband and he in turn should reciprocate. The first time this is done, the wife shaves her husband and then the husband reciprocates. This means that only a wife can shave her husband and vice versa. Should the wife shave herself, it can lead to divorce because she may be considered to have been shaved by another man (adultery). The third colour is white which symbolises purity and fertility. It represents the cervix and safe periods when couples can enjoy sexual intercourse, which results in offspring. These three colours summarize the teaching of *Imbusa* (Richards 1956; Corbeil 1982; Rasing 1995). Rasing (1995) further highlights that blood, sex and fire may symbolise constant danger because failure to comply with the societal warnings and norms is believed to cause diseases. In addition, Rasing reveals that the initiation rite has three phases: the separation, the liminal and the aggregation phases. The separation phase is symbolically secluded which signifies that the initiate is moving from an early phase into another in the social community or structure. The intermediate phase, which I will briefly focus on in the ensuing section, is called the liminal phase and is the most crucial and could

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<sup>3</sup> One of the rituals in marriage among the Bemba is that of spouses shaving each other's pubic hair and it is an important ritual, the only time one shaves him/herself is upon agreement. When one shaves without liaising with the other, it can be considered as the one shaved is having extramarital affair.

be considered as the main phase. The third phase is aggregation, a stage at which the rite of passage is concluded. This marks the end of the initiation process when the initiate comes out into the open, confirming her new status. She would have been accepted as a woman and is therefore, expected to behave in line with customary norms and ethical standards (Rasing 1995:34).

## The Liminal Phase

The liminal stage is the most critical phase of the initiation ceremony. It is during this period that the girl is refashioned into a new person. The characteristics of this phase are ambiguous because the initiate passes through a cultural realm that has none of the attributes of the past or the coming state (Rasing 1995:34). The liminal stage is also the longest. According to Rasing, the young woman is stripped naked or wears only a slip of clothing to demonstrate that she has no status or property. Her nakedness also serves to humiliate her, for she is made into a non-person; she is teased and treated badly in order to make her strong in dealing with all disappointments that life may bring to her (Rasing 1995:36). I concur with Raisin's interpretation and would also like to add that nakedness symbolises that she has no status as she is in the liminal, but nakedness is not something to be ashamed of. A nubile bride is taught and shown her sexual agency as a married woman. She is taught that she can take charge and actively participate during sex with her husband. The young women at this stage "must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group or society in those respects that pertain to the new status" (Rasing 1995:36). Mushibwe (2009:134) observes that both Mbikusita-Lewanika (1979) and Rasing (1995) are in agreement that "the ordeals and humiliations have a physical and emotional nature". Yet Rasing (1995:36) also feels that the process "has an ontological value; it refashions the being of the initiate". Maria Rosa Cutrufelli (1983:155) perceives such a process of initiation as:

Instilling an attitude of submission to man into women's hearts by making them accustomed to the notion that they were born to take second place in society. During the ceremony, the girls are told that from now onwards their task is to procreate and attend to their husbands and their homes, and any other task is forbidden to them. These initiatory rites, surrounded as they are by an aura of mystery and religious solemnity, have

such a devastating psychological impact on the girls that they are mesmerized into a blind acceptance of the indoctrination through a traumatic experience bound to affect them for the rest of their lives.

The whole process seems to be setting women up for subservient roles in their marriage. As claimed by Cutrufelli (1983), women are made to uncritically and unquestionably accept teachings of terror and hence, the dominance of men could be accepted as the right thing, despite its oppressive nature. Indeed, it can have psychological repercussions on the self-perception of a young woman in marriage. Tamale (2005: 6) argues that the initiations are fraught with inconsistency and inconclusiveness and the main theme includes subservience, “manipulation and the control by women”. There is the absence of dialogue in the process of transmitting the teachings and this makes the teacher or *nacimbusa* active and the bride passive. This is the down-side to the *imbusa* teaching. It is not based on a dialogical framework which is liberating, but a domesticating model which, according to Paulo Freire (1996), is disempowering.

In the *imbusa* process, the bride is not supposed to look up at the people instructing her. Some of the characteristics expected of the bride are, submissiveness, to learn in silence, to be passive and humble and to obey the instructors without question. Such characteristics constitute what is regarded as an ideal and traditionally moulded woman (Mbikusita-Lewanika 1979, Rasing 1995, Tamale 2005). However, Rasing (2006:6, 7) argues that the songs and emblems that are disempowering to women in their marriages are contested by other songs and emblems that empower women to rebuke their husbands for immorality and to have control over their sex life. Thus, the ambivalent nature of *imbusa* comes to the fore depending on who is teaching or even interpreting it, it can seem disempowering or empowering. One may argue that this is not enough and that the teaching must be empowering right from the start.

It is in the liminal stage where aspects of sexuality are taught. The young woman is taught the technique of sex dance which involves wriggling the waist while standing and this is meant to help her to sexually satisfy the husband (Fiedler 2005:32). It is here that women are taught various positions they should assume to give variety to the ways they have sex with their husbands (Fiedler 2005:32). This is the central theme that runs throughout the initiations. In addition, the young woman is also encouraged to lengthen or elongate the labia minora (*ukwangala*, literally means “playing”). Rasing (2010:4) asserts that from young age girls are taught to play (*ukwangala*) with their genitals and this is done for the purpose of

sexual enjoyment when they are married or for them to know their bodies well. *Ukwangala* is the disguised term for *ukukuna* (elongation of labia minora). Usually, girls would be encouraged to go into the bush to find herbs that they would use to elongate their labia. The first time, the paternal aunt or grandmother would teach the girl how to pull/elongate her labia and after that initial instruction she will go to the bush or to her room with her friends to continue the ritual. Rasing (1995:31) alludes to the fact that labia elongation is very important and older women encourage girls to elongate before their initiation. If a girl had not elongated her labia, *nacimbusa* would go to the extent of even beating her because it is a disgrace for a girl to not have elongated labia by the time they reach marriage age. It is believed that the man enjoys sex with a woman who has elongated labia minora. Mushibwe (2009:130) feels that the lessons the brides are taught during this period are ambiguous. Citing Chondoka, Mushibwe (2009:132) says “a common element in the teachings stresses sexual rituals, caring for the husband and his family members, lessons in childbearing and childcare due to the fact that it was a requirement to marry and to have children”. Rasing (1995) believes there is a clear teaching that empowers women to become subjects of their destiny as the ritual puts emphasis not only on the power and authority of senior women, but also on their personal power and self-respect as taught women. Rasing further argues that one critical issue that is emphasised throughout the ritual is “self-reliance”. Nevertheless, satisfying the husband sexually seems to be emphasised in the teaching. Jonathan Kangwa (2011:18) opines:

African women theologians have largely condemned the idea of women focusing too much on satisfying their husbands. They argue that women are turned into sex objects to satisfy their husbands thereby making them more vulnerable to HIV (Phiri 2003:10). Fiedler (2005:32) has however, argued that men are also taught to satisfy their wives in sex during their initiation rites.

Richards (1982:51) refers to this as “the dilemma of a matrilineal society in which men are dominant but the line goes through the women”. Rachel Nyagondwe-Fiedler (2005:31), writing from the Chewa context in Malawi, argues that it is necessary to uphold cultural values that encourage women to have power over sexual affairs. This is crucial, especially in the context of HIV.

## The Role of the *Imbusa* Teaching among the Bemba

The *imbusa* teaching is a significant rite for women who are about to enter into marriage. It is a transitional ritual which is perceived as a means to cross boundaries, changes in time and social status (Rasing 1995:34). It is usually assumed that the bride is a virgin before she is married. The initiation rite takes one or two months to complete. As soon as lobola<sup>4</sup> and preparations for the wedding are made, two months prior to the wedding, the *imbusa* teachings commence. The *imbusa* teaching is a place where a woman is primed into becoming what an ideal married woman ought to be. Within this space, older women who have undergone *imbusa* pass their experiential knowledge to a bride regarding what is expected of her in marriage. Should she behave differently there would be consequences, one of which is being sent back to her marriage mentor for further teaching. This becomes disgraceful to the girl's family; therefore, women strive to follow the teachings religiously.

Rasing (2004:279) defines initiation as “a rite of transition and sets out the basis for adult life by constructing a new identity for a woman”. This means that the *imbusa* teachings as an initiation rite or rite of passage, mark the transition from childhood to adulthood, as well as from being unmarried to being married for Bemba (and other Zambian) women. The young bride is secluded in a house or room where she and her *banacimbusa* spend the time in marital counselling and teachings. Rasing (2004:278) has similarly explained that women's initiation rites are “an intrinsic part of traditional culture and society” and have been performed by experts for a long period of time. These rites are not only significant or in existence in traditional/rural societies in Zambia, but urban educated women in Zambia also equally emphasise the value of the *imbusa* teachings. While not disputing the significance of the teachings such as *imbusa*, Oduyoye (1995a:134) has argued that ritual is a key site through which women's subordination is maintained and enforced within African society. Oduyoye (1995b:11) further argues that the ritual is so significant that “an individual's path through life is monitored, marked, and celebrated from even before birth to death, and thereafter the events in the life of a community echo this same cycle”. Indeed, the whole life of an African is marked by ritual after ritual. Yet, it has been observed that women undergo many more rituals in comparison to men (Oduyoye 1995b:16).

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<sup>4</sup> Gift given to the bride's family as assurance that the man will marry their daughter.

When looking at the women-centred nature of the ritual, Rasing (2001:23) is right when arguing that initiation rites are significant in the “construction of female identity, pride, autonomy and meaning”. The point of concern lies on the identity constructed and what the women make of it. Mushimbwe (2009:130) argues “the initiation rite is an ideology-based set of practices whose aim is to reproduce young women who are well established in the customs of their forefathers and who would later on pass these customs down to their children”. Thus, for Mushimbwe the significance of the initiation rites is therefore, “to introduce the young girl to adult life or womanhood, although the full status of real womanhood would only be acquired after one had given birth” (2009:131). Similarly, Rosemary Edet (1995:26, italics mine) articulates:

Women's rituals in Africa fall under ritual ideology which aims at controlling, in a conservative way, the behavior, the mood, the sentiment, and the values of women for the sake of the community as a whole. Much of the concern is to instruct, to direct, and to *program individuals as they enter upon new tasks*, and to stabilise society by preventing individuals from straying too far from the roles they have assumed.

The teaching is depicted here as a mechanism for domesticating women in the ways of the community. Through the ritual, the dos and don'ts of the community are reinforced. It is a double-edged sword for me, because depending on who is teaching *imbusa*, it can be used to subordinate women in marriage or empower them as agents of their lives. In short, through *imbusa*, the Bemba community seeks to bring not only social coherence and stability, but the teaching is “needed also for social experience in time, for change, for interaction” (Dallistone 1986:219). A teaching like *imbusa* is meant to stir action and bind together a social group of women. Thus, there is a way in which *imbusa* could be utilised to promote social transformation rather than it being a mere cultural preservation of status quo. Therefore, *imbusa* has been perceived to be necessary for maintaining an intricate balance of life in the community and it is meant to preserve the normal order of societal life (Rasing 1995, Rude 1999). It is the medium of understanding the world around and a mechanism for renewing and reconciling or making things right (Edet 1995:26). Among the Bemba people, the *imbusa* ritual has several aims. Here I only discuss two of them, that is *Imbusa* as a mechanism for community counselling and *Imbusa* as a mechanism for community solidarity.

## ***Imbusa* is a Mechanism for Community Counselling**

The *imbusa* initiation rite is a strategy or method used by the community for premarital teaching and on-going marital counselling of women viable for marriage. It is not only the bride and *nacimbusa* who benefit from this institution, but it works as a marriage enrichment program where every woman who has undergone the ritual has an opportunity to refresh their lessons. Yet, the counselling is a secret, as it can only be revealed to a woman who is entering into marriage (Rasing 1995:38). It is a very marital specific type of teaching. One hears such statements as 'marriage is not for children but adults'. This means that a mature person who is ready for marriage is the one that undergoes the teachings. The women are not taught in the form of sermons or lectures, as a methodology of marriage counselling in community, *imbusa* teaching uses songs, proverbs, drums, stories, and pottery moulded on the floor and painted on the walls to pass the message. Everything that needs emphasis is made visual so that it can be easy for one to remember. This teaching is based on community praxis. It starts with the marriage experiences of the community which are developed into theory. When women receive teaching from the initiation rite, they go and put their lessons into practice in their marriages where they formulate their own theories based on their own experiences. These personal theories are brought back to the teaching space where they also pass on information as they have experienced the teaching in praxis. The teaching is therefore, cyclic in nature. One gets the teaching, goes and lives it in marriage and comes back to teach another woman by showing how the teaching has worked out in their marriage.

## ***Imbusa* as a Mechanism for Community Bondedness and Solidarity**

Looking for a particular kind of marriage (life-giving), Bemba women sought a way to prepare themselves for marriage because a woman is central to marriage thus, the special and secret teachings are for women. Virginity is emphasised on the woman's part through the wisdom passed from generation to generation via *imbusa*. This can be done by those who have gone through the teaching and have become much more experienced. Mushibwe (2009:118) explains that a woman is to follow such

teachings strictly if she is to be accepted as one of the initiated/taught/cultured ones. Further, Mushibwe (2009:118) explains that following such teachings is a way of solidarity with other women in the community and society. Rasing (1995:39) asserts "information, understanding and experience is needed to ensure the correct performance" of the rite. Senior women, who collectively hand down wisdom to young brides, are those with immense experience and whose marriages are established, and their services are financially rewarded (fees). Rasing (1995:39) further notes that conducting these rites means accepting serious accountability that the marriage will be a success as the initiate will follow through the teaching.

What prompted the *imbusa* teaching is the desire for the Bemba women to develop viable and life-giving marriages. Thus, *imbusa* is seen as a mechanism to protect themselves and prepare to make the marriage work and last. Bemba women stand in solidarity concerning marriage and mentor each other to have better marriages. Mushibwe (2009) elaborates that women need each other's loyalty in order to stand in solidarity in the community. Therefore, as the teaching goes on during *imbusa*, everyone participates in mentoring the young bride as well as remind themselves of the value of these teachings. Similarly, Rasing (1995:80) states that the teaching is for the initiate as well as *ifimbusa* (All women involved in the teaching). In this way, it is noted that women keep learning and re-evaluating their experiences in marriage as they pass these on to the younger women and learn from the other *banacimbusa* and married women. It is an experimental kind of learning that leads to developing new ideas and theories. Every woman invited is involved in teaching and learning. By being invited, one should be able to share their own experiences and thus, pass on information to the young and fellow married women; in this instance, *nacimbusa* only facilitates the teaching although she takes an active role and controls how the whole process should work out. As soon as one is initiated and married, she will be invited to others' *imbusa* teachings and she should be able to participate in the teaching because she also becomes a teacher to others after her initiation. *Imbusa* is an inclusive teaching space for women. Even those who eloped or were cohabiting (which is still seriously condemned), would be welcome to such a learning and teaching space, only if they decided to formalise their relationship through marriage.

## Conclusion

The main purpose of this chapter was to give a brief exposition of the *imbusa* teaching and to provide an explanation for the connection between the status of Bemba women in marriage and the ritual. I have demonstrated the ambivalent nature of the *imbusa* ritual. On the one hand, the *imbusa* teaching encourages self-esteem and self-reliance on the women involved, while on the other hand, because of its non-dialogical method of teaching, it disempowers women. Nevertheless, the ritual remains crucial among the Bemba people because it is one of the rituals that have persisted and endured through centuries and it is carried even to Bemba women in the diaspora as authentic premarital teaching.

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# GRANDMOTHERS IN MAI MAHIU, KENYA CHALLENGE PASTORS ON BEING CHURCH

*Pauline Wanjiru Njiru*

## Background

The story of HIV & AIDS<sup>1</sup> has been told from different perspectives. This includes the focus on orphans, widows, stigma and discrimination, and others. The diverse ways in which it has been told has not given much visibility to the grandmothers in Mai Mahiu. This chapter tells the story of the grandmothers<sup>2</sup> of Mai Mahiu<sup>3</sup> grappling with the challenge of HIV. It focuses on how HIV has affected them, and how they have gained strength from their suffering, leading them to become a living church, hence, their desire to teach the pastors the same. The chapter describes how the grandmothers, and the pastors encounter each other and how the pastors<sup>4</sup> learn from the grandmothers, challenging them to practically re-define being Church in the era of HIV & AIDS. The chapter further brings to light the muted voices of grandmothers that have not been heard in academic theological circles in the era of HIV & AIDS. Nyambura Njoroge has encouraged the church and theologians in Africa to sit at the feet of the people of God in order to acquire wisdom from interacting with the

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<sup>1</sup> HIV basically stands for Human Immuno Deficiency Virus while AIDS is the Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome. Mai Mahiu has suffered one of the most devastating pandemics. HIV & AIDS when mentioned alongside Mai Mahiu has the overtones of sex work, death and pain.

<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, grandmothers refer to the women of Mai Mahiu whose children have died from HIV related illnesses, leaving behind children, and these children are now under the care of grandmothers.

<sup>3</sup> Mai Mahiu, is a town located in the Rift Valley of Kenya. It lies along the Eastern Africa transport corridor and is a major stop over for long distance truck drivers, en route to or from Mombasa, Kampala, Kigali or South Sudan. This has rendered it an HIV & AIDS “hotspot.”

<sup>4</sup> In this chapter, pastors refer to leaders of the churches in Mai Mahiu, who may or not be ordained, but are in charge of congregations. The majority of the Mai Mahiu pastors are from Independent Churches and Ministries, with only a handful coming from main-line Protestant churches.

reality on the ground. Cognisant of the importance of this injunction by Nyambura, the chapter focuses on a few of the narratives of the grandmothers raising grandchildren whose parents have died from AIDS. It employs a descriptive narrative methodology to evaluate the interactions between the pastors and the grandmothers. This is the methodology that the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians have used in both research and engaging the community. The chapter builds on the earlier work on Africa and HIV by the Circle (see for example, Dube and Kanyoro 2004; Amoah, Akintunde and Akoto 2005; Hinga, Kubai and Ayanga 2006).

## **A brief description of Mai Mahiu**

Mai Mahiu is a settlement in Kenya's Rift Valley Province. The name means "hot water" in Kikuyu language. It is a major stop over for long distance truck drivers on one of the major Eastern Africa transport corridors. Many of the hotels and lodgings operate twenty-four hours a day. The town has been known as a sex hub, due to the rampant transactional sex that takes place there. The majority of the people engaging in transactional sex are the long-distance drivers who stop over to rest, the local community members, as well as people from neighbouring towns of Naivasha, Nairobi, Limuru and Narok. This business, which has thrived for a number of years, has contributed to the high rate of new HIV infections and AIDS deaths in the community.

## **Introduction**

My interest in writing this essay arose from a visit to Mai Mahiu Comfort the Children International (CTC), now Ubuntu Foundation, in 2011. A classmate invited me to see the work the organisation was doing with grandmothers who are raising children whose parents died of AIDS. During the visit, I encountered a few grandmothers who sat around me and told me their stories. Two of the narratives stood out, namely, the stories of Wanjiru and Wanjeri.<sup>5</sup> Wanjiru, seventy-five years old, lost five daughters to AIDS. Humorously, she also explained that her husband, had died of shock after their third daughter died. She had a permanent bent over posture. She explained that a tree branch fell on her, breaking her spinal

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<sup>5</sup> For ethical reasons and confidentiality, the names used here are not the real names.

cord as she was fetching firewood to cook for her grandchildren. I was amazed by the way she told her story with calmness, dignity and passion, which appeared to have been firmly grounded in her faith in God.

Wanjiru had watched her five daughters waste away and finally succumb to the strange disease. She, like many members of her community, knew very little about this body wasting disease. There was so much stigma, shame, denial and discrimination of those who had contracted HIV and were now suffering from AIDS, which worsened the effects of the disease. Her daughters had left behind a trail of orphaned grandchildren.

Wanjeri, was an eighty-year-old grandmother at the time of the study, living with diabetes and high blood pressure. She sat still and listened as Wanjiru narrated her story. When it was her turn to tell her story, Wanjeri told the story of how she takes care of thirteen grandchildren and great grandchildren; she could not manage to do any manual work to earn a living to feed the now too large family and hence, depended on well-wishers. The status of her house confirmed the desperate state she was living in. Of the thirteen children she talked about, a five-year-old was crying for food and there was no food. The house looked empty and dry, there was no indication that there was food or anything had been cooked in the house for several days. Grandmother after grandmother told their story of pain, loss, hope and faith in God. Their pain and loss did not leave them desperate, for their hearts spoke of God who came, comes and will come to their aid.

The narratives and images and the call from this visit remained in my mind for a long time and I made up my mind that I would go back and get to know the grandmothers a bit more. I kept wondering what had given them so much strength amidst such loss, pain and brokenness. How was it possible to trust in God in such circumstances?

Against this background, I sought to expound on the following, firstly, to show the effects of HIV on the grandmothers based on their own accounts. Secondly, to explain what it means to be church in the context of suffering through the eyes of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu and the pastors of Mai Mahiu. Thirdly, to expose the gaps that exist and suggest a way forward.

## Appreciating the Context of the Grandmothers

The grandmothers have walked a long journey of pain, loss, despair. Nevertheless, they retained their hope in God, even as they watched their children suffer from a mysterious disease, they saw them become bed ridden and subsequently die. All they knew was that the disease had no cure. The grandmothers went through the home-based care giving and grieving processes without the much-needed pastoral accompaniment, since neither the community nor the church wanted anything to do with the “homes of AIDS”, as they called them. In most instances, the grandmothers buried their children without the pastors or the church. The children of the grandmothers left their own children behind and the grandmothers are now parenting their grandchildren. Yes, in the midst of old age, poverty and disease, they are learning to be mothers again. Unlike in traditional Africa set-ups where grandmothers spent time with playing with their grandchildren telling stories, sayings, proverbs and riddles as they communicated sex education among other things, the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu find themselves doubling up as the mothers and fathers to their grandchildren. They are taking up the roles of nurturers, providers and instillers of values and discipline. However, sometimes when the grandchildren are disciplined, they respond in a manner that suggests that they are being mistreated and misunderstood.

The grandmothers are learning to be mothers again and they feel they do not have the skills required to raise adolescents and young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The grandmothers are grappling with serious questions that their grandchildren are asking. They would like to know who and where their fathers are, since most of them know that their mothers died, but have no knowledge of the whereabouts of their fathers. This is a question that the grandmothers do not have a ready answer to. The grandmothers have resorted to giving creative answers to the grandchildren. Because the town is known for long distances trucks, the grandmothers often tell their grandchildren that their fathers were run over by the trucks, and because some of the trucks are very huge, the children somehow believe there were no remains to be buried.

The stories of the grandmothers are real life experiences spreading over a period of more than twenty years. The stories of being ostracised by their loved ones and the church came out strongly as each grandmother shared how they were treated when they sought for help from their families and the pastors. The experiences of the grandmothers were painful, and this

was brought out every time they were prompted to share. They felt that although they had successfully parented their children, they were now reduced to the level of beggars and that every story they shared was an effort to seek for support towards the care for their orphaned grandchildren.

According to their shared stories, Mai Mahiu grandmothers faced many terrible experiences. These included: denial of rights and injustices, exclusion, threats and violence, abandonment, displacement, hunger, being subjected to poverty, lack of knowledge of HIV & AIDS, spiritual poverty, lack of representation and lack of shelter. Most of these problems were aggravated by the stigma that existed around HIV & AIDS.

The grandmothers said that some of their children died even when antiretroviral therapy was available. Some said that the people living with HIV defaulted from taking medication because of stigma and shame. Some people living with HIV did not appreciate the idea of hospital social workers and field officers visiting them with drugs and information. The community stigmatised people whose homes were visited by hospital staff and branded them “the homes of AIDS.” This dampened the spirit of the people living with HIV and they opted not to take the drugs. Therefore, their preventable and postponable deaths were merely due to stigma.

The stories, told by different grandmothers indicated the unchecked forms of denial of their rights and justice. From one grandmother to another, they repeated similar stories which showed a tolerated injustice. One grandmother said that after the death of her daughter who was married to a pastor’s son, the in-laws brought to her the grandchildren, although their father was alive. She was forced to take them and could not get redress, even from the local leaders. She obviously did not have access to the government children’s department and, therefore, had to take care of the grandchildren single handedly.

The grandmothers experienced limited access to support services and exclusion by close relatives and the community. There was self-denial that could also translate or lead to self-stigma. Further, stigma leading to rejection and exclusion from the rest of the community was a common experience for the grandmothers. They faced threats and violence. This form of suffering was heightened by the laxity of the local leadership and law enforcement arm of the government to recognize and offer protection to the people living with or affected by HIV in the region. Grandmothers shared how, even after resisting all forms of threats from their close relatives and reporting to the necessary administration, nothing in the form

of help came their way. They remained to nurse their pain without those entrusted to help them doing their part. Instead, they had to watch them as they waste away in poverty, stress, diabetes, and high blood pressure resulting from their struggles as they offer care for those living with and affected by HIV, mainly their children and grandchildren.

Most of the grandmothers who shared their experiences revealed their frustration of having been abandoned by their relatives for choosing to stand with their children dying from AIDS and grandchildren living with or affected by HIV. They mentioned how their daughters were brought back to their maiden home and kicked out of their matrimonial home after they tested HIV positive. Some of the grandmothers were displaced from their original homes after resisting efforts to discourage them from caring for their orphaned grandchildren. One of the grandmothers shared how she was forced out of her home by her husband after refusing to bury a living two-day old baby (their own grandchild) with her dead mother (their own child). Despite such severe treatment, the grandmother has continued to care for the child who was now in school at the time of writing.

Most of these grandmothers are senior citizens who are not in a position to work for a living. They struggle to get enough to feed themselves and their grandchildren. Despite the lack of food, they remain hopeful of a better future and their anchor remains the sincere prayer they make to the Almighty God every day, to give them their daily bread. Although some have portions of land where they can grow some crops, poor health deters them from getting enough food. The hostile climate of Mai Mahiu is also very unpredictable and cannot guarantee a good harvest.

Most of the grandmothers coped badly with their experiences; some were shocked and distressed to the extent that they developed health challenges, commonly high blood pressure. Others were under enormous stress, especially because they had to depend on hand-outs to be able to feed themselves and their orphaned grandchildren. The grandmothers nursed their sick children single-handed. Sometimes out of love, they risked their lives by not taking precautions, for example, wearing gloves because they felt that if they wore gloves, they would be stigmatising their own children, like the rest of the society around them was doing. These grandmothers knew they had no way out. They had to stand with their children whatever the case because they had birthed them.

These experiences of the grandmothers challenge Deervla Murphy's (1993) idea that HIV was a truck drivers' virus, hence the title of her fictional work, *Ukimwi Road*. Her ride as recorded, restricted her to the road, with stop overs in some of the towns she passed through and Mai Mahiu is mentioned as one of those stops. Due to her limitations or maybe lack of deep interest, she did not delve into the villages of Mai Mahiu and see the pain, and devastating effects of HIV. She does not make the connection between the truck drivers who were presumed to carry the virus with the daughters of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu with whom they had transactional sex in exchange for the much-needed food and necessary commodities. Neither did she make the connection between the truck drivers and the sons of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu who also may have had transactional sex with the daughters of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu or who would have been spouses of the same daughters of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu. She does not make the connection between the casual and transactional sex happening in the brothels of Mai Mahiu with the pain of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu or the deep-seated questions of the grandchildren of Mai Mahiu. This is often the delink that exists in the interventions that target HIV as a stand-alone and fail to see the connection of HIV to the social fabric, as well the psychological and economic effects of the same virus. There is need to acknowledge that actually a single infection can go viral to change the entire community's outlook (Murphy 1993).

As the women theologians rightly confirm in Phiri, et al. (2003), women have become the most affected and infected as HIV & AIDS devastate many parts of the African continent. They challenge Christian and cultural traditions and provide concrete suggestions for change in the teaching and practice of the church. It is important to see the parity between the theologies of these 'learned' sisters doing research and writing books, and the struggles of the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu living their theology and experiencing first-hand what it means to follow Jesus. The classroom theology is by coincidence the experienced theology. Whereas the African women theologians have accurately captured the experiences of the grandmothers, can the same be said of the pastors in the church? In the following section, I examine this question further.

## What does being church mean in the context of suffering?

For the purposes of this chapter, I will define the church as;

the body of Christ which comprises the believers in all places. Their visible presence is made through the exercising of the divine gifts bestowed upon them by the Holy Spirit and by expression of love which is fruit of the Spirit' (1Corinthians 12 &13).

However, in Mai Mahiu, the understanding and expression of being church was different between the grandmothers and the pastors. According to the pastors, the church is a fellowship of believers gathering in one place to worship and united by baptism and confession of faith in Jesus, giving offering and gifts to support the ministry. The members of the church were distinct in their participation in worship, public confession and giving for the work of God.

According to the grandmothers, the church as expressed by the pastors lacked its value in the face of suffering in the face of HIV & AIDS. The people affected by HIV & AIDS could not go to church to fellowship, they could not participate in giving and in weekly worship, hence, they were not part of the church as defined by the pastors.

The worldview of the grandmothers was alien to the pastors. This created a real gap between the two categories, one challenging the other for not being church. The pastors saw those suffering from AIDS and likewise their caregivers and families as receiving a curse for "their evil deeds." For them, HIV & AIDS was judgement from God for those who are sexually immoral. They therefore, distanced themselves from such people and called on those in the "church" to lead holy lives to avoid being infected by the virus.

The grandmothers were concerned that there were many churches in Mai Mahiu. Actually, the grandmothers described the churches as 'competing for space with the brothels,' meaning that there are as many churches as there are brothels in the town of Mai Mahiu. A few of the pastors were from mainline churches while the majority were from independent churches and ministries without national membership. Each of the pastors understood that for Christians to belong to their church or ministry they had to meet some membership criteria. Committed members are known by giving offerings, gifts and, most importantly, tithing.

The grandmothers felt the church had failed the people living with and affected by HIV, and they attributed the failure to lack of knowledge. For

them, the pastors simply did not know; they were ignorant. When the grandmothers asked for help from the pastors, the pastors sent them away to the clinics and the social workers dealing with HIV. At other times, when the grandmothers turned to the church for help, they were struck by the emptiness in those churches.

The grandmothers felt that the issues they were dealing with were beyond the medical, they felt that the issues were social, economic, political and pastoral. Only a very small number of the grandmothers indicated they had received some form of help from the church, in the form of a visit from the pastor or the pastor burying their dead. Contrary to the expectation of many of the grandmothers, the church led in abandoning and condemning the people living with or affected by HIV. The church referred to them as people reaping from their evil and immoral practices. On turning to their relatives for help, stories of being abandoned on the death bed were told. Unfortunately, many of these stories reflected sheer negligence of the church and the community due to the high level of stigma that existed in the society. The grandmothers experienced similar stigma from the church and from the community. On many occasions, the church leadership failed to stand with the grandmothers in order to build their courage to care for their children living with HIV and to sustain their hope in what they were doing.

It is worth noting that the grandmothers distinguished the church from the Catholic sisters from Naivasha, whom they described as kindhearted as they had taken many of the orphans to school and were providing fees and learning materials. For whatever reason, these were “the Catholic sisters” and not the churches I describe above.

The grandmothers felt they wanted to teach the pastors how HIV is transmitted, arguing that it was not just through sexual intercourse and that some of the orphans they were looking after were born with the virus and they themselves had not been involved in any sexual intercourse. They wanted to inform the pastors that HIV is a virus which thrives in human bodily fluids, mainly in the blood, breast milk, vaginal fluid and semen. The high level of viral load in the said fluids is a contributing factor to the infection, meaning if one living with HIV is under medication and the viral load is suppressed to undetectable levels, they are unlikely to infect another person. The grandmothers needed the support of the pastors to help those living with HIV with treatment adherence and not to condemn them for having the virus. People living with HIV need to be supported to

access and remain in treatment because if they are under treatment and their viral load is suppressed, then they are unlikely to spread the virus; this is the information the grandmothers had received from the health care workers which they felt the pastors were lacking.

The pastors said that they had believed and taught that a believer in Christ cannot contract HIV because it was a disease for sinners and was a result of sexual sin. It was, therefore, judgment from God for the sexually immoral. If one remained sexually pure through sexual abstinence for those who were not married and sexual faithfulness for those who were married, HIV would not strike. The pastors also taught that using condoms was sinful and that condoms were not meant for Christians. One of them, when asked to describe what his church was doing about HIV, loudly referred to Deuteronomy 28:28, pointing out that such diseases followed those who failed to obey the law of God. He added that he had googled and confirmed that HIV was a disease for sinners and that there is no way those who trusted in God could get the virus. For this reason, his church had nothing to do with HIV or those living with the virus. This is the lack of information on the part of the pastors that had prompted the grandmothers to want to teach them, and demonstrate that there was more to HIV than meets the eye, and the pastors needed to educate themselves on matters related to HIV.

The pastors were afraid of the ‘disease’ and they did not have adequate knowledge on the basic facts of HIV, for example, how it is transmitted, prevented and managed. This led the pastors to offer inappropriate interventions. From the faith perspective, they located their theology in Deuteronomy 28:28, on curses and blessings for the disobedient and obedient respectively. Following this theology, some of the pastors prescribed faith healing, which is dependent on the faith of the person who is unwell or who is providing care. They claimed that those who did not get healed did not have enough faith. By regarding HIV infection as a judgment from God, prescribing faith healing based on the faith of the sick person or the care giver, and claiming that those who do not get healed have no faith, the pastors placed the burden of the disease on the person who was suffering. This enhanced the burden of HIV, self-stigma as well as societal stigma where the person feels unworthy and sinful deserving death. The pastors responded in this manner for various reasons.

**Firstly**, they had inadequate theological education. Only ten% of the pastors interviewed had any form of formal theological education. Only one

had a degree in theology which was an online distance learning course which the Commission for Higher Education failed to endorse for him to proceed to a Master's degree. This shows that most of the pastors did not have any theological education. The pastors applied simplistic and speculative theology which likened HIV to the incurable diseases mentioned in Deuteronomy 28. The pastors observed that church doctrines which have no room for sinners were part of their greatest limitation. The church's sole focus on the subject of sin, led to condemnation of the people living with or affected by HIV in the community and made the pastors refuse to embrace HIV awareness. This heightened their fears; the fear of being identified with sinners and the fear of being labelled HIV positive due to associating those living with or affected by HIV. They were concerned with preserving the church's supposed purity more than sharing the love of Christ.

**Secondly**, there were connections between HIV and the act of having sex. From the onset of HIV infections in America in the early 1980s, the virus was linked to sexual promiscuity as it was seen as a disease for gay people. When it came to Africa and since LGBTQ issues were somewhat perceived to be Western, HIV in Africa was linked to homosexuality and prostitution. The issues of sex and sexuality in Africa are generally seen as taboo. This link of HIV with sex and especially to sex that is not socially sanctioned, marred the pastors' understanding of what HIV is, how it is transmitted, how it is prevented and how it is managed. When the question of how HIV is transmitted was posed, most of the pastors were quick to say it was transmitted through sex, citing lack of abstinence and lack of faithfulness in marriage as being key in the transmission of the virus.

**Thirdly**, many of the participating pastors lack access to literature on HIV & AIDS. This limited their ability to understand and address issues related to the epidemic. They lacked tools for biblical interpretation, and in most cases used the Bible and caused more pain than providing life giving theologies to the grandmothers and those living with or affected by HIV. They also did not have programmes in their church that were designed to meet the needs of the people living with or personally affected by HIV.

I concur with Chitando (2007) that there is need for an in-depth understanding and analysis of how churches in Africa are living with the epidemic of HIV & AIDS. Chitando insists that the church must accompany people and communities living with HIV & AIDS on their journeys of faith (See also, Oduyoye and Amoah 2004). He argues that the church in

Africa must be one with friendly feet, which ministers to every need, thus changing its negative attitude as well as the stigma and discrimination surrounding the disease. As it works with and among those living with HIV, it must also interrogate its theology, its attitude to sexuality and its gender insensitivity and awaken to the realisation that it must become an all-embracing community. Chitando further insists that a church with friendly feet does not pose questions about the moral standing of those with whom it is journeying. African churches need friendly feet to journey with individuals and communities living with HIV & AIDS, warm hearts to demonstrate compassion and anointed hands to effect healing (Chitando 2007). And again, he calls upon the African churches to train their voices in speaking out and challenging systems of oppression so that AIDS competent churches work towards the transformation of death-dealing practices while strengthening life-enhancing ones (Chitando 2007).

### **Outcomes of the interactions between the grandmothers and the pastors on being church in Mai Mahiu**

The church in Mai Mahiu has failed to lead by example. The few pastors who had made efforts to embrace the people living with or affected by HIV had also faced serious opposition and were ridiculed openly by other pastors. However, through the efforts of Christian NGOs, for example Comfort the Children international (now Ubuntu foundation), and FBOs like WCC-EHAIA, both the grandmothers and the pastors could express hope for a future without exclusion and rejection of any form. This is because the efforts to build the capacity of the grandmothers and the pastors were yielding positive results.

The pastors had used the scriptures in a manner that the grandmothers who were giving home-based care for their ailing children felt that the pastors and the churches they were representing did not represent the true church. Some of the grandmothers said that they had to bury their own children single handed, without any pastoral accompaniment. They argued that even if it is assumed or it is true that their children had sinned and that is why they contracted the virus, they were still human beings with a soul that yearned and longed for God. When they died, they left behind orphans and they needed to be nurtured and taken care of. They expected the church to express compassion to the sick and the poor. In-

stead, they received rejection and stigmatisation. Story after story disclosed the sort of mistreatment grandmothers experienced from the church leaders. The doctrinal naiveté of the pastors became visible when grandmothers went to seek for decent burial of their dead ones from HIV related infection. CTC has come out a number of times to conduct burial for those rejected by their churches and to provide care for those positively living with HIV, who the churches have rejected. The context of HIV raises important questions regarding what it means to be the church (Phiri and Nadar 2005).

The pastors learnt from the grandmothers, they heard for themselves the tribulations and pain they inflict on the one hand, on the souls of the care providers, in this case the grandmothers, and on the other hand, on those living with HIV and those affected by HIV. They heard first-hand, the impact of their way of reading scripture which condemns the weak and the sick, as well as the impact of their lack of compassion when they fail to offer the dearly desired spiritual and moral support to those living with or affected by HIV. Upon hearing the experiences of the grandmothers, the pastors were repentant and willing to change and began responding in a different and more pastoral and sensitive manner.

## Conclusion

While most significant actors, including the church, had retreated in the face of HIV, the grandmothers who had birthed the dying children had no choice but to face it head on. No amount of pain, stigma or denial could deter them from loving their children. They were stuck with it. They bore the brunt of HIV by not only enduring loss and facing grief, but by the sheer fact of taking up roles of parenting once again. One of the orphans interviewed, at age twenty-two, said, “My grandmother is my father. If the role of a father is to provide, she has provided all my life, if the role of a father is to guide his son, she has guided me through to manhood, when I see her, she is my mother, my father, my all”. As much as this is a compliment from the well-meaning young man, it is a confirmation of the burden these grandmothers bear as they grapple with the realities of HIV. The grandmothers have carried out multiple tasks.

**Firstly**, they give birth to their own children, they nurture them until they are of age, and they continue to nurture them through sickness and into the grave. They grieve on one hand, bury, on the other and with a third

hand they hold the young orphans left behind, while a fourth hand pampers their nagging husbands. Thus, one of the grandmothers said that the husband will demand the special diet the orphaned child has to take to boost her CD4 count, and therefore the poor old lady has made sure there is always extra for the husband, otherwise he will demand the child's share'.

**Secondly**, they have to explain to their orphaned grandchildren the whereabouts of their absent fathers. And thirdly they have the task of teaching the ignorant pastors on being church. These multiple tasks of the grandmothers challenge the Pauline theology of "women are the weaker vessels" (I Peter 3: 7) for, indeed, the grandmothers of Mai Mahiu have held the fabric of the community together. With their story, they have kept a generation from extinction; the presumed weak have proved beyond any reasonable doubt that they are strong.

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# **CHILD MARRIAGES IN AFRICA: INTERFACE WITH AFRICA'S AGENDA 2063 AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

*Sophia Chirongoma*

## **Background**

This chapter is written in honour of Nyambura Njoroge, a human rights activist, an ecumenical leader, a passionate advocate for gender parity, as well as inclusive and effective leadership in Africa. She is a mother, a sister and a friend to all. Her conscientious advocacy for children's rights enshrined in life giving and life affirming theologies has inspired the focus of this chapter. Wearing gender activist and religio-cultural hermeneutical lens, the chapter interrogates the ugly face of child marriages in Africa. It lays bare how not only in Africa but globally, religion and culture are often used to justify the contentious practice of child marriage. The multifaceted factors perpetuating this practice, which robs young girls of their childhood whilst exposing them to various forms of human rights violations, are deliberated upon. Acknowledging that both boys and girls are susceptible to the clutches of child marriage, this chapter focuses specifically on the girl child who bears the brunt of burden of this practice in Africa. Tapping into the United Nation's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDGs), the chapter bemoans how the prevalence of child marriages in Africa threatens the achievement of five SDGs, focusing on poverty eradication (SDG1), achieving food security (SDG2), ensuring equitable access to health care (SDG3), facilitating universal access to education (SDG4) and attaining gender equity (SDG5). The chapter also articulates how the practice of child marriage presents major barriers in eliminating the harmful cultural traditions and inadvertently stifles the realization of our cherished dream of the "Africa we want," as expressed in the Africa Agenda Vision 2063. Perched firmly and confidently on Njoroge's shoulders whilst embracing her avid and fervent advocacy for children's sexual and reproductive health and rights, the chapter calls for multi- sectoral collaboration towards ending child marriages in Africa. In unison

with Njoroge's consistent advocacy for prophetic leadership, the chapter concludes by reiterating that a prophetic church and visionary leaders cannot afford to be oblivious to the harmful effects of child marriage which are denying fullness of life to millions of young girls.

## Introduction

Despite the numerous global, regional and national legislations against child marriage, this practice has persisted in our contemporary times. Although some boys are also subjected to child marriage, the reality of the matter is that girls are disproportionately affected, hence the focus of this chapter. According to a UNICEF report (2013), while the age at marriage has been rising, over a third of African women are married before their 18th birthday. Several factors provide fertile ground for the prevalence of child marriages. Millions of adolescent and teenage girls have fallen prey to being forced into early marriages against the backdrop of socio-economic challenges compounded with a rigid adherence to religio-cultural traditions. Civil war, displacement and the fear of family dishonour through the girl child's falling pregnant out of wedlock often pushes some parents to withdraw their daughters from school and offer them for marriage to older men (in most cases) in exchange for payment of *lobola/roora*, (a dowry for the bride). In response to the negative impact of child marriage, advocacy work for girls' and young women's sexual, reproductive health and other social and human rights has taken centre stage in our current times. It is against this backdrop that worldwide, women are raising a clarion call for putting our heads and hands together in an endeavour to amplify our voices in saying no to child marriages. As the old adage goes, "united we stand, divided we fall." There is strength in numbers, hence, a united front from all women of the world, whether directly or indirectly affected by this practice, will go a long way in changing communities' perceptions about child marriage. The contention of this chapter is that the scourge of early child marriage is bedeviling human societies and derailing economic progress. Hence, if we are to envisage successfully attaining all the SDGs by 2030 while seeking to realize the vision of Africa's Agenda 2063, it becomes mandatory for us all to work together in eliminating the detrimental practice of child marriage. Since the effects of child marriage are not only confined to the African continent, it is also important to take a glimpse of the practice from a global outlook. In this

light, the next section of this chapter presents a global purview of child marriage.

## Child Marriage: A Global Challenge

The pervasive practice of child marriage spans the global divide. This was made apparent by Anju Malhotra, the Vice President of Research, Innovation and Impact International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) whilst delivering an impassioned appeal to the U.S. House of Representatives Human Rights Commission in July 2010. He foregrounded the urgent need for eliminating child marriage in the following words:

Forced child marriage is a life-changing reality for many of the world's girls. Some as young as 8 or 9 are forced to trade their childhoods for a life that can be defined by isolation, violence and illness. It is a practice rooted more in tradition than religious custom, and one that spans the globe, from Asia to Africa to the Americas. The number of girls who are married as children is astounding (Malhotra 2010:2).

The above citation clearly reveals the complex nature of the problem confronting us, with some of the child brides as young as eight or nine.

An ICRW review shows that the rates of child marriage are highest in parts of Africa, and in South Asia, where one-half to three-fourths of girls are married before age 18. Niger, Mali and Chad have the highest rates (ICRW, 2007). In 2012, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) produced a report revealing that every year, about 15 million girls aged under 18 are married worldwide with little or no say in the matter. The pervasiveness of child marriages is more pronounced in the developing world (middle-income countries) where the proportion of young girls being married before their 15th birthday is one in nine. Prevalence is even higher in the least developed countries where nearly one in two girls become child brides. More often than not, young girls are married off to older men and majority of them have to endure the detrimental social effects embroiled with most inter-generational marriages. Reflecting on the available statistics, a UNFPA report released in 2012, warned that if current trends continued unabated, by the year 2020, approximately 42 million girls will be married by their 18th birthday. This translates to 14.2 million girls married each year or 37 000 girls married each day. Girls living in rural areas of the developing world are twice as likely to be married before the age of 18 as their urban counterparts, and girls with no

education are over three times more likely to do so than those with secondary or higher education (UNFPA, 2012).

Regional and International legislations ratify that child marriages are wrong. The right to 'free and full' consent to a marriage is recognised in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Furthermore, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) prohibits child marriage and forbids the mistreatment of girls. Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), governments have committed to ensure the overall protection of children and young people aged under 18, however, child marriage and the range of rights implications it has, substantially infringe these protections. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child also disallows child marriages in article 21. Despite these national laws and international agreements, child marriage remains a real and present threat to the human rights, lives and health of children, especially girls, in more than a hundred countries (UNICEF, 2012).

Child marriage is often perceived as a safeguard against premarital sex, and the duty to protect the girl from sexual harassment and violence is transferred from the father to the husband. In conflict-ridden zones or during times of natural disaster, parents may marry off their young daughters as a last resort, either to bring the family some income and alleviate some economic hardships, or to offer the girl some sort of protection, particularly in contexts where sexual violence is common. These girls are called "famine brides", for example, in food-insecure Kenya (North, 2009). In the aftermath of the most destructive tsunami in 2004, young girls were married to "tsunami widowers" in Sri Lanka, Indonesia and India as a way to obtain state subsidies for marrying and starting a family (Krishnamurthy, 2009). During the conflicts in Liberia, Uganda and Sudan, girls were abducted and given as "bush wives" to warlords, or even given by their families in exchange for protection (Plan International, 2011).

Having delineated how child marriage presents a challenge at a global level, as well as highlighting how the practice is an affront of regional and international legislations on children's rights, below the chapter proceeds to discuss the causes and effects of child marriage focusing particularly on Africa.

## Interrogating the Causes and Effects of Child Marriages in Africa

Although child marriage is now widely recognized as a violation of children's right, it continues being practiced globally. According to a British community development charity, one girl below the age of 18 is married off every three seconds worldwide (Plan UK, 2011). Despite its strong association with adverse reproductive health outcomes, lack of education depriving girls of equality, the practice of child marriage continues to be fuelled by tradition, religion, cultural and economic reasons (Sibanda, 2011). In most parts of the developing world, particularly in Africa, underage girls are often married off without any recourse. The high prevalence of child marriage in the sub-Saharan region of Africa is a matter of grave concern. The available statistics indicate that 39% of girls in sub-Saharan Africa are married before their 18th birthday; 13% are married by their 15th birthday. In Malawi, 51.8% of the girls are married off before they are 18 years old. Zambia stands at 46.3% while Mozambique is at 43.9% and Zimbabwe 30.7% to name a few. It is therefore worrisome that child marriage robs millions of girls in Africa of their childhood; it forces them out of education and into a life of poor prospects with increased risk of violence, abuse, ill health or early death (UNFPA, 2012).

According to a collaborative study conducted by the Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) Belgium-Zimbabwe mission and the University of Zimbabwe's Centre for Applied Social Sciences, poverty is one of the key factors precipitating young girls' and women's vulnerability to early marriages. In some rural communities, out of desperation, some hunger-stalked families, who cannot afford to send their girl children to school, ultimately marry them off to a potential suitor who can provide them with food or cattle. Additionally, the rural setup in most African communities tends to privilege the boy child to the detriment of the girl child's sense of self-worth. Resultantly, some underprivileged young girls will end up aiming for no greater achievement beyond getting married. In their perspective, being married at a younger age provides them with an escape route in the hope that their husband will take care of all their unfulfilled material and emotional needs. Moreover, poor and uneducated parents, battling to support all their children, might consider marrying off their underage daughters hoping to relieve themselves from the burden of keeping and feeding them. Usually, the affected family will ne-

gotiate with a wealthy, elderly man who is either already married or widowed so that they can give away their young daughter to him as a wife and he will provide them with some material goods in exchange. This practice of marrying off a young girl in order to avert a crisis or to facilitate some form of barter trading is referred to as *kuzvarira* (pledged marriage) among the Shona people in Zimbabwe (Chitakure, 2016).

The patriarchal system which is deeply entrenched in most traditional African societies also plays a focal role in perpetuating child marriages. Male heads of patriarchal structures in Africa often treat young women and girls in their families as commodities that can be dispensed of according to the family's needs. According to Shoko (2007), this can be illustrated through some common Shona people's practices such as *roora* (charging of bride price) whereby young women or underage girls are often forced to marry a certain man simply because he can afford to give her family the desired bride price. Chitakure (2016:38-50) provides an informative discussion of similar practices which include *kuripa ngozi* (giving away a young girl as a wife to the afflicted family in order to propitiate an avenging spirit), *kusimbisa usahwira* (giving away a young girl as a token wife for purposes of cementing relations), *makasi/chimbadzo* (paying off a debt by giving away your daughter to the creditor as compensation), *chimitsamapfihwa* (replacing a deceased sister/aunt), *chigadzamapfihwa* (when an elder sister/aunt is unable to conceive or produces female offspring only, her younger sister or niece might be offered to the husband so as to produce particularly male offspring on her behalf) and *musengabere* (a man kidnapping a girl of his choice then forcibly taking her to his homestead as his wife.) This patriarchal tendency of treating women and girls as commodities exposes them to various forms of violations such as domestic violence, rape and lack of access to basic human rights all in the name of culture and tradition (IYWD, 2014).

Religion is also often used as a tool for coercing young women and girls into the snare of early marriages. All the three major religions on the African continent, African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam are in certain ways used by some unscrupulous religious leaders as a bait to entrap young women and girls to be married off to elderly men within their community of faith. Being young and naïve, as well as being susceptible to religious gullibility, they are often made to believe that certain individuals have a special ability to be 'shown' (through divine/spiritual revelation) who should be married off to whom. Through manipulation and intimidation, they will be made to believe that if they defied the spiritual

'calling' to be married off to these elderly men, then they will bring a curse not only upon themselves but their families at large. Consequently, most young girls, bereft of no other sanctuary, they will grudgingly accept marriage as their "allotted fate" and go off to become one of the several wives to the elderly man. Clearly, this is a violation of the child's right, depriving her of an opportunity to choose her life partner. Often times, they end up entangled in polygamous marriages riddled with strife and wrangling since the elderly men will already have other wives. Once married, girls are likely to feel, and in many cases are, powerless to refuse sex. They are likely to find it difficult to insist on condom use by their husbands, who commonly are older and more sexually experienced, making the girls especially vulnerable to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (UNFPA, 2010).

It is irrefutable that child marriage is a direct form of discrimination against the girl child, who, as a result of the practice, is often deprived of her basic rights. It stands in the way of girls' education, health and productive lives. It also excludes girls from fundamental decisions, such as the timing of marriage and choice of spouse (Sibanda, 2011). At its worst, child marriage can be tantamount to bonded labour or enslavement. It can be a sentence to regular exposure to domestic or sexual violence, and a pathway to commercial exploitation (UNICEF, 2010). On this note, the next section of this paper focuses on elaborating how this contentious practice is thwarting the attainment of five key SDGs focusing on children.

## **Child Marriage Obstructs the Attainment of Five Crucial SDGs**

Child marriage is recognized as a social evil in most countries of the world. It directly hinders the achievement of five out of the seventeen SDGs. The five SDGs mainly affected by child marriages to be discussed in this chapter are as follows, SDG1 aimed at eradicating poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030. Forcing young girls into early marriages compromises their chances of enjoying equal rights to economic resources, presents fertile ground for an uneven competition in ownership of property, inheritance, utilization of appropriate new technology and financial services. Being denied access to poverty alleviation opportunities and economic upliftment prospects keeps them ensnared in a web of poverty,

making it difficult to adequately fend for their offspring. Inadvertently, this will negatively affect the economic status of their offspring, creating a vicious cycle of poverty and economic vulnerability. It is, therefore, apparent that if the international community is really committed to eradicating global poverty, it must be equally committed to ending child marriage (UNICEF, 2007).

The state of being trapped in poverty and economic vulnerability also hinders the accomplishment of SDG2 which is anchored upon ending hunger, achieving food security, improving nutrition and protecting sustainable agriculture. Being forced into early marriages often exposes young girls to the vulnerability of having no access to land of their own. This impinges on their chances of being agriculturally productive. Furthermore, the lack of agricultural productivity impacts heavily on their ability to maintain a balanced nutrition for themselves and their children. All these factors inevitably make them susceptible to food insecurity. Hence, addressing the negative impacts of child marriage have a correlation with the realization of this particular SDG.

Vulnerability to hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity has a huge bearing on the attainment of SDG3 which envisages the provision of good health and well-being for all at all ages by 2030. Due to their constrained socio-economic opportunities, young girls forced into early marriages are the majority of those heavily impacted by the health care challenges such as HIV & AIDS related ailments, tuberculosis, malaria, neglected tropical diseases and other diseases. Besides, the available statistics indicate that the majority of young girls who have been forced into early marriage experience major complications during pregnancy or childbirth consequently increasing the percentage of maternal and infant mortality. Additionally, due to financial constraints and lack of access to adequate information, young pregnant girls often have limited or erratic access to maternal health care facilities causing several of them to suffer from permanent health challenges. Resultantly, their health and well-being and that of their offspring becomes compromised.

The first three SDGs discussed above all directly affect the realization of SDG4 which calls for access to inclusive, quality and equitable education for all. Attaining this goal by 2030 entails ensuring that all boys and girls complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes. Unfortunately, the majority of young girls forced into early marriages have also been forced

to drop out of school in order to take up responsibilities for household chores and childbearing. Having been forced to drop out of school deprives the child brides of the chance to pursue further education and robs them of the opportunity to attain life giving and life enhancing knowledge. Forcing them out of school also stifles their chances of attaining higher education, posing major impediments on their capacity to be remuneratively employed. With limited access to paid employment, their chances of economic independence and rising up from the doldrums of poverty become very limited. The old age, “educate a woman and you educate a nation” denotes that educated mothers have higher chances of financially sponsoring their children’s education as well as assisting the children with their schoolwork which generally increases the success rate for their school going children. Regrettably, an uneducated mother usually battles with constrained resources which compromises her ability to adequately cater for her children’s educational needs.

SDG5 is hinged upon achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Among the targets for this particular SDG is the advocacy for ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation. The elimination of all harmful practices such as child, early and forced marriage enshrined in this SDG is the core of the present chapter. Clearly, being forced into early marriage is an outright denial of one’s legal and human rights, hence infringing on gender equality, social and economic empowerment for the young women. It is a paradox that some poor families coerce the girl child to get married while underage so as to escape from poverty, however, the harsh reality of the matter is that most child brides remain entangled in both intellectual and economic impoverishment. Usually, the young girls forced into early marriage find themselves in a situation that denies them rights to access basic health care and other opportunities in life. Worse still, they will be robbed of their childhood. With little access to education and economic opportunities, they and their families are more likely to live in poverty (Chirongoma, 2016). Neither physically nor emotionally ready to become wives or mothers, the girls are at far greater risk of experiencing domestic violence. With heightened chances of susceptibility to physical injury or exhaustion, incidences of mental health challenges become rife and chances of those marriages breaking down are very high (UNFPA, 2012). Hence, perpetuating the practice of child marriages clearly jeopardizes

the attainment of the five SDGs discussed herein. After expounding on how the practice of child marriage frustrates the attainment of the above mentioned five SDGs, below the chapter goes on to illuminate how the same practice militates against the realization of the precepts of Africa Agenda 2063.

## **Child Marriage: Blurring the Vision of Africa's Agenda 2063**

Africa's Agenda 2063 is presented in the form of seven aspirations/goals charting the hopes and yearnings for a united and progressive African continent. While all the seven goals are crucial for Africa's renaissance and their intertwinement makes them relevant to the lived realities of young women or girls forced into early marriages, however, for the purposes of this chapter, the discussion shall focus only on three of these aspirations. The practice of child marriage clouds the achievement of the aspirations echoed in the African Agenda 2063. At the core of Agenda 2063 is the "desire for shared prosperity and well-being, for unity and integration, for a continent of free citizens and expanded horizons, where the full potential of women and youth, boys and girls are realized, and with freedom from fear, disease and want" (Agenda 2063: 1). As has been reiterated above, most young women and girls forced into early marriage are inevitably deprived of the chance to enjoy the envisaged prosperity and well-being. More so, their full potential for growth would have been quashed. Child marriage also makes them susceptible to a life of perpetual fear, insecurity and the outbreak of diseases finds fertile ground under such circumstances.

The first aspiration of Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 1) envisages a prosperous African continent based on inclusive growth and sustainable development. Attaining this goal by 2063 entails a resolution to eradicate poverty in one generation as well as building shared prosperity through social and economic transformation of the continent. This aspiration also expresses the desire for African people to enjoy a high standard of living, quality of life, sound health and well-being by 2063. Another target included under this goal is to work towards ensuring that by 2063, Africa will be the nerve center of well-educated and skilled citizens. Such a commitment calls for safeguarding against any children missing school due to poverty or any form of discrimination. Furthermore, within this goal is affixed the target that by 2063, African countries will be amongst the best performers in

global quality of life measures. This target can only be attained through implementing strategies of inclusive growth, job creation, increasing agricultural production; investments in science, technology, research and innovation; gender equality, youth empowerment and the provision of basic services including health, nutrition, education, shelter, water and sanitation. All these are well intentioned targets but unfortunately the entrenched practice of child marriage in Africa presents a major stumbling block in attaining the tenets of these targets. Poverty eradication, youth empowerment, assurance of being protected from discrimination, equitable access to education, health and well-being, all these become veiled in obscurity the moment one has been forced into an early marriage. Clearly the practice of child marriage is a mirage of attaining this first aspiration.

The third aspiration (Aspiration 3) towards hewing “the Africa we want” by 2063 envisions an African continent imbued with a universal culture of good governance, embracing democratic values, gender equality, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law. If the practice of child marriage persists, the targets enshrined in this goal will remain as a measly pie in the sky especially for the affected women and girls. It is apparent that forcing someone into child marriage infringes upon their human rights and it is an affront of democracy since it denies the affected women and girls the freedom to choose whom and when to marry. It also frustrates the upholding of gender justice and gender equality principles because in most cases, the marriage negotiations are conducted by elderly men and women who will impose their decisions on the young women or girls. The principles of good governance should entail free and fair decision-making processes which prioritizes protecting the rights of the weaker and vulnerable groups such as the young women and girls who are often forced into early marriages against their wishes. It therefore needs no genius to discern that perpetuating the practice of child marriage in Africa goes against the realization of the third aspiration for Africa Agenda 2063.

The sixth aspiration towards carving Vision 2063 (Aspiration 6) visualizes an African continent whose development is people driven. At the heart of this goal is the vision of Africa relying on the potential of all its people, especially its women and youth, and this is fostered through caring for children. Amidst the targets of this goal is the resolution that by 2063, all African citizens will be actively involved in decision making in all aspects. The realization of this target by 2063 entails Africa transforming into an

inclusive continent where no child, woman or man will be left behind or excluded, on the basis of gender, political affiliation, religion, ethnic affiliation, locality, age or other factors. This goal also envisages the empowerment of all African children through the full implementation of the African Charter on the Rights of the Child. Additionally, it is targeted that youth unemployment will have been eliminated by 2063, and Africa's youth will be guaranteed full access to education, training, skills and technology, health services, jobs and economic opportunities, recreational and cultural activities as well as financial means and all necessary resources to allow them to realize their full potential. Another target inscribed in this goal is the vision that by 2063, young African men and women will be the path breakers of the African knowledge and society whilst contributing significantly to innovation and entrepreneurship. In this light, it is envisioned that the creativity, energy and innovation of Africa's youth will be the driving force behind the continent's political, social, cultural and economic transformation. Reflecting on this goal and its targets, it becomes crystal clear that abandoning the practice of child marriage in Africa should become everyone's responsibility because if young women and girls remain trapped in this retrogressive practice, they will be inhibited of their potential for creativity, innovation and growth. Child marriage also barricades them from pursuing further education which will limit or deny them any prospects for gainful employment, and this will present a major barrier towards the possibility of becoming pacesetters.

Having articulated how the practice of child marriage is blurring the realization of Vision 2063, the next section of the chapter focuses on discussing the immense power of collaborative efforts in eradicating child marriages in Africa.

## **Collaborative Efforts in Eradicating Child Marriages in Africa**

As has been noted above, forcing young girls into early marriages has devastating consequences for their health, education and wellbeing. In an endeavour to eradicate the abhorrent practice of child marriage in Africa, numerous programs spearheaded by local, regional and international organizations are making some headway. These programmes and initiatives are targeting individuals, religious and community leaders to advocate for a paradigm shift regarding child marriage. For instance, educative programs on the harmful effects of child marriages are ongoing. The focus

on parents and communities is premised on the conviction that once these stakeholders understand the irreparable damage that the practice of child marriage can inflict on girls, this can persuade them to realize the need for abandoning such a practice. Some of the programs aimed towards ending child marriage are being spearheaded by international organizations such as Girls Not Brides, a global movement campaigning to end child marriage in all parts of the globe; Girl Child Network Worldwide, another global movement advocating for the rights of the girl child, Plan International, also a global movement defending children's rights and the Institute For Young Women Development (IYWD). All these noble initiatives are commendable; however, they need to be complemented by local and pragmatic programmes starting from the grassroots.

There is also an urgent need for transforming harmful social norms and perceptions that tolerate inequity in gender roles and responsibilities. This is crucial because gender disparities provide fertile ground for perpetuating child marriages, not only in Africa, but the world over. In view of the fact that some young girls opt for an early marriage as a pathway to escape from poverty and societal stereotypes, it is pertinent that intervention programs focus on proffering alternative girl empowerment strategies. This entails implementing livelihood strategies and income-generating initiatives which build up girls' assets. Such mitigation measures should focus on ensuring that girls can enjoy the childhood to which they are entitled, and have the space to grow, learn and be a girl. Just as important is instilling the notion that every person is endowed with inalienable human rights and should be treated with dignity and respect (UNFPA, 2012).

Cognizant of the harsh reality that 15 out of the 20 countries with the highest rates of child marriage are in Africa, in May 2014, the African Union (AU) launched a first-ever campaign of its kind in Africa to end child marriage. The two-year campaign, organised in partnership with UNICEF and UNFPA focused on 10 African countries; Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Ethiopia, Mauritania, Mozambique, Malawi, Niger, Sierra Leone and Zambia. The vantage point for selecting these ten as focus countries for the campaign was based on their high prevalence rate of child marriage. The main aim of the campaign was to accelerate the end of child marriage in Africa by enhancing continental awareness of the harmful impact of child marriage and by taking appropriate legal, social and economic measures (African Union, 2014). Marking the end of this two-year campaign, in November 2016, the first ever African Union (AU) Girls'

summit dubbed “Ending Child Marriage” was held in Lusaka, Zambia. The ground-breaking event managed to attract over 1000 delegates from across Africa. Among the delegates who attended were traditional leaders, Civil Society Organisations, government officials, activists, television personalities, religious leaders and some leaders from the AU. A number of issues were raised concerning drivers of child marriages and possible solutions. One of the key resolutions made at this summit was to challenge African countries to make a commitment not only to come up with policies and laws to safeguard the rights of the girl child, but to ensure that these policies and laws were adhered to. This was aimed at preparing the ground for shovelling the practice of child marriage into the annals of history (African Union, 2016).

Commenting on the causes, effects and progress made so far in addressing the pervasive practice of child marriage, Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, a Zimbabwean human rights lawyer serving as the African Union Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage at the time of writing aptly put it across as follows:

Across continents and in the regions of the developing world, child marriage occurs at high rates bringing the gravest consequences for the poorest, the least educated and those living in rural and isolated areas. There is evidence of some small shifts of prevalence in a handful of countries, in a few areas, and for some age groups, notably girls under 15. However, the pace and reach of change is neither fast nor far enough (Gumbonzvanda, 2014).

Whilst human rights activists and think tanks of the empowerment programs realize the importance of educating and empowering girls about the far-reaching repercussions of child marriages, they also acknowledge the fundamental need for including men and boys as an indispensable cog for moving the vehicle of change. Gumbonzvanda (2014) poignantly states this point in the following words:

I am looking for male responsibility and accountability and indeed a re-socialisation of boys. Each year, 15 million men are directly responsible for marrying girls under the legal age of marriage, committing crimes of sexual abuse, rape, abductions, and modern forms of slavery and even trafficking. In addition, this is aided and abetted by another circle of men who are either family members, (fathers, uncles, traditional or faith leaders) who give a blessing to such a marriage. I am asking for these men to be responsible adults, fathers and community members. My call goes beyond general involvement for gender equality, but practical action to stop violence against women and girls...We strive for human dignity and human

rights from the womb of patriarchy. Men and boys permeate all the spaces that control power, resources and voices. They make laws and policies, define norms, distribute economic wealth, control women's bodies and make wars. All human beings, all institutions, and all in their daily lives must respect each other; must strive to end discrimination against women and girls. Each and all must strive for gender equality, peace and development (Gumbonzvanda, 2014).

The foregoing citation has been quoted verbatim at length to illustrate the vital importance of male involvement in taking the practice of child marriage to a grinding halt. There is therefore need for concerted efforts in addressing the underlying causes of child marriage such as poverty, entrenched social norms and practices, gender inequality and a lack of protection for children's rights. Hence, families, communities, religious and political leaders, law enforcement agents, educators, essentially all global citizens have a role to play in stemming the tidal wave of child marriage which is threatening to continue wreaking havoc at our doorsteps. Each individual, institution and each sector has a crucial role to play in eradicating the cancerous parasite in our midst. On this note, below the chapter proceeds to present African women's prophetic voices as they denounce the practice of child marriages in Africa whilst proffering ways of transforming norms and values which inculcate life-giving traditions that will unshackle the African girl child from the chains of early marriage.

### **A Clarion Call against Child Marriage: African Women's Prophetic Voices**

As we honour Nyambura Njoroge in this volume, her prophetic voice against social injustices and untiring protests against human rights violations continue to inspire fellow African women in raising voices of lament against the detrimental effects of child marriage in Africa. Njoroge (2014) pinpoints skewed power structures as the furnace where the fire of gender-based violence is kept alive while rearing its ugly head which emits the venomous poison of sexual violence. Resultantly, the practice of child marriage in Africa is engulfed in these numerous violations, hence, she restates the issues in the following words:

Power inequality between women and men - as dictated by tradition, culture, religion, and economic status - gives rise to gendered violence, in-

cluding sexual violence. In some cultures, this includes female genital mutilation, early marriage, sexual trafficking, forced sterilisation, and abortions, and breast ironing (in Cameroon) ... Sexual violence is a crime. It is sinful, and injures the creation in God's image. It violates human dignity, and diminishes life. It should not be tolerated under any circumstance... The social organisation of the family unit is marked by the supremacy of the male, and the legal dependence of children and wives... In Christianity, this supremacy is emphasised through the headship of the husband in marriage, and, consequently, some Churches do not allow women in all ecclesiastical leadership positions (Njoroge, 2014).

As reiterated by Njoroge above, the exclusion of women from domestic, communal and ecclesiastical leadership positions puts them in a precarious position such that major decisions about their lives end up being made by other people, particularly their male counterparts. These power imbalances are a violation of not only humanity created in God's image but it extends to violating the rights of the girl child, putting her on the altar of sacrifice by being forced into child marriage. Affirming the same issues raised by Njoroge in the above citation, Gumbonzvanda, (2014) puts it across as follows:

It is time to end child marriage, simply for the sake of those who are subjected to it. Yet, the costs of inaction extend far beyond the price paid by girls themselves. The costs of inaction, in terms of rights unrealized, fore-shortened personal potential and lost development opportunities, far outweigh the costs of interventions. It is time to end child marriage, also for the sake of families, communities and countries...Such investments are a sure and certain means by which to turn the tides of gender inequality, illiteracy, adolescent pregnancies, and the associated rates of maternal mortality and morbidity. In today's demographic realities, reducing child marriage, delaying pregnancies and securing the rights of young women to education can also help offset population momentum (Gumbonzvanda, 2014).

The issues raised by Gumbonzvanda in the citation above challenge us as responsible citizens of the world whilst spurring us into action as sons and daughter of "Mother Africa" to work tirelessly towards ending the practice of child marriage for our own good and for posterity.

Although Njoroge penned the following words within the context of interrogating the HIV epidemic, they still speak pertinently to the challenge of child marriages in Africa.

Regrettably, a focus on empowering women and girls has been understood by some people to mean that gender discourse refers only to women's issues, rather than to human issues and to the underlying oppressive structures and systems that fuel power imbalances between women and men. Reductionist ways of understanding gender inequality demonstrate either naivety or a deep-seated ignorance of the oppressive and dehumanising nature of patriarchy and sexism in our families, societies and religious communities. It is of great importance that when we engage in gender discourse in theology, in the search for recognition, reconciliation, healing, justice and fullness of life, that we confront the fundamental problems of patriarchy and sexism... (Njoroge, 2009:3)

In the above citation, Njoroge is inviting us as men and women of faith in Africa to go back to the drawing board and rethink the way we have erroneously perpetuated gender-based oppressive norms and values which act as manure in the garden of manipulation and violation of the girl child's rights. Denying justice and fullness of life to the girl child in Africa has brought us to where we are now, the doldrums of child marriage and its attendant vices. Njoroge argues that placing the female folk on a lower pedestal whilst hiding behind the finger of religion and culture is unnecessarily tainting religion and culture as sources for female suffering. It is these myopic tendencies that have been used to rob women and girls their God-given right to make decisions over their lives particularly in matters relating to their sexual and reproductive health. By stripping them of decision-making powers over their lives, young and innocent girls continue being yoked to the heinous acts congruent to the practice of child marriage in Africa. Appealing to the biblical story of creation as a resource for rejecting female subordination and their exclusion from ecclesiastical leadership positions which pushes young girls into the dungeons of child marriage, Njoroge (2009:5) contends that:

From a Christian perspective many women do not accept that patriarchy and other dehumanizing 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).

Hence, Njoroge (2009:5) enjoins us to "provide effective and collaborative leadership that leads to changed lives and changed communities."

Concurring with Njoroge's assertions as discussed above, Gumbonzvanda, (2014) concludes that:

Bringing an end to child marriage, therefore, is a matter of national priorities and political will. It requires effective legal frameworks that protect

the rights of the children involved and it requires enforcement of those laws in compliance with human rights standards. It requires the engagement and support of families and communities who, when they do stand up for their daughters and granddaughters, will win change in otherwise longstanding but harmful social norms and traditions. Most of all, it requires the empowerment of girls themselves; empowerment so that girls are positioned to make decisions at the right time; empowered so that, exercising free and informed consent, girls can make the decisions that will safeguard their own futures, transform their own lives and enable them to live in the dignity to which they, as human beings, are entitled (Gumbonzvanda, 2014).

It is therefore apparent that abandoning the practice of child marriage in Africa will reap more rewards, hence the prophetic voices being echoed by African women as they appeal to all who have endearing ears to respond to their bidding. On this note, the chapter draws to the concluding section.

## Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to honor Nyambura Njoroge by discussing one of the key themes that lies close to her heart, namely, children's rights. In order to achieve this goal, the chapter has interrogated the causes and effects of child marriage in Africa. The chapter has also iterated how child marriage in Africa presents a major impediment for realizing the aspirations/goals for Agenda 2063 as well as the SGDs. Elucidating how the girls involved in child marriages end up in violent marriages, experiencing birth complications, as well as becoming likely candidates for high maternal and child mortality rates, the chapter has raised a voice of lament and protest against the practice of child marriages in Africa. Echoing the voices of fellow African women of faith as we honor our sister Nyambura, this chapter has reiterated that Africa and the world at large is capable of implementing effective interventions and strategic policies to avert the human tragedy of child marriage and to put girls on another path instead, a path for prosperity, progress and peace. It has also been restated that when as Africans we make investments targeted towards supporting married girls as well as coming up with interventions to reduce vulnerability to early marriage for the poorest, least educated and rural or isolated girls, we will be depositing into the banks of social justice and human rights whilst producing benefits for the individual, their families and for

generations to come. As the chapter draws to a close, we listen to the following words of counsel from Njoroge (2006:11) who cautions that “in life especially within Africa, there are many challenges that produce enormous pain, suffering and indignity.” Clearly, being forced into an early marriage as a young and aspirant girl is one of such experiences. As such, she summons us to “provide a prophetic voice to resist and reject social and ecclesiastical injustices and to announce that neither” gender-based violence nor child marriage have the last word (Njoroge, 2009:7). In closing, Njoroge beckons us to:

Advocate for justice and empowerment of girls, with a clear mandate from Jesus, who called to life Jairus’ daughter and demanded that she have food to empower her to embrace the gift of life (Njoroge, 2009:7).

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# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE CONTEXT OF HIV IN TOGO

*Godson Lawson & Ayoko Bahun-Wilson*

## Introduction

After millions of lives have been saved through prevention, care and treatment, after all the battles won over prejudices and ignorance regarding the disease and after all the milestones reached, “AIDS remains the second cause of death for children and adolescents (10-19) in the world and the first in Africa.” (UNICEF 2015). Despite the efforts made, HIV infection seems to be finding a new breeding ground: children and youth. The rapid and unexpected growth of the sero-prevalence rate among children, adolescents and young people provides ample evidence that the levels of risk and exposure to this group of the population are extraordinarily high, exacerbating and promoting inequities and the spread of the infection (Marijke Wijnroks 2013)<sup>1</sup>.

Looking at the magnitude of this situation, Michel Sidibe<sup>2</sup> reveals, “Young women are confronted by a triple threat. They have a high risk of HIV infection, have a feeble screening rate and difficulty in accessing treatment. The world must not forget young women and must engage more to protect them from the devastating impact of HIV.” It is not surprising to hear, in many spheres of the HIV response today, the use of the term “failure” to refer to the challenges faced by actors responding to the HIV & AIDS pandemic.

While it is true that the process of finding solutions to HIV is very challenging, the fact remains that one of the ways to maximise opportunities of success is to first consider the possible obstacles in order to face new challenges, such as the increasing HIV infections among adolescents.

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<sup>1</sup> Marijke Wijnroks was the Interim Executive Director at The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria

<sup>2</sup> Michel SIDIBE was the UNAIDS Director.

## Adolescents, Young people and HIV in Togo

At the launch of the new guidelines regarding HIV and adolescents, the WHO reveals that more than 2 million of adolescents aged 10 – 19 are HIV positive and many of them do not have access to the necessary care and treatment to live healthy and prevent transmission. The number of infected adolescents worldwide has increased by 33% since 2001, while the global infection (adults and children) has dropped to 20% over the same period. Doug McClure who is the UNICEF HIV programme officer admits that about one of 7 new infections involves an adolescent. Unfortunately, every day, 170 adolescents are infected in Central and West Africa. Because of the lack of adolescents-friendly care, services and infrastructure, the mortality rate among young people who are vulnerable to HIV-related diseases has been increasing, while it has dropped in the adult population. The direct impact is that generations of orphans and vulnerable children who are HIV+ are suddenly confronted with survival issues, unplanned by care and support programmes.

Although significant work has been done in response to HIV & AIDS in Togo, making the prevalence rate drop from 6% to 2.2% between 1999 and 2017 (NAC-STI TOGO), the prevalence among the youth and adolescents continues to be a serious challenge. For example, 25% of young women aged 20 to 24 years are married before the age of 18. Further, 5% of the teenagers aged 15 to 19 years give birth every year. Only 12% of married adolescents use a modern method of contraception. This rate is the same with young women aged 20-24. Statistics show that between 2013 and 2015, there were 374 cases of early pregnancy among schoolgirls (Junior Secondary School 1 to Senior Secondary School 3). This statistic is alarming and requires urgent action. This situation pushed the Togolese government to consider adolescents as a vulnerable and marginalised category in the global population. To better reflect on the problem, there is need to identify enabling factors of the adolescents' vulnerability vis-à-vis HIV.

### Factors that lead to the vulnerability and marginalisation of adolescents

In addition to the weak health system linked to poverty in sub-Saharan African countries, the rapid and unexpected increase of HIV prevalence

among adolescents and young people is related to various reasons. These include:

### **Lack of education on sexuality**

The persistence of taboos on sexuality and sexual facts, as well as lack of communication between principal actors of socialisation<sup>3</sup> of adolescents are today major risk factors for HIV infections in adolescents who will not have been adequately prepared to confront the challenges related to this stage of their lives. In fact, parents often forget that at the adolescence stage of development, sexuality is influenced by multiple factors. These include peers, the media and many other factors. During this period, adolescents do not always adhere to social codes and dictates. Instead, they can adopt or reject these social dictates according to the pressure they receive from their peers.

Moreover, it can easily be seen that during this period of “quest for sense” (Ka Mana 2006), adolescents and young people have margins of freedom and pro-activeness which enable them to meet the socially prescribed roles and their reality. In other words, they compose the sense and rules of their relationships based on available norms and symbolic resources, the social status and the available moral authorities and “morality doers” that care for their salvation, wellbeing and health. Based on this scenario, elements of socialisation to sexuality reveal that when it comes to love and sexuality, adolescents are confronted with normative messages which are somehow contradictory. These messages force them to view their relationships in one way or the other and push them into romance, transgression or conformity, passion or distance, risk or prudence. This period is at the same time a period of “true faithfulness” to one’s partner because of the adolescent principles of exclusive love and sex. As a result, betrayal or suspicion of having been betrayed is reason enough to end the relationship (Le Gall, Le Van 2010).

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<sup>3</sup> The first actors in the socialisation of children are parents and families.

## Rape, Sexual violence and HIV

The issue of rape and sexual violence is at the heart of adolescents' vulnerability to HIV. In Gbodjome, a small village in the Lake County, Togo, it has been revealed that from the year 2014 to 2015, fourteen girls were raped, and seventy-seven cases of violent treatment of young boys and girls were also reported. Of the seventy-seven, thirty-two victims were girls and forty-five of the victims were boys. In the year 2015, there were nine cases of children who were raped, and these children's ages ranged from 8 to 12 years. In March of 2018, of the sixty cases that were reported to court, fourteen were linked to paedophilia, seven had to do with rape and similar offenses. This data reflects the statistics at the national level and Vincent PITCHÉ<sup>4</sup> confirms;

adolescents and young people are really vulnerable just by looking at the rate of undesired pregnancies among the youth and the frequency of sexual and gender-based violence faced by women and young girls.

Unfortunately, these aggressions, abuses and sexual violence often occur in contexts where the abuser is in a position of trusted authority vis-à-vis the victim. The adolescents are often abused by parents, neighbours, family members, doctors, sports coaches, religious counsellors (pastor, priest / catechist), professor, friend or someone they know. Data have shown that the majority of sexual aggressions are done by someone well known to the victim. The abuser/rapist often uses verbal pressure and/or threats during the aggression. These abuses happen in schools (restrooms, classes, teachers' hall), on the way to school and at teachers' residences.

To illustrate this point further, sexual favours given by students are often a result of the economic power of teachers and other members of the academic staff. The persistence of sexual violence in schools can also be explained by the deficit of female teachers in primary and secondary schools. This has a negative impact on adolescents' mental, psychological and physical health. The immediate consequences can be suicide, mental and physical challenges and risk of HIV and STI infection. Young girls who are victims of violence often show signs of post-traumatic stress syndrome and most experience a decline in their social skills and schools performance.

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<sup>4</sup> Vincent PITCHÉ is a professor of medicine and National Coordinator of the National AIDS Council – Sexually Transmitted Infections in Togo.

Apart from sexual violence, gender-based violence is one of the factors that makes adolescents vulnerable and at risk of HIV infection. In Togo, a study conducted by the Ministry of the Promotion of Women in the year 2010 revealed that the prevalence of gender-based violence against girls aged 9 to 18 is 62.5% for physical violence, 91.9% for psycho-moral violence, 5.5% for sexual violence, 25% for economic violence, 21% for institutionalised violence and 22% for discrimination. These statistics sufficiently reflect the gender inequalities which sometimes constitute an important source of stigmatisation and discrimination.

## Stigmatisation and Discrimination

The fear of stigma and discrimination is very significant in a context where the nicknames given during adolescence and schooling follow throughout. As Augustin Dokla<sup>5</sup> acknowledges, “9% of People living with HIV have been excluded from family activities.” Stigma and discrimination are at the root of the following actions which are currently happening in schools and colleges in Togo:

- The refusal to register a child living with HIV or suspected of being HIV positive
- Non-assistance to a child living with HIV who is injured.
- The refusal to share food, plates with other children during school breaks.
- The lack of attention from teachers to some children.
- Quarantining students whose parents died after a long illness.
- Refusal to buy food from suspected HIV positive vendors.
- Shaming students suspected of being HIV positive.
- Unjustified continual punishment.
- Corporal punishment.
- The use of derogative nick names to students suspected of being infected.

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<sup>5</sup> Augustin Dokla is one of the pioneer activists in the HIV response. He is the President of the Network of Associations of people living with HIV in Togo.

Such a situation creates some kind of “social sorting”<sup>6</sup> which classifies and categorises the “pure” and the “impure” in schools and learning centers among adolescents. It reinforces their social isolation and the consequences from this range from lack of knowledge of the HIV infection, the ignorance of modes of transmission, ignorance of symptoms and absence of compassion for the neighbour.

## Cultural practices and family abandonment

In addition to known cultural practices such as female genital mutilations, collective circumcision with unsterilised instruments, there are other dangerous practices instilled upon adolescents which are:

- Unsafe abortions
- Childbirth at home

The fear of mother-to-child transmission protocol, PMTCT, which systematically dictates an HIV test for pregnant women prevents girls from going to health centers by adopting home delivery. Forced marriages, early marriages or arranged marriages are also some of the cultural practices that put adolescents at risk of HIV infection. The rate of child and teen marriages in Togo is 37% in the rural areas against 19% in the urban areas. The situation is alarming. Almost a quarter of young girls are forced into marriage before the age of 18.

The story of Chefatou, a 15-year-old girl is a perfect illustration of this situation. Chefatou narrates:

I was living in Sokodé with my grandmother. I was in Class 6. One day, a man came to take me with him to Atakpamé. Upon arrival, he told me that I had to stay with a boy I did not know. I told him I did not want to. They beat me and called the boy and his friends to come and pick me. When we arrived in the boy’s house, I was kept in a room with no permission to go out. And every night, the boy would come and have sex with me. I shouted for help, but no one came<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> « *Social Sorting* » is a selection system that actually creates frustrations. It is more observed in the Francophone and French education system. For more information, see “*Discrimination in Education*” in Encyclopædia Universalis France S.A. 2003.

<sup>7</sup> This testimony was recorded by PLAN INTERNATIONAL TOGO in its work to protect children in Togo. The name has been changed to protect the identity of the child.

Chefatou's case is only one of millions of cases of adolescents' suffering and distress and these practices are deeply rooted in beliefs and false ideas on fecundity, the illusion of protecting girls from sexual deviance risk, the fear of unwanted pregnancies and the feeble social status of women. These practices are sometimes supported by religious conceptions which state that "The young girl should have her first menstruation in her parents' house but the second one in her husband's house". Unfortunately, the economic situations of the parents and mainly the resigned attitude of the fathers do not favour the protection of adolescent girls in particular. Adolescents in emergency and precarious situations, for example, during political conflicts, sometimes engage in "transactional sex" to get assistance, money, accommodation or even registration in schools and training centres.

## Tourism and mobility

Precariousness, endemic poverty, instability and mobility are among other sources of adolescents and young people's vulnerability to HIV infection. In fact, many young people instead migrate from the rural areas to the urban areas, particularly the capital city of Lomé. This rural migration involves a large number of young and adolescent girls (6-17 years). These girls usually become house girls/helpers or vendors in the markets and streets (Ségniagbéto 2015, Ségniagbéto and Pilon 2015)<sup>8</sup>. Official data shows that the age of mobility and migration in Togo is around 15 years.<sup>9</sup> Hence, the mobility of children, is sometimes a result of the practice called "*Evi no amégbo*"<sup>10</sup> in which a child is entrusted to a close relative/parent (Ségniagbéto, *ibid*). This practice is usually unsafe for the child involved because they may become victims of violence and sexual

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<sup>8</sup> Ségniagbéto, K. and M. Pilon. 2015. *Les migrations de travail des jeunes filles ouatchis vers Lomé : quelles évolutions depuis la fin des années 1950?* Communication presented at the 6th European Conference of African Studies (ECAS-6), 8-10 juillet 2015, University of Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne et École pratique des hautes études (EPHE), Paris.

<sup>9</sup> *Migration au Togo*, PROFIL NATIONAL 2015, International Organisation Internationale for Migrations, P 5 - 17.

<sup>10</sup> « *Evi no amégbo* » is an old practice deep rooted in the history and sociology of AdjaTado in Togo and Benin. It is a family solidarity chain which imposes to the wealthy the moral responsibility to care for the poor in the family and ensure that they have a future. They are also obliged to do the same for others.

slavery, increasing their risk to HIV infection. Unfortunately, the new African Christian revival trend sometimes legitimises these abuses by using some biblical passages taken out of context so as to make the victims feel guilty.

## Potential Solutions

**Education.** If it is true that prevention efforts should necessarily take into consideration the complexities that lead to variations in the behaviour of adolescents vis-à-vis the risk of the HIV infection, the fact remains that education and training are two of the most essential levers for the empowerment of adolescents. Education is the area where a human community becomes aware of itself. Through education, the community defines its values and purposes, its self-conception of the human being and his or her accomplishment<sup>11</sup>. In the area of HIV prevention among adolescents, the educative approach is always important. Therefore, this process can only be accomplished effectively through dialogue and the educational relationship.

Contrary to Emile Durkheim who considered education as “an action done by adults on those who are not matured enough for social life in order to stimulate, develop in the child, some physical and mental states requested by the political society as globally and the special environment to which he or she is intend to”<sup>12</sup>, education about HIV prevention should use all the explanatory and comprehensive<sup>13</sup> communication channels. Education helps to identify the processes of production of sense which are expressed in the different reasons why young people and adolescents understand their behaviour, express themselves in certain ways. This process cannot be completed efficiently without dialogue and an educational relationship.

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<sup>11</sup> F. E. BOULAGA, *Lignes de résistance*, Editions CLE, Yaoundé, 1999, P. 26.

<sup>12</sup> Emile DURKHEIM, *Education et sociologie*, Paris, PUF, 1966.

<sup>13</sup> Wereferhere to the approach of Max Weber, *Comprehensive Sociology*.

## **Educational relationship: an approach to regain consciousness on HIV prevention among adolescents**

As mentioned by Rimon II who says, “because there is no efficient way to cure AIDS, education and communication are the essential components which can be used”<sup>14</sup>. However, it is not easy to help an adolescent to come out from a difficult situation. There is need to establish a relationship, or a link, hence, the need for an educational relationship. The educational relationship can, therefore, be understood as a dependency link and mutual influence that ensures adolescents’ training and development.

### **Framework of practice**

The educational relationship is practiced within the family, religious settings, school, and in the society. In the family setting, the educational relationship between parents and children transfers values: societal, cultural, spiritual and identity, behavior models of doing, feeling and acting which mark the adolescents’ consciousness and future in his or her personal development. The educational relationship is highly influenced by the principles of collective consciousness as a structuring value and censor of attitudes vis-à-vis HIV. In the social context, the educational relationship between an adolescent and an educator or teacher, shapes the adolescent’s development according to collective values and ideals of the society (Jeanine Filloux, 2015), in relation to the type of citizen or person the society wants to have. If it is true that the path that takes a person from childhood to adulthood is through educational relationships with parents and educators, it is also true that this process provides symbolic aspects that mark the life of the person. Education becomes a cultural fact that ensures the transfer of essential knowledge to maintain and develop the society! From a Christian perspective, educational relationship in HIV prevention among adolescents is a ministry, a Church service where Jesus is at the centre of the action.

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<sup>14</sup> Jose G. “Oying” Rimon II is director of the Bill & Melinda Gates Institute for Population and Reproductive Health and senior scientist, Department of Population, Family and Reproductive Health, at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

## Scope

The Educational relationship is not a movement that emerges *ex nihilo nihil*. It comes and settles between two existing elements: the subject and the educator (Sunday school teacher / teacher). It is a field of action which is purely educational and helps adolescents to:

- Have gained knowledge on HIV, modes of prevention, treatment, stigmatisation and discrimination.
- Know how to rely on stable things.
- Know how to build and have a life project.

It must be recognised that the adolescence period is a stage where rules are broken down and it is only through the educational relationship that the adolescent will find his or her ways of being responsible.

## Objective

The educational relationship aims among other things to:

- establish training and coaching links.
- enable the construction of identity and capacity development of adolescents.
- ensure a benchmarking and sharing function with an ethical approach.
- re-establish trust and friendship among actors.
- develop skills of discerning risks.
- create mutual listening.
- increase chances of a good accompaniment in respect of the adolescents' dignity and identity.
- act to enable change in young people for better social integration.
- empower the adolescent to become aware of his/her future in the society while showing authority, respect of life principles and rules.

From the moment when the educational relationship is formed between two social entities namely the Adult-Adolescent binomial, it is crucial to integrate the dynamic of teamwork.

## Dimensions

**Meeting.** No matter the objectivity given to the educational relationship, it is important to know that it is an intersubjective relationship in which each person's desires are considered. It is based on commitment and educational responsibility. In fact, it is meant to respond to adolescent needs. Consequently, it is important to care for the adolescents in order to prevent any destructive behavior patterns. The educator or teacher will build confidence in the adolescents and by showing them that they can trust their teacher not to betray them. In this regard, J. Rouzel articulates:

in this relationship, the educator is not neutral. He/She not only involves himself/herself, his or her personality, his/her feelings, his or her taste, his/her opinions, his or her passions, self-representation, the representation of others and of the world but also, he or she does it for an external cause. By doing this, he or she professionalizes his or her acts. (Rouzel 2014)

**Exchange.** Considering the fact that the educator or teacher intervenes in the social reality, behavioral and social exchange, it is impossible to function in a relationship which is based on neutrality. Hence, if there is neutrality at this level, it can only be gentle.

**Listening.** "Listening is essentially: availability, welcome, receptivity, a desire to be emotionally tender towards the other and to understand [...] but listening is at the same time keeping a distance. There can be no more listening with an internal space in an absence of differentiation and fusion than in an irreducible separation" (Maurice Capul et Michel Lemay, *De l'éducation spécialisée*). It is important to listen to words but also to gestures, attitudes and silences. Listening enables the adolescent to feel understood, recognised and worthy of interest. The educative work can only be done in intersubjective exchange and can only be pursued in a privileged relational framework of acknowledgement, listening and trust.

**Authority.** Authority here does not necessarily mean power, domination, and commandment. It is rather a capacity to be able to choose and do what pleases. In fact, it is not because one has authority that one has the divine rights to condition or submit to obedience. This would not work with adolescents.

**Decision-making power.** The educator or teacher cannot perform without parents' consent because parents are naturally custodians of parental authority over their child. Parents should not feel left out regarding their

children's lives, for example, for catechism meetings, youth gatherings, and so on.

**Empathy.** The educational relationship requires an empathetic attitude; this means an ability to identify oneself with others through emotions, by being careful to avoid pity. It is, therefore, imperative for the partners in the educational relationship to keep some distance. The educational relationship is everywhere and at all the times, and the educator must stay tuned, at all times of everyday life.

**Presence.** The educator should be present in the educational process of the adolescent although he must also keep some distance.

**Distance.** The distance here reflects the opportunity that the teacher gives to the adolescent to independently take responsibilities and assume some leadership initiatives.

**Responsibility.** Notions of responsibility and commitment in educational relationships are closely linked to ethics and morals; here the manipulation of conscience should be avoided.

To these factors, it is important to add respect, in the perspective of Kant (cf. Muglioni 2008). This refers to the conviction that every human being has an intrinsic value, which is based on his human status although some of his or her reactions may sometimes seem incorrect. He or she must also afford the adolescent freedom by leaving him or her alone to face his or her conscience (D. W. Winnicott).

## Limitations

In the educational relationship involving adolescents, it is important to avoid indifference, lack of interest, too much empathy, alienation, avoidance, abandonment, fusion, transfer, suffocation, self-centrism, codification of behavior and total distance.

## Jesus and the woman of Samaria to illustrate the educational relationship<sup>15</sup>

### *Background*

We are here in the city of Sychar, which is the Shechem from of the Old Testament, in Samaria, a province of Palestine. The history tells us that between the Jews and Samaritans; there was some rivalry close to hatred that nothing could change. Four or five centuries ago, Samaritans were people whom the powerful King of Babylon Nebuchadnezzar had transplanted to Palestine. These people had adopted the Jewish religion, worshipping the same God but in their own way. Rather than going to Jerusalem, where the temple of Yahve is, they constructed their own temple on the Mountain of Samaria. This enabled them to remain autonomous. Between them, there was an old inherited cultural and racial hatred to the extent that a Jew, rather than taking any shortcut through Samaria to reach any place, would prefer to use the longest route. It is also true that the Samaritan people did the same.

### *Meeting*

#### *ACT I: Breaking the barriers*

To ensure the success of the education on the HIV prevention among adolescents, there is a need to meet them. While Jews used to turn away from Samaria, Jesus went there voluntarily. Jesus is above barriers, and mistrust (no child or adolescent is to be neglected even if he or she is temperamental).

#### *ACT II: the KAIROS, the right moment*

If the Lord had come 15 minutes earlier, it would have been 15 minutes early. If he had arrived 15 minutes later, it would have been 15 minutes too late. Jesus arrived just in time. It is, therefore, important to find the right and opportune time (Karios) to decode the challenges facing an adolescent.

#### *ACT III: the peculiarity of the meeting*

With Jesus, each case is special; each child of God is unique. The woman of Samaria came alone to Sychar. Jesus is the friend of publicans, people who are deemed immoral. He always uses an inclusive approach. Every child is special and should be dealt with accordingly in particular and singularly.

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<sup>15</sup> The word: the woman of Samaria is used instead of the Samaritan woman because of personal theological positions.

*ACT IV: Leave the tag*

“How is it that thou, being a Jew, asketh drink of me, which am a woman of Samaria?” (Verse 9: KJV). The educational relationship should promote our living together beyond our differences. Jesus said: “But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst” (Verse 14: KJV). Jesus’ approach is always perennial. He always offers something sustainable, something which does not dissipate the next day leaving one with feelings frustration. Thus, what Jesus gives, will be an everlasting source. The educational relationship should therefore have lasting effects and changes upon the adolescent’s life.

***Honesty and Truth***

Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship! (Verse 20-22: KJV).

The educational relationship with adolescents requires breaking of taboos about sex and sexuality so as to open the dialogue about these issues with adolescents.

***Facilitator***

I know that Messias cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things (Verse 25: KJV).

At the moment when the woman of Samaria acknowledged the need for mediation between her and God, it is at that moment that Jesus said, “I that speak unto thee am he”. The educational relationship should be rooted in faith and the conviction to receive what is missing.

***Quake<sup>16</sup> and disruption***

The woman then left her water-pot! (Verse 28: KJV).

What an upheaval! What a quake! Why filling again, the water-pot? Why continuing all these unnecessary activities? Once the response is found, there is an urgency to share the news. The woman of Samaria went to look

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<sup>16</sup> The quake here must be understood in Soeren Kierkegaard's philosophical approach, that is to say a spiritual act of faith.

for others, she goes to the people she usually avoids, she crosses the village, something she has not been able to do for so long. She breathes and inspires respect, everything in her shows that she has a new source of life. She is no longer the same woman. There is something that has changed in her life. She is no longer driven by taken-for-granted prejudices. Her new self helps her to overcome her prejudices and to take control of her own situation.

This should be the ultimate goal of the educational relationship. Adolescents must be able to organise themselves and to create new synergies for action. They must narrate their own testimonies, testimonies that are characterised by success and overcoming their burdens. They should be able to proclaim, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves" (Verse 42: NRSV).

## Conclusion

Children and adolescents are not only a precious resource in our communities but also a target on which experts in the HIV response are called to build their strategies if they want to achieve the set targets. The urgency of the situation calls to all the actors involved to change their mental software,<sup>17</sup> as suggested by Théophile Obenga in his theories of development in Africa. It must be clear today that, as far as adolescents are concerned, the scientific messages given by experts and specialists on HIV are often dry and unappealing. These messages do not consider the dimension of adolescents' sexual development during their questioning period. This is the period when they are curious to know more about sexuality. Yet, a time is coming and has now come when the truth needs to be told the way it is duly, crudely and nakedly to enable adolescents to make their own choices rather than putting them in a "state control system" by following out-moded concepts. This is why in this chapter the educational relationship model is presented as a flexible approach and a more effective alternative to the traditional HIV preventive methods.

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<sup>17</sup> Théophile Obenga, is Congolese, Egyptologist, linguist and historian. He is a disciple of Professor Cheik Anta Diop.

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# **SEXUALITY AND SEXUAL PURITY: RELIGIOUS LEADERS' PASTORAL RESPONSE TO HIV & AIDS AMONG CHRISTIAN ADOLESCENTS**

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## **Background**

There are assumptions that the church is not a space to address or teach about sexuality, HIV & AIDS. Teaching adolescents about sexuality and HIV is often confined in the family and traditional cultural community spaces. The church is often held responsible for her silence and ambiguity on adolescent sexuality and HIV prevention. Following an exploratory design, qualitative data for this study were collected through structured in-depth interviews and informal conversations with eight religious leaders from Johannesburg metropolitan serving in African Independent Churches (AICs) and mainline churches. The aim of this study was to explore and describe how religious leaders negotiate issues of adolescent sexuality in a context of HIV prevention in their churches. Findings were analysed by integrating pastoral care particularly the 'guiding' function and feminist cultural hermeneutics theory to discuss efforts made by religious leaders to address adolescent sexuality and HIV interventions. Findings highlight that religious leaders do not have specific approaches to negotiate adolescent sexuality in an HIV & AIDS context and they use sexual purity and morality theology to justify this. Their theologies of sexual purity and morality are often used to exclude adolescents, differently abled persons and queer sexualities from enjoying the gift and pleasures of sexuality.

## Introduction

Increasing interconnectedness and globalisation have had a huge impact on adolescent sexuality. Adolescence is a stage where the body goes through a lot of changes that include sexual and hormonal changes. According to Stanely Hall (1844-1924), adolescence is a period of Sturm and Drang (Storm and Stress), “when all young people go through some degree of emotional and behavioural upheaval before establishing a more stable equilibrium in adulthood” (Arnett 2006: 186). Adolescence refers to those who are between thirteen to nineteen years of age. This age group’s sexuality is highly moralised across the different continents, cultures, religions and social groups. In some cases, particularly traditional conservative cultures and religions, adolescent sexuality is understood in connection to sexual purity, where virginity is used to measure sexual purity both in the secular and religious world. In Christian contexts, the understanding of sexuality is influenced by St Augustine (354-430)’s negative views about sex and sexuality as a source of disorder, corruption and “shame, which attends all sexual intercourse” (Augustine 1952: 88). Sexuality in Christian contexts is generally understood from morality measured by heterosexual marriage and the ideology of purity. Christian adolescents and those not yet married are expected to abstain from sex and reserve it for marriage (Eriksson 2011: 22), because marriage is sacred. Church theology on sexual purity is generally consistent across the various denominations. It condemns sex outside marriage, both girls and boys, women and men are expected to only have sexual intercourse with their marital partners in heterosexual marriages. In the Roman Catholic theology, sexual intercourse is meant for procreation in a context of marriage and any sexual act outside marriage is a serious sin (Salzman & Lawler 2008: 11; cf. Salzman & Lawler 2012). Although adolescents are aware of these teachings, they are not implementing them as the church teaches due to the different values about sexuality that they are exposed to. The catechism classes that adolescents attend in the mainline church do not explicitly address adolescent sexuality or HIV & AIDS. The focus of catechism classes is often divorced from the reality of the adolescents.

Scholars of adolescence and sexuality studies have written extensively on perspectives of adolescents on sexuality and the factors that influence their perspectives (Dykstra 2013, cf. Maluleke 2007; Rudolfsson, Tidefors, Stromwall 2012). Teenage pregnancies and HIV prevention seem to top the debate on adolescent sexuality (Maluleke 2007; Ericksson 2011, Moyo 2004).

Issues of sexuality are crucial when extending pastoral care to adolescents in the context of contesting and contradictory sexual information. Technology has changed the way sexual values and norms are instilled in adolescents because it exposes them to different information about sexuality. Adolescents learn the way of life from the internet, media, peers, schools and families. Thus, the church is overwhelmed, because often, sexuality education from the internet, media and peers contradicts education from the Bible and church. This leaves adolescents from faith communities confused, traumatised and stressed when it comes to issues of sexuality and HIV prevention. Maluleke's study on adolescent sexuality argues that, in their confusion, adolescents expose themselves to sexual health risks such as unprotected sex and rape (Maluleke 2007: 4).

Sexual health risks are a consequence of the internet, media and peer pressure that encourages adolescents to drive in the fast lane where religious leaders and their use of the Bible which is an ancient book cannot compete. Dykstra confirms this in arguing that adolescents and the clergy come from different contexts, as a result, this makes it difficult for clergy to talk about sex and sexuality, church tradition and culture with adolescents (2013:4). Thus, this chapter seeks to explore and describe how religious leaders negotiate issues of adolescent sexuality in a context of HIV prevention in their churches. The aim is to create an interesting creative dialogue on pastoral care and adolescent embodied sexualities. Qualitative data for this study were collected through structured in-depth interviews and informal conversations with eight religious' leaders from Johannesburg metropolitan. The study purposely recruited eight religious leaders, four from African Independent Churches (AICs), all male, four from different mainline churches, three male and one female. The aim was to get views from at least a balanced perspective of churches. The data were initially collected for a doctoral research project, but could not fit in the project. The findings for this study are analysed through integrating pastoral care particularly the 'guiding' function and feminist cultural hermeneutics theory to describe how religious leaders negotiate issues of adolescent sexuality in a context of HIV prevention.

## Pastoral Care and Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics in the Question of Adolescent Sexuality

“All things are subject to interpretation. Whichever interpretation prevails at a given time is a function of power and not truth.” (*Friedrich Nietzsche*)

Current discourses on sexuality focus on sexual orientation such as being Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Intersexual, Queer (LGBTIQ+) or purity theology such as abstinence from sex. The term sexuality in traditional African contexts is defined in conservative ways. Sexuality may literally mean sex where virginity of girls and unmarried women is emphasised. It is also assumed to mean heterosexuality of humans, where anyone who does not conform to heterosexuality is regarded as unclean and sinful. Conceptually, sexuality encompasses many variables, other than just sex. It is a concept that includes; gender identities and roles, sexual orientation, sex, eroticism, intimacy and reproduction (van Drie, Ganzevoort, Spiering 2014). Sexuality is both socialised and inherent in human beings; it is experienced differently by different people depending on the way they were socialised. Sexuality is not exclusively about sexual orientation, but it is linked to the sociological, biological, psychological and spiritual nature of a being. The Intervention for Support Healing Awareness (IFSHA) (2005:1) understands sexuality as:

“the totality of being human not simply the genital acts, sexuality is concerned with the biological, psychological, sociological and spiritual variables of life that affect personality development and interpersonal relations. It includes one’s self perception, self-esteem, personal history, and personality concept of love and intimacy and body image.”

The IFSHA definition rejects the focus of sexuality on genital acts which contributes to the surveillance of the feminine body and sexual minorities. It defines sexuality as a human variable which encompasses behaviour, relations and body politics. The definition resonates with Moyo’s understanding of sexuality as ontological, in her argument that human beings are sexual beings with sexual needs that are natural, just as hunger related needs (2004: 76). Sexuality is a gift that God gave to creation for both pleasure and procreation through sexual intercourse. Moyo argues that sexual intercourse as a variable of sexuality is a gift given to humanity to be enjoyed by two people who had committed themselves to each other (2004:76).

For many adolescents, sexual intercourse does not mean commitment, but it is a developmental stage that is often abused for pleasure during

their puberty. Chitando (2007:32) articulates that Christianity in Africa does not emphasise sex as a gift for pleasure but it emphasises the procreation part of sex. Therefore, because adolescents are not yet matured for marriage and parenting, the church teaches them to abstain. The main aim for abstinence from sex is to conform to the purity and morality teaching, where sex is accepted only within the confines of marriage. Some of Maluleke (2007: 9)'s findings on the perceptions of sexuality by adolescents reveal that adolescents understood sexuality as physical and emotional development and also as sexual intercourse between a woman and a man.

This study is about adolescent sexuality and health communication in a religious context; therefore, I find the pastoral care function of 'guiding' relevant in studying health related behaviours of adolescents, because adolescents learn and imitate models of behaviour from adults who are mainly their primary role models. Guiding as a pastoral care function encourages the caregivers to 'read the signs of the times' in journeying with adolescents through their confusions and stress. Gerkin (1997) argues that the guiding function directs the religious leader to take the role of an 'interpretative guide.' Interpretative guide according to Gerkin is where a religious leader takes a role of interpreting not only the Christian story, but the "conflicts and pressures, the contradictions and pitfalls, the lures and tendencies toward fragmentation of contemporary life" (1997:114). Osmer (2008) refers to this as the 'interpretative task' of practical theology or sagely wisdom. The interpretative task asks the question of "why is it going on?" In the interpretative task, a religious leader should ask him or herself, 'why should the church negotiate and engage with adolescent sexuality in a context of HIV & AIDS?' Why is theologising adolescent sexuality critical for church theology in a context of HIV? Osmer on the interpretative task says sagely wisdom is applied in relation to thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgement (2008: 82-83). Adolescent sexuality, therefore, is conceptualised and theorised from a sociological and theological perspective where guiding as a pastoral care function is integrated with African women theologians' feminist cultural hermeneutics as conceptualised by Oduyoye (2001) and Kanyoro (2001; 2002). Feminist cultural hermeneutics explains the intersection of religion and culture on people's conceptualisation of reality at a particular time and within a specific context (Kanyoro 2002). This theory exposes the patriarchal biases embedded in scripture and emphasises the awareness of patriarchal

bias of scripture. It argues that the one right meaning of male, androcentric exegesis cannot support the desires of all humanity to find good news and liberation scriptures (Rakoczy 2004:164). Thus, it stresses the reading of scripture with African eyes in order to sift the liberative from the oppressive (Oduyoye 2001; Dreyer 2011). Integrating guiding and feminist cultural hermeneutics benefits this study in that the combination is able to explain the intersectionality of religion and culture in pastoral care initiatives towards sensitive issues such as adolescent sexuality in a context of HIV & AIDS.

### **Pastoral Care in a Context of Adolescent Sexuality, Sexual Purity and HIV Prevention**

Religious leaders revealed the complexity of adolescent sexuality in pastoral care settings because of the cultural and theological issues attached to understanding sexuality in African spaces. Addressing issues of sexuality publicly is a taboo, both in religion and African culture. Thus, the majority of the religious leaders confirmed that sexuality is not an easy topic to tackle in their pastoral care ministries with adolescents. Therefore, like African traditional culture, religious leaders emphasise sexual purity through emphasising adolescent virginity. Some African cultures, including the Zulu from KwaZulu Natal in South Africa, justify the guarding of virginity as sexual purity and as an HIV prevention strategy. In this study, religious leaders treated adolescent sexuality and HIV as a 'double crisis' for the church.

### **Adolescent Sexuality and HIV Prevention - Religious leaders speak**

All religious leaders in this study linked adolescent sexuality to HIV. On the one hand, AIC religious leaders' description of sexuality focused on sex, immorality, purity and gender roles. On the other hand, the mainline church religious leaders' responses focused on the question of negotiating and raising awareness on adolescent sexuality about HIV prevention. Some religious leaders said they do not speak about sexuality and HIV with adolescents because sex before marriage is sexual immorality. Statements such as, "the Bible is clear that sex outside marriage is promiscuity,

adultery or immorality, sexuality should be taught by parents,” were recurrent. Fear emerged from the religious leaders.

## **Hiding behind the Bible to promote abstinence from sex and HIV prevention**

In questions about their role in guiding adolescents on issues of sexuality and HIV prevention, religious leaders raised mixed reactions. An AIC religious leader said:

In the first-place adolescents are not supposed to engage in sex, the Bible is clear on that, very clear, so if they are infected with HIV or fall pregnant before marriage it is because they have ignored the biblical teaching on sexual morality. I don't talk about sexuality or HIV in my church. That is ungodly.

In agreement, another religious leader from AICs said:

Go to Exodus 20:14 the Bible puts it in very simple words “you shall not commit adultery.” So, because adolescents are not yet married, if they are true Christians, they will be safe from that disease (HIV). This is not something that should be preached about in Church, what kind of church speaks about sex and HIV? That is a sacred space not a social club. Christians should understand and live by the Christian ethos where they are commanded to run away from sin that promotes sexual immorality, they must never engage in sexual immorality or fall pregnant before marriage, it is an unforgivable sin.

These religious leaders understood and linked HIV infection to sexual relations. Their views are based on the idea that HIV is spread through sexual intercourse and ignore other factors that increase adolescents' vulnerability to HIV, such as unequal gender roles and stereotypes. Further, a girl does not fall pregnant on her own: there is a boy or man involved. The AIC religious leaders' responses highlight a gender biased approach. They also seem to believe that Christians must not be infected by HIV, because HIV is an infection caused by sexual immorality or adultery. Some theologians have critiqued this theology for reinforcing stigmatisation of people living with HIV & AIDS (Denis 2003:75). I, therefore, probed for more information on their understanding of sexual immorality. For them, sexual immorality means sex before marriage or sex outside marriage. One of them went to the extreme as he explained sexual immorality in terms of two dogs mating. He said:

Sexual immorality is adultery, and it is disgusting to the church and God's eyes. You see my Ndebele/Zulu Bible from Old to New Testament says "ungaphingi" and "ukuphinga" in our understanding in Ndebele from Zimbabwe or Zulu from South Africa is when two dogs are mating, but not people. You see, God had to put it in this language to show people that it is disgusting! Do you understand me? I am saying it is disgusting! In my church we rebuke such people and put them in holy water for cleansing.

The way this leader interprets sexual immorality is extreme and surely people will be afraid to seek for pastoral care when they are raped. For the two religious leaders, adolescents should be safe from HIV because the Bible commands them to abstain from sex. For them, teenage pregnancy reveals that a girl is not abstaining, suggesting that abstinence from sex before marriage applies to adolescent girls, but not adolescent boys.

All mainline religious leaders who participated in that study have attended a seminary and had university degrees in theology. They also raised the same text that was raised by their AIC counterparts, but they referred to this text in a liberal way. A religious leader from a mainline church said,

As you know that the primary mode of HIV transmission is sex, our duty is to protect the sheep of God from dying, so we need to address this in an empowering and careful way. We need to conscientise our adolescents and youth especially our sisters because they are more vulnerable to HIV and teenage pregnancies. If they can't abstain, they need to use preventive methods like a condom or use other methods of prevention such as being faithful to that one sexual partner. They need to date men whom they trust and men who respect their rights.

Probing further, I asked him if he tells adolescent girls to use condoms and have one trusted faithful sexual partner and why should it be girls who are conscientised more than boys? His response was:

Remember that people come to church to hear the Goodnews about the Kingdom of God and that is what I preach and feed them with. I encourage them to abstain from sex as the Bible teaches, but because I know that they cannot abstain since they have already tasted sex; in our youth meetings I tell them to use prevention measures. Come on my sister! Most of the girls in my youth league have babies, I can't encourage them to abstain, they need to use a condom to be safe, they need to play it safe or otherwise we risk losing them to sexually transmitted diseases. Although I do not have refugee children in my church, but if they come, I will treat them like the other adolescents from my church.

One of the religious leaders from a mainline church said:

I can't just throw scriptures from the Bible at people. My theology is against that, theology taught me to interpret the Bible from a particular context. These days we can't just say abstain because we know it is impossible. We cannot use the Bible to discriminate or to kill. We need to teach a message of liberation that guides the Christian adolescents in protecting themselves from STIs, including deadly diseases like HIV and live life to the fullest free from preventable diseases and death.

The other issue that was raised by mainline religious leaders on abstinence was that abstinence may encourage masturbation.

The truth that we must face as clergy is that technology has made our jobs difficult, our adolescents are exposed to pornography. They are teaching themselves issues of sex. The teachings from the Bible are questioned by adolescents who learn from peer pressure rather than the Bible. These kids tell each other that sex is nice. We cannot run away from this reality, so, rather than giving them half-truths, we need to be explicit. Otherwise, they end up masturbating and becoming addicts. This has serious consequences for their adult sexual life. So rather than demonising sex, in youth gatherings I teach them reality to play it safe by using condoms and enjoy their sexuality. I do not want to be facing a problem of addicts of masturbation in the years to come.

It is evident that AIC religious leaders' use the Leviticus code in the Old Testament to theologise their responses. While counterparts from the mainline church use liberation theology lenses to theologise their responses. The danger of using the Leviticus code uncritically reverses the hard work that has been done by the church in preaching a theology of life in a context of HIV & AIDS. Similarly, using liberation theology uncritically may lead to unrealistic romanticised theology which affects the praxis of the church. The responses above also reveal the significance of theological education for religious leaders. This helps religious leaders to interpret the Bible critically, from a liberation perspective rather than condemnation. Prior studies have identified the connection of adolescents' abstinence from sex to the teachings of the Bible and religious affiliation (Verona & Regnerus 2014; cf. Eriksson 2011). Although using the Bible to promote and encourage adolescents to abstain from sex can be accomplished, the behaviour of the religious leaders is important because adolescents' behaviour is influenced by their primary role models. However, even the mainline church leaders' approach towards masturbation needs to be updated. Further, the above responses do not imply that religious leaders from mainline churches are superior to those from AICs: more work on both sets needs to be undertaken.

## Parents and communal responsibility

Religious leaders expressed that adolescent sexuality and HIV education is a responsibility of parents. AIC religious leaders argued that because the Bible is clear on issues of sex before marriage; teaching adolescents about sexual issues is the responsibility of their families not the church. One of the AIC religious leaders said:

Every family is aware of its responsibility in initiating adolescents into adulthood by teaching and guiding them to have responsible behaviour. For those who are forced to live on the streets without parents, like foreigners from other countries and street kids, the government and social workers should obviously play a role by taking them and putting them in safe places where they will be taught about these things by caregivers and adult community members. It takes a village to raise a child.

In this case, the religious leaders appeared to be influenced by the African context of raising a child. They acknowledged that a child is the responsibility of the whole community. However; the family should play a strong role in influencing and shaping children and adolescents according to the family's norms and values. As a result, one of the mainline church leaders said:

In Africa we say a child reveals who his or her parents are and where he or she comes from, so families and the community at large are aware that guiding their children is their responsibility. The church's role is to sustain the good character and behaviour that is instilled by the family, because a child also reveals the values of the church where that child worships. As much as parents should play a significant role, the church also, as part of the community, must play a significant role.

In this response, religious leaders resonate with caregivers in Chisale (2014) who believed that a child should be guided to responsible behaviour by a family or parents and in the absence of parents, caregivers should guide adolescents to responsible behaviour for the reason that *isikhumba sigqwa sisemanzi* (an animal skin can only be folded when it is still wet) (Chisale 2014: 210). Once a child is grown it will be difficult to guide or instil in him or her ethical and accepted values and norms. This is consistent with Lester's (1985: 25-35) argument that the pastoral neglect of children and adolescents is influenced by stereotypes and cultural myths that children and adolescents are a responsibility of their parents and any initiative directed to these may be interpreted as interfering in

parents' task or intruding in family affairs. Religious leaders from mainline churches agreed with their AIC counterparts that parents should help in teaching and guiding adolescents on sexuality and HIV. Their reason was that because in church adolescents do not come from the same culture, families should initiate their adolescents in their cultural beliefs and the church will play its part of sustaining good behaviour in adolescents. Culturally, adolescents are initiated into puberty by aunts, grandmothers, sisters, uncles, grandfathers and brothers. Different cultures have their own ways of initiating adolescents to puberty by focusing on their sexuality. Some of the Southern African cultures initiate their adolescents into puberty through virginity testing, labia elongation and male circumcision (Buthlezi 2006). It is clear that pastoral care ministry does not have proper vocabulary to teach Christian adolescents on such issues. Talking about sexuality in the church space is regarded as a taboo, because the church attaches shame and guilt to sexuality. Due to this, many religious leaders struggle to address issues of sexuality. Bishop Verryn argued that because pastors are not experts in the field of sexuality and HIV prevention, they should work in collaboration with public health experts to come and do workshops with the youth on issues of sexuality and HIV prevention (Chisale 2014). This underscores that the church can partner with other stakeholders on issues of sexuality and HIV prevention.

## **Fear of suspicion**

Some pastors also expressed a fear of suspicion or being accused of statutory rape by people, given that in some African cultures any form of friendship between a man and woman is looked at with an eye of suspicion. This was mainly raised by male religious leaders who said they were afraid to talk about issues of sexuality because some female adolescents may misinterpret their openness as a motive for a sexual relationship with them. Some also said adults in church do not approve of such openness and if one forces it, the male pastor may be accused of sleeping with young girls or boys in church. A mainline religious leader said:

A colleague was once in trouble in his church because he tried to implement life skills education for both Sunday school and youth leagues. His openness to these leagues created a strong bond between him and these children and rumours started that he is sleeping with these children because of their suspicious behaviour when they are around him. You know our youth if you are friendly to them, they tend to enjoy spending time

with you, when you are around, they will joke with you and some adult congregants see this behaviour as suspicious.

A woman religious leader said she does not mind talking about sexuality and HIV with adolescents, but it is not an easy topic to tackle in a church setting as the motive of talking about sexuality and HIV may be misinterpreted. Fear of suspicion resonates with Lester's (1985:31) findings. Lester also confirmed fear of suspicion as one of the reasons for neglect in the pastoral care of children and adolescents. The woman religious leader also communicated that the challenge the religious leaders face in communicating about sexuality and HIV in church contexts is that sometimes adult congregants interpret this as a motive to encourage adolescents to engage in sex. She said:

Anything to do with sexuality and HIV is always looked at with an eye of suspicion . . . they believe that because I am young and not yet married then I cannot be able to communicate acceptable sexual health behavioural messages to their children. Sometimes we are accused of encouraging the youth to engage in sex or of promoting homosexuality to the youth of the church because of our liberal approach to sexuality. I don't know how many times the parish council has accused me of encouraging the youth to engage in premarital sex and promoting homosexuality in church. You understand that this is not an easy theme to address in conservative and township churches that we serve in.

This response takes us back to African culture, where it is believed by some cultures that only adult married women can counsel and guide young girls, hence, the Nguni saying, "*indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili*" (wisdom is learnt from elders), which means that experience is the best teacher. I believe that young and unmarried pastors are able to break the influence of peer pressure among adolescents. From the above responses, it seems that the challenge that religious leaders face in their churches is resistance by adult congregants who are against transparency on issues of adolescent sexuality and HIV. Religious leaders find themselves caught in between old-fashioned adult members who drive on the slow lane of traffic and digital natives or adolescents who drive on the fast lane of traffic. The two generations' ideologies of sexuality and HIV clash as the former is resistant to change and the latter moves with the signs of the times.

## **Pastoral Care in a context of Adolescent Sexuality and HIV Prevention**

Issues of sexuality and HIV among adolescents require the evoking of the guiding function of pastoral care. Guiding from a pastoral care context, according to Lartey (2003:65) enables the guided people to use available and personal resources to protect themselves from a crisis. In a context of adolescents, guiding means leading, directing and showing the rightful path. Religious leaders, as assets and resources of the church, can play a critical role in guiding adolescents to understand issues of healthy sexual behaviour in the context of HIV. Adolescents are at high risk of STIs. A study conducted by Mahati (2015:183) with unaccompanied migrant minors highlight that some adolescent migrants use sex as a survival strategy. This means that pastoral care cannot help but engage with adolescents on issues of sexuality. Oppressive biblical and cultural interpretations weaken pastoral care interventions in contexts of adolescent sexuality and HIV prevention. Thus, through the pastoral care ministry, the church should engage in dialogue with adolescents on “sexual questions and interests often deemed unsafe and unspeakable by church and culture . . .” (Dykstra 2013: 4).

The guiding function of pastoral care can learn from the traditional and cultural approach where aunts and uncles guide adolescents to sexuality for them to understand right and wrong sexual behaviours. The Bible is and should be a tool of guidance and decode a contextualised message that is relevant to people’s contexts. The challenge that religious leaders face is that they interpret the Bible through patriarchal and homophobic lenses. The problem with this is that male or patriarchal interpreters want to convey a message that upholds their status in society (Masenya (ngwana’ Mphahlele) 2003: 115). Masenya (ngwana’ Mphahlele) (2003: 115) argues that it is a responsibility of the affected to reinterpret the Bible in a more empowering way, particularly in context of HIV. Pastoral care ministry calls upon religious leaders to be facilitators of liberation in reinterpreting the Bible, where interpretation should be through the lenses and lived experiences of the reader, as advocated by feminist cultural hermeneutics. The delaying of sexual debut for adolescents in AICs is not only based on biblical interpretations but patriarchy since some AICs marry off adolescent young virgins or non-virgins to older married men in polygamous marriages (Musevenzi 2017: 192). As a result, some the AICs enforce patriarchy in their churches by interpreting the Bible literally,

and in ways that feed and benefit the patriarchal egos of the leaders of those churches (see also the chapters by Tsara & Siwila and Vengeyi in this volume).

## **Addressing Adolescent Sexuality in Pastoral Care**

Adolescent sexuality is highly moralised through the sexual purity theology. This makes adolescents more vulnerable to HIV infections because the church is in denial and fears to accept that adolescents are sexually active and diverse. The denial is due to that sex is regarded as being confined within marriage and premarital sex is considered as immorality according to church teachings (Mashau 2011). The findings from this study highlight that religious leaders conform to a theology that condemns premarital sex and is informed by purity theology. Purity theology teaches about the purity of the body, which should not be polluted by sin physically and spiritually. This is because of the emphasis that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, as preached by Paul to the Church of Corinth (1 Cor. 6:19). Because they are not yet married, adolescents are expected to stay pure sexually and spiritually. Adhlakun (2016: 5) writes from a Pentecostal theology perspective in arguing that churches teach that God makes no provision for premarital sex or fleshly pleasure in the Bible. Christians in some of these churches are forbidden from having a boyfriend or girlfriend as it is said that this leads to sexual immorality and is a leeway to lust. Due to these beliefs, many religious leaders find themselves caught in-between reality and religion. Reality says the church finds itself in a changing context that requires flexibility, adaptability and contextuality. In such a scheme, religion says that the Word or Bible does not change, and the Word is infallible or African traditional religion says culture is static. All this calls for critical hermeneutics. Although the Word is infallible, the interpretation of the Word is fallible. Thus, one has to interpret between the Word and hermeneutics. African women theologians argue that the Bible and culture are double-edged swords for women and other marginalised communities because the two are used to liberate, or oppress (Kanyoro 2002). Thus, African women theologians and feminist theologians coined different biblical and cultural hermeneutical tools to interpret scripture in relation to contemporary social and spiritual issues affecting women and marginalised communities. These include feminist cultural hermeneutics that stress that women must read and interpret the

Bible through African lens and distinguish and extract from it what is liberating (Oduyoye 2001:11) and Bosadi (womanhood) hermeneutics that challenges the disempowering notions of womanhood as embedded in African cultures and the Christian bible (Masenya (ngwan'a Mphahlele) 1998). Thus, in addressing adolescent sexuality in religion and society, feminist cultural hermeneutics should be applied.

### **A reinterpretation of purity in adolescent sexuality, HIV prevention and pastoral care**

Church praxis through pastoral care ministry cannot ignore that adolescents need guidance about their sexuality. Religious leaders are key in informing and shaping the sexuality of congregants and communities surrounding their churches. Religious leaders in this study seemed to have been informed by patriarchal beliefs. This confirms Eriksson's findings. According to Eriksson (2011: 41), religious leaders that participated in her study were informed by patriarchal norms that burden girls, they implied that girls were supposed to be taught about sex and HIV prevention. Moyo (2004: 73) laments the patriarchal standpoint of sexuality as she argues that sexual rites and sexual education in religious institutions or faith-based communities suggest that women should be taught about sex and sexuality, while men know how to do sex. This is a pastoral concern where pastoral leaders should integrate feminist cultural hermeneutics in their pastoral care ministry to reject theology that condemns and kills, and campaign for theology that promotes liberation and life. Christ protected life, in John 10:10, Christ said 'I have come so that all will have life and have it to the fullest' (John 10:10).

The perception of linking HIV to sex is discouraged for assuming that everyone living with HIV is promiscuous. It is scientifically proven that sex is not the only cause of HIV infection, some were born with the infection, some were infected through accidents and other ways. Thus, religious leaders' connection of adolescent sexuality to sexual purity in a context of HIV is harmful and destructive and cannot be accepted. Rakoczy (2002:5) reminds the church, theologians and all Christian communities that their belief in Christ challenges them to forge a positive theology of HIV & AIDS that is life affirming. This then requires the idea of sexual purity to be revisited and reinterpreted as the theologies of sexual purity are negative and contrary to affirming life. Additionally, the integration of

feminist cultural hermeneutics to pastoral care contextualises pastoral care in contexts of cultural and human diversity. It confirms that rather than condemning sexual diversity through sexual purity theology, pastoral care ministry should promote theologies of liberation, where sexuality is celebrated and enjoyed rather than controlled and condemned. Religious leaders in all churches in Africa should embrace conversations about sexuality and sexual diversity in church spaces and allow adolescents to freely speak about their sexuality and HIV prevention choices. This will create a space where sexuality and HIV are discussed in public like any other social and health issues. The idea of sexual purity is a myth, but sexuality is a reality. Therefore, other than focusing on sexual purity, pastoral care ministries should focus on theologising sexuality from a liberational approach, where people are given the choice to have authority over their sexual bodies.

Positive and life affirming theologies of sexualities are able to emerge from people's lived experiences if they are allowed to reinterpret sexuality and HIV from their lived experiences. Such a space can be used to disrupt patriarchal hermeneutics of sexuality, where all bodies are expected to conform to the sexual purity myth as theologised and interpreted by patriarchal and misogynist gate keepers. A reinterpretation of sexuality should remove the shame and guilt that is attached to sexual diversity, premarital sex and HIV dialogues. The emphasis on sexual purity limits human freedom in exploring and enjoying their sexuality. Sexuality is a gift that is given to humanity by God, where God allows humanity to explore their sexual bodies. This gift is not confined only to heterosexual marriages and able-bodied people nor is it age restricted. Adolescents, differently able-bodied and LGBTI communities should be allowed to enjoy this gift responsibly, as it is God given. Pulling the sexual purity card means that those who do not conform to heteronormative marriages are not able to enjoy sex. It also means that the differently able-bodied persons who are assumed to be asexual and considered not fit for marriage by society (Goyal 2017: 140) are not able to enjoy sex, if sex is confined to able-bodied heterosexual marriages. Furthermore, it means that victims of rape do not fit in the sexual purity identity. This alone exposes the weakness of the sexual purity theology. Sexual purity theology excludes and divides humanity, as a result, I argue, in agreement with Valenti (2009:25), that sexual purity is a myth that is used to protect patriarchal ideologies of sexuality.

Sexual purity theology also condemns fornication, premarital or extra marital sex, pornography, prostitution and sexual behaviours not conforming to the teachings of the church (Adelakun 2016:5). Valenti (2009:24) rightly argues that sexual purity is both a myth and a complicated lie, used to control women and queer sexualities. Her argument unveils the androcentric and misogynist interpretations of scripture. Sexuality then is often feminised and queered, because androcentric hermeneutics perceive sexual purity as a women, girls and marginalised sexualities' agenda. I, therefore, argue that pastoral care should be able to disrupt androcentric sexual purity hermeneutics by conscientising all humans, including adolescents, queer and different able-bodied sexualities on their right to responsibly enjoy and celebrate their sexualities. Masturbation as a sexual act helps humans to explore and understand their bodies by knowing them better without the pressure of pleasing another person. Masturbation has advantages for adolescents since it can be used to prevent teenage pregnancies, unwanted pregnancies and sexual transmitted infections (STI) such as HIV & AIDS. It also protects those who may be humiliated by virginity testers if they are no longer virgins.

Non-penetrative sex such as masturbation is accepted in some African traditional cultures such as Nguni traditions and is known as *ukusoma*, *Ukuhlobonga* or *Ukumentsha*. *Ukusoma* is the preferred sexual performance in contexts of HIV prevention and unwanted teenage pregnancies (Mchunu 2005). Like masturbation, *ukusoma* is non penetrative sex where two people satisfy each other sexually without penile penetration. This sexual practice is encouraged in cultures where virginity of young girls is emphasised, in a context of HIV and teenage pregnancies *ukusoma* is promoted (Buthelezi 2006). It allows adolescents to understand the changes in their bodies while satisfying their sexual desires without the risks of HIV and teenage pregnancies. Due to the availability of alternative ways of enjoying sex without penetration, I argue that sexual purity theology should be reinterpreted in a liberative way to embrace the changing times. Unmarried women contest the sexual purity theology by resorting to sexualities that are invisible to the gaze of the church and society (Kandela 1996: 1615). Their contestations show the limitation of sexual purity theology because surveillance and policing are on the genitals of a girl and woman than on the character, behaviour and conduct of a person. Valenti (2009) rejects the ideology of sexual purity as illogical because it focuses on feminine and queer sexualities. As a result of this, I suggest that sexual purity theology should shift its focus from feminine and queer sexualities

and be imagined from a human behavioural standpoint. An imaginative of theology of sexual purity that targets human behaviour and character will be able to condemn those who cause sexual harm to others, such as rapists. This then takes me to my next discussion where I seek to reinterpret adolescent sexual morality, HIV prevention and pastoral care.

## **A reinterpretation of morality in adolescent sexuality, HIV prevention and Pastoral care**

As much as the church focuses on morality, the teachings of morality differ due to the diverse contexts churches are situated in. The theme of sexual morality and HIV prevention emerged from all religious leaders. For religious leaders, sexual morality, purity and HIV prevention are intertwined. One has to conform to the theology of sexual morality and purity to avoid HIV infections. This theology has been condemned by theologians for stigmatising those living with HIV & AIDS (Phiri 2003; Denis 2003). It is surprising that some religious leaders who participated in this study still enforce this theology to children, adolescents and the whole Christian community. Morality theology has been used as a quick fix to HIV & AIDS challenges and it is used in the current contexts to silence arguments on sexual diversity.

Morality theology is problematic because those who conform to the conservative hermeneutics of morality believe that they must not be concerned about HIV & AIDS. It clearly emerges from religious leaders that the conservative theology of sexual morality and purity is used as an HIV prevention strategy and excuse not to address sexuality in church spaces. This raises a critical ethical question of whether the moral aspect of sexuality can be used as an HIV prevention strategy or to police and control sexualities of those not yet married. My argument is that although sexuality and HIV are linked, this link should be carefully addressed, because treating HIV as a consequence of sexual immorality condemns those who live with HIV. Moreover, using sexual morality theology to police and control those that are not married stigmatises and condemns victims of rape, queer and different able-bodied sexualities. The pastoral care ministry should be able to reinterpret morality in order to create a liberative and an inclusive society. Biblical texts of morality should be interpreted through the eyes and lived experiences of different ages and diverse sexualities.

Mashau (2011) perceives premarital sex as immorality and discusses it from a genital surveillance rather than ethical behaviour and character perspective. My contention is that the sexual morality argument is conservative and overlooks the reality that in this day and age there are some people who are not interested in getting married due to the dangers associated with marriage, such as gender-based violence and femicide. Others are just not interested due to personal or career endeavours; how then can we use the sexual morality theology to deny enjoying God's gift of sexuality? In this case, heterosexual marriage cannot be used to build an argument on sexual morality. Instead of condemning and excluding people from enjoying the pleasures of sex, pastoral care should read the signs of the times. It should reject theologies that define marriage and HIV prevention as an antidote of sexual immorality. This is because immorality is an attribute of action and behaviour. It defines the right and wrong behaviour and actions to God's creation. The right behaviour is to love God with one's everything and one's neighbour as oneself. For me this is morality that is justified and defended by Jesus. Wrong behaviour is behaviour that does not display loving God and your neighbour. The question of sex and sexual morality has made it difficult for the church to talk about sexuality in history, and today the church still struggles to debate about issues of sexuality (Black 1997). This silence has made it difficult for the church to preach the Gospel of love.

## Conclusion

The findings of this chapter highlight that religious leaders' perceptions about adolescent sexuality in the context of HIV prevention is based on sexual purity and a theology built on morality. Religious leaders who participated in this study linked sexuality to HIV prevention, adopting the theology that some scholars have worked hard to deconstruct. This is a theology that argues that HIV is a punishment by God for sexual immorality. By integrating the pastoral care function of guiding and feminist cultural hermeneutics as coined by African women theologians, this chapter argued that conservative sexual purity and morality theology cannot be justified as it fails to read the signs of the time. A theology that ignores the signs of the times tends to exclude other people, such as adolescents, queer and differently able-bodied persons' sexualities. The chapter argued that since findings from religious leaders confirm that adolescents are

sexually active, therefore, using sexual purity and morality theology should be reinterpreted from the lived experiences of adolescents. Thus, pastoral care should be sensitive to the lived experiences of adolescents. This implies that rather than focusing on negative aspects of sexuality, pastoral leaders should enter into their space and journey with them, without condemning them, since they have a choice to exercise their sexual freedom. Adolescents need guidance on experiencing a sense of agency as they explore their bodies and sexualities. Sexual purity and morality cannot be used to control HIV & AIDS: there is need for a revolutionary theology, such as that articulated by Nyambura that reminds humanity to love God and their neighbour.

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## RE-READING AND CONTEXTUALISING MANU IX: 2, 3-2: A BOTSWANA WOMAN'S PERSPECTIVE

*Elizabeth Pulane Motswapong*

### **Background**

After more than fifty years since Botswana gained independence (from 30 September 1966), one would expect Batswana women to be finally independent and living their dream. This is because the majority of them are educated and hold influential positions of responsibility across the country. However, this is far from being a reality because the majority of women continue to experience violence. Tswana law and customs continue to be a catalyst in gender-based violence in Botswana. Women continue to be victimised by the very people who should be protecting them. The sad part is that men feel justified in abusing women because they contend that culture allows them to do so. The way these women are treated can be compared to The Laws of Manu IX: 2, 3-2, hence, this chapter's reading of the text with Tswana lens. Manu IX: 2, 3-2 states, "Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. 3. "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence." The chapter argues that this is the harsh reality faced by many Batswana women in their day-to-day life. It is this lack of independence which has translated into violence on the part of men, because they feel justified to abuse women. In other words, most Batswana men have a sense of entitlement and ownership on Batswana women. It is the intent of this chapter to re-read Manu and contextualise it in Botswana with the hope to encourage society to take responsibility and stop hiding behind religion, especially African Traditional Religion and Hinduism respectively.

## Introduction

Nyambura Njoroge has dedicated her personal and professional life to the struggle for gender justice. Central to her approach has been her conviction that religions are deeply patriarchal and that men have appropriated sacred texts to justify their oppression of women. The Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle) has taken up the quest to examine the portrayal of women in religion. This has been achieved mainly through an analysis of African Traditional Religions, Christianity and, to a less extent, Islam. However, Africa is now home to numerous religions and religious ideologies.

This chapter contributes to the key theme of the Circle by focusing on the images of women in a selected sacred text in Hinduism, namely, the Laws of Manu. The chapter maintains that the images of women in this ancient text are relevant for understanding the struggles of women in contemporary Botswana. The chapter begins by outlining the context of the Laws of Manu. This is followed by sections that reflect on themes relevant to appreciating the status of women in contemporary Botswana in the context of the stipulations found in the Laws of Manu. The chapter concludes by calling upon the judiciary in Botswana to be more proactive in promoting the full rights and dignity of women, otherwise the disempowering images of women found in the ancient Laws of Manu will continue to be true in our own time.

## The Laws of Manu: An Overview

Manusmriti, also known as the Laws of Manu, is the earliest work on Brahmanical dharma in Hinduism. It is the most important and authoritative Hindu Law Book (Dharmashastras) which served as a foundational work on Hindu jurisprudence in ancient Indian society. The Laws of Manu are seen as a projection of an ideal society and ideal human conduct which forms the basis of establishing not just an orderly society, but *rta* (cosmic order), as well. In order to promote these ideals and enforce divine will, the Laws of Manu propose numerous laws to govern human life and conduct as applicable to each individual according to her or his social class, duties and responsibilities. The purpose is to inculcate discipline,

while providing the basis for the rulers to enforce lawful conduct and observation of obligatory duties. These duties are carried out by individuals who have chosen for themselves the life of a householder or renouncer.

Although most people would argue that laws proposed by Manu to govern human conduct and society reflect conditions, needs and values of the times in which they were formulated; and are not relevant to present day value system, I am inclined to differ. I maintain that although some might view these laws as archaic, outdated and even primitive (Jayaram, nd), they are still relevant to understanding modern societies. The relevance may be multifaceted, but the one dimension that stands out is that Manu explains gender inequality as a natural condition of human existence. Similarly, Manu becomes relevant to contemporary Botswana for a number of reasons. The Laws “favour[s] a paternalistic society and family system, vesting the authority to regulate them with men, proposing rather a subordinate status and subservient role to women” (Jayaram, nd). Furthermore, they also “betray a clear lack of trust in the integrity and sexual choices of women, thereby suggesting that they should be guarded by men and never left alone in the presence of men outside their families” (Jayaram, nd).

Let it be made clear that Manu does not regard women as necessary evil, but as a prime factor in a man’s life. Although she might be viewed as inferior to man in every respect, a woman is as much a part of the creator as a man is. In order to imitate creation, He (creator) divided himself into two parts, one being male or female. It follows that the Creator sees a woman as a significant component of man, in the manner that man is a significant part of a woman and together they make a whole. Hence, Manu appreciates the role of women in the family and domestic matters, and urges men to treat them with honour and respect and not let them suffer. However, it is interesting to note that at times Manu poses double standards where he praises women to the highest level by recommending that they be revered and kept happy by the householder in order that the family may thrive. In the same breath, he denigrates them to the lowest point of Hindu society where “a woman should never execute the important tasks of her family independently (*svantantra*) whether she is a young girl, a woman or an old lady,” (Buhler 2004: xxxii), but must be subject to male authority. It is this categorisation that ultimately concretised the severe repression of women.

## Manu General views on Women

Before addressing the Manu IX, 2, 3-2 text, a general overview of Manu and women is given. During the time of the Vedas (Hindu sacred texts), it appears that “women occupied the same position as men” (Andal 2002:20). However, even then “the birth of a girl was less appreciated than that of a boy” (Patil & Patil 1996:111). Despite the inequalities in terms of preferences, women could still reach high standards of learning and culture, for example, some of the Vedic poets were women. In addition, women held property rights, participated in social and religious rituals, while some held powerful positions. The paradigm shift becomes apparent during the time of Manu where for the first-time women lost their esteemed status and forfeited their rights to wealth and personal property, including their own bodies. Since Manu postulates the father as the real guardian and protector of the daughter as long as she is not married, his duty is to arrange for her marriage to the deserving groom at the right age, otherwise he is viewed with suspicion and contempt. Furthermore, virginity and chastity are associated with dignity, honour and reputation of the maidens in Hindu society. By protecting the daughter, the father is safeguarding her chastity and honour, not just of her as an individual, but also of the whole family.

In the eighteenth century dharmic text, *Tryambaka's Stridharma Paddhati*, for example, the duties of a wife to her husband are outlined in detail, including how he is to be treated by her as a *deva* (god), as well as his expectations of her (Leslie 1989: v). It is the expectation that a wife has to obey and honour her husband and never do anything that might displease him, whether he is alive or dead. She should, as a faithful wife, worship her husband as a *Deva*, even if he is virtue-less, seeks pleasure elsewhere and has no good qualities (Buhler 2004). The reason for such devotion is the happiness that she receives from him in this world and the next and for this devoted service she assumes her exaltation in heaven. Her *stridharma* (woman's duty) is to produce children, because, “begetting children is the greatest obligation of a woman” (Buhler 2004: xi). In other words, her foremost duty is to become a mother, preferably one who produces sons. Motherhood is extolled, thus, “. . . the mother is to be revered a thousand times more than a father, yet his laws place women socially on a level with the lowest of all groups in Aryan society, the Sudra” (Das & Quayson 1932: 27-28).

Under Manu, women are required not to seek independence; hence, in her youth, as a married woman she should be under the control of her father and husband respectively, and must not seek separation from him. In doing so she saves both the families from dishonour “for a woman is a replica of honour” (Buhler 2004: xii). It is worth noting that, Manu takes away women’s independence, liberty and freedom by laying down a general principle that nothing must be done independently by her. Social freedom was eradicated, and a woman was restricted to the household of her husband where she became his property, thus, reducing her to a shadow of her former self. Consequently, “a woman became a liability and when her husband died became a burden to his family” (Andal 2002: 23). The woman has to continue to keep her dignity intact despite the harsh realities she faced because a “characterless woman not only loses her own honour but also for her family as well” (Buhler 2004: xii).

In addition to safe-guarding a woman’s honour, a husband should guard her in order to be sure that she conceives from him only, because “children are the greatest obligation of women” (Buhler 2004: xii). It is feared that because of their ‘adulterous nature,’ and regardless of their beauty or age women can give themselves to any man. Women are seen as possessing passion for men and with their ‘unstable temper and natural heartlessness,’ it will be easy for them to become dislodged with their husband. Notwithstanding, sex is not inherently sinful but can be legitimately explored and expressed within the correct caste specific boundaries. However, “sexuality beyond rational control, that is outside of caste restrictions and pollution controls, was an anathema to the orthodox Brahman for it threatened his ritual purity and threatened the stability of society and family” (Flood 2004:65).

Basically, Manu does not recommend that a widow should die with her husband. However, he expects her to live a life of self-negation after the death of her husband. She must not even mention the name of another man after her husband has died. Until death, let her be patient through her suffering while exercising self-control and chastity and striving to fulfil that most excellent duty which is prescribed for wives who have one husband only. By violating her duty towards her husband, a wife is disgraced in the world (Buhler 2004). Manu is explicitly against the marriage of widows. Widowhood was considered “extremely unfortunate, not only for the widow but for her family and society at large” (Gupta 1976:60). The text further stipulates that a second husband is never declared for a virtuous woman - *sati*. It is in her interest to remain unmarried and go to

heaven. In addition, widows were considered worthless; many were forced to live a life of torture, tonsure and deprivation. Those who decided to remarry or failed to live a chaste lonely life were shunned by society and were believed to have no place in heaven.

Having reviewed the status of women in the Laws of Manu, the following section focuses on the status of women in contemporary Botswana.

## **The Status of Women in Contemporary Botswana**

As already indicated earlier, Manu required a woman not to seek independence; hence, she should be under control of the males in her life. She should be under her father in her youth, husband in her married life and sons as a widow and must not seek separation from them. In doing so, she saves both the families from dishonour. In the same way, women in contemporary Botswana have been subjected to the same laws stipulated by Manu's blueprint. They are seen as "loose cannons" that need constant monitoring. The expectation is that a woman should safeguard her body lest she dishonour her husband, her marital and even her natal family. As a result, the acceptance of a man in the society is largely dependent on the behaviour of women within the family or in the eyes of the community. Therefore:

A woman becomes dishonoured when she behaves like a man, enjoying her sexual freedom because a man's honour is tied most closely to the reputation of women in his family, that is his mother, sister, wife, wives and daughters but not his own (Pitt-Rivers 1965: 42).

It follows that instances of breach or any suspected violation of sexual codes by women is mainly viewed as a potent assault on men's honour and the honour of the family. Basically, honour here becomes somewhat skewed. Why should it be the woman's responsibility to uphold honour for both the marital and natal families when the husband is not expected to return the favour? Does the man's honour not count in this case? The same goes for mutual fidelity, can one really say there is mutual fidelity in Botswana marriages or relationships? Given the predicament faced by women in contemporary Botswana, the question is, is there such a thing as mutual fidelity or it is just a figment of our imagination? This becomes very relevant to this discussion.

## Mutual Fidelity – What Mutual fidelity? – A Figment of our Imagination?

Although Manu advocates for mutual fidelity till death, which he considers a religious duty for the husband and wife, in contemporary Botswana there is no such thing as mutual fidelity between married couples. In Botswana marriage becomes a stage where gender roles are underlined and reinforced. This is where a man is allowed to do as he pleases because he is a man and only the woman is expected to be the faithful one who keeps the flame burning in the household. Hence, in marriage, older women counsel the newlywed. In most settings there will be a few uncompromising words of advice from elderly women ranging from deserting friends, especially unmarried ones, to being a good mother and a good wife. However, the most common word of advice remains the cognisance that marriage is a challenge and calls for endurance on the part of the woman. It is not uncommon to hear the older women telling the new bride “*nyalo e tlhaola basadi mo banyaneng,*” (trans. marriage samples real women from girls). It is during this gruelling counselling session that the new bride will be made aware that “*monna ga abotswe go re o kae*” (trans. a husband is never asked his whereabouts) because “*monna ke poo ga a agelwe lesaka*” (trans. a man is a bull and cannot be confined to a kraal). The expectation is that a woman should exercise patience and endurance with the understanding that “*monna ke selepe o a adimanwa*” (trans. a man is like an axe that can be shared). The wife is further reminded not to neglect her duties as a ‘good wife’. She is firmly told:

Daughter you must carry water for your husband. Beware, that at all times, he is the owner of the house and must be obeyed. Do not mind if he stops now and then and talks to other ladies. Let him feel free to come and go as he likes. Be a good Wife! Be a good wife! (Huma 1996: 96).

While the poor bride undergoes this gruelling counselling, the groom does not. His counselling is very brief and to the point, he is simply told, “Today you are a man, see to it that your wife and children have food and shelter. They should never sleep hungry. Make sure they are protected” (Dube 2011: 219). It is often taken for granted that men know how to be good husbands and counselling is deemed unnecessary in most cases. When looking at the treatment of the bride and the groom during marriage counselling, it is obvious from the onset of marriage that there is no mutual fidelity between husband and wife. In fact, it is the woman who

has to be truthful to her husband, but the husband is not bound by anything to remain faithful to his wife. As a result, fidelity becomes one sided and skewed since only the woman is expected to be faithful. Despite all that, the woman is still expected to produce children for her beloved husband.

### ***Mosadi tlhatswa lesire – lit trans. “Woman Wash your Wedding Gown!” – Woman have Children!***

Manu makes it very clear that a woman’s duty is to produce children, hence she should always keep her face smiling and radiant with beauty, in order to attract her husband. In the contemporary Botswana context, marriage and having children are considered the most fundamental events affecting an individual’s status and rights within the community. The family household of husband, wife and children forms the basic building block of Tswana society. Therefore, as soon as the marriage is solemnised the expectation is that the woman will “wash her wedding gown”- (*O tla tlhatswa lesire*) that is, she will fall pregnant. But with so much freedom granted to husbands during the counselling session by elderly women, married women face the danger of being infected with HIV by the very husbands who they were told to set free. The problem is that at the end of the day, these promiscuous husbands always come back to their wives. Married women have been hit hard by HIV in many parts of the world, including Botswana.

This is sad because marriage, which is supposed to be a safety net, is not as protective as for men or for women as previously thought. As argued above, it is particularly precarious for women. Furthermore, condom use within marriage is infrequent, and rates of extramarital partners are higher among men than women in Africa. Botswana is no exception. As Marita Barrassa, one of the women profiled in *The Silent Partner, HIV in Marriage* tells us, “. . . As a woman I cannot tell my husband to use a condom; that’s just the way I cannot tell my husband not to have sex” (Coen 2008:1). It is because of these defined relationships that women have little or no say in matters such as sexual choice. With pressure mounting on the woman’s ability to produce an heir and the husband’s freedom in matters of his sexual explorations, the woman is faced with a dilemma between either insisting on the use of condoms (which is deemed out of the question) or abstaining from sex. However, because

she desires to fall pregnant in most instances the woman ends up having unprotected sex. Since married women are not in a position to insist on safe sex and if the husband works away from home, they are vulnerable to any infection that he may have picked up from casual sex relations (Preece 2001). When a woman decides to execute her utmost duty, as defined by society, she might find herself having to deal with being infected with HIV in her own home, in their own bed, from her own husband. It is because of this predicament that many married women find themselves in a twisted noose instead of a safety nest - which is what marriage should be. This is the contradictory nature of dominant discourses which, on the one hand, define men as decision makers, but on the other hand, unfairly blame women for the spread of HIV.

Furthermore, there is also the background of normative behaviours where traditional beliefs and taboos are used to perpetuate a gendered distribution of blame and responsibility towards undesirable outcomes of sexual relations. Some examples of such taboos are manifested in perceptions about female bodies. On the one hand it is understood that giving birth cleanses the womb and this understanding contributes to the prevalence of teenage pregnancy. On the other hand, blood and semen are seen as pollutants meeting in female bodies so that the spread of HIV is often attributed to women. These issues “can be explained by identifying conceptions of gender as socially constructed and reproduced over time through relations of power and enacted in behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that have become so internalized that they now are simply common sense” (Preece 2001: 224).

### **The life of a widow: a life of self-negation**

Widows do not fare any better, just as Manu stipulated, they are expected to live a life of self-negation and self-control. Therefore, they are always under constant scrutiny by relatives of their deceased husband, by their own families and the community as a whole. Until death, Manu dictates that a widow has to portray qualities of patience, of hardships, self-control, and chastity and strive (to fulfil) that most excellent duty which (is prescribed) for wives who have one husband only. If for some reason a wife is found to be in violation of her duties towards her husband, she is viewed as a disgrace and a *pariah*. Likewise, in Botswana it is normal that widows undergo rituals to cleanse themselves from the blood of their deceased

husbands. Depending on which part of the country the woman is married, the widow will be adorned with colours of mourning. For example, she is expected to wear either a black or blue dress for the whole year as a sign of mourning for her deceased husband. In addition, she is to become less attractive or even warn men to stay away from her because the belief is that any man who has sexual intercourse with her before the cleansing ritual will fall ill. However, a widower can only go up to six months of mourning or even less and he is not expected to abstain or have self-control, except out of his goodwill towards his late wife.

### **Disempowered Man, Victimised Woman**

Adultery is regarded as a female crime, and as Mookodi (2000: 12) states, “there are defined power relations within consensual relationships and ... women occupy subordinate positions in relation to their consensual partners”. When a man comes to the realisation that he has lost grip over what he regards as his entitlement to “his” woman’s body, the body he is so used to wielding power and control over, as well as possessing, he ultimately resorts to gender-based violence. A number of emotions come into play, for instance, there is the feeling of disempowerment and dispossession. Once a man feels dispossessed and disempowered, the woman becomes the victim. In Botswana, gender-based violence mainly manifests in two forms, that is, marital rape and femicide or “passion killings” (as media in Botswana prefer to call it).

The abuse of women is rampant in Botswana. A study conducted by the United Nations Country Team (UNCT) report titled “Botswana Millennium Development Goals Status Report 2010” vindicates the concerns of the Botswana Police that violence against women in the country is rife. According to the report, rape, murder and battering were some of the biggest gender issues that the country had to address in order to meet Goal Three of the MDGs (later to become Sustainable Development Goals, SDGs) which call for the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment. The report further adds that violence against women in Botswana is mostly domestic, with perpetrators being consensual partners, members of women’s families and close acquaintances. Furthermore, the abuse is linked to men’s economic and social control of women. The problem is often not captured in records due to lack of reporting by the abused who normally is economically dependent on the perpetrator, while stigma

and family pressure can also be the resultant force (Botswana Millennium Development Goals Status Report 2010).

In 2008, the Botswana Parliament passed the Domestic Violence Act to protect abused persons. Unfortunately, the Act does not address marital rape. This is the major challenge that would make Botswana fail to achieve gender equality and women empowerment. The Domestic Violence Act recommends that marital rape needs to be recognised by Botswana Law because there have been instances where a partner living with HIV has infected his or her partner. Having said that, there is still lack of data on monitoring and analysing gender issues because the Botswana Government has refused to sign the SADC Gender Protocol. This has become a drawback when considering the remarkable milestones that have been covered so far and yet, this crucial issue cannot be ignored. Marital rape is and remains one of the most contentious issues in the negotiations on the SADC Gender Protocol.

### **Marital Rape: A Husband's Sexual Privilege or a Dehumanising, Unjust and Criminal Act?**

Women rights activists and human rights organisations and hundreds, if not thousands of women in Botswana, want marital rape classified as a crime. They are calling on parliament to lead the way ahead of the courts and criminalise marital rape in Botswana. Marital immunity implies that rape within a marriage is not recognised by the court, based on the premise that it is impossible for a husband to rape his wife, because it is tolerated and accepted as a husband's prerogative. However, the laws should be revisited because:

Marital rape violates the woman's right to bodily integrity, self-determination, freedom and the harm is not alleviated or assuaged by the fact that marriage exists between the parties or that the harm occurred in the comfort of the marriage bed (Kala 2015: 1).

Therefore, one cannot have a situation where the right of one party is protected over the other, just because he is a man. Marriage is not just about sex and where violence is used, it is unlawful. This explains why Botswana women are decrying their silent participation and are saying enough is enough. However, they are not shocked at this patriarchal attitude, where for some people "a woman is like a teddy bear that will do as she is told –

inside the bedroom and outside. People like this are an impediment to marital rape ever being recognised as domestic violence” (Kala 2015: 1). According to the Domestic Violence Act of 2008, women can now prosecute a husband’s rape in a civil lawsuit. However, rape cannot be tried as a criminal lawsuit and is not recognised as a criminal offence despite the constitution of Botswana providing in Section 3, for the protection of all persons in Botswana regardless of sex. Botswana further ratified CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women) in 1996. For instance, Article 1 of CEDAW provides for the removal of any discrimination against women on the basis of sex, irrespective of their marital status. In addition, Article 2 of the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights provides for non-discrimination on the basis of sex. In July 2003, the African Union adopted a protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, a supplementary protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. It calls for an end to all forms of violence against women, including sexual violence and recognises that the protection from sexual violence is inherent to the right to dignity. Laws on rape which do not take these factors into consideration and take away the recognition of free consent from women continue to be in violation of these fundamental human rights standards.

The question that comes to mind is whether the court’s view on marital rape is in line with Botswana Laws governing rape. Section 141 of the Penal Code does not identify marital rape. What is needed is for the legislature to be courageous and pass a law that clearly outlaws marital exemption. This is the only time when law will educate Botswana society that “marital rape is not a husband’s sexual privilege but a dehumanising, unjust and criminal act” (Madibana 2013:1).

Despite all the debates and exemptions surrounding marital rape, there is particularly one case which can be viewed as a test case on marital rape and can be seen as a major breakthrough in Botswana. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2010, Magistrate Thabo Malambane issued an order interdicting a man from physically, verbally, sexually and emotionally abusing his wife of six years. This followed an urgent application restraining the man from going to his wife’s workplace and causing misconduct intended to embarrass and humiliate her. In her affidavit in terms of Section 7, Sub Section two of Domestic Violence Act of 2008, the mother of three girls aged nine, seven and five said trouble started after she became pregnant in 2006. She decided to go for HIV testing with the husband, she tested negative, and

he tested positive. Following this turn of events, her husband's behaviour changed dramatically. She claims:

He started demanding to have unprotected sexual intercourse with me and I tried to make him understand that this was not a good idea, further that we have been advised by doctors that we should at all times use protection as this was crucial for our own health and wellbeing (Madibana 2013: 1).

For the wife, this was the beginning of a turbulent relationship. The abuse came in all forms and despite her resistance to his risky sexual demands, he proceeded to force himself on her on many occasions since he learnt of their status. With the Botswana law still maintaining that a husband can never rape his wife, incidents like these will continue to traumatise women because men know that the law is on their side. As long as adultery continues to be a female crime only, "women will continue to have little or no say in matters such as sexual behaviour. It is this lack of control over matters in relation to sex which result in abuse, violence or forced sex in or outside of consensual relationships" (Preece 2001: 224). Until the Government of Botswana takes the initiative to address the issue of marital rape, women will continue to suffer unimaginable atrocities in the comfort of their beds, by the very person whom they love and had trusted with their own lives. But then, how many women are going to be infected by their husbands and even lose their lives before the government of Botswana realises that marital rape is rape and not a man's privilege but a dehumanising criminal and unjust act which reduces a woman to nothing but mere chattel?

### **Femicide: 'Passion Killings' or Killings caused by hatred**

The second thorny issue in Botswana is femicide or passion killings. According to Ushe, "gender violence is frequently excused and tolerated in some societies where women are assigned inferior roles, subordinate to the males who are heads of the families" (Ushe 2015:107). Botswana is no exception and femicides (murders of females) have taken their toll. Women continue to lose their lives at the very hands of the people they love and trust the most, that is, their intimate partners. These femicides happen when men are told that the relationship is over, then "they resort to violence because they think their authority has been undermined" (Letlhogile 2006:1). In the majority of cases, women are often beaten and punished while some are even killed in the name of love, hence 'passion

killings'. Just as the former President Mogae rightly pointed out, "there is no passion in these heinous crimes because knives are used to slay women" (Bosaletswe 2013:1). The judicial system is also failing the women in Botswana because of the way they handle these cases. The conviction that is usually imposed on a culprit who has committed femicide has been to serve only 10 years imprisonment or less and before long he is already walking the streets and courting yet another woman - another potential victim.

These murders have been attributed to a number of reasons. These murders can be attributed to power on the male side where males want to exert their power, hence it becomes gender-based violence. The problem is also a moral and socialisation issue, because the moment people think of taking someone else's life, it means that respect for the other person has ceased to exist. There are and will be diverse perspectives debated as to what these killings are and what brings them into the community. Many terms will be used to address and even name them, that is, passion killings or hatred killings, the fact of the matter is "these are simply murders, brutal acts carried out by jealous lovers seeking revenge for being jilted by ladies" (Letlogile 2006:1) and as and when they happen, a life is lost, namely, that of an innocent woman. Men act the way they do because they feel they are not in control of "their" women anymore. Consequently, they feel disempowered and dispossessed and resort to killing.

## Conclusion

Having looked at Manu's treatment of women, it would not be far-fetched to conclude that Manu IX, 2,3 is relevant to contemporary Botswana. A number of reasons can be attested to that effect. For instance, in contemporary Botswana, just like in Manu, men have ownership of and entitlement over women; be it on girls, married women and widows. It is when this entitlement and ownership of women's bodies is threatened and eroded that males resort to violence in the form of marital rape and femicide. This gender violence and sexual abuse occurs in families, is meted out by the women's intimate partners and society in general. This violence is committed against women and has great impact on women's social status. As a result, a woman feels distressed and wretched because not even the judicial system guarantees her any protection, especially from her tyrannical partner. Let it be reiterated that gender-based violence and sexual

abuse in contemporary Botswana manifest in three major forms: physical violence, sexual abuse and psychological violence. These forms of violence cut across racial, cultural, religious and even educational backgrounds. Therefore, education does not exempt a woman in Botswana today from abuse, because all women have been victims one way or the other. Even after over fifty years of independence, women in Botswana are still experiencing abuse and subjugation from their intimate partners. The Botswana laws and customs further worsen the plight of women because they validate a man's roving eye simply because he is a man. Furthermore, the Botswana legal system, by refusing to proscribe marital rape, is giving men the platform to carry on their abuse of women. Until and unless the Botswana laws are amended, many women will continue to find themselves at the crossroads. Consequently, Botswana family law becomes a catalyst to women being considered as inferior and non-existent in matters pertaining to their bodies. This leads to them being viewed as objects and properties of men, thus, making Manu XI, 2.3 very relevant to contemporary Botswana women and the abuse they face on a daily basis.

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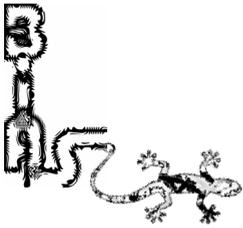
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# THE BIBLE AND WOMEN IN THE AFRICAN APOSTOLIC CHURCH OF JOHANE MARANGE IN ZIMBABWE

*Elizabeth Vengeyi*

## Background

African women are the backbone of the family; they are the ones who give birth, raise and care for the children when sick and in some cases, they are the sole providers. There is truth in the Shona saying; “*Musha mukadzi*,” (home is wife!), for without her there is no future for the family. However, central as they are, women are usually relegated to the margins when it comes to decision making. It is here that the family now belongs to men. The justification for women’s subjugated position is often sought in the Bible and within ‘culture’. Women are thus, dispossessed of their worth by these two forces against the reality that they literally run the family. It is from this context that this chapter investigates the impact of the Bible and culture in the industry of impoverishment of women in the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange (AACJM), not only in real economic terms, but also in decision making. I argue that their deprivation of voice in many spheres, including marriage, sex and in the general running of the family, contributes to poverty, and puts the girl child at great risk of HIV because she is usually deprived of formal education and, as per church tradition with ‘biblical and cultural’ blessings, is married off at an early age. Thus, I argue that unless we target the African woman for empowerment through suggesting a biblical reading of the Queen Mother motif, not as a source of evil, but of life, the future of Africa is in limbo.

## Introduction

In Africa, the Bible plays a central role, not only in the religious sphere, but also in every aspect of life: social, economic and political. It is read and interpreted as a manual for daily living. What is claimed to be the meaning of the Bible is often taken without question. There is no intention on the part of the adherents to ask contextual questions such as; who is the

reader and what is the intention of the interpreter? These questions are central since the reader, depending on their gender, social class, and economic status among others, determines the meaning of the Bible passage. It is this dimension that has caused a queer scenario that while women command the majority in every church, the reading and interpretation of scripture is controlled by the minority - men. In this regard, women have always been side-lined when it comes to Bible reading and interpretation. This has contributed to their low status, both in church and in the society. They are lower than second class citizens.

This is especially true in African Initiated Churches where the African traditional family structure must be maintained. Therefore, on top of the Bible, 'African culture' has also become a yardstick to determine how women should present themselves in almost every facet of life. In fact, the Bible and culture are commonly appealed to by men to control women. Unfortunately, several women have conformed to the socially prescribed status as divinely appointed. As a result, many women and young girls have no voice in all matters of life, including matters that concern their own bodies, such as sex and marriage. This sad reality is a common sight in the AACJM of Zimbabwe. In the name of the Bible and culture, women are deprived of nearly all important rights of selfhood. Because of such loss of voice, young girls who are often married off even before the legal age of consent to sex have become victims of poverty and, sometimes, HIV.

In this chapter, I argue that the same Bible and culture which are used to subjugate women can also be used to liberate them. Reading and interpreting the Bible from women experiences and reading and understanding African cultural heritage on gender prescriptions is key to emancipating women, especially those in the AACJM, where the same apparatus are used to dominate and deprive women of their voice. This is the basis upon which I call for the use of the Queen Mother Motif, not as a source of evil, but as a source of life, since women in this church are thought to be impure and less than men because they are the conduits through which sin came into the world. Sadly, the ideology is believed by several women I have so far interacted with. To that end, the chapter briefly traces the background of AACJM so as to unravel its biblical and African cultural claims, which it has always used as weapons against women. To dislodge the claims by male members of this church, the chapter exposes the colonial roots of strict and notoriously hierarchical society and church where women are slavishly subordinated to men. In conclusion, I suggest that

the biblical impression of the Queen Mother as a source of evil is a myth created to oppress women. Read differently, the Queen Mothers become an inspiration for African women to be involved in all spheres of authority and decision making, that is, religious, economic, social, and political. In order to uphold confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for the study participants.

## **The Background of the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange**

The AACJM is one of the leading Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe. As the church was formed in the 1930s as a protest movement against white missionary Christianity, it does not depend on foreigners (missionaries) for funding, leadership and control (Hayes 2000: 3; Daneel 1971). The founder of the church, Muchabaya Momberume, now popularly known as Johane Marange, formed the church to address African problems in an African way. Missionaries were not fully equipped to address African problems, not only because they did not know, but simply because they did not want to appreciate African culture. Unlike in missionary churches, Marange made sure his followers used their own languages during prayers and worship. Since the missionaries also operated hospitals, whose major role was to aid the missionary work of converting Africans to Christianity, the church of Marange prohibited its followers to use Western medicine and to visit hospitals. Instead, believers were to rely on faith-healing through prayer, fasting and prophecy (Isichei 1995: 254).

While the church condemns any association with traditional practices, the church has much in common with traditional religion. The church has adapted the traditional institutions to fit its new religious outlook (Bourdillon 1997: 193). The church finds from the Old Testament prescriptions, for example with regard to food, dress code and practices such as polygamy (Hastings 1971: 200), an institution which is quite normal within the church. It literally applies the Old Testament commands and attitudes, especially the book of Leviticus, which are very closely related to African (Shona) religious practices.

## Women in the African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange: Dispossession through 'Bible' and 'Culture'

Women in AACJM are a sad example of people who have been deprived of their worth through Bible reading and claims of cultural heritage. In the church, as well as in their homes, the world is defined by males. Even though in church they hold positions such as being prophetesses, their participation cannot be equated to that of their male counterparts. It is surprising that even the young girls and women, whom one would think may have a different worldview from that of their older mothers and male leaders of the church, still uphold the teachings of the church. They are almost quite comfortable with their position. One of the legitimisation myths for the subordination of women in this church, is the doctrine of original sin. Women are condemned as people who brought sin into the world; hence they are deemed inferior to men.

The story of Genesis 3 where Adam and Eve are said to have sinned before God is believed as true and prescriptive of our social and religious roles in this day and age. As God pronounced to Eve after the fall that 'your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you', so should the women in this church hold themselves. Men are, therefore, divinely ordained as rulers over women because women are naturally sinners. This story is very much believed by the adherents of the AACJM. One day, on my way home from work, in a commuter omnibus, a conversation began about 'small houses' in Harare (a practice whereby a man would have a mistress). Women blamed men and men blamed women. What was striking about the conversation was one man's argument. He said that sexual sins are caused by women in this world and, "that is why in Genesis 2 God called the first woman *Mutadzi* (sinner). It was only man who made a mistake when he named her *Mukadzi* (woman), instead of *mutadzi* as was originally said by God in the Garden of Eden.' He performed a play on words, "*mutadzi*" (sinner) and "*mukadzi*" (woman). As the argument continued, I later realised that this man was a member of the AACJM. I became keenly interested in knowing their female counterparts' perspectives on this issue.

Before I even carried interviews with the AACJM women, I was surprised to realise that probably, I was one of the few people who had never heard about this perspective. It is actually popular talk in Zimbabwe that the word *mukadzi* (woman) is a corruption of *mutadzi* (sinner). The man in the commuter bus only said what was considered 'common knowledge',

and gave it a biblical basis. This ideology does not seem to come from anywhere among the Shona and Ndebele themselves since there is no historical myth in Zimbabwe where sin was brought by women. There have been suggestions that African societies had myths of creation of humanity that are similar to the creation story in blaming women for the original sin (Frobenius 1930, 35; Kahari 1986, 1995, 137; Banana 1991), but I do not believe that. Rather, I see such stories as coming from African Christians who desperately wanted to show similarities between African religion and the Bible so as to convince Africans to convert to Christianity by a false assertion that everything in the African past was similar to the world of the Bible.

Nevertheless, in Zimbabwe the notion of woman as a sinner was popularised through music and preaching in the missionary churches. The late Paul Matavire, who was a renowned Zimbabwean musician, composed a song that became an instant hit and the song is titled '*Dhiyahhurosi Nyoka* (Devil the Snake). The song is based upon Genesis 3 scripture. Initially, Matavire blames both Adam and Eve, but later blames the woman, as one who brought sin into the world. Matavire argues that before Eve was created Adam did not sin. He only sinned after Eve was created, therefore, Eve brought sin to the world. Matavire even sings that 'If I were Adam, I would ask God one or two questions in self-defence: For how long have I been in this orchard as a bachelor? How many sins did I commit before this woman was created?' Clearly, from Matavire's perspective, the story is true that women cause men to sin. It is this general perception that has seen women having to play second fiddle in all matters of life, even in church.

Curious to see how prevalent this perception of women is, in Zimbabwe, especially the *Marange* church, I irregularly interviewed some women who attend this church. I was surprised by how this story is reflected by these women. Among the twenty-two women I interviewed in a period of about two months, whose ages range from 15 to 60, eighteen of them confirmed that it is true, sin was brought into the world through women and even now they still cause men to sin especially sexually. As such, they supported the fact that women in their church do not have to sit next to or rather close to men. Because of the general belief that women are a source of corruption and cause men to sin, men and women sit separately in church. Also, part of the explanation is that women are unclean because of menstrual blood (Crumbley 2006: 81). The idea of menstrual uncleanness also exists in parts of the Bible, especially the book of Leviticus

(Wegner 1992: 36). As a result of this 'biblical' teaching, women in this church observe these taboos by staying away from church or by attending church, but not performing any duties (Sackey 2006: 6).

While women and men alike in this church, and in the society, see the practice of relegating women and women's subjugation in church and in society, as having divine origin, the reality is that this perspective about women developed over the centuries of Judaism until Christianity was born. But it has always been strongly contested. Women have been part of the community playing equally important roles as males. To the effect that although the written history has the male voice, there are some examples in the Bible that show women as equally powerful individuals in society, who refused to be defined and subordinated as slaves.

In the formative years of Christianity for example, although some gospels, like that of Matthew purposefully, decide to highlight the maleness or patriarchal nature of the story of Jesus by having the angel speak to Joseph and not Mary, (Matt 1:20ff), Luke gives us another version where the angel spoke to Mary and not to Joseph, (Luke 1:26ff) (Schaberg 1992: 275). If we want to harmonise the disparity, we will come up with the image that the angel appeared to both Joseph and Mary, suggesting that men and women are equal. God knew this and that is the reason he spoke to both. More so, Jesus had female disciples, which is an indication that women were significant as well (Luke 8:2-3). At the death of Jesus, women could not leave him, even as the men, including the most trusted ones such as Simon Peter, deserted him. Women, however, were there until the end, including Mary, the mother of Jesus (John 19:25-26) (O'day 1992: 300). Where was Joseph? It serves to show us the reality of life, especially as African women; 'when the going gets tough, women hold on!' They are not just incubators, but that process of carrying the future of humanity in the womb for nine months is a miracle that bonds women to the life of the whole society. Leaving such important people in the history, politics and economic, religious and social spheres of life is to do injustice to oneself.

When the missionaries introduced Christianity to the Africans, they dispossessed them culturally. Women and men, who previously had almost the same proportion of power and value, were now being ranked according to the gender dictates of the colonial system. It is common knowledge that African cultures were not as rigidly hierarchical as they became with

the introduction of missionary Christianity (Mate 2002: 2). Colonial interventions changed people's mind-sets and made this the accepted ideal, even though lived realities showed otherwise. Men were placed higher than the African women, but they (missionaries) were sure to make the same African men subordinate to white women (Schmidt 1992: 1). This was meant to ideologically dispossess people by condemning all they did and believed to give them a new identity: an identity that pleases not the one given it but the one who prescribes it. For example, they made sure that men left their rural homes to work for them in towns. Women were left behind with nothing else but an increasing burden of agricultural labour falling on their shoulders (Schmidt 1992: 82). Today, it seems a Zimbabwean 'culture' for a husband to leave his rural home and look for work in towns while the wife remains at home. Yet, women were very economically active before colonisation.

According to European missionary teachings, a Christian woman was to be as passive, soft spoken and as subordinate as possible. This process was resisted by both men and women of Africa. In Zimbabwe, for example, the settler establishment together with Christianity were fought by both men and women. In 1896, Mbuya Nehanda led a rebellion against the colonial government (Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000: 16; Ranchod-Nilson 2006: 57). She was accused of inciting men to kill one white settler in her territory. After she was arrested and tortured, she even refused to be converted even as men, afraid of death, converted to Christianity. She even inspired the spirit of resistance by saying, "*Mapfupa angu achamuka*: my bones will rise again." She is an example in our culture, of a woman role model, a liberator, a woman of courage, a woman of virtue, a woman for men and women alike.

In the name of culture and the Bible, the church practices polygamy, which mostly benefits men and not women. Philemon Matunya, a member of the church in Murambinda, aged thirty-two, noted that, 'having one wife (within their church) happens occasionally, as a mistake'. Passmore Gondo, another church member had this to say:

Variety is the spice of life, and that is true for one's sexual life, and polygamy was the best platform to experience that variety. "You need a variety in a diet to keep your (body) network strong. Today, you have *sadza* with lacto, tomorrow, you have vegetables, and on another day, a diet with beef" (Chidavaenzi 2010).

There have been debates from organisations such as the Girl Child Network that polygamous marriages practiced by apostolic churches increase the spread of HIV and other related illnesses. However, an AACJM church member and Headman, Pedzisai Gondo Murambinda of Murambinda, said their church is structured in such a way that the spread of HIV is limited as those caught cheating on their wives also risk ex-communication from the church, and that was the last thing anybody wanted to happen to them (Chidavaenzi 2010). From Gondo's analysis, it implies that within the church some men can cheat on their wives even if they have many wives, but cheating is not expected of women. The Old Testament and Shona culture are the sources of the practice of polygamy in the church and the attached ways of marriage.

Closely connected to polygamy, is a cultural form of marriage called *kuzvarira*. In traditional Shona culture and under extreme conditions, there was a custom where a girl, no matter how young she was, was given as a wife to a certain man. Even an unborn baby was given in marriage; that is where the term *kuzvarira* came from (Kabweza 1979, 60). The church takes its doctrine from both traditional religion and Old Testament codes. Child marriages are a reality from what we find in AACJM. Some girl children are forced to enter into marriages before they even reach marriageable age, which is now officially at 18. The Zimbabwean legal age of sexual consent is 16, but a lot of girls are being married off before they have reached that age. There is no consensual agreement between the child and her husband-to-be, but the agreement is between the parents and the man who intends to marry her. Usually, it is the father and not the mother who decides where to marry off his daughter. There was a case where a fourteen-year-old girl (AACJM member) was forced by her parents into marriage with a sixty-seven-year-old man, a man old enough to be her great grandfather. She had this to say:

I can't go against [the will of] my elders and leave my husband in order to attend school. Besides, where would I go if I leave? My parents will not welcome me (Kachere 2010).

This implies that even if the young girls are not willing to be married off to old men, they do not have any other alternative as their parents will not allow them to return home. This exposes young girls to problems such as miscarriages, sexual abuse and exploitation. Also, Madzibaba Desmond of the Johane Marange had this comment on child marriages:

Once a man identifies the girl he likes and her parents agree, the man usually keeps the girl at his home so that she gets accustomed to what goes on there. It is not all about sexual abuse as people may think. But, there are others who get tempted and end up becoming intimate with the girl before her body is ready (Sachiti 2011).

For some of the AACJM members, child marriages are advantageous to them in that young wives are easy to control. Gideon Mombeshora, an AACJM member, told Inter Press Service News Agency, (IPS) that most men in the church prefer to marry under-age girls because they are easy to control:

“Most men want to get married to docile women. The younger the bride the more chances for dominance for the man,” he said. He further explained the sect strongly believes in the practice of under-age brides: “Although it is not in our church’s statutes that old men should marry under-age girls, the practice is deeply entrenched in our belief system”. (Kachere 2010).

She is not the only one who is a victim of this system from her parents since the report says a large number of girls are dropping out of school to get married. According to the Girl Child Network (GCN), an estimated 8 000 girls have been forced into early marriages or were held as sex slaves since 2008 (Moyo 2010). Also, Caroline Nyamayemombe, a gender officer at the United UNFPA country office in Harare, indicated that studies have confirmed that teenage pregnancies are on the increase in Zimbabwe and are the leading cause of maternal mortality. This is caused by older men who marry young girls, these girls are young enough to be their own daughters. This scenario has significantly contributed to pregnancy complications in teenage mothers. For Nyamayemombe, such harmful cultural practices affect the girl child. Poverty is one of the key reasons for early marriages as UNFPA data have shown that about 80% of pregnant teenagers come from poor families (Kachere 2010). In other words, the poor parents marry off their young daughters to old men to fight poverty. When girls from poverty-stricken homes become victims of sexual abuse from their husbands, they face the consequences of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases because of their powerless position (Kanyoro 2008: 219). The young girls extend their poverty in that after dropping from school they become uneducated and become unemployable and, in the process, remain stuck in impoverished conditions.

Also, while reliance on prayer may be adequate to believers, many times, women suffer the consequences of relying on prayer for everything. As

the church became independent of missionaries, it denied everything that was Western, including medical treatment. The church makes use of holy water or a wide variety of sanctified objects which symbolise God's protective powers (Daneel 1971: 348). It refuses to be identified with Shona traditional religion, hence it neither uses traditional nor European medicine (Bourdillon 1976, 300). However, this is very risky for pregnant women. Some would rather die than receive modern medical treatment. It is reported that the church built a maternity hospital in Mhowa Village in Chihota communal lands, Mashonaland East to cater exclusively for pregnant women of their faith (Murape 2010). They do not use any modern medication, but they strictly use holy water as per religious belief. The head midwife said that the church was against the idea of forcing people to take medication or vaccination against their religious belief (Murape 2010). However, many pregnant women and infants die due to lack of proper medical facilities and attention (The Zimdaily 2010). Also, lack of medication means that women will be the worst affected as they are also left with the burden of caring for sick children.

### **The Queen Mother Motif: Repossession through flipping pages of Culture and the Bible!**

To a people who are caught between two systems of power; 'Bible' and 'culture', we need to find cultural icons and Biblical stories that empower them to realise that these are not tools for men to do whatever they want. There is no other way except to attempt repossession of what was lost through the flipping of the pages of culture and the Bible. We need to turn weapons of oppression into weapons of liberation for the women and girl children. Since the Johane Marange group reads the Bible, we also must read the biblical passages such as the Queen Mothers as examples of women who controlled politics, and the economic, social and even religious affairs of their communities for entire nations. As such, women in these churches must not be intimidated into submission and accepting second or third-class roles, in church and society. In the context of HIV & AIDS, depriving women knowledge and appreciation of themselves as equal partners can only intensify the problems: social, political, economic and religious. Men in these churches as well as in the society have tended to appeal to the Bible and culture to sustain their privileged positions in politics, religion, society and economic power as well as to consolidate that

power. We need to revisit these two tools to empower ourselves and the girl child.

In the Old Testament, royal women were known as Queens or Queen mothers. Royal women influenced the politics of Israel and Judah through their strong personalities. So, the queen or queen mother had political influence in the royal court. The royal women in the Old Testament have been referred to as *gebira*, a title which includes women like Jezebel of Israel (2 Kings 10.13). Royal women were notable for their strong character, personal influence and ambitions (Cushman 2006, 327; cf, Mwandayi 2011). They were known as the source of evil, for instance, Jezebel, as the wife of Ahab and head of the royal household, got involved in the killing of the prophets of the Lord (1 Kings 18.4) and established priesthoods of Baal and Asherah at her royal table. She sends messengers to Elijah, threatening his life (1 Kings 19.2), (Cushman 2006, 335). Also, Bathsheba, David's wife, played a crucial role in the succession and establishment of Solomon on the throne of David. As a queen mother, she used her position to receive and pass on critical information and to ensure the accession of her own son and the elimination of a rival (Cushman 2006, 336).

These stories about particular royal women or Queen Mothers as sources of evil, were brought down to the village where the peasants had a totally different mentality altogether. In the village, women and men never had rigid hierarchies as was obtaining in the palace. It later became a stereotype for all women as sources of uncleanness, sources of evil and women became stigmatised as irredeemably evil by virtue of being women. These stories could have been produced after the exile when the issue of what was foreign and local was still real. So, there is an attempt to paint the foreign women as sources of evil, so that those who had foreign wives would let them go. This, we can suspect, was derived from the myths that were created by the society (see Genesis 3, for example). However, we can still trace the history of resistance to this stereotype among certain women heroes who refused to submit. They engaged in centuries old struggles. Today we are still in the battle and we stand in a long history of struggle, for reordering the society that was reordered by males to suppress women based upon foreign cultures.

Since the Johane Marange Church claims to be leaning towards African culture, we also must find women heroes to bring upon a different image. The death of 'Queen Mother' Nehanda represents two opposites: first, de-

feat of women from their previously advantageous social, economic, political and religious roles and the subjugation of not only women but also men by the colonial system. Second, and opposed to the above, she is a symbol of resistance, a symbol of an ongoing struggle; she represents a spirit of non-compromise. By her refusal to convert but choosing instead to die for her beliefs and ideals, women and girl children of Africa have valuable lessons for life. Women must be empowered to fight for their rights and their recognition. They must reclaim their status. Like Nehanda, they must fight and never to surrender the battle. Victory is certain! Women and girl children must take a stand in politics, economic, social and religious spheres, in academia, even in teaching courses that are thought to be masculine like theology, the same discipline that legitimised oppression of women over the years, must be filled with women waging the struggle. The struggle that women like Kimpa Vita fought for: 'through protesting against the Catholic Church and the colonial government' (Dube 2001, 134; 2000, 41). With all these rich examples that could be at the disposal of women, change within the church and in society is attainable.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown that before the introduction of Christianity to the Africans by missionaries, African culture was never hierarchical. Structures were put in place by missionaries, which oppressed women, hence, the use of both culture and the Bible as weapons of oppression. This is why most of the Johane Marange women and girl children are sidelined. As an African Initiated Church which protested against missionaries, in its formation, it considered practices such as polygamy and child marriages from both culture and the Bible. The Bible is read, interpreted and applied literally, hence the belief that women were the originators of sin. This justifies why women sit separately from men and are less active in the church. From a biblical position, we can use the Queen Mother motif, not in its negative sense as portrayed by some scholars, but as a positive step towards empowering women. Women still have power and control within themselves which can change the church and society. To the Zimbabwean women and men, 'Queen Mother' Nehanda became a role model who resisted dominance by the missionaries. Women within the church and society at large are encouraged to do the same.

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# **“DZIMBA DZEWARWERE” (MAKESHIFT CLINICS) AS A SAFE HAVEN FOR WOMEN’S REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH IN AN INDIGENOUS APOSTOLIC CHURCH IN ZIMBABWE**

*Lindah Tsara & Lilian Siwila*

## **Introduction**

Despite health being prioritised as a basic human right for all people in Zimbabwe, some Apostolic churches such as the Bonagesi Apostolic Faith Church (BAFC) still find it difficult to allow their members, especially women, to go to hospital and access modern medical facilities. Instead, they resort to makeshift clinics, “*Dzimba dzewarwere*.” This is a set-up where BAFC women are encouraged to go and stay at the designated prophet’s homes for the treatment of various diseases associated with women’s reproductive health. Besides the significant efforts that the government has made to build clinics and hospitals which are available for all, Apostolic churches still regard their makeshift clinics as safe havens for women to come and have their ailments treated. Going to a hospital is regarded as a sin and a sign of lack of faith on the part of the adherent. Women who are members of the BAFC believe that at the prophet’s home, all diseases are cured by the power of the Holy Spirit accompanied of course by the use of holy water which has been prayed for by the prophet. Although a lot has been written on African Initiated Churches and their position on modern medicines, we write this chapter from a feminist standpoint to critically analyse some of the patriarchal discourses informing the use of these “make shift clinics.” Nyambura Njoroge, in whose honour this chapter is written, invested a lot of her passion and energy in promoting women’s health. She maintains that religion must not bring servitude and death to women.

This empirical study, which was conducted among the BAFC African Initiated Churches, uses gender justice theory as its conceptual framework to question the theological justification for forcing women to opt for the makeshift clinics as opposed to the modern hospitals in health seeking

for their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR)-related illnesses such as pregnancy. The chapter envisages that the church needs health education that is life giving and is able to challenge their theological beliefs which hinder women from having any health choices over their bodies. The study concludes that many women are dying in the misguided bid to theologise health through the practice of “makeshift clinics”.

## **Theologising Health in the Bonagesi Apostolic Faith Church**

The evidence of the influence of religiosity on the deteriorating status of health is increasing among Apostolic church members due to the churches’ stance on banning its members from accessing modern public health medicine. The BAFC church leaders and members argue that they achieve positive effects on health and well-being at the makeshift clinics within the church and these are regarded as safe havens especially for women’s sexual and reproductive health (Smith 2013). Although Smith seems to argue for this point, Apostolic churches in their diversity cannot uniformly claim these benefits for all members (Agadjani 2005). The structural behaviour of each religious organisation’s ideology and the cultural historical context influence the way in which it would enhance or impede health and well-being among its members (Mpfungu, Dune, Hallfors, Mapfumo, January 2011). In the case of the church under study, many people in this church are completely indoctrinated into believing that going to the hospital would make them sinners and so they continue to risk their lives by placing their well-being on the makeshift clinics (Sibanda et al 2013). Members are taught that all things are possible with God and all diseases such as cervical cancer, diabetes and HIV, among others, cannot affect the Apostolic members because they follow a strict code of conduct that protects them from contacting such diseases.

## **Gender Justice Theory (GJT)**

This chapter is informed by the gender justice theory which advocates that enhancing choices for individuals is a seemingly fair process rather than trying to achieve particular outcomes for the community (Devins1988). Gender justice theory (GJT) proceeds on the conception that justice needs to be seen through a gender lens. In advancing the free-choice model, the

theory underscores the traditional treatment and current condition of women in the BAFC, including the discussion of a historic segregation of women in public policy. Women are victimised by policies designed to protect them, policies that deny them the chance to make basic decisions for themselves. GJT resembles the liberty enhancing model. This is true of the BAFC policy seeing “makeshift clinics” as safe places for women’s reproductive health rights. This policy denies women the chance to make independent decisions about their health, especially when they are pregnant. Some lose their lives due to inexperienced midwives (*nyamukuta*) at these “makeshift clinics”. Thus, this theory is very useful for our study as we use it to critique this risky practice.

The GJT is consistent with the principle of equal opportunity which holds that persons of equal ability and motivation should have equal chances to achieve their personal life plans. Both men and women must be deemed similarly equal, since both are capable of making choices. As a result, both men and women should have the freedom to make choices and make use of opportunities available to them without any regard to their gender. In arguing for gender neutral policies, the theory emphasises that individual choice and ability are instrumental in determining outcomes (Devins 1988: 22). Thus, GJT maintains that the government should play a significant active role in implementing its particular vision of social justice. This theory is relevant to our chapter for we observed that women in the Apostolic community such as the BAFC, do not exercise their full right to make their own choices since most of the decisions and policies of the church are crafted by men. Some of the policies designed for them have dangerous outcomes for their reproductive health rights, especially policies such as banning women from accessing modern medicine and public health facilities. The GJT is used in this chapter as a way of advocating for the participation of both men and women in decision making and policy drafting.

## **Aims of the Chapter**

The specific line of inquiry in this research focuses on the following aspects in relation to the potential consequences of the makeshift clinics and questions their supposed safety, particularly when it comes to women’s reproductive health rights. The aims of the chapter are summarised as follows:

- *Understanding of health and well-being in the church.* In this, we sought to investigate the general understanding of the church's perception on women's health and well-being.
- *Makeshift clinics as safe havens for health.* Here, we sought to unpack the concept of makeshift clinics as it is understood by the church regarding its role of being a safe haven for women's reproductive health rights.
- *Religion and missionary hospitals.* We sought to understand the church's perception on missionary hospitals.
- *Consequences of makeshift clinics as safe havens for health.* We sought to discuss the effects of solely relying on makeshift clinics as safe havens for women's reproductive health rights.

## Methodology

### Research Design

To achieve the aims of this research, we made use of an interpretive qualitative research approach. The interpretive qualitative approach was suitable to the study for it involves an activity that is not immediately accessible consciously to investigators' interpretations and opinions (with careful reflection) (Christiansen, 1996:178). Data for interpretative qualitative inquiry are collected mostly through participant observation, interviews and discussions in naturalistic settings (Christiansen, 1996). Interpretive qualitative inquiry approaches are particularly appropriate for exploratory studies such as the present study, whose goal is to derive preliminary evidence on understanding the concept of makeshift clinics as safe havens for women's reproductive health rights in BAFC.

### Sampling and Selection Procedure

This study included a sample of fifteen participants, namely, ten women and five men who are members of BAFC aged between 22 to 75 years. These members were identified using both purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling is suitable for achieving the goals of this study which are to provide exploratory evidence on aspects of the governing rules of the BAFC and how these rules affect women's reproductive health and well-being. The participation of senior church leadership is based on the fact that they were well versed in the church's culture,

history and core values. Snowball sampling was used to identify and include others known by the church members to be credible informants on the church's faith and affairs including the church's understanding of "makeshift clinics" as safe havens for women's reproductive health rights. The participants included the son of the founding father of BAFC in Tangwena and senior members with more than ten years of membership in the church. Young adult members of the church were also included. We are confident that we captured the institutional memory of the church organisation from our interviews, as well as contemporary views represented by the younger study participants with high school education. None of the church members refused to participate.

## Data Collection

The data for the study were collected in January 2018. We used open ended questions with focus group discussions on core cultural historical and contemporary activities of the church in four broad areas:

- The origin of the church as a religious organisation and specifically its structural behaviour;
- How the church organisation understands the concept of makeshift clinics as safe havens for women's reproductive health rights.
- The church's understanding of health and well-being
- The church's view of missionary hospitals.

Data was collected in the native or first language of the participants (*chiManyika*). This was done in order to enable richness of data from the ease of speech and to reliably capture embedded cultural nuances important for contextual interpretation of the data. The credibility and reliability of the study was established by allowing participants to lead the discussion to their inter-subjectively determined consensus point for the specific questions. Participants were also allowed at the beginning of the discussions to revisit any part of the interview with additional commentary as needed and to their satisfaction. We were also able to triangulate data from observing consistencies in participant member responses across overlapping questions.

## **Position of the researcher in the study**

The lead researcher previously belonged to an Apostolic church and had a historical-cultural membership similar in faith teaching and practices to the one under study. Currently, the lead researcher attends a Pentecostal church organisation. The second member of this research is a member of the Methodist church. The Apostolic church historical membership background of the lead researcher made it possible for us to be trusted with information that would not ordinarily be shared with relative outsiders or strangers to the church.

The lead researcher also attended a church service and addressed the congregation, demonstrating her credentials in Apostolic church praxis and ideology. Attending a church service also allowed us to have informal interactions with both the church leadership and ordinary members, equipping us to better interpret the focus group discussions that followed. Although one of the researchers had an Apostolic background, we resolved to bracket out all our preconceived ideas of the indigenous Apostolic churches in the area of study in order to allow an honest qualitative inquiry within the BAFC community.

## **Ethical considerations**

Since this chapter was part of an ongoing thesis research at the University of KwaZulu Natal and constructed mainly upon one of the major key themes of makeshift clinics which emerged from the field research, the study protocol was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Kwazulu Natal. Another approval for the research came from the African Christian Council of Zimbabwe (ACCZ), a body which represents many Apostolic churches in Zimbabwe. We respected freedom to participate and adhered to the research principles pertaining to privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Participants were provided with both verbal and written consent to take part in the research. This verbal and non-verbal consent gave room for the participants to say out their views freely. We also made it clear to participants that participation was voluntary, and withdrawal was allowed at any time when one feels the need to do so. Data were collected during the day at the church leader's

homes and other members' homes. The data were collected by two transcribers verbatim and with ascription only to the group identity by gender. Anonymity was guaranteed to participants for confidentiality purposes.

## Data analysis

The participants' responses were analysed thematically, using panning approaches (Kendon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, Tesch, 1990, Manen, 1997) to reveal major themes. The use of panning allowed the identification of preliminary themes and tentative frameworks for thematic analysis. Credibility of the research themes was established after the consensus of the research team, member checks and other triangulation checks. Due to the gendered nature of membership of the church, responses were analysed for each theme by gender to the extent possible.

## The church's understanding of health and well-being

The BAFC believes in the ultimate power of the Holy Spirit in promoting good health and well-being to its members. For instance, they consider makeshift clinics as an alternate care system in its provision of cure from chronic and other health conditions. The BAFC leaders believe that the health and well-being of their members is guaranteed by one's total commitment to prayer and fasting, as well as going to mountains where one portrays humility and total commitment to God. The BAFC women are encouraged to stay away from sin, as this is said to enable one to live a healthy life. They believe that if one commits a sin against God, one will be punished and usually the punishment will come in the form of diseases. According to one of the informants:

*Munhu akata dzira Mwari anorohwa neshamhu. Kazhinji kacho shamhu yacho urwere hwakasimba kusvika munhu azoreurura ndokuti apore - (Those who commit sin against God will be given a whip by God in the form of sickness. The sickness will disappear after one confesses the sin and repents), (Interview with one senior member of the BAFC).*

Besides sin, another disrupter of health and well-being, as it is understood by BAFC, is in the form of evil spirits. This has been clearly elaborated by one of the informants who said:

In most cases, most of our members joined the church because they came for healing when they were sick and it was after they were healed that they decided to join the church. Some joined the church after being haunted by evil spirits and after those evil spirits were exorcised and cast out, they decided to join the church. A few of the members come to the church because they like the singing and the drums (Interview with one male church leader).

People become new Christians mostly when the evil spirits from their family which haunt them have been cast out (Interview with one female spiritual leader).

The members of the BAFC provided metaphysical explanations for health and well-being which emphasise spiritual, rather than material sources of health and well-being. In our study, our focus was on women's health. Basing on gender justice theory, it is not fair for the BAFC leaders, who are men in most cases, to make decisions for women to rely on makeshift clinics as safe havens for health considering that women are more vulnerable to conditions that require modern public health services such as the use of contraceptives, cervical cancer and HIV. It is essential for women to be tested before they fall pregnant. However, all these facilities are not provided at the makeshift clinics, hence, it becomes dangerous for women to rely on "makeshift clinics" as safe havens for their health.

## Unpacking the concept of makeshift clinics as safe havens for women's reproductive health

*Dzimba dzewarwere* refers to the designated homes of prophets responsible for curing various diseases. Some prophets who are senior members are well known for specialising on different problems in the church. There are various makeshift clinics in BAFC where they claim that "we have our own doctors in the church, whatever problem one experiences, there are people who were selected by the Holy Spirit to help cure such problems (Interview with one senior male member of BAFC). The interviewee, further stated: "At one point I managed to heal a dislocated hand of a boy and I achieved this without going to the hospital" (Interview with one senior male member of BAFC). There are makeshift clinics that specialise in children's health problems such as (*nhova*).<sup>1</sup> Hence, the babies

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<sup>1</sup> *Nhova* is a common problem experienced by babies from birth to three years. If not handled properly, the child may die at a very young age.

are supposed to be checked regularly by the specialist in the church. Other tasks of makeshift clinics for children will also look at the coming out of teeth for new babies (*kubuda mazino kwevana*). These specialists at makeshift clinics have certain religious rituals that they perform to make sure that the top teeth do not come out before the bottom teeth (*Mazino eku-musoro haafaniri kutangira epasi kubuda*). One of the interviewees who is a senior member argued that “if rituals for teeth are not performed well and the top teeth come out first, when that child grows up and gets married, all the wives or men he/she marries will die”.

Others specialise on pregnant women during both prenatal and post natal care. These are popularly known as mid wives (*nyamukuta*). The study found out that the BAFC is one of the ultra-conservative Apostolic groups that do not allow their members to go to hospital or to access modern medicines and they are very strict on that. Such beliefs tend to hold the believers at home when they are sick. Instead of going to the hospital, they have to go to the prophet’s designated areas in the church known as makeshift clinics which they believe are safe havens for health where all diseases are cured, rather than going to hospital. The church’s perception on modern medicines caused the members of the church to be reluctant to seek medical attention when urgently needed. One of the interviewees, who is a member of another conservative Apostolic church, stated that a 17-year-old boy who had just finished writing Ordinary level examinations had died because of a simple injury on the leg. She indicated that the boy was injured by an axe while cutting firewood. Instead of the parents taking him to the hospital or clinic, they took him to a makeshift clinic to be prayed for by the prophet. After five days, the boy’s leg turned green, and he finally died.

Such beliefs are fuelled by the conviction that going to hospital is associated with lack of faith in God. They strongly believe that all diseases are cured by the Holy Spirit and the hands of the prophets as well as using Holy water prayed for by the prophets. The senior members who are leaders in this church and are strong believers in this practice remark:

Why do we need to go to people as if God has failed? Why do we need to put our trust in man rather than God himself? Going to hospital simply means that one lacks faith in God and is saying God cannot help him or her, yet God is all powerful. If one has strong faith and waits for God, he or she will be healed. There is no guarantee that those that choose to go to hospital will be healed there and not die. We saw many people dying in hospitals, so there is no need to blame our makeshift clinics saying that

people are dying there. Even in hospital people also die (Interview with BAFC senior female member Tangwena).

The remarks in the foregoing quote point to serious dedication to religion by most followers of BAFC, highlighting the idea of makeshift clinics as safe havens for health and well-being of the congregants. This has a huge impact on maternal practices as well. The BAFC interpretations of sickness, including complications during pregnancy, are based on spirituality. The BAFC members believe that everything that happens to a person, including sickness, originates from the spiritual realm. Having complications during pregnancy is seen as a curse from God. To do away with such a curse, one needs to be prayed for and be delivered. One of the interviewees made the following remarks reiterating the idea that makeshift clinics are safe havens for health in the BAFC:

When you go to a prophet's home, you are safe because he or she is able to foretell the danger that one is likely to face during pregnancy and giving birth. That problem will be dealt with before it harms both the mother and the baby. The prophet, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, uses his or her hands if the baby is not in right position to return the baby to the right position. The midwife will also be under the influence of the Holy Spirit during the process of giving birth: if the child comes in an unusual way, the Holy Spirit guides her on what to do to save the baby's life (Interview with midwife/*nyamukuta* from Tangwena).

However, such beliefs encourage women not to seek medical interventions. This puts the women's reproductive health in danger because there will be a fifty: fifty chance of success when one attends a makeshift clinic for the purposes of giving birth. Modern public health services seem to be safer than makeshift clinics since one would be attended to by experienced and trained personnel such as medical doctors. However, when there is an emergency in the makeshift clinics, they watch their members "dying whilst praying" (Dodzo *et al* 2016).

## The BAFC understanding of missionary hospitals

Chitando (2005) maintains that African Indigenous churches (AICs) have provoked scholarly debate and controversy. He further argues that AICs can be understood as African Christian movements that seek to ensure that Christianity is not experienced as a foreign and alienating religion in African contexts. However, from the onset, this goal of AICs made them

develop a negative attitude towards missionary hospitals, for they sought to do away with everything that was colonial, including education and modern medicines. The contention was that the oppressor had to be resisted on all fronts: the political, economic and the spiritual. Therefore, this caused the BAFC to prevent its members from going to the hospitals run by the missionaries or the colonial state. The reason is that they regard modern medicine, including bandages, contraceptives and ointments, as unclean since they might have passed through so many hands which they do not know. Again, it is regarded as a sin to go to the hospital and use these medicines. If the church gets to know that one of the members has gone to the hospital and that one is using modern medicines, that individual will be punished severely or face(s) excommunication from the church. In some instances, one is forced to remove the white garment as a sign of showing that one is under discipline, popularly known in the church as *pasi peshamhu* (under the whip/discipline) (Interview with one senior male member of the church).

Some of the informants made the following remarks on missionary hospitals:

At church anything to do with the hospital is a taboo. We are not allowed to take pills because the church leaders argue that, “we did not know what ingredients went into making these pills” (Interview with one of young women of BAFC).

However, basing on the above remarks, going to hospitals among the Apostolic church is viewed as a display of serious lack of faith in God. The members should have a strong belief that God healed all diseases for according to BAFC, “all sicknesses including pregnancy complications are spiritual” (Interview with one of the pastors in BAFC). They believe that everything that happens to a person including all sickness originates from the spiritual realm, hence they are regarded as a curse. Therefore, one needs to be prayed for and delivered. By so doing, going to hospital without deliverance will be a useless endeavor. Thus, the BAFC strongly believe(s) in the power of the Holy Spirit through the prophets to deliver people from all sickness.

## A Critique of makeshift clinics as a safe haven for women's reproductive health in light of the Gender Justice Theory

The fact that the Apostolics entirely reject modern medicines and accessing public health facilities and instead seek to get services from spiritual attendants in makeshift clinics especially for pregnant women where they are offered pre-natal, intra-partum, post-natal and emergency care in the best way a spiritual health system cannot afford has put the health of women at a higher risk (Maguranyama 2011). Some women have lost their lives when giving birth, whilst others may have stillbirths due to inexperienced personnel at the makeshift clinics. This was highlighted by one of the informants when she said:

When I was giving birth, the baby started by bringing out its legs and the midwife was inexperienced and ran away. I tried to help myself by pushing the baby and pulling the baby from my stomach and this resulted in a still birth (Interview with a young woman in the BAFC).

Another young woman also made the following remarks when she considers herself lucky after giving birth at a makeshift clinic where she delivered her baby in an excruciating manner:

I was lucky to be alive following the birth of my child who was born in a breach position. I nearly died when I was giving birth and that gave me the confidence to walk away from this church. They used *tsanga* (reeds to cut off the umbilical cord and clamped it with *dhirawu* (thread used to sew sacks) (Interview with a young woman in BAFC).

The above remarks from the two women, regarding makeshift clinics highlights that they are not a safe haven for women's reproductive health. The GJT is against the idea of the male Apostolic church leaders making choices for everyone in the church, yet women and children constitute the majority of its members. Instead of the church banning its members from using modern public health facilities, the choice should remain with the individual to choose what he or she wants, rather than forcing everyone to go to makeshift clinics.

Chibaya (2012), notes that the tragic reality continues to be the order of the day as one of the Apostolic churches had developed a "makeshift maternal clinic" to help expecting mothers to cure diseases. However, he further asserted that one of his informants made the following remarks:

I am troubled by the death of the children at that place. It's too much, there are many deaths of children. Last year we buried scores of children, I don't have the exact figure. But after forcing them to report every death, they will

come twice or thrice weekly to report the death of children who are part of the church. You can estimate how many would have died at the end of the month (Interview with Muringai headman in Domboshava).

According to the GJT, women are victimised by policies designed to protect them, policies that for this very reason, deny them the chance to make basic decisions for themselves. Although the example used above refers to Johane Marange Apostolic Church, the two churches share similar beliefs when it comes to the issue of makeshift clinics. Thus, the BAFC violates women's rights by forcing them to go to makeshift clinics and bans them from going to hospitals to access modern health facilities. Women have no choice because the laws were designed by the church leaders who are men. They have been indoctrinated to such an extent that it now appears normal to regard makeshift clinics as safe havens for their health. Thus, BAFC should revisit their policies so as to come up with all-inclusive health solutions for its church members.

## Recommendations

- The BAFC leaders and members should be encouraged to appreciate the effective interventions to help mothers and babies survive during childbirth at makeshift clinics. These include precautions for infection control during deliveries such as washing their hands with soap and clean water, using surgical gloves, keeping the newly born baby warm and keeping the umbilical cord clean after birth.
- The government and other health organisations should continue working with Apostolic leaders and birth attendants or midwives at makeshift clinics to find ways to advocate for and encourage them to make referrals of pregnant women and new mothers to attend to health care facilities during both pre-natal and post-natal checks. However, they may not entirely prevent the women from attending to their makeshift clinics which they strongly believe in.
- The government should launch some training sessions for the midwives in these makeshift clinics in order to increase their knowledge on how best they can help women during pregnancy and childbirth. If possible, they could also provide the sacred practitioners at the makeshift clinics with the necessary equipment or facilities to use in order to save lives and to promote positive results from these makeshift clinics.
- The government should also remove all costs associated with pre-natal and post-natal check-ups at hospitals in order to encourage these apostolic members to come to hospital.

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# IS DOCILITY POWERLESS POWER? SHONA WOMEN'S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS

*Revai E. Mudzimu*

## Introduction

I often hear people say, “When life gives me lemons, I make lemonade and find someone with vodka and have a party,” but the question to ask is: “is lemonade the drink one likes and is it the best drink for a party? These are statements normally used by people who are presented with challenging situations and they try to make them appear better. I liken this saying to how many women try to make docility agentic and transformative. When women in Zimbabwe face challenges to their sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), they deploy several strategies of navigation. These strategies range from resistance, resilience, reworking, and docility, among others.

Using the data from my fieldwork with the Korekore women of Mt Darwin in Zimbabwe that I undertook from April to September 2018, I will demonstrate how docility as a strategy can be agentic. SRHR is an aspect of human rights which is related to sexuality and reproduction. Docility has been for the most part taken to mean subordination and yet there is an element of malleability that results in a person becoming agentic. I analyse docility as a strategy through the panopticism theory. Panopticism is a theory that was invented by Michel Foucault (1975) from the architecture that was developed by Jeremy Bentham; panopticon literally means “all-seeing”. I use panopticism to analyse how the Korekore culture creates women as docile bodies. On their part, the women are forced to respond using docility as a strategy to navigate their SRHR. Several epistemologies on African women’s ontologies have rendered them powerless. As a result, African women are expressing the voice of their silence, the sexuality of their eroticised desexualisation, the fullness of their ‘lack’ and the centrality of their marginality and exclusion (Mackinnon 1983: 639).

Given such a background, using docility is counter intuitive as it perpetuates their own violence. However, I argue that women's experiences are not homogenous, hence, the need to tap into the lived experiences of the Korekore women. The names that I use in this study are all pseudonyms.

## Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights

Discussing Shona women's SRHR may be futile without tracing it back to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR 1948) and the International Conference on Population Development (ICPD, 1994). Although SRHR were not explicitly spelt out in the UDHR, they were indirectly referred to in article 2 which states that "*Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status ...*". It was only in 1994 that the ICPD clearly stated that SRHR are human rights that are applied to sexuality and reproduction. However, history shows that SRHR should not be taken as timeless givens but rather as part of the wider, political and social ideologies (Finkle & Mcltosh 2002; Oford 2012). SRHR were introduced as a concern to population growth, not to human rights (Pizzarossa 2018: 2). In 1954 in Rome and in 1965 in Belgrade, the UN argued that population was increasing at any alarming rate hence there was need to find family planning services to reduce birth rate and slow population growth (Ashford 2001; Kellog 1970). In line with the UN call, some governments started deploying coercive practices to force women to control birth rates. Some were even forced to undergo abortions (Zeidenstein 2009; Garcia-Moreno 1994). Although it cannot be denied that rapid population growth can pose a threat to economic development, there are also several factors that cannot be taken for granted in wanting to promote SRHR. For example, when the agenda for SRHR instrumentalises women's bodies for political reasons, this makes them factors not actors, objects not subjects of their lives. It is in this manner that I argue that SRHR might be playing a panoptical role in African women's sexuality. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I will use the view of SRHR that has been agreed on from the ICPD (1994). This view is horizontal and puts human rights at the centre. They state that SRHR are everybody's rights to a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; rights to decide freely about sexuality, to be sexually active or asexual, who to have sex

with, how and when, physical, mental and social well-being in relation to reproduction and the rights of all people to decide freely whether to have children or not, the number of children and methods of birth control they like. Put together, these four aspects translate to women's rights to their sexuality. A lot of campaigns on SRHR have been undertaken by the government and different non-governmental organisations on social media and in some cases by visiting the people in their different locations. The women have taken this new socialisation about their sexuality in the same manner they have done with their culture.

Sexuality encompasses sex, gender roles and identities, sexual orientation, eroticism, pleasure, intimacy and reproduction (Reynolds 2006; Shaw 2006; Pascale et al, 2006; Chitando & Njoroge, 2016). Tamale (2011) argues that sexuality, like gender, race and class is a system of power which defines what is acceptable and what is unacceptable for both women and men. It is important however, to first of all understand how the issue of sexuality is understood in the African context so that we get a better understanding of the women under study's use of docility in their SRHR. The first problem we are faced with in trying to come up with the meaning of sexuality is that the term sexuality does not have a direct translation in the Shona language (Zimbabwean local language). Hence, when talking about sexuality we mainly end up talking of femininity and culture (Kambarami 2006). The three variables are inextricably interwoven to the extent that any efforts to separate them are fruitless. To this end, I discuss sexuality as interwoven with femininity and culture. The Oxford English dictionary defines femininity as qualities or attributes which are regarded as characteristics of women. However, it must not be overlooked that femininity is rooted in an intricate system of socio-cultural contexts rather than psychobiological factors. Thus, it is dependent on time, place and cultural norms (Borgota & Montgomery, 2000). Culture may be defined as the abstract values, beliefs, and perceptions of the world that shape and are reflected in a people's behaviour. Culture encompasses all that is human-made, learned and transmitted, especially through language, rather than what is inherited biologically.

## Conceptualising Navigation

Navigation can mean different things in different milieus. In this context, it will refer to how women resist, are resilient or rework their oppression

in respect to SRHR (Scott 1985:57). For Scott, these are “everyday forms of resistance”, whereby those with little power come up with strategies for their survival where they do not have agency. He declares the process as “weapons of the weak”. This resistance may happen in several ways, for example, foot dragging, mimicry, slander, sabotage, false compliance, inter alia. Thus, this chapter seeks to understand the women’s experiences as they evolve and respond to violence and marginalisation through docility. Due to the patriarchal nature of the Korekore culture, it dictates how women should behave with their sexuality and in this manner, I argue that it is violent towards women’s SRHR. Because of this violence, the women deploy docility as a way of navigating the violence that is directed towards them.

While many scholars have focused more on conflict and violence in relation to wars between nations, they have overlooked the somatic (bodily) violence, as well as mental inhibitions regarding women’s lives (see Galtung 1990; Tarusarira 2017). This chapter takes a nuanced trajectory and deploys a hermeneutical discursive approach to investigate how Korekore culture in Zimbabwe negatively influences women’s agency and prevents them from realising their mental and physical potential. Violent acts can be manifested as direct and structural. This chapter will dwell on cultural violence which Galtung identifies in religion, ideology, language, art, empirical science, formal science and cosmology. He refers to it as those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence . . . that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence (Galtung 1990: 292-301). Put simply, the chapter discusses cultural violence as expressed in ideologies and religion, where sometimes there is no immediate human being directly harming anyone, but the violence is built up into the structure and shows up as “unequal power” and “unequal life chances.” In the face of violence, women’s navigation may involve engagement with the perpetrators of violence, in whatever form it may rear its ugly head. This is a way of transforming the conflict situation expressed in suppression and oppression, in this case, the denial of SRHR.

Instead of only being docile, the women can also make the effort to transform their situation thus, land themselves in the process of conflict transformation. Lederach (2003) asserts that conflict transformation entails “envisioning and responding to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (Lederach

2003:14). The conflict transformation approach takes the process of handling violence and conflict beyond management and resolution. In so doing, there is acknowledgement that the situation in which the women find themselves is not one that can be managed or solved with some mathematical puzzles as is implied by conflict management and resolution. The tools of humility, prudence and knowledge which the women use help them to transform their violence.

Etymologically, the word docile comes from the Latin word *docilis* which means, “easily taught”. According to Foucault (1979: 136), the notion of docility entails that a person may be subjected, used, transformed and improved. I have invented the phrase “powerless power” to mean trivial survival mechanisms that a group with less power use, but which is not transformative. Docility, for the most part, has been taken to mean subordination and abandonment of agency. It has also been taken to suggest a lethargic and submissive person who blindly submits to power structures (Bezuidenhout et al, 2018). While it looks like docility is powerless power, I would like to take a nuanced approach to interpret the strategy of docility as I am informed by the data from my fieldwork. This does not mean that I am baptising docility as a strategy. Neither am I saying that it is the best way that weaker groups should use to respond to their violence. That is not the task of this write up: I just seek to demonstrate how the women in my study make it agentic. If docility has qualities of teachableness and readiness, then it is inextricably linked to prudence. Docility and prudence are closely linked because of their situational aspect which gives allowance to know when to follow the rules and procedures and when to deviate from them (Bezuidenhout 2018:74). Simply put, docility is an integral part of prudence. When you are taught, you learn how to interpret and how you should act.

## The Panopticon metaphor

Panopticism as a social theory was developed by Foucault (1975) in his book *Discipline and Punish: The birth of prisons*. The Panopticon building was designed in the form of a ring with a tower at the centre. Each cell had two windows, one opening on to the inside of the central tower and the other one allowing light to pass through the whole cell. The idea was to allow the inspector to see all the inmates from the tower without them

seeing the inspector. The inmates could not also see other inmates. However, the inmates would know that they were being watched at any moment and hence, behave as if they were being watched. In this case, the idea of being watched is internalised by the inmates. When the inmates internalise the idea that they are being watched, they become docile bodies which are very easy to control as they discipline themselves. Foucault used this to explain a new kind of subjectivity in the modern period which emphasised self-discipline. Although this concept was used for prisons, Foucault argues that it can be used in several institutions such as schools, churches, hospitals and so on, but it does not mean that we overlook institutions which are differently organized, such as African culture and religion. African culture and religion use many rituals and according to Tuner (2017), rituals use structure and in Foucauldian perspective, structure is a characteristic of panopticism (Foucault, 1977). I argue that through panopticism, the women become prisoners of their culture. They become docile bodies. Therefore, the task of this argument is to determine whether the women lose their power when they are thus turned into docile bodies.

There are several assumptions of panopticon, but two are of interest in my argument. First, the total invisibility of the inspector and second, the “universal visibility of the inmates”. These assumptions involve two sides of power, that is, the “power over the inmates” and the “power over oneself”. The historical background of the discourse of SRHR has informed us that it is a product of modernity where the population growth rate is seen as a threat to economic development, hence, it must be controlled, regulated and governed. For the UN to achieve the goal of SRHR in Zimbabwe, they use a lot of funds to spearhead programmes that help to control the population. They go around the country advertising their programmes and offering family planning services free of charge. Like the inspector in the central tower of the panopticon, invisibility is also ensured in these programmes where the real motives of these programmes lie hidden to the clients, but they achieve their desired goals of making the people, especially the women, internalise the importance of family planning services so that nearly everyone grabs one type or the other, of family planning services. The women I interviewed confirmed that nowadays nearly everyone uses modern family planning services. They spoke with a lot of conviction that reflected how they have internalised the importance of using family planning services. The “inspector” (UN) uses several strategies such as research to assess the universal visibility of the

women. Let me put it very clearly here, I do not mean to go against the women attaining their SRHR, but what I am simply doing is to demonstrate how the panopticon concept can be translated to reflect how the women's sexuality can be pressured so that the women end up being docile.

Shona culture also uses the concept of the panopticon in surveilling women's sexuality. From childhood, women are taught how they should behave in relation to their sexuality, for example, on characteristics of femininity. The women grow up with the belief that a real woman should get married as a virgin and this helps them to abstain from sexual relations. Another example is the stretching of labia minora. The women in my study told me that every girl is supposed to undergo the elongation of the labia minora because failure to do so will lead one to being divorced when one gets married. What is central to these teachings is that they instill in the women that their sexuality is in the hands of men. This happens in multiple ways, for example, through proverbs, games, songs and so on. Both SRHR and Shona culture use the panopticon concept to instill discipline and to engender docility. SRHR expects the women to be free and express their sexuality as they wish (ICPD, 1994), whereas Shona culture expects that women should not be self-expressive when it comes to their sexuality. Culturally, their male counterparts should determine when to have sex and how, when to have children, how many and whether to use contraceptives, which type, or not to use at all. My research participants indicated that when they are under such pressure, they use docility as a way of negotiating the complications that are caused by these conflicting value systems.

In the Shona culture, when a woman gets married, she is treated as a novice in sexuality, hence the need to be docile so that she can be taught (Chitakure 2016, Kambarami 2006). For the most part her matrilineal aunties and her husband's sisters teach her and control her sexuality. The women indicated that they have nothing to do other than being docile and be open to learning. However, that does not mean that they do not have rights to their sexuality. They are prudent and know what to do with the information that they get from the power structures around them. Some have argued that docility has some elements of the eagerness to learn, and this eagerness has been referred to as "epistemic conscientiousness" (Montmarquet 1992; Zagzebski 1996). In the Shona culture, men are treated as more knowledgeable than their female counterparts and the men themselves have taken it as the reality. To this end, the men find themselves

giving instructions to the women always, even in line with their sexuality, which I assume they do not know very well.

The Zimbabwean society is highly patriarchal and to this end, it is clear that the meaning of female sexuality is a patriarchal product (Khumalo & Garbus 2002). Women learn and internalise the meaning of sexuality from tender ages and there are several institutions that socialise these women, namely, the family, religion, education and the society at large. As if that is not enough, the Shona society is highly controlled by western values, thus putting the women in a quagmire regarding their sexuality. This can be explained well in the Kenyan Gikuyu proverb which says “*Njogu igiri ikihurana, nyeki niyo yumagira*” translated to mean that “when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers”. The encounter of SRHR and Shona culture makes the women the zone of contestation. From very tender ages, the girls are socialised to view themselves more as subordinate housekeepers, with their male counterparts as physically strong protectors and breadwinners. This is done, for example, through a game known as *mahumbwe* (mock marriage). In this game, girls are given dolls and kitchen utensils while the boys have cars, axes and cows among other things.

Moreover, these young girls are taught the so-called feminine qualities such as gentleness, passivity and submission so that they will please their male providers. This socialisation is carried throughout puberty, adolescence, up until adulthood. Besides games such as *mahumbwe*, there are several rituals that are performed such as labia minora elongation and virginity testing in a bid to define female sexuality. It seems to suggest that what is central to Shona female sexuality is marriage. Hence, the desired destiny for most women is marriage (Kambarami, 2006). Within the marriage constellation, female sexuality is defined as being in the hands of men. Once *roora* (bride price) has been paid for the woman, it results in her losing her SRHR, in a real sense. A case in point is the payment of *rusambo* (the central portion of bride price paid in cash or cattle). Once this has been paid, the woman is expected to be sexually passive and satisfy their husband’s sexual desires because that is enshrined in the marriage contract (Messer, 2004). Women are not allowed to insist on safe sex measures as the men control the sexual encounter (Leclerc-Madlala, 2000). In this regard, the social meaning of the payment of bride price may be regarded as violence on women.

The socialisation of women on their sexuality does not end with the family, but also infiltrates into the education system. Some of the textbooks that are used in Zimbabwe portray women as a weaker sex compared to their male counterparts, who are portrayed as strong. A textbook that was used in elementary school by the first class is one good example to demonstrate how the education system in Zimbabwe defined sexuality. It had pictures with the father driving a car and the mother breastfeeding and it said, “*Ona baba vanotyaira mota kuenda kubasa*” (look at father driving his car to work), “*ona mai vanoyamwisa Tarisai ari kuchema*” (look at the mother breastfeeding Tarisai who is crying). This socialises girls into believing that their sexuality is supposed to mean getting married and having children, while the men should go to work and provide for them. Marriage is a sacred institution among the Shona that every woman is supposed to undergo. Those who choose not to get married are given names, for example, they are called *vane chitsinha* (a boy or girl without interest in heterosexual relationships or marriage). On another note, women who decide to prolong getting married because they want to further their education are stigmatised. They are called the “unmarriageable” (Chirimuuta, 2006; Kambarami, 2006). This kind of socialisation is internalised by the women so that when they grow up and there would no longer be anybody to tell them what they should do, they discipline themselves and behave according to the dictates of their culture. There are statements that are constantly repeated in Korekore society, such as “*hazvibvumidzvi*” (it is not allowed), “*zvinoyera*” (it is sacred), “*unoita munyama*” (misfortune will befall you) and others. Statements such as these act as the watchtower at the centre of the panopticon prison and continue to surveil women’s sexuality.

In Africa generally and in Zimbabwe in particular, religion permeates all aspects of human life, hence, religion is not spared in defining women’s sexuality among the Shona. If we take, for example, what is portrayed in Christianity: the story of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:4-3:24) portrays Eve as having been taken from Adam’s rib. This has been taken to mean women’s subordination to men in all areas of life. Such a background text polices and guides relations between women and men in society. This is responsible for many of the “gender troubles” in African societies (Chitando 2019).

According to Foucault (1997: 24), people can perform a number of operations in their thoughts, body and conduct in order to attain happiness and wisdom. In the context of the Korekore women’s use of docility, there is

need to think in line with Judith Butler (1997). She calls for a revisiting of the “paradox of subjectivation”, which can be explained to mean that the process and conditions that secure a subject’s subordination are also the means that lead to self-consciousness. They may further be understood if we take an example of the virtuoso pianist who submits to a painful regime of disciplinary practice in order to acquire the ability of playing her instrument with mastery (Mahmood 2001). Docility becomes, therefore, an act of agency. Agency is defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and freely to influence a change (Giddens 1968). However, agency is not limited to those actions that result in progressive change, but also those that aim towards continuity, stability and stasis (Mahmood 2001: 212). The women that I engaged with during my fieldwork indicated that, to a large extent, sexuality is in the hands of men who have been socialised to believe that the payment of bride price grants them exclusive rights over women’s sexuality. Within such a context, the women said that they navigate their SRHR through docility and how they do it makes me argue that docility is agency. This docility is shown in both language and action, for example, they refer to their husbands as *Shewe* (My Chief) (Mukova & Mangena 2016: 120). Among the Shona, chiefs are traditionally revered, and their word goes without being questioned. When the husband is referred to as a chief, this is a reconfirmation of their power over the women and they are happy to engage into this “zero-sum” constellation, where they feel that the women’s loss is their gain (Mukova & Mangena 2016: 120). Furthermore, most women were very clear that to be submissive, docile and available to one’s husband all the time is the best strategy for staying happy in a marriage. They showed that those who would want to go against this so-called norm would be stigmatised and sometimes end up losing their marriages. This is in line with what has been argued by some scholars that African marriage entails that the women should be sexually passive and submissive, men are the initiators of sex and set the conditions for the sexual encounter (Kambarami, 2006; Messer, 2004). While docility can be interpreted as a way in which women perpetuate their oppression, the women I interviewed showed that they try to make it yield agentic results although it is a painful process. They try to make lemonade out of lemon.

## Transformative docility

The Korekore women engage in several actions that resemble being docile and the question to ask is: are these actions transformative? Put simply, do they give them agency or do they facilitate any change? As I have said before, conflict transformation entails envisioning and responding to the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships (Lederach 2003:14). The patriarchal nature of the Korekore culture holds that sexuality is in the hands of men, thus, women are supposed to be passive and submissive. Taking a closer look at humility and self-knowledge as the roots of docility, the women said that they influence their sexuality for a change. The women said that when they are humble, that makes the men treat them as harmless people and hence, relax and leave them to do what they like.

*Ukazvidukupisa anongorivara nekuti anoona kuti hapana wekurwisana naye, Ipapo unenge wahwina* (If you humble yourself, your husband will realise that he has nobody to argue with, then you win it) (Grace 42).

While SRHR offer everyone the rights to do what they like with their sexuality, the women are not passive recipients in this whole situation. With the strategy of docility, they are able to distinguish and choose what they want from what they do not want. Docility is related to prudence, which is the virtue of realism and the willingness to know the truth. Several women in my study indicated that they use their prudence in accessing their SRHR. Some said,

*Haungoiti mukumbazvose tsapo yebenzi, unosarudza zvinoenderana newe uye zvisingakukuvadzisi* (you do not just take everything. You choose what fits you and what is harmless) (Fungai 39).

Among the Shona, for example, the Zimbabwean constitution does not accept same-sex relationships, neither does it allow abortion. In this manner, they use their prudence to choose what befits them and what is beneficial to them. This also includes using family planning services of their choices, even if in some case their husbands might not be forthcoming. They also choose family planning methods that have less side effects. In line with this, I argue that docility is a conscious transformation and a two-way process that is premised on how one stage influences future events. In simple terms, it is an active process. Where it seems to our naked eyes that by being docile the women have given up, we are actually

being too simplistic. Most women I spoke to indicated that docility can be way of empowering oneself if one knows how to manipulate the power structures around oneself. One said:

*Ahhh, kunyarara kunokunda zvose... wongoita fungira mumwoyo rwendo rwembwa, asi zivai kuti kunyarara hakusi kupusa* (Silence surpasses everything, you just plan in your heart but you need to know that silence does not mean foolishness (Maria, 54).

They referred to several examples to show that docility can be powerful, for example, having more children might mean that the women's reproductive rights are being violated, yet for them it is a game changer. Once you have children, you earn the title "mother" and motherhood is a highly esteemed category within the community under study and elsewhere in Africa. While women have been generalised as oppressed (de Beavour, 1949; Daly 1975), in Africa, woman as a category is not always powerless, disadvantaged, controlled and defined by men (Oyewumi, 1997). More so, having more children is also a great investment as it is envisaged that these children will look after them when they grow up. Thus, it can be explained in the proverb "*chirere mangwana chigokurerawo*" meaning when you bring up your children, they will look after you in the future. Shona sexuality includes the women undergoing certain practices such as labia minora elongation and virginity testing, among others. These practices have been interpreted by several scholars as violating women's SRHR. My research participants told me that womanhood is embedded in having undergone these practices and some say this also enhances their sexual lives. Finally, docility places cognition, knowledge and decision making at the forefront of how individuals adapt, learn, discover and achieve their desired goals.

While the payment of bride price has been taken as violating the dignity of the women and engendering their docility, the women I interviewed said, to be paid for means one is valuable and one is worthy being paid for. This is further confirmed by Bourdillon (1976). He argues that the payment of bride price is to tantamount to saying, "here is a woman who is worthy being paid for". When you have been paid for, the in-laws give you respect unlike when nothing has been paid for you. It seems like you are imposing yourself on their son and they do not give you respect. Coupled with the humility from the women's side, the respect that the in-laws give the sister-in-law helps her to act in a way that she sees fit to empower her. In this manner, docility becomes empowering. When men control the sexual encounter, some treat that as violating women's SRHR as they

contend that women should not be docile. The women indicated that when it comes to sexual encounters, it is feminine to be docile and let the men dictate the pace. The women indicated that motherhood is also embedded in being able to satisfy the husband sexually. When they are docile in relation to sexual activities, they do not feel oppressed. They are rather responding to what motherhood means. This becomes transformative as that helps the couple to live in happiness. In this manner docility results in what Mahmood (2001) refers to as continuity and stability. Moreover, when the men are sexually satisfied, they do not go to look for extra-marital affairs, thus, reducing the rate of contracting sexually transmitted diseases. In this manner, docility becomes a way in which sexual health is enhanced.

## Conclusion

Through the process of panopticism, the women are created as docile bodies by African culture and SRHR. However, they use the characteristics of docility namely humility, prudence and knowledge to transform their violent situations. Prudence, humility and knowledge as characteristics of docility are the tools that the women use to actively participate in their SRHR. Although this has been taken by several scholars as dangerous coping strategies through which the women perpetuate their oppression, I have argued that womanhood does not have precedence among the Shona. The more important category is motherhood, and that motherhood is an empowered category. Although several institutions socialise women in their sexuality and by so doing create them as docile bodies, this docility does not translate to unrefined coping mechanisms. The women under study creatively appropriate and deploy docility to negotiate numerous SRHR roadblocks. Hence, docility can be agentic and transformative, and it is powerful power. It is a resource in the lives of Korekore women and should not be underestimated.

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# UBUNTU, SACRED TEXTS AND THE AGENCY OF PEOPLE ON THE MARGINS<sup>1</sup>

*Masiwa Ragies Gunda*

## Introduction

From the turn of the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the Women's Empowerment Movement took centre stage in Africa fighting for the equality of women and men in all spheres of life, another movement was being born on the continent. This was the Gay Rights Movement, which was fighting for the recognition of the humanity of Intersex, Transgender, Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual persons (ITLGB)<sup>2</sup> in our communities. While both women and ITLGB persons had participated in the wider war of liberation in various communities on the continent, a few years after independence was won, it became clear that they were not fully represented in the newly found independence. Their fight, therefore, was from their perspective, a continuation of the fight for independence and that largely remains their focus. While greater strides have been made in achieving the goals of the Women's Empowerment Movement (seen in the rise of women to very senior political, economic, religious and social positions), some churches in the region, however, remain resistant to full equality between men and women in ministry. The same cannot be said of ITLGB persons because for them, very little strides have been made.

Are the experiences of women and sexual minorities in line with the oft lauded concept of Ubuntu? How does Ubuntu relate with the Christian sacred text, the Bible, in fostering our ethos? This chapter engages with a concept that has been lauded as a critical indigenous philosophy about humanity and the world, Ubuntu. It also interacts with the critical and

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this paper was initially presented at a Fellowship of Church Councils in Southern Africa (FOCCISA) gathering of Presidents, General Secretaries and Gender Officers in Johannesburg, August 29 – 1 September 2016.

<sup>2</sup> I deliberately inverted the popular acronym LGBTI to ITLGB in this paper specifically because I wanted the religious leaders to begin from the categories of human sexuality and gender identities that are least challenging for them. That is, many would be more familiar with intersex individuals.

indispensable manual for the Christian faith, the Bible. This is accompanied by a consideration of the role and function of those that are on the margins in our society, the ITLGB persons. What is Ubuntu? Is there something within the concept of Ubuntu that makes this a useful resource in the quest to understand the position and role of those on the margins in our society? What is the Bible? Is there anything in the Bible that can serve as a resource in understanding the position and role of those on the margins in our society? These are some of the questions that will be tackled in this chapter. This chapter will unfold in sections: the background, a re-appraisal of Ubuntu, then of sacred texts, followed by the relationship between Ubuntu and sacred texts as well as the concluding observations.

## Background

Southern Africa is a region with great and glorious stories to tell, as well as sad and sordid tales to re-tell. The glorious stories of the great Kingdoms of the past, of the great and fearless ancestors who resisted the gun-wielding coloniser with their bare hands and spears, and the bravery of young women and men who left their schools to go and fight for the liberation of their people from the yoke of colonial oppression. These glorious stories are, however, accompanied by some sad and sordid tales such as the humiliation of being made outsiders in our own lands, the humiliation of an elderly man being called “boy” (Vengeyi 2012) by a young white boy, the sad narratives of indigenous liberator-turned-oppressor in independent African states (Gunda 2009), the rabid resistance to women’s empowerment in the 1990s (which continues in some circles to date) and now the de-humanisation of the ITLGB persons born and raised in this region. Most of the ITLGB persons have never known any other place on earth other than this region. The Church has been found on both sides – the glorious and the sordid!

I want to salute the Church in this region for its involvement in the glorious narratives of the region, for the Church and its schools became the cradle for the birthing of the liberation movements in this region. In taking this stance, particularly symbolised by the World Council of Churches’ Program to Combat Racism, the formation of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe, the gathering of the Kairos Theologians in South Africa (Mapuranga and Chitando 2008), the Church re-

claimed its position as the “salt and light of the world.” With the importance of “salt and light” lying in the transformative qualities that these substances possess, the Church became a transforming agent for this region. I call this a reclamation because it was a function and character of the Church that the Church inherits from Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, but which character and function the Church has allowed to be domesticated by empire at several points in the history of humanity post-Easter (Rieger 2007). We can also claim our rightful position as the new centre of Christianity, we could once again become the “salt and light” of this world. There is so much growth and vibrancy in churches in this part of the world, however, what has been lacking are platforms to discuss issues of our own accord. To this end, it is important to recognise the work done by the World Council of Churches’ Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA) that has been spearheaded by Rev. Dr. Nyambura Njoroge, whose work has created multiple platforms for discussion and dialogue.

Through the work of EHAIA and other Christian organisations, discussions on the position of our brothers and sisters who have been crying to be brought inside for full fellowship have been held. However, the majority who are inside have consistently said that there is no more room inside, hence they have remained on the margins. Nonetheless, they retain the hope that the few (like Nyambura) who are inside, and who see that there is room for them to come and take their place alongside those already inside will eventually succeed, as happened with slavery, colonialism, apartheid and women’s liberation. It is no coincidence that the ITLGB individuals came to light in this region in the 1990s because they saw an opportunity for themselves in the rise of the Women Empowerment Movement of the same period, which benefitted immensely from the successes and publicity of the Beijing convention of 1995 (Gunda 2010). As Chitando (2016) has observed, in spite of our experiences of multiple deprivations in this region and the tremendous effort we put in fighting for freedom, we have also consistently excluded and even promoted the deprivations we considered dehumanising for ourselves to be adequate and good for the ITLGB persons, some of whom played a sterling role in the liberation of men and women of this region.

While we have judged all other persons on the totality of their humanity, we, however, have consistently judged the ITLGB persons ONLY on the aspect of their sexuality. We have decided to throw away all the other contributions that these brothers and sisters and those in-between have made,

by entirely narrowing our focus on their sexuality. Where states and churches have prided themselves as “rainbow communities” owing to their supposed celebration of diversity of the people, even in this celebrated diversity, no room has been found for those whose diversity is within the realm of sexuality. These individuals have mostly been disowned and labelled “foreign-influenced” persons who cannot be accommodated in our community of the “morally pure.” We have also found many other problems such as poverty, lack of clean water, and high unemployment rates as justifications for delaying talking about ITLGB rights and to justify their exclusion from the Church (Chitando 2016). In the meantime, those on the margins continue to cry and beg to be accommodated.

In taking positions on the subject of sexual diversity, two key instruments have been invoked, that is, African culture, represented in this region by the indigenous philosophy of Ubuntu and the sacred text of the Bible. In the following sections, I focus on these instruments, first by presenting their dominant view and then problematising the same for further discussion and engagement.

## **Re-thinking and Re-presenting the Concept of Ubuntu**

The concept of Ubuntu is highly celebrated in this region, especially because of the way it was credited with facilitating the successful execution of the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in post-apartheid South Africa by Desmond Tutu. The term Ubuntu comes from a group of sub-Saharan languages known as Bantu (Battle 2009: 2). It is a term used to describe the quality or essence of being a person amongst many sub-Saharan tribes of the Bantu language family (Eze 2010). Hunhu/Ubuntu also says something about the character and conduct of a person (Samkange and Samkange 1980: 38). Ubuntu is described as a philosophy that places an imperative on the importance of group or communal existence as opposed to the West’s emphasis on individualism and individual human rights. In Ubuntu, everything is done to put the interests of the community ahead of the interests of the individual (Mangena 2016). In short, Ubuntu is understood as a philosophy that proclaims the primacy of the community over the individual, and to further elaborate on this, some phrases and idioms have been used such as:

- in the Nguni/Ndebele phrase, *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (a person is a person through other persons)
- in the Xhosa proverb, *ungamntu ngabanye abantu*, (a person is made a person by other persons)
- in the Shona phrase, *munhu unoitwa munhu nevamwe vanhu* (a person is made a person by other persons)

Through these phrases, it is suggested that Ubuntu is about the group/community more than it is about the self (Mangena 2012). In line with this understanding, we are led to see Ubuntu referring to the quality of being human as well as the ideology that governs intra-community relations hence, the idea of Ubuntu as African humaneness and African humanism in which;

African humaneness would then entail that the qualities of selflessness and commitment to one's group or community are more important than the selfish celebration of individual achievements and dispositions. While African humanism, on the other hand, would then refer to an ideology, outlook or thought system that values peaceful co-existence and the valorisation of the community (Mangena 2012:6).

When it comes to the morality of the community, the community is the source, author and custodian of moral standards, and personhood is defined in terms of conformity to these established moral standards whose objective is to have a person who is communo-centric rather than one who is individualistic (Mangena 2012:11). Understood this way, Ubuntu can be an instrument that can condone the exclusion of those deemed non-compliant with community values.

Unfortunately, as has happened with most African inventions of the post-colonial era, things have been defined and understood in a dualism of Africa versus the West, that sometimes, we have not engaged the totality of our ideas in our quest to outdo the West. While this is the dominant presentation of Ubuntu in the region, there have been others who have expressed reservations to certain degrees, among the most important counter-perspectives being the observation of Onyebuchi Eze (2010:92); who observes:

Ubuntu is projected to us in a rather hegemonic format, by way of an appeal to an unanimous past through which we may begin to understand the socio-cultural imaginary of the "African" people before the violence of colonialism; an imagination that must be rehabilitated in that percussive sense for its actual appeal for the contemporary African society.

This observation is key in that it allows us to critically engage with the concept of Ubuntu, especially when it is largely used to romanticise pre-colonial Africa by making some problematic suggestions such as the one below:

Most homes in the West have durawalls or high fences to maximise the privacy of the owner and so a stranger cannot just walk in and be accommodated. This is quite understandable because in Western societies, the individual is conceived of as the centre of human existence and so there is need to respect his or her rights to privacy. In the West, the idea of a stranger walking into a private space is called trespassing and one can be prosecuted for this act. And yet in African traditional thought in general, and in the Shona/Ndebele society in particular, the idea of trespassing is not conceptualised in that way (Mangena 2016).

Even though Ubuntu has been used by many to entrench and sustain the exclusion of those on the margins, especially the ITLGB persons because their sexuality has been labelled anti-community, some, like Chitando, are convinced that *Ubuntu* can still be an instrument of inclusion of all, an instrument that has always acknowledged diversity, hence, he writes:

One of the most useful concepts to promote openness and acceptance has been that of Ubuntu. Ubuntu is a Pan African concept which suggests that one's humanity is incomplete without acknowledging the humanity of the other/next person (Chitando 2016).

This idea is also expressed by Mangena as follows:

Thus, as an aspect of African traditional philosophy, *Hunhu/Ubuntu* prides in the idea that the benefits and burdens of the community must be shared in such a way that no one is prejudiced (Mangena 2012).

To sum up this section, I am proposing that *Ubuntu* expresses the fact that each individual's humanity is ideally expressed in relation to others, in such a way that the individual and community are conceived of as intrinsically and inseparably related. The one is in the many but the many are in the one; the individual is in a community and the community is in the individual. This way, the humanity of the community lies and is dependent on the humanity of the individuals. If the humanity of the individual is emasculated, the humanity of the community is emasculated! This understanding of *Ubuntu* makes it closely related to the fundamental tenets of the Christian faith as bequeathed to us by our Lord, Jesus Christ.

## Sacred Texts as Sites of Struggle for Re-conceptualising the World

The Bible belongs among the very few select texts in the world that are classified as “sacred texts” or “scripture”. These texts and their importance are particularly emphasised in the three Abrahamic faiths, namely, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In these three faiths, sacred texts are considered the be-all for believers, these are timeless writings that originate with God. These writings are not ordinary writings, hence, there is the belief that when approached properly and correctly, these writings will answer all questions put to them. My focus here is especially on the Christian Bible, but most of my observations could as well be applied to the sacred texts of other faiths. Through an interpretation of sacred texts, believers develop their worldview – how the world works, the relationship between humanity and other beings in the universe and, critically, the intra-relationship within the human species itself. This explains why most Christians are quick to invoke the Bible each time ITLGB persons are mentioned as members of the community at large and the community of faith in particular. How have we come to be “people of the Bible”?

While African exposure to the Hebrew Bible happened even before the time of Jesus Christ, it is true that this exposure occurred in North Africa and was largely limited to that region. Most of sub-Saharan Africa was exposed first not to the Hebrew Bible but rather to the Christian Bible through the agency of Imperial Europe and Western missionaries. Our Christianity is, therefore, intrinsically connected to colonialism and all its vagaries and the quest for independence and the joys and sorrows of such aspirations. Our Christianity is essentially “Bible-based Christianity” (Gunda 2014:150), with the Bible being the book; read in times of joy and in times of sorrow (Togarasei 2008:73). In most cases the Bible is the only piece of literature that one finds in many homes. The Bible was mediated to us as the Holy Book, one that guided everything that we did in our lives. Through this Book, we were informed that God spoke to us. We believed, and we became “people of the Bible”, people who are quick to seek authentication from the Bible. While initially, the Bible was read to us through the agency of missionaries and their indigenous collaborators, the Bible was translated into indigenous languages, thereby making it accessible to more people. The success of the translation project was aided by the success of the mission schools that were set up by missionaries (Gunda 2009:79).

The shift from having the Bible read for them to indigenous people reading the Bible for themselves brought to the fore the nature of the Bible as a “site of struggle.” In articulating the values of the Contextual Bible Study method, Gerald West (2013) says:

the CBS works with ‘struggle’ as a key socio-theological concept because ‘struggle’ is a key characteristic of reality. In that regard, the CBS takes sides with the God of life against the idols of death. For CBS the primary ‘terrain’ of struggle is the ideological and theological; CBS recognises that the Bible is itself contested, including biblical ‘voices’ or theologies that bring life and biblical ‘voices’ or theologies that bring death. Therefore, CBS ‘wrestles’ with the biblical text to bring forth life.

During the colonial-evangelisation onslaught and before the colonised-converted could read the Bible for themselves, the Bible was presented as a single unified document with a single unified voice on all matters, hence, all who heard the text read were obliged to obey and follow its instructions. During this period, one could not refer to the Bible as a site of struggle, for there was no such struggle because the Bible was being read by one for the other, from the single perspective of the one reading.

This consistent Bible did not last long because as soon as indigenous converts had learnt how to read English and as soon as it was translated into local languages, in the spirit of European Protestantism, it became clear to some of the readers that the Bible possessed many voices. Not only did they begin to struggle with the text to speak to their situation of being emasculated in their own homes, they also began to struggle with the readings that seemingly suggested that it was fine for them to be so emasculated while they also encountered texts that suggested that it was not God’s plan for any human being to be so constrained.

Since the 1990s, the same scenario that characterised the colonial-evangelisation context re-appeared in most communities in Southern Africa, with most Christians *reading the Bible for* people on the margins, such as the ITLGB persons. The Bible was used mainly as a tool to domesticate, dehumanise and disempower those on the margins. While these readings gained momentum in the 1990s, they remain the major voice on the subject. It was so vicious at first that those on the margins reacted in the same way that most Africans reacted towards the Western missionaries once they had fully appreciated how the Bible was being used to exclude them:

by disowning and removing themselves from submitting to this text! The text was labelled “empire text, developed and deployed for the benefit of only those that serve the empire while depriving those on the margins of empire!” (Rieger 2007).

Contestation becomes a reality once those being pushed outside resolve to put their own questions to the text and to wear their own reading glasses because it is only then that it becomes apparent to them and others that it is not necessarily the text that is pushing them outside, but the prejudice of the dominant readers (Gunda 2009). At no point must we ever resolve to engage the text in a struggle for understanding, and we should even be more suspicious when those in charge of empire are informing us how we should read the Bible and who we should accept in the house of God, for then the house of God will become house of Empire. We are aware that there were white missionaries who were deported by white colonial governments because they refused to accept empire-championed interpretations of the gospel.

Bishop Donal Lamont is one such celebrated missionary, who in his 1976 open letter to the government of Ian Smith, wrote: “Far from your policies, defending Christianity and western civilisation, as you claim, they mock the law of Christ and make communism attractive to the African people.” That same year, he was sentenced to 10 years’ imprisonment with hard labour because he had permitted nuns in his diocese to tend to wounded guerrillas and because he had also advised them, for their own safety and for the good reputation of the Catholic Church, not to report the presence of the guerrillas to the authorities. He was held under house arrest before he was deported” (Maye 2011).

We have now come to the point where the ITLGB persons that have been confined outside because the Bible has been read for them, have now started questioning the ways of reading and the motivations behind those who are inside, who continue to refuse them their humanity and who refuse to see the image of God that is in them. Whereas they once ran away from the Church in search of alternative accommodation, they are clear that they belong within the family of God and have and continue to come back to ask for their own space in the House of God. Through their readings, we are reminded of our own past of deprivation and rejection, when, because of our skin colour, we were considered not human enough.

Two lines of argument have emerged in this contestation over and in Scripture:

- **First**, that sexual minorities are an aberration of the created world, that God intended for heterosexuality hence, God created Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve. Through the use of the so-called “bullet texts” (Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 and 20, Romans 1, 1 Corinthians 6, 1 Timothy 1 and Jude), it has been suggested that homosexuality was so wicked that God punished the people of Sodom so severely and that if any society were to accept sexual minorities it would put them on the path to destruction.
- **Second**, that sexual minorities are a wonderful part of God’s creation, that God created males and females and others who are neither male nor female. This diversity is not an aberration, but a divinely ordained difference. Through the use of some texts (Genesis 1, Matthew 19, 1 Corinthians 12-13), it has been argued that diversity is inherent in God’s creation, yet we are all united by the Image of God in all individuals. The hermeneutics of love and abundant life have been central to this alternative reading that seeks to “enlarge the tent of the House of God” (Isa.54:2) to accommodate all those that have been excluded so far.

Herein lies the ‘struggle’ for which our communities are invited to engage in. We are aware that the largest threat to this struggle is the politicisation of the ITLGB people in our communities. However, we are called to mission by Christ, and we must engage with ITLGB persons through the lenses of Christ’s own dealings with those that were on the margins, the outcasts of Jesus’ time. In my perspective, there are ways in which a struggle with scripture can lead us into a happier House of God where all children of God will find a place to abide because the Lord is already in all of us (1 Cor.12:9). Below, I will highlight areas that could make Ubuntu and sacred texts resources for re-appraising the people on the margins.

## **Ubuntu and Sacred Texts: Resources for Re-appraising People on the Margins**

In this section, I intend to highlight some aspects of *Ubuntu* and the Bible that actually challenge us to re-think our perception towards ITLGB persons in our community. While there has been an emphasis on the “communo-centric” nature of Ubuntu, I critically think that the individual is not completely annihilated by the same. Similarly, at the heart of the rev-

olutionary Christian faith and as attested both in the Old and New Testaments, is the charge to “protect the vulnerable, especially those that are victims of the machinations of empire” (Ex.12:49, 22:21-22; Lk.4:18-22). The following are points that are critical in our quest to re-engage with Ubuntu:

Ubuntu is the idea that no one can be healthy when the community is sick. Ubuntu says I am human only because you are human. If I undermine your humanity, I dehumanise myself (Yamamoto 1997:52).

For Battle (2009:2), Ubuntu is the interdependence of persons for the exercise, development, and fulfilment of their potential to be both individuals and community.

From these two key conceptualisations of Ubuntu, one could argue that it is in its openness to protecting all persons within the community that it could become “the gift to the world” because our world is driven by philosophies that are built on discrimination of the “Other.” All members of the community, notwithstanding their diversity, are fully accommodated in the community. Their role and status in the community is not dependent on them converting to be like the majority. Diversity has always been a part and parcel of all communities. However, I am not suggesting that there are no expectations or obligations for those that are members of the community, because they are there. There are expectations and obligations not to harm other members of the community and to assist members of the community in every way possible. These expectations do not seek to eradicate the diversities that exist among community members.

Coming to the Bible and following on earlier observations that the Bible must be taken as a “site of struggle,” it is important to consider how we approach the Bible, especially being aware that some of our readings may cause death and harm while others may give life, comfort and security to some people. I consider the following points to be critical for our engagement with the Bible:

- That in the Old Testament, God’s Israelite project is to create a society that is governed by the principles of justice, righteousness, equality and equity. In this society, all would be welcome and would be catered for (the image of Eden, the Abrahamic nation (Gen. 18), the Promise to the Exodus party, the Occupation and Settlement in the Promised Land and the reigns of Judges are all inter-woven into this project of God). The prophetic theology of the Old Testament is also falling into this consistent strand of thought that God is making Israel a “pilot project for just human society.”

- The great inaugural statement by Jesus in Luke 4 follows this consistent strand of thought, proclaiming the “good news”, which would offer hope, comfort and security to those who were at the mercy of the Roman Empire. Are we surprised, then, that from its inception Christianity started off by becoming a refuge to those that were outcasts of their time and of their empire?

I am aware that this consistent strand has been threatened, challenged and, over time, been subordinated to empire strands that are also fairly represented in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament, but also in the New Testament. The project of God towards a just society is disrupted when, instead of the other nations coming to copy the good thing in Israel, it was Israel who opted to be co-opted into Empire (Gen.18:18-19; I Sam.8:5). Clearly, the Bible demands that we choose either to follow the first strand, which focuses on justice and righteousness or the reading that legitimises injustice in society.

These observations provide for us the most solid platform upon which to engage with our faith and with our perceptions, not only of those on the margins like the ITLGB persons, but also of those on the center, who mostly belong with and for empire. In this regard, I propose here the adoption of “the hermeneutical option for life,” which challenges every reading we undertake on its impact on life. Every reading that threatens or can be used to threaten life cannot be part of the “good news of and in Christ!”

## Concluding Observations

For millennia now, there has always been contestation in society regarding the persons that stood on the margins of society. Theories and philosophies were developed in order to keep those on the margins where they were, while alternative theories and philosophies were also developed to bring those on the margins inside. From recent history, this reminds us of the situation of people of African descent both on the continent and abroad, who suffered so much because of their skin colour; we are also reminded of women from across the world, who also suffered (and continue to suffer) innumerable numbers of deprivations simply because they (are) were women; the list goes on.

However, what has been heartening is that at each stage, even when it seemed impossible because those inside had built fortifications and arsenals to keep others outside, they were still defeated because they were

fighting against a life-giving force. We are, like those before us, at the crossroads where critical decisions must be made; are we going to opt for safety first and downplay what is in our faces or are we going to stand up for all life that possesses the image of God and join the life-giving force that cannot be stopped by empire?

Ubuntu and the Bible provide us with the basis to engage with ITLGB persons in our communities because they both value all individuals since in their personhood lies our own personhood. The individual diversities that exist among us cannot be the basis upon which we decide to deny the personhood of the other. Perhaps, brothers and sisters, Ubuntu is what Paul is speaking about in the texts 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 and Romans 12:5. Ubuntu is about a body that celebrates the diversity of its many parts. When it comes to those on the margins, let us always consider the question; “On which side would Jesus be: exclusion or inclusion?” Jesus, I contend, consistently expressed commitment towards radical inclusion.

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# **'LIFE-FORCE': AN AFRICAN CONCEPT OF S(S)PIRIT, RELATIONALITY AND WHOLENESS**

*Kuzipa Nalwamba*

## **Introduction**

African philosophical thought, grounded in the notion of wholeness, construes life as a constant flow of a force or energy throughout the entire cosmos. That life-force enfolds all modes of organic and inorganic life. Africanist theologians, thinkers and philosophers have explored and appropriated themes of the integrative African worldview suggested by a cosmic view of the life-force or s(S)pirit.

Nyambura Njoroge's life-work as theologian, activist, ethicist, administrator and ecumenist exemplifies that approach. In its variedness, her work self-evidently presupposes the interconnectedness of the African view of reality. Through an integrative approach, she has sought to identify patterns by searching for connections that tie her endeavours together as a contribution to the wholeness of life. Her own words capture that attempt as a:

... struggle to articulate within a biblical and theological framework, the dilemmas presented in the African context in the last fifty years, especially in the 1990s. My reflections are undertaken as an African Christian woman in search of a metaphor or metaphors that will lead us to engage in restoring our human dignity and respect for life (Njoroge 2001: 67).

This contribution, therefore, honours Njoroge's work by reflecting on the holistic African worldview as a relational, life-affirming theological and ethical model. It takes the totality of life into account, thereby transcending reductionist foundationalism. That view of life that transcends confined binary and fragmented notions.

## **The Bondedness of Life**

In African understanding, human life is inseparably embedded within the cosmos. To that extent, human life is defined by its connectedness to the

totality of the entire community of life (Gitau 2000). Such a bio-centric theology and philosophy presupposes an inseparable reality. The kinship within the community of life that such a view entails resonates with Njoroge's rallying call for life-giving theologies. It is the thread that runs through her theological articulation and formulation of ethical responses towards children and women's issues, HIV & AIDS, ecumenism, disability and sexual diversity.

Malawian theologian, Harvey Sindima (1990), underlines the importance of such an underlying belief being constitutive of a life-centred understanding of reality. Kagame (1956), Jahn (1961), and Nyamiti (1976), have all enunciated this theme as an expression of African ontology. As all aspects of life are apprehended within the matrix of the life-force, the African worldview offers a holistic hermeneutical lens for pneuma-theologies that link every aspect of life to the divine.

Vincent Mulago (1962) presents this holistic view of life as *union vitale* or *participation vitale*, capturing the elements of the unified and participative nature of the worldview that underlies it. *Union vitale* and *participation vitale* nuance the understanding that God - in whatever way God is understood in various African cultures - is essentially a life-force or s(S)pirit. That s(S)pirit which imbues all creatures and connects the "dynamic and intricate relationships" (Kaoma 2013: 17) within the cosmos understood as a community of life. The union-of-life-in-participation that Mulago advances is instructive in that regard. Within it we identify a pneuma-theological category of relationship and participation that echoes the biblical tradition that concepts like *pneuma* and *ruach* suggest.

Other African theologians have underlined the need to harness this life-centred insight within the ambit of eco-theology. Ghanaian theologian and ethicist, Emmanuel Asante, who coined the term *pan-vitalism*, further nuances Mulago's notion of *union vitale*. His emphasis on the kinship that exists within the community of life aptly captures that notion, when he avers;

Reality is inseparable. The African is kin to all creatures – gods, spirits and nature ... The whole of nature must be understood as sacred because it derives its being from the Supreme Being who is the Creator-Animator of the Universe (Asante 1985: 289).

Njoroge's work illustrates her quest for fullness of life in the midst of threats to life such as gender-based injustice, disease, poverty and poor

leadership. Her search for a life-affirming metaphor has led her to a spirituality of resistance and transformation. She highlights the need for peace-making and transformation as the building block in the incremental quest for fullness of life. She has reclaimed biblical narrative by highlighting the role of obscure women like Rizpah (2 Samuel 3:6-8) and other marginal characters as symbols of resistance and contributors to the wholeness of communities. By juxtaposing biblical narratives with stories of, for instance, African women as nurturers of life, she valorises a spirituality of resistance and transformation that could emerge from the seemingly weak and marginalised people to challenge life-threatening forces.

Such a spirituality of resistance is nurtured in a context where there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the secular. Because of the bondedness of African life, it is imbued with a 'this-worldliness' that links the divine and the mundane in an abiding vital participation. That reality includes God and humans in an abiding relationship which is the divine destiny of humankind, as well as the purpose and goal of the universe (Bediako 1995). In other words, the mundane, everyday life experiences and actions are unified. Out of that, new experiences become incorporated and infused with spiritual meaning and inclusiveness (Balcomb 2005). There is, therefore, no aspect of human endeavour that is outside of the realm of the participative action of God and humans. That is the source of hope, namely, that life-defying, ethical action is possible in the midst self-centredness and greed.

### **Life-force as Connector of the Divine, the Living, the Living-dead and Nature**

In the African universe, the life-force within connects everything - the divine, the ancestors, the living and nature. It is the milieu in which acts of resistance to life-threats are undertaken. Because life cannot be understood without reference to the divine, every aspect of life has significance. This is exemplified in the rituals of the lifecycle in which all living beings, including God, spirits and ancestors share in rites of intensification that reveal the foundational beliefs and identity of the community. The rites signified the underlying belief that all organic and inorganic 'things' are imbued with potency. In that regard, every object serves as a religious

symbol. The material world and the unseen transcendent realm are interwoven in a mutually influencing dynamic flow. In traditional Christian parlance we could thus speak of a realm in which every external act, ritual and entity communicates God and is a medium through which we encounter God.

In such an interconnected belief system, even misfortune has multidimensional sources. Living in an enchanted universe in which there are multiple human and non-human actors imbued with potency means each has the potential to impact life in diverse and invisible ways. The intertwined interplay of the life-force in African cosmology, as earlier suggested, is not limited to organic life. Inanimate (or inorganic) entities such as artefacts and charms are understood to be imbued with potency and can impact life in diverse ways.<sup>1</sup>

It is thus, not uncommon for newly born babies to be adorned with beads and charms which are believed to ward off malevolent spirits. The potency that the beads or charms have, in that respect, may be said to be 'sacramental'. Through that 'seen' object, the unseen transcendent realm is brought closer to human consciousness. The attribution of power to objects and actions has latent subversive elements that could inform tacit resistance and inspire transformation.

A case in point is the work of Reformed theologian, Marthinus Daneel, who served as a theological educator in Mashonaland. He has made a distinct contribution by bridging the realms of African Initiated Churches (AICs) and African Traditional Religions, which has resulted in the formation of an interreligious grassroots' organisation, the Zimbabwean Institute for Religious Research and Ecological Conservation. Together with its affiliates, the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Ecologists and the Association of African Earth-keeping Churches and through interfaith cooperation and dialogue, they embody a holistic, communal approach to earth-keeping<sup>2</sup> that appropriates African spirituality. Njoroge's spirituality of resistance and transformation resonates with this kind of appropriation.

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<sup>1</sup> Charms and some certain artefacts are understood to be imbued with power to ward off evil (i.e. preserve life) or indeed to inflict evil (i.e. deny life). Their potency is derived from their presence within the 'realm' of the life-force or as it is situationally summoned.

<sup>2</sup> See Marthinus Daneel, *African Earthkeepers: Wholistic Interfaith Mission*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001) for an engagement of the traditional African from a Christian theological

In her ground-breaking investigation of the encounter between local people and development policy on the Copperbelt in Zambia, Parsons makes an observation that further indicates the prevalence of this way of construing reality. She examines the response of mine workers to mine accidents and the preventive measures they employ to avert the ever-present danger. They use physical objects they believe to have potency as protection from misfortunes and especially of mine accidents. These practices have been updated to include Christian prayers and Christian symbols such as crosses, rosaries and the Bible. Miners engage in prayer rituals and carry what they consider to be auspicious objects with them as they go underground to ward off misfortune (Parsons 2010).

Even their way of relating to the mine itself and the rocks within it is such that each is ascribed with agency. As Parsons' informants told her, 'The underground was fine by itself, the rocks were peaceful and dignified until we provoked and aggravated them ...' (Parsons 2010: iii). The miners bemoan the excesses of mining as an extractive industry which promotes a utilitarian attitude towards the earth's resources. The belief that the mine and rocks respond with vengeance echoes the underlying reverence for the presumed connectedness of everything to the divine. Therein lies the potential for tacit resistance. When creation is valued for being imbued with the s(S)pirit of God, there is potential to shape ethical responsibility. Zambian theologian, Lackson Chibuye, in his 2016 PhD thesis assessed the environmental impact of mining activities in Zambia with a goal to develop theological resources as a platform for entry into national dialogue about environmental stewardship. His research includes an assessment of the cosmology of the Lamba people of the Copperbelt province. He uses that as an entry point into understanding the ecological wisdom embedded in the Lamba culture that finds expression in a communal ethic. He presents that as a hermeneutical lens for interpreting biblical material and systematises that into theological reflection that challenges the basic assumptions that have led to environmental degradation caused by the mines (Chibuye 2016).

Nkemnkia aptly captures the prevalent dynamic communal view of the life in African thought when he opines that 'African thought has a unified vision of reality in which there is no room for irreducible dichotomies of matter and spirit, religious tension and daily life between soul and body'

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point of view, highlighting the Spirit's role as the oasis of life and healer of the land whose presence and action is directed against the life-denying forces in the universe.

(Nkemnkia 1999: 165). Thus, the African ontological and metaphysical conception of reality renders its universe sacred and bio-centric. It is so suffused with life that even inanimate objects are potent because they exist in a world ‘charged’ with the life-force. It therefore, “is the creative force behind all human and non-human action” (Nel, 2008:40) that fuels a spirituality of resistance of death-dealing forces in preference for life. Conversely and critically, one may ask why the spirituality of resistance and transformation is not prevalent in society.

According to the African theologian, Gabriel Setiloane, the ‘interpenetrating and permeating’ (1998: 80) influence that saturates the community of life tends towards a harmonious existence of the whole. He asserts that:

[T]he term community is inclusive of all life (*bios*): animals, the habitat (the land), flora, and even the elements. The success of life is found in the ability to maintain a healthy relationship with all (Setiloane 1998: 79).

Setiloane’s cosmological assertion frames relational inclusivity in terms that confirm that an ethic of responsibility and commitment to the well-being of the whole, emanates from African cosmology. As a result, all activities are informed by a holistic understanding. Every aspect of life has potential to singularly or jointly maintain and transform life’s landscape. In this realm, an act cannot be separated from its environmental, societal, or spiritual influence. Within traditional African society this view informed acts of technology, agriculture, animal keeping, music, song, dance, ritual, and family among others. It is a system of thought rooted in action and its thought structure is embodied. In other words, a spirituality built on this insight cannot but lead to concrete action and transformation. This is a latent resource within the culture that could enrich Christian spirituality and ethical action in the world as exemplified in Njoroge’s life-work. Such a ‘sacramental’ sensibility speaks of a world that lives within God and a God who lives in the world. God and the world are not fragmented into two separate realities that are independent of each other. Rather, they somehow find each other in a milieu so “charged” with God, that a spirituality of resistance and transformation towards a life-affirming goal may flourish.

## Living in the s(S)pirit as Reverence for Life

Acts 17 postulates that everything exists within the milieu of the Spirit of God. That theological insight undergirds Christian reverence for life. In

incarnational terms, we speak of life as being *with* and *in* God. The scriptures use metaphors of water, breath and air to indicate creation's dependence on God for its growth and flourishing. The interpenetrating and permeating realm of the Spirit is what constitutes what American theologian McFague says is "the body of God . . . (and that) God as Spirit is the power of life and love within which all bodies exist (McFague 1993: 116). The inclusivity suggested by the interpenetrating and permeating power of the S(s)pirit in the universe affirms the embedded and embodied nature of life. Ethical action in the world that concerns itself with the well-being of the whole, then, tends to the body of God, thereby elevating any life-affirming action in the world.

The implication is that an integrative imperative is implied for ethical and moral responsibility because everything subsists in God. This convergence between African thought and Christian tradition challenges utilitarian and transactional ways of relating that have historically distorted Christian practice and that curtail the reverence for life that view conveys.

Though the ideas about the sacramental nature of creation in Christian tradition and that of the life-force in African thought are conceptually and cosmologically spaced out, they are compatible and can be theologically appropriated in a nuanced way because of some of the convergence points outlined thus far. They make for a viable conversation about theological articulation in terms of relational categories that nurture life-giving theologies.

African cosmology postulates a dynamic ontological and epistemological quest for equilibrium. There is, therefore, within it an in-built persistent pursuit of harmony in the varied inter-subjective relations within the cosmos. Harmony in relationships is the ultimate goal whenever there is disequilibrium. The need to prevent it summons and galvanises the entire community of life. Njoroge's quest for a spirituality of peace-making and transformation seems to be galvanised by and is a response to these summons for an epistemology and ontology that spurs all towards equilibrium as a constant call to action for the wellbeing of the whole because the meaning of life is bound up in the dialectic of the collective. As a result, when humans are spoken of as subject, they can only be spoken of in terms of relationship with other(kind)s. Human beings are, therefore, not subjects in the abstract but subjects in relation to other subjects: '*Umuntu*

*nga bantu* (A person *is* in relation to others and by extension to other-kind within the web of life).

Thus, whether it be in the fight against the HIV pandemic, gender-based violence, war and the ecological crisis - to mention a few of the themes in Njoroge's body of work – relationships are implied. As long as there is divine connection to, and the inter-subjective relationship within, the web of life is kept in view, there is a reverence for life that underpins the movement toward life-affirming alternatives.

Living justly and sustainably in recognition of inter-subjective relationships imputes value to everything. Within that is the humbling recognition that without that the other there can be no life. That imperative for the life of the other (kind)s has a self-evident societal dimension. Everything is interrelated and so the flourishing of all is the affirmation of life for all and has religious, social, cultural, economic and political implications.

### **Relational Participation: *Creatio Continua***

The life-cycle and its accompanying communal rites of intensification<sup>3</sup> that mark the various stages and seasons of life in African traditional life are at the core of life. Religion is so deeply embedded in daily life that separating religion from other aspects of life seems superfluous. Rites of passage and communal rites exemplify the ubiquitous nature of religion in life. In an African sense, all vicissitudes of life hinge on the interaction between the divine and the mundane as the 'realm' of life.

The rites, practices, customs and ceremonies performed to mark the various human transitions from conception to death heighten the sense of sacredness of each stage. During the ritual practices, the participation and presence of the divine. What the Banyarwanda and Barundi of East Africa

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<sup>3</sup> This concept is applied to congregational studies, but it also describes what we are discussing here (see Nancy T. Ammerman, "Culture and Identity in the Congregation," in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook*, ed. Nancy Ammerman, Jackson W. Carroll and Carl S. Dudley, 1998). Rites of intensification are rituals that focus the community and strengthen (intensify) the community's commitment to its beliefs and shared meanings. These include especially those rituals, which celebrate or focus on the core values of the community. In African traditional life these include all the rituals that mark the cycle of life from conception to after-life; the cycle of seasons and the celebration around the sacred object within nature like trees, rivers, mountains, animals and the spirits which are revered and understood to sustain and nourish life.

called *Amziy'mana* (God's water) is an example of such an intensified reminder of the divine-human participation in the life-cycle. In anticipation of conception, a woman puts a bowl of water in her room before going to bed. The water symbolises the cooperative action that preserves the life of the foetus during pregnancy. It is a co-operative venture. The woman and the water function in concert to give, nurture and preserve life. The mother-to-be is additionally, subjected to food taboos and other restrictions intended to preserve the life of the unborn child. The pregnant woman herself is chosen for the sacred duty of bringing a new life to the community in a co-operative act with natural elements as media for divine action (Lugira 2009). In John 3, the mother's womb and water symbolise re-birth.

The water is a symbol of cleansing in the new-born's transition from the mother's womb into the world. Later in life, water marks other life-cycle transitions like the initiation of boys and girls into adulthood in some cultures. The initiate may wash in a stream and emerge from it as a man or woman, ready to be incorporated into the community as an adult with adult responsibilities. The ritual washing echoes the symbolic initiation through the water of baptism, which initiates and incorporates the believer into the body of Christ.

At birth, a midwife who may also be a medicine woman<sup>4</sup> and regarded as sacred, attends to the mother-to-be and conducts the rituals associated with birth. Among them are the first baby bath, the disposal (not in the sense of 'dumping' as these items are imbued with ritual symbolism that pertains to the life of the new-born) of the placenta and the umbilical cord. Their disposal is a sacred ritual symbol that signifies the baby's transition from confinement in the mother's womb into another realm as a new life that is part of the community.

In some cultures, the placenta and umbilical cord of the newly born are buried under a tree. From then on, until it bears fruit, that tree is considered sacred. When the fruit matures, it is used to prepare a sacred feast

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<sup>4</sup> The role of medicine men and women evokes the idea of healing. In the traditional African sense, healing is not confined to mental and physical health. It is the total sum of the person's interpersonal relations with the family, community (including the living-dead) and nature. 'Sickness implies that there is an imbalance between the metaphysical and the human world as the flow of the supernatural life force may have been disturbed' See, Obinna, "Life is Superior to Wealth?": Indigenous Healers in an African Community, Amasiri, Nigeria" in *African Traditions in the Study of Religion in Africa*, ed. Afe Adogame, Ezra Chitando and Bolaji Bateye (London: Routledge, 2012).

for the community. The tree is linked to this mysterious act as recipient of the same nourishment as the newly born, but also as bearer of the fruit that in turn nourishes the community. The significance of the tree being nourished by the bodily elements of a human is that even in death, interdependence within the cycle of life remains constant. Dead creatures and organisms become nourishment for plants and other creatures in the lower bands of the food chain. Within such an interdependent web, even death is an acceptable natural part of the life cycle. The life cycle is just that - a LIFE-cycle. Even death leads to and becomes life.

The relational life-giving process in which the divine is participant is reminiscent of the act of creation, as a relational participatory process, *creatio continua*. From it, we may derive an ethic that 'subjectifies' everything, including elements such as water that tend to be commodified. The use of water as ritual symbol indicates that it is more than a commodity for human utility. It is ritually connected to our very being. Its participative link to the divine in the act of conception and characterisation as the 'primal water' of the womb, the incubator of life accords it agency. It neither competes with nor nullifies the Creator's agency.

In the human quest for cosmological congruence through science, philosophy and religion, water is a major factor. In Chinese philosophy, water is one of the five basic elements of life together with earth, fire, wood and metal. Many religions, including Christianity, understand water to be the source of life. In the Genesis 1 creation narrative, the *ruach* of God<sup>5</sup> is presented as hovering over the chaotic primordial waters. Water also serves as a religious ritual cleansing element and as a symbol of renewal or rebirth (c.f. John 3; 1 John 5:6-8). In science, the example of the 'Follow the Water' themesthat guides the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Mars Exploration Project (MEP) in its quest to establish how habitable the planet Mars is, is another case in point. The existence of water as vapour, ice or in liquid form would authenticate, or otherwise, the planet's ability to support (or to have supported?) life.

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<sup>5</sup> Karl Barth contends that the *ruach* of Genesis 1 is mere wind and cannot be said to be the Spirit of God. In that vein, he sees discontinuity between *ruach* and the Spirit of God and certainly between the Spirit of God and other conceptions of the s(S)pirit. See, *Church Dogmatics III by Karl Barth*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark. 1953).

The relational principle speaks to the interactive nature of life. It engenders self-extension as varied interrelations regenerate and renew as "a genealogical filiation of forms of beings, engendering or relating to one another, all of them witnessing to the original source that made them possible" (Mudimbe 1990: 190). Within the milieu of the S(s)pirit, the on-going dynamic interaction supports an integrative approach oriented towards life.

## Conclusion

This contribution sets out the African worldview with reference to what is presumed to be the epistemological and ontological underpinning of Njoroge's life-work. Her contribution to scholarship and activism is a quest for a congruent spirituality that affirms life. What is set out is not a critical appraisal of the African worldview in totality, rather, it is a retrieval of salient points of reference towards the foundational assumptions for a holistic worldview.

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# THAT ALL MAY LIVE — THE FUTURE OF THE WOUNDED PASTORS

*Catherine Wambui Njagi*

## **Background**

This chapter discusses a peculiar category of people, namely, the wounded pastors (with special reference to divorced pastors). It seeks to find out whether divorced pastors can live a full life as Jesus intended when he said that he came so that human beings can have life and have it in abundance (John 10: 10). The mission of Jesus, His death and resurrection was to enable all human beings to live and not just live but have a quality life before death and after death. For a human being to enjoy abundant life, they must live in touch with their deepest aspirations. Men and women have never been able to give up this hope and dream. Jesus Christ declared emphatically that his purpose in coming was to enable us to discover that this is not just a dream but a God-implanted aspiration that he has come to fulfill. Human beings have many aspirations in life but one of the major aspirations for almost all human beings is to have a successful career. When a person is prevented from carrying out his or her chosen career, a certain vacuum is created which prevents them from living a full life.

This chapter looks at the life of wounded pastors and concentrates on divorced pastors and their future in the church. It examines the definition of divorce and looks at the biblical and scholarly views of divorce and remarriage. It will also highlight the causes of divorce among pastors as received from interviews and then look at how the church treats divorced pastors and finally give suggestions on how the church should help divorced pastors live a full life as God intended for them. This chapter is guided by the functionalist theory of marriage and divorce and specifically applies the feminist theory that shows that tension can arise in marriage because of the struggle over money, property and power relations. The data in this chapter were gathered through field research interviews and filling in questionnaires, literature review, and demographic health survey reports, among others.

## Introduction

The phrase, that all may live, is derived from Jesus' statement, "I came that all may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10: 10). In Matthew 9: 36, we see Jesus taking notice of the crowd's pathetic situation and having compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. In Matthew 10: 6, Jesus commands his disciples to go and handle the factors that made the crowd to look harassed and helpless. They were to do that by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God, healing the sick, raising the dead, cleansing those with leprosy and driving out demons. This ties with Jesus' mission statement recorded in Luke 4:18-21, where Jesus stated his mission as proclaiming good news to the poor, proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

The mission of Jesus, his death and resurrection was to enable all human beings to live and not just live, but have a quality life before death and after death. For a human being to enjoy abundant life, they must live being in touch with their deepest aspirations. John Huffman (nd, online) argues that no human being is ever to be saved except by the fulfillment of his/ her own nature, and not by the restraint of his/her nature. No human being is ever to be ransomed from his/her sins except by having opened to him/her a larger and fuller life into which he/she has entered. We seem to have displayed before us a large region into which we are tempted to enter, one which is so rich and inviting to us that we immediately begin to ask ourselves if it is possible that there should be such a region. Huffman (nd, online) went on to raise the possibility that perhaps this aspiration is a dream. If it is a dream, is it not amazing that every single person who has walked the face of this earth has had this dream of living life to the fullest that goes beyond contemporary success standards? Men and women have never been able to give up this hope and dream. Jesus Christ declared emphatically that his purpose in coming was to enable us to discover that this is not just a dream. This is a God-implanted aspiration that he has come to fulfill. He put it in these blunt terms: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10: 10).

Human beings have many aspirations in life but one of the major aspirations for almost all human beings is to have a successful career. When a person is prevented from carrying out the chosen career, a certain vacuum is created which prevents them from living a full life. This chapter looks

at the life of wounded pastors and specifies on divorced pastors and their future in the church. It will look at the definition of divorce and look at the biblical scholarly views of divorce and remarriage, it will also highlight the causes of divorce among pastors as received from interviews and then look at how the church treats divorced pastors and finally give suggestions on how the church should help divorced pastors live a full life as God intended for them.

## Definition of Divorce

Divorce, also known as dissolution of marriage, is the process of terminating a marital union. Jay Adams (1986: 32) traces the meaning of divorce from Deuteronomy 24:1, Isaiah 50:1 and Jeremiah 3:8 which means to cut off and from the New Testament word *apolyo* which means to loose from, to put from, to put away, to send, release or dismiss. Divorce entails the cancelling of marriage between a married couple under the rule of law of the particular country or state. Divorce law differs in different countries, but in most countries, divorce requires the sanction of a court of law or other legal authorities. Divorce may involve issues of distribution of property, child custody, alimony (spousal support), and child support among other demands, but every country or state has its own guiding rules on these issues. Some countries have very stringent rules on divorce, while some countries allow couples to divorce easily but there are some countries that do not allow divorce such as Philippines, the Vatican City and the British Crown of Dependency of Sark. According to Peter Waithima of Daystar University Kenya, in a research carried out by Daystar University (<https://www.daystar.ac.ke>), 15% of Kenyans divorce every year and 42% of Kenyan divorces happen within the first five years of marriage, 77% between 6-10 years and 23% after ten years of marriage. Further, 20% of pastors in Kenya either divorce or separate.

## The Biblical View on Divorce and Remarriage

There are many valid views concerning the biblical teaching on divorce and remarriage. Many scholars have given their views on the issue but, as Shannon (2006) and House (1990) have argued, scholars' views can be summarised into four main positions:

- i. No divorce and no remarriage. This position is held by Charles Ryrie, Bill Gothad and J. Carl Laney. These scholars teach that the Bible does not give any grounds of divorce or remarriage (Laney 1990: 15-54). According to them, marriage is indissoluble, and the covenant relationship is unbreakable until one spouse dies. These scholars hold unto this view despite some biblical texts such as Ezra 10:1-15 where Israelites are commanded to divorce their foreign wives and Matthew 19:9 where Jesus allows divorce on the grounds of adultery.
- ii. Divorce but no remarriage. The main proponent of this position is John Stott (1978). The others are John Piper and William Heth, as quoted by Shannon (2006). These scholars argue that Christians can divorce, but none of the parties must remarry as long as the partner is alive. They quote Matthew 5:32 where Jesus forbade people from divorcing, except for marital unfaithfulness and argues that whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery. This view is also held by the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection in its 2014 discipline that says, “We believe that the only legitimate marriage is the joining of one man and one woman (Gen. 2:24; Rom. 7:2; 1 Cor. 7:10; Eph. 5:22, 23). We deplore the evils of divorce and remarriage. We regard adultery as the only scripturally justifiable grounds for divorce; and the party guilty of adultery has by his or her act forfeited membership in the church. In the case of divorce for other cause, neither party shall be permitted to marry again during the lifetime of the other; nor violation of this law shall be punished by expulsion from the church (Matt. 5:32; Mark 10:11, 12). In the carrying out of these principles, guilt shall be established in accordance with judicial procedures set forth in the discipline (House 1990).
- iii. Divorce and remarriage in a wide variety of circumstances. According to House (1990), this position is held by a number of scholars and public evangelical figures like James Dobson. They suggest that abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual and verbal abuse, is one of the many reasons for divorce. According to these scholars, every human being is entitled to a full life and living in an abusive relationship is not God’s will for God’s people.
- iv. Limited grounds for divorce. This position is represented by the Westminster Confession and reformed Bible teachers such as John MacArthur, Jay Adams, John Murray, Lorraine Boettner, and Thomas Edgar. This view sees the very limited grounds for divorce, and thus remarriage, as unrepentant sexual sins (Matt 19:9) or desertion by an unbeliever (1 Cor

7:15). This view is a response to when one spouse has forsaken his/her covenant obligations. It is simply an accommodation of humanity's sin for the protection of the other party. It is not, however, a commanded response nor is it part of God's original plan for marriage.

## **Causes of Divorce among Pastors**

This section records the answers given by the divorced pastors through interviews and questionnaires. However, because of the sensitivity of the matter, I will use pseudonyms rather than their real names. I received the following feedback on the question, "what do you consider as the main cause of your divorce?"

Pastor Abel believes that his marital problems began after he was promoted from a church army captain to a full Anglican priest. His wife was unhappy and told him that her hope was that he would quit the church job and join her in business. According to Abel, she refused to join him in the new parish he was sent to as a vicar and also refused to offer any financial help towards the running of the family needs as she used to do before. Abel says that on the first day of reporting to his new parish, he called her and their two children to introduce them to the congregation. She refused and when his two children aged seven and nine went in front to be introduced, she went and took them back and shouted that he should no longer count them as his family. From that day onward, she would go to his office during the weekdays and harass the evangelist who was a woman. She would also harass the Mothers' Union members and female choir members, arguing that pastors usually sleep with female members of the congregation. This behaviour made Abel be rejected in a number of parishes. He tried reconciliation in vain and finally, she applied for divorce which was granted even though he did not sign for it.

Pastor Beryl says that she had to run away when her husband became extremely violent. The husband who works with the Kenya army tried to shoot her twice. He accused her of neglecting their children and demanded that she had to resign from her church job. To test the waters, she took a six-month unpaid leave but during that time, the husband insulted her, calling her lazy and refused to support her and the children. When Beryl returned to work, he was extremely infuriated and tried to shoot her and she escaped from the house. He would go out looking for

her and beat her in public, claiming that she was still his wife and that was the time she applied for divorce to save her life.

Pastor Carr says that his wife started giving him unrealistic demands and became extremely possessive. She became extremely nagging and arrogant and demanded that he must be at home by 7 pm. If he failed to uphold this rule, she locked the house and refused him entry. He was not allowed to attend overnight prayers or any other night fellowship, parties and other events. Before she left him, she gave him a one month notice to buy her a house and when he was not able to do it, she left, applied for divorce privately and later married a very rich man.

According to Pastor Daniella, her husband became insecure when she graduated with a PhD and her salary exceeded his. He started opposing everything she suggested and began abusing her. He told their children imaginary evils that their mother had committed and tried to turn the children against her. Daniella sought the intervention of his family members and senior clergy, but things became worse when he started threatening to kill her. She reported the issue to the chief and within one week, he carried almost all the household items, rented another house and started living with another woman.

Pastor Drogba admits that he had an improper relationship with one of the choir members but insists that it was a trap that was set by his wife and her accomplices. His wife would not be sexually intimate with him for more than one year and then there was a young woman from the same choir with his wife who appeared and befriended him. He says that he should have thought twice when the young woman started asking him what he would do if he was denied sex at home. One day, the girl persuaded him to take her home in his car and on the way, she seduced him until he fell into the trap. The planted camera recorded their short illicit sexual relationship which the wife took to the court as evidence as she applied for divorce. His effort for reconciliation was futile because his wife was looking for divorce.

Pastor Eunice regrets that she married a joker and a conman who left her while still on their honeymoon. She argues that her husband to be sent by the devil to torment her because after their first sexual intercourse, he complained that she was not good in bed and Eunice assured him that their sexual life would improve with time. However, when Eunice woke up the following morning, he had gone and carried the more than ksh. 300,000 they had been given during their wedding ceremony. She also

learnt with shock that he had transferred all the wedding gifts they had received from his house to an unknown place. Within one month, Eunice received an email from her would have been husband informing her that the marriage was declared null and void because it was not consummated. This is the time when it dawned on her that the man was a conman who just wanted property and money, especially from Eunice's rich family members. Eunice knew that there are some men who disappear with money before the wedding but did not know that someone could go all the way to the wedding day. Her husband later married while Eunice was left with no child or anything else from that arrangement. She has tried to persuade her church leaders to allow her to marry because her marriage was declared null and void, but they have refused to allow her to remarry.

According to Pastor Frank, the in-laws played a decisive role in his divorce. His wife's parents did not want her to marry him, claiming that he was poor and that the church was not a good place to work in. When she insisted on marrying him, she was sacked from the family business where she was working, but Frank was able to secure another job for her, though not as well paying as her former job. Although her family attended her wedding, Frank knew that his mother-in-law was completely opposed to their union. When their first-born daughter attained six years, the mother-in-law took her and insisted that she was to study from her home. Frank objected to this arrangement vehemently, but his wife accepted. She was then given another job in the family business and asked to leave her pastor husband. Frank says that his wife's family used corrupt means to get a divorce and he knew about it after it had happened. His wife then married her mother's choice of a suitor.

From the interviews and questionnaires, 90% of pastors are divorced by their partners who are not usually pastors. These pastors still have a call to serve God and given the opportunity, they would serve God.

## **How Does the Church Treat Divorced Pastors?**

Most of the churches in Kenya, both mainstream and evangelical, are completely hostile to the divorced pastors. These pastors are judged as failures, rejects and social misfits. Pastor Galileo was dismissed from the

church ministry. He was not given any opportunity to explain the circumstances of his divorce. Pastor Galileo asserts that he was shocked because despite his church leaders' knowledge that his wife had asked him to choose either her or his church job and hence, she divorced him because he chose to serve God, they still dismissed him from the ministry. He kept on asking himself whether to have a strong call to serve God was a sin. After dismissal from his church, he started his own ministry which is doing well because the divorce did not take away his call.

Pastor Harriet was demoted to the lowest rank of the church after her divorce. Her church leaders had encouraged her to run away from her violent husband who threatened to kill her, but when she was granted divorce, she was demoted immediately and placed under the same people she was leading before her divorce. She says that her new bosses still accord her the same respect and consult her on almost every issue but then her salary was reduced by half, which is really demeaning.

Pastor Jones says that his church forced him to resign after his divorce. After resigning from the church, the church stigmatised him even more by writing to all the branches of his church in Kenya and advised the branches not to allow Pastor Jones to preach or even pray in any of the churches. Pastor Jones says that it was very unkind for the church because they did not give him a copy of the circular and they did not indicate the reason why he was not allowed to conduct any business in the church. The churches then formulated their own reasons why Jones was not allowed to conduct any church ceremonies. Some of them told their followers that Jones had stolen church funds, while others speculated that he may have committed adultery. This was extremely hurtful to Jones because his wife applied for divorce without his knowledge, and he had really objected to the divorce.

There are two pastors who have to report to their senior pastor's office every month and assure him that they were keeping the promise that they were not going to remarry for that would be the end of their ministry. It is unbelievable that the senior pastor traces their movements and whenever they meet, he mentions to them the people they seem to be relating closely with and reminds them that they must not think of remarrying. One of the two pastors did not have a child because her marriage was nullified and she is still young, yet the church will not allow her to marry.

Divorced pastors appreciate the few church leaders who understand them and allow them to continue serving God without demeaning them or frustrating them. Such leaders are few and scattered all over and therefore, it is very hard for them to come together and help the divorced pastors. On the contrary, most of the church leaders mistreat and disrespect the divorced pastors, forgetting that no pastor would like to be divorced and that most of the divorces are applied for by the pastors' partners who are usually not pastors. According to the divorced pastors, divorce is so painful and has negative consequences, especially on their children and they need help to overcome the pain and move on with their lives.

## **How the Church Should Help Divorced Pastors**

How can the church help the divorced pastors so that they may live and have life in abundance? The church has been labelled as the only institution that abandons its wounded soldiers. This is because the church is known to defrock wounded pastors without any attempt to help them. We have seen that most of the pastors who have marital problems are either defrocked, forced to resign, demoted or frustrated until they leave the church ministry against their will. In this way, the church does not help these wounded pastors to have full lives as Jesus intended. If the church is continuing with the mission of Christ and helping all the people to have life in abundance, then the church must consider helping its wounded pastors and, specifically, the divorced pastors.

The church must constantly remind itself that pastors are human beings who marry human beings, and like all the other couples, the pastors' families live in this fallen world. The church must remember that although it takes two people to get married, it takes one person to nullify the marriage. This means that the pastor may not be willing to divorce, but the spouse may single handedly push the divorce to the end. The divorced pastors then do not need condemnation but tender care, spiritual and psychological support. The church should walk with the divorced pastors and help them to overcome the pain, struggle and other challenges that come with divorce.

The church should borrow St. Augustine theology which avers that the church is the hospital for the sinners and aim at extending a hand of healing to the divorced pastors. This theology is in line with Jesus' statement recorded in Mark 2:17 that Jesus came for the sick and the lost. The church should

rehabilitate them and prepare them for a different ministry in the cases where a divorced pastor cannot be accepted in the parish ministry. Other churches should borrow a leaf from the Roman Catholic Church who treat their wounded priests using a motto, “once a priest, always a priest”; hence, they help their wounded priests until they stand on their feet again.

The church should re-look at how it has interpreted some biblical texts that are used to penalise divorced pastors. One of the major texts is Malachi 2:13-16. According to Shannon (2006), proponents of the “no divorce ever” position like to quickly cover the discussion with the blanket of “God hates divorce,” as per Malachi 2:16. Yes, it is true that God hates divorce. It always leaves carnage in its wake, and brings a breach into the marriage covenant, which God, the architect, never intended. Additionally, it leaves its dreadful effect upon the spouse and any children involved. However, it is a particular kind of divorce that the prophet had in mind that was especially grievous to the Lord, as the context bears out (House 1990). There is no verse in Scripture that explicitly teaches that marriage is indissoluble - not even the “one flesh” passage that is so often used in the debate (Gen 2). Shannon (2006) continues to explain that in reference to God’s hatred of divorce (Malachi 2:13-16), Malachi was focusing on the divorcing of older, faithful wives in order to marry younger women. Note that “wives of their youth” is repeated, making clear that these were older couples. In that day, as in ours, there is a host of older men deserting their first wives in order to marry more sexually attractive, younger women. Also repeated is that they “failed to guard themselves in their spirits” as they went through the normal troubles and triumphs of life in a fallen world. Thus, what elicited the bitter rebuke by the prophet of God was humanity’s selfishness and sin. For those pastors living with violent abusive partners, the argument that God hates divorce, but also hates murders that are caused by a violent marriage partner, apply. We also know that God commanded that people should remain married until death, but surely their death should not be caused by the marriage partner!

One of the contributors to the debate on whether a divorced person can serve at a high level in church initiated by Charles Specht (2011, online) challenged the traditional interpretation of 1 Timothy 3:1-5. It says that if a person desires to be an overseer, he must be above reproach, a husband of one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that

his children obey him with proper respect. This text is used to deny divorced pastors an opportunity to serve. Unlike the popular belief, the contributor argues that this advice was given to the church at Ephesus that was going through some leadership crisis and that this advice was a remedial point of action, not necessarily an all-time universal advice. He argues that if this advice was to be taken literally, then it would mean that only married men with children and families were allowed to serve and no woman can be allowed to serve. This would be an exclusion of all types of people from church leadership, but we know that both Jesus and Paul rejected these types of marginalisation.

Matthew 5:32 is the most controversial text on issues of divorce and re-marriage. It states that anyone who divorces his wife except for marital unfaithfulness causes her to become an adulteress and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. According to Shannon (2006) this text has been misinterpreted and misapplied over the years. Jesus was not addressing the outward tool of sin but the inner cause of offense. Culminating his teaching on humanity's adulterous heart, Jesus introduces what has become known as the "exception clause" (Matt 5:31-32), which is later expounded in Matthew 19:3-9 (and also found in Mk 10:11-12; Lk 16:18). In his teaching here, Jesus calls Moses' teaching as a witness (Duet 24:1-4). Humanity's wicked and hard heart, which Jesus just spoke about, had caused the multiplication of divorces for virtually any reason at all. Due to the chaos surrounding divorces, Moses gave a concession to humanity's hard heart in order to protect the innocent party. It was a provision, a gift of grace. He did not condemn divorce, nor did he command it (contrary to what the Pharisees foolishly/wrongly stated in Matt 19:7-8), but he permitted divorce and sought to regulate it. Adultery was not part of the original grounds for divorce, as the punishment for adultery under the law was death by stoning. Though Moses did not command divorce, the Mosaic principles that must be followed were: Limiting divorce to certain causes. Indecency (literally "matter of nakedness") must be proved in the presence of witnesses, giving a bill of divorce. This states that the wife is innocent of unfaithfulness, not allowing the husband to re-marry the wife he divorces. This highlights the seriousness of the marriage covenant. Deuteronomy 24:1-4 clearly teaches that a divorced woman who marries is so completely and permanently severed from her initial husband that if innocently divorced from her second husband she can marry another believer, but never her first husband.

The religious leaders of Jesus's day used the supposed authority of whatever rabbi they chose to quote in support of their argument. There were those who by and large followed Hillel, who stated that a man could divorce his wife for any reason at all. On the opposite end of the spectrum were the Jewish leaders who followed Shammai's rabbinic teaching that divorce was permissible only for a major offense. In contrast to all the false ideologies about marriage and the permissibility of divorce, Jesus taught that marriage is viewed by God as a lifelong commitment, and should not be terminated by humanity in divorce. God, the master-architect of marriage, designed marriage to be permanent until the death of one of the spouses. Jesus abrogated the death penalty for adultery and made it an exception for divorce. He gives this teaching in abbreviated form here and develops it further in Matthew 19. He says that the only grounds for divorce (into which no one is to rush, since it is merely an option, not an obligation), is sexual sin (*porneia*). This is a general term that includes many types of sexual sin such as adultery, incest, and many others. However, adultery seems to be the sexual sin that is emphasised, especially as confirmed in Matthew 19. Once the spouse has broken the intimate marriage covenant by sexual sin (translated "unchastity" here), the innocent party is released from his/her covenant obligation. If either spouse pursues divorce in an unbiblical way, they have sinned against their spouse and God. Furthermore, if they pursue another marriage without the marriage bond being broken, they commit adultery because the covenant of marriage is breached in an unbiblical manner. However, if the guilty spouse repents of his or her sin and seeks reconciliation with the former spouse, they can find grace, mercy, and forgiveness (5:23-24).

## Conclusion

We have seen that in line with Jesus' statement that all may live and live their lives in full, wounded pastors, specifically the divorced pastors, need to be helped to heal. Further, they must be supported to continue with their ministries in the church because divorce does not curtail peoples' sense of calling. We have seen that most of the pastors are divorced by their spouses and that the church does not need to penalise them even more by defrocking them, demoting them or forcing them to resign from active church ministries. We have seen that the church will need to make use of St. Augustine's theology that the church is the hospital of the sick

and like Jesus, the church should walk and support the wounded pastors, and in that way, the church will be carrying out Jesus' mission of enabling all to live.

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## CHURCHES AND HEALTH

*Mwai Makoka*

### **Biblical reflection: Luke 8:43-48**

<sup>43</sup> Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, <sup>44</sup> came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped.

<sup>45</sup> And Jesus said, “Who touched Me?”

When all denied it, Peter and those with him said, “Master, the multitudes throng and press You, and You say, ‘Who touched Me?’”

<sup>46</sup> But Jesus said, “Somebody touched Me, for I perceived power going out from Me.” <sup>47</sup> Now when the woman saw that she was not hidden, she came trembling; and falling down before Him, she declared to Him in the presence of all the people the reason she had touched Him and how she was healed immediately.

<sup>48</sup> And He said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you whole. Go in peace.”

The story of a woman with an issue of blood for twelve years who was miraculously healed by Jesus is a fitting place to start a discussion of churches and health – or rather, exploring the question, “what role should churches play on health today?” And by today we mean the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, or Agenda 2030.

Who is this woman? We begin by entering into the world of this woman. But before we do so, we need some entry tools. When introducing ourselves nowadays, (or when we are describing someone), we usually refer to name, nationality, age, marital status, qualifications, occupation, number of children that one has, notable people that one is related or connected to and so on.

This woman is not identified by name in the text, but we can still understand a little more about her from the story. If the problem started while in her mid to late 20s, she is probably in her early 40s. There was a lot of stigma and discrimination associated with menstruation in biblical times, (which unfortunately persists today in some cultures and societies). It is likely that she had long been left by her husband (if she had been married)

due to this stigma. There were probably spiritual or socio-cultural explanations to menstrual problems, which perpetuated moralistic/religious condemnation and discrimination against the sufferer. It is also likely that if she had been married, even her own children had abandoned her. She had also been cut off from participating in religious activities, as she was deemed unclean.

Rejected and alone, she “spent all her livelihood on physicians” to no avail. But what constitutes a person’s livelihood? It is our income, savings, property and assets. It is also our social network of family, friends and colleagues that we turn to in time of need. In times of illness, these networks support us with financial assistance or soft loans to pay medical bills; food and nursing care (bathing, ablution, feeding, etc.); and also take care of our children and our affairs. Indeed, the largest quantity of nursing care worldwide is provided by family and friends. The woman in this story spent all her livelihood: had borrowed from friends and failed to pay back, received favours and support from friends and family without being able to pay back in cash or in kind. Those who initially cared for her got tired as she was not improving, and they left. Economically, even if she had any strength left, she could not engage in any trade/commerce as no one would buy from her.

Now, what was this woman suffering from? It is easy to see that the biggest pain of this lady is NOT the medical disease itself, but the social rejection, the religious condemnation and the economic marginalisation.

Disclosure: After Jesus’ interrogation of who touched him, the woman comes out and “told Him the whole truth”. This was a public disclosure of her condition. In telling the whole truth the woman narrated how she had suffered at the hands of the neighbours, the religious establishment and the society at large, how she had lived and suffered as an outcast in her own land and among her own kindred.

Healing vs Cure: The story indicated that the lady was cured from the issue of blood immediately she touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, before the conversation. After the conversation, however, Jesus told her that her faith had healed her, or made her whole. He also bid her go in peace – apparently a veiled message to her tormenters, “don’t reject her anymore”, “don’t trouble her any more”, or indeed an admonition “did it have to come to this?”

## **History of health care in Africa: precolonial, colonial, postcolonial**

The modern history of Africa can be subdivided into the precolonial, colonial and postcolonial era. In terms of health care, precolonial times in sub-Saharan Africa were characterised by indigenous and traditional beliefs and practices on causation of disease and illness and healing practices. Contact with western civilisation by way of colonial settlers and missionaries introduced western scientific medicine, and consequently clinics and hospitals. Colonial administrations invested in health care only to the extent that it served their settler populations. Churches and missionaries were left to provide “the human face” of the European settler enterprise, ameliorating its impact and also embodying the gospel mandate of healing the sick. In many countries, there were more colonial government prisons and detention centres than schools and hospitals.

The postcolonial, newly independent governments were either too poor, too preoccupied with consolidating and staying in power, or too oblivious of their social responsibilities to invest in health. The churches thus, continued to provide health care, with no recourse in those countries where the missionary footprint was weak on health. The new economic world order championed through the World Bank structural adjustment programme did not help much for developing countries to emerge and provide holistic health care to their populations.

The winds of change on governance and democracy, including representational governments and space for civil society promoted local provision of health care. Many governments are now held accountable for provision of health services, even though some of their service delivery models leave a lot to be desired. All in all, churches have to redefine their space in the health sector in light of new local and global realities.

## **Preach, teach and heal**

The churches’ response to the three-fold calling to “preach, teach and heal” is evident in many parts of the world. Church missions, health facilities and schools continue to witness to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. More beautiful dimensions are firstly, that many such institutions are now run by local churches with varying support from overseas founding churches and partners. Secondly, there are also indigenous churches,

with no direct link to western missionary investment, that have established health facilities in response to the needs of the local communities that they serve.

## Christian health associations

Missionary doctors in some parts of the world sought to collaborate, share ideas and fellowship. They established national Christian medical associations for these purposes, notably the Christian Medical Association of India in 1905 and the Christian Health Association of Kenya in the 1930s. During the post-independent era, the World Council of Churches (WCC) supported churches and national councils of churches to coordinate and cooperate among themselves on the one hand, and with the newly emerging governments on the other.

A story is told of a team of WCC officials that was invited by the Malawi Council of Churches to assess and advise them on how to re-organise their health portfolio. During their visit, three things happened:

**Firstly**, as the duo travelled around visiting mission hospitals and interviewing officials, a bishop of the Roman Catholic Church heard about it and asked them to include hospitals that were under their church.

**Secondly**, they visited the then president, Dr Kamuzu Banda, who coincidentally was a medical doctor himself, and asked him to include the mission health structures as he was organising his Ministry of Health. He replied that his government could not cooperate with people who did not cooperate among themselves.

**Thirdly**, and further to their findings, including the interview with the president, their debriefing at the MCC, the Council resolved to establish a medical association. The Catholic bishops were present at the de-briefing and decided to be part of the association. In this way, the Christian Health Association of Malawi was jointly established in December 1966 by the Malawi Council of Churches and the Episcopal Conference of Malawi. In 1967, a similar association was established in Ghana, and so on. There are currently similar ecumenical networks in many African countries, including Malawi, Ghana, Nigeria, Lesotho, Tanzania Zambia and Zimbabwe.

The main functions of these ecumenical health networks are: i) to promote coordination and collaboration among the churches on health affairs, allowing for joint planning and limiting undue competition and duplication of efforts; ii) to provide a unified voice in negotiation, collaboration and planning with the government. Over time, more functions have been discovered, for example, resource mobilisation and promotion of standards of care.

## **African Christian Health Associations Platform**

In February 1970, the WCC invited the Christian health coordinators from sub-Saharan Africa to a meeting in Limuru, Kenya and eighteen representatives from twelve African countries attended. Similar conferences were held in February 1972 in Blantyre, Malawi, and in February 1973 in Mombasa, Kenya. These biennial meetings continued, until at the meeting in Bagamoyo, Tanzania in 2007, the participants decided to formalise the forum, taking on the name Africa Christian Health Associations' Platform (ACHAP). ACHAP was registered as an international NGO in Kenya in 2012 and at the time of writing had membership of Christian health associations or similar networks from 28 countries. Collectively the church health system provides over 40% of health care in sub-Saharan Africa.

In terms of institutional mandate, ACHAP is a vehicle to lift up the work of churches on health for joint advocacy within the church community and with governments and development agencies. It also provides an opportunity through which development agencies like WHO, UNICEF and Global Fund among others can reach out to the Christian health providers on a regional scale. Sharing of lessons and experiences among churches of the same or of different denominations across the region is also facilitated. Above all, it is a platform to reflect on our joint calling to the ministry of healing without the denominational encumberments. This is important because "denominationalism" has been a major barrier to the church's mission and any forum to diminish it while elevating the unified calling is worth all the support.

## **Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network**

The churches through the WCC's Christian Medical Commission championed the concept of Primary Health Care, which was adopted by UNICEF and WHO in 1975. A Conference on Primary Health Care held in Kazakhstan in September 1978 produced the famous Alma Ata Declaration on Primary Health Care (PHC).

In the pursuit of the PHC goal of "Health for All by the Year 2000," the WCC established a Pharmaceutical Action Group (PAG) in 1981 to help promote the availability of essential medicines and supplies in mission hospitals. A number of strategies were employed, including price negotiation with manufacturers and distributors of medicines and diagnostic supplies, establishment of standards for drugs to be available at the different levels of health care and promotion of capacity building on pharmaceuticals. The PAG included technical experts from WHO and UNICEF. The concept of pooled procurement has been adopted by many organisations and countries.

Due to financial and other reasons, the office of the coordinator for PAG was moved to Nairobi, Kenya in 1997. The PAG coordinator organised a meeting in Harare, Zimbabwe, for Church-based organisations that she was supporting, and the participants agreed to become a network, resulting in the establishment of the Ecumenical Pharmaceutical Network (EPN). EPN was registered in Kenya in 2004 and at the time of writing had one hundred and five members (associations, institutions & individuals) from thirty-seven countries in almost all continents.

## **EHAIA**

The WCC Assembly in Harare, in 1998, was a watershed as far as the churches' response to AIDS was concerned. Since the discovery of AIDS and the reporting of the first cases across many countries, moralisation from the faith community abounded. Stigma and discrimination followed, especially because of the predominantly sexual nature of the transmission of HIV. Churches were part of the problem. They were also part of the solution in that, even before the discovery of anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs), churches were providing health care, including palliative care to the sick and dying. It was a number of years before stigma and discrimination were addressed, at least at institutional levels.

The Harare Assembly mandated the WCC to address HIV & AIDS and an ecumenical programme was established, named Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), later extending to the Caribbean and to the Far East, and becoming the Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (EHAIA).

EHAIA distinguished itself by venturing into the socio-cultural, religious and moral dimensions of the AIDS epidemic. The first years were spent listening to the voices and issues from the ground and understanding what these meant to the churches.

The remarkable work of EHAIA includes theological discourse on HIV & AIDS, and writing and publishing theological books, covering such pertinent areas as hope, healing, masculinity, and mainstreaming HIV in theology education among others. These have empowered Christians, both as individuals and congregations, to deal with the socio-cultural drivers of HIV & AIDS. Contextual Bible studies have been a tool that has facilitated engagement with difficult socio-cultural and even taboo issues in Africa from a Christian perspective. EHAIA has published over a dozen books and Bible studies, all of which have been distributed for free.

At the end of the day, it is the empowerment that these resources foster that will have a lasting impact. Indeed, these tools have found applicability into spaces heretofore unexpected. The dedicated EHAIA field staff have facilitated workshops with teachers and soldiers on understanding issues of power, culture and sexuality. Following a successful pilot in Cameroon and Nigeria, the EHAIA programme is now extending to in-school youths.

## **Health-promoting churches**

Now we return to the story with which we started. We saw how ill-health has negative effects beyond the physical and biological dimension of our lives. By the same token, ill-health is also caused or exacerbated by not only physical or biological agents or microorganisms, but by other factors as well. Health is not primarily medical, and so health work is not a preserve for only the medically trained professionals.

Multi-sectoral collaboration was obviously required to restore our dear friend in Luke 8:43-48 to good health: psychosocial support for reintegration into the community, economic empowerment and support, as well as the restoration of broken relationships with family and friends.

The continuum of health, sickness, healing or death encompassing the aspects of health promotion, disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment, control, rehabilitation and/or bereavement demands seamless collaboration among diverse players. Professional health workers and the health facilities play a small, albeit important part in this continuum.

In the same way, the ministry of healing by the church is not only for those Christians who are medically trained. Equally, the ministry of healing is not to be consigned to church hospitals and clinics. Health and healing should be an integral part of the life and witness of the local church.

## Conclusion

In paying tribute to the Rev. Dr Nyambura Njoroge, I close by the story of a hypothetical pastor that we used to talk about, who on delivering the New Year's Eve address provides a "health report" of the congregation: how many births and deaths and so on. S/he continues to provide a breakdown of the deaths by age, gender, cause of death. "What report do we want for next New Year's Eve?" the pastor asks. The following year the congregation goes into action to achieve their desired goal. For Nyambura and I, this dream of health-promoting churches exercised our minds considerably, challenging and inspiring us in equal measure. Its realisation will bring us closer to Jesus' three-fold calling to preach, teach and heal.

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This volume of BiAS/ ERA is a Festschrift honouring Nyambura J. Njoroge. She is an outstanding woman theologian whose work straddles diverse fields and disciplines. Inspired by her rich and impressive oeuvre, in this volume friends and colleagues of her explore how theology in diverse contexts can become more life giving. Contributors explore themes such as African women's leadership, theological education, HIV & AIDS, lament, the Bible and liberation, adolescents and young women, sexual diversity and others. Collectively, the volume expresses Nyambura's consistent commitment to the full liberation of all human beings, in fulfilment of the gospel's promise that all may have life and have it to the full (John 10:10).

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