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22 Econo-patriarchy's construction of biblical and African masculinities

Rehoboam, Amnon, and Jezebel

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Abstract

In honouring the work and life of Ezra Chitando, this essay situates itself within the trajectory that he has helped establish with respect to African masculinities. This essay extends the construction of biblical and African masculinities beyond the realm of culture to the realm of economics. The essay offers a conceptualisation of 'econo-patriarchy', in which economic systems are intersected with patriarchal systems. Three biblical texts from the books of Samuel and Kings are read trans-textually, recognising econo-patriarchal resonances across them. The final section of the essay, in which I engage with the work of other African biblical scholars alongside my own work, reflects on the usefulness of the concept 'econo-patriarchy' to ongoing biblical and theological work concerning African masculinities.

Introduction

Working alongside the pioneering work of Ezra Chitando, this essay analyses the construction of masculinity within econo-patriarchy. Beverley Haddad and I suggested the concept 'econo-patriarchy' in order to foreground the need within African contexts to recognise the intersection of patriarchy with economic systems (West 2020, 113, note 35). In African post-colonial contexts, patriarchy and economics are entangled in an econo-patriarchal knot, to use Allan Johnson's metaphor (Johnson 2014).

The essay begins with an analysis of the patriarchal system, identifying its distinctive elements. I then intersect patriarchy with economy. A third thread is added to the African econo-patriarchal knot by including the sacred – religion (and/as culture). The essay then pauses to reflect on the term 'patriarchy', acknowledging its limitations but retaining the term, linking it with notions of econo-patriarchal violence. The essay then shifts from theoretical framing to biblical interpretation, reflecting on three

texts in the books of Samuel and Kings, each of which offers insights into the concept 'econo-patriarchy'. Finally, the essay reflects on the usefulness of the concept 'econo-patriarchy' for our work on biblical and African masculinities.

The patriarchal system

Patriarchy is a system. In his useful analysis of patriarchy, Allan Johnson is insistent that "[p]atriarchy is not a way of saying 'men'" (Johnson 2014, 5). "Patriarchy", he continues, "is a kind of society, and a society is more than a collection of people. As such, 'patriarchy' refers not to me or any other man or collection of men (contra Ademiluka 2018) but to a kind of society in which men and women participate" (Johnson 2014, 5). The heading for chapter two of his book summarises this analysis rather well: "Patriarchy, the System: An It, Not a He, a Them, or an Us" (Johnson 2014, 26; see also Johnson 2004).

However, we should be clear that patriarchy is about *male* "privilege" (Johnson 2014, 5), in much the same way as racism in general and apartheid in particular are about *white* privilege. I make this connection not only because it resonates with my own social location as a white male South African, but because it is instructive for an analysis of patriarchy (see also Nadar 2014; West 2021b, 124-125). Just as most men become defensive, taking it personally (as in Ademiluka 2018), when we speak of patriarchy, so too most whites become defensive, taking it personally, when we speak of racism or apartheid. "Some of the time" says Johnson, "men [whites] feel defensive because they identify with patriarchy [racism/apartheid] and its values and do not want to face the consequences these produce or the prospect of giving up male [white] privilege. But defensiveness can also reflect a common confusion about the difference between patriarchy [racism] as a kind of society and the people who participate in it" (Johnson 2014, 26, with my interjections). Johnson's book emphasises the systemic dimensions of patriarchy, which is why I have chosen to use his analysis. He is clear about the intersecting elements which constitute the system.

In Johnson's analysis the patriarchal system has four core distinctive features. First, "[p]atriarchy is male dominated in that positions of authority – political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic – are

generally reserved for men" (Johnson 2014, 6). Second, "[p]atriarchal societies are male identified in that core cultural ideas about what is considered good, desirable, preferable, or normal are culturally associated with how we think about men, manhood, and masculinity" (Johnson 2014, 7). Third, "[i]n addition to being male dominated and male identified, patriarchy is male centered, which means that the focus of attention is primarily on men and boys and what they do (Johnson 2014, 10). "The fourth characteristic of patriarchy is an obsession with control as a core value around which social and personal life are organized. As with any system of privilege that elevates one group by oppressing another, control is an essential element of patriarchy: men maintain their privilege by controlling both women and other men who might threaten it" (Johnson 2014, 13).

I would place particular emphasis on this fourth factor, male control, intersecting as it does race and patriarchy. Sharon Welch's incisive feminist analysis identifies an "ethic of control" as central to the establishment and maintenance of white Western econo-patriarchy (Welch 1990, 23-47). Econo-patriarchy, in all its variants, is about male control.

The econo-patriarchal system

Johnson elucidates both the independence of the patriarchal system and its complicity with economic systems when he argues that "[i]n preindustrial patriarchies, the main objects of control are land and women's reproductive potential". In such societies, he continues, "[s]ince families produce most of the wealth, male privilege is based primarily on men's authority as husbands and fathers and their title to land and other property". Furthermore, "[t]o the extent that preindustrial societies have institutions outside the family – such as separate religious, medical, military, or state institutions – men dominate those as well". "This is how it was in most patriarchies", he continues, arguing for the presence of patriarchal systems prior to industrial capitalism, "until industrial capitalism began to revolutionize social life several centuries ago". "The most dramatic change", he continues, "was to shift production away from agriculture and land and into urban factories. This made land less valuable as a source of wealth and power, lowered the economic value of children and their labor, and drew increasing numbers of men and women into wage labor in a money-driven economy". "As a result", he explains, "men could no longer

use the family as a basis of privilege because the family no longer had a central place in economic production. A great deal of work was still done in families, but it wasn't done for money. Since power revolved increasingly around money, and wealth was valued in terms of money, family work could not be used as a basis for privilege". He continues, "Male privilege now depended on controlling capital or earning the money that families needed to purchase goods and services in a rapidly expanding market economy. Men moved quickly to appropriate this for themselves" (Johnson 2014, 62). "In some ways", he concludes, "the position of the father lost so much of its traditional authority under industrial capitalism that, technically speaking, the gender system was no longer patriarchal but androcratic, based on male (andro-) rather than father (patri-) dominance" (Johnson 2014, 62-63).

Johnson here signals scholarly concerns about the term 'patriarchy'. The term has come under careful scrutiny, both in the study of ancient societies, like ancient Israel (Meyers 2014), and contemporary society (Hunnicutt 2009). Gwen Hunnicutt offers a particularly useful summary of the concerns about the concept 'patriarchy' because she intersects them with patriarchal violence, and each of the biblical texts I analyse reflects forms of econo-patriarchal violence.

However, before I come to Hunnicutt's proposal and texts from the books of Samuel and Kings, it is important for my analysis to add one more conceptual element, the sacred.

Sacred econo-patriarchy

I have already indicated that feminist biblical scholarship has concerns about the concept 'patriarchy'. Carol Meyers identifies two concerns. First, she argues that "close examination of the roles of Israelite women, using the interpretive processes of gender archaeology and attending to certain biblical texts, indicates that the patriarchy concept occludes the presence of significant domains of female agency in household and society-wide contexts in ancient Israel" (Meyers 2014, 26; and more fully in Meyers 2013). Second, she is attentive to third-wave feminist work, which has identified "many significant problems with the patriarchy model", noting in particular "that patriarchy is a Western, constructed concept" (Meyers 2014, 26; and more fully in Meyers 2013). African women's biblical work (Dube 2001), alongside which our colleague Ezra Chitando has made a

substantive contribution (Chitando 2016b; John, Siwila, & Settler 2013), has raised similar concerns, on the one hand wanting to acknowledge women's agency in the indigenous African household, and on the other hand worrying about the undue influence of colonial and neo-colonial white Western conceptions of patriarchy.

While a decolonial engagement with indigenous African women's work and African indigenous concepts of 'patriarchal-like' systems is important (Nzimande 2008), my focus here is on the lived African reality of intersecting post-colonial and neo-capitalist systems, across the world and across our African continent. As Johnson has documented in his historical overview of the rise of patriarchal systems, while we may envisage pre-patriarchal societies, the male dynamic of control and fear as the driving force of patriarchy tends to construct forms of patriarchy early on in human history (Johnson 2014, 68-70).

Engaging with the quest for the origins of patriarchy within the quest for the origins of ancient Israel, a notable trajectory within biblical scholarship, Roland Boer asks why the search for origins, for the earliest form of Israel, should "focus on a hypothetical society in which women were better off, if not central?" His answer is instructive, reflecting our yearning for a past reality which is different from our present reality:

> The feminist answer is that the search for origins is an ever more complex effort to obfuscate the fact that we are all born of women, at a physiological, psychological and social level. The psychoanalytic answer is that such a hypothetical society, however real or fictional it might be, is the constitutive exception of our own; in other words, we need such a narrative, necessarily excluded and external to our own, in order to sustain the various patriarchies we perpetuate. And the Marxist answer is that the search for origins is a misplaced utopian drive, that the search expresses the desire not for a return to a better state that has been lost but the desire for a better society of the future (Boer 2005, 27).

I turn now to another article of Boer's, in which he analyses the sacredness of ancient economies and, I would argue, ancient econo-patriarchies. Boer is careful to distinguish within the Ancient Near East (including ancient Israel) between the village commune and the temple-city complex (Boer 2007, 36). While it may have been the case, as Meyers argues, that women had a more egalitarian "partnership" place within ancient econo-patriarchies, including forms of "managerial power ... in the household setting" (Meyers 2014, 22), once the ancient state emerges, both gender

and class divisions are constructed (Fuchs 2005; Boer 2007, 37). The ancient state, Boer insists, "arises in a tension between the village commune and the temple-city complex" (Boer 2007, 36), fuelled by economic systems of both "allocation" and "extraction" (Boer 2007, 39).

Allocation economics, Boer explains, concerns "production outside human control and knowledge", including "allocation in terms of land, fertility, family, war, patron-client relations and the judiciary" (Boer 2007, 39-40). All of these domains of life are understood in the ancient world to be under the control of the deity, and those designated by religion and/or culture as the representatives of the deity (Boer 2007, 39). "Since the deity is central to the process of accounting for productive capacities and to the allocation of such producing items", says Boer, "I would suggest we use the term *theo-economics* as the economic logic behind the sacred economy" (Boer 2007, 39).

Because men tend to be the representatives of the deity in the Ancient Near East in religious, cultural, and economic domains (Melville 2004), especially so within city-temple state economies, they tend to accrue a sacred status, imbuing ancient econo-patriarchies with a sacred character.

Elite males associated with the city-temple state system are not only constructed as the representatives of the deities allocations, they also control systems of economic extraction. The most common form of ancient econo-patriarchal extraction was tribute or tithe, an ancient form of taxation (Boer 2007, 41). The temple-city component of the ancient state sustained itself through forms of tribute extraction from its surrounding villages, in return for military protection and juridical governance. In the ancient world, there were no 'countries' or 'nations'; there were a series of connected city-temple states, each of which extracted resources from the surrounding villages. 1 Samuel 8:11-17 reflects this reality with clarity. Tribute extraction linked village and temple-city, often to an exploitative extent. Yet extractive economics "was justified in terms of an allocative ideology", whereby it was the deity "who sanctioned tribute", most usually in the form of a "reallocation" of village produce for city-temple priests and city-temple kings (Boer 2007, 42). In both cases these were men, representing the deity.

Both economic systems of allocation and economic systems of extraction were sacred systems represented by men. Similarly with the juridical system, whose role in the Ancient Near East, Boer argues, "was to oversee

the workings of allocation", formulating the many laws we find in the Hebrew Bible that deal "with the allocation of land, the control of women, the patterns of kinship and inheritance and the nature of patron-client relationships". "The fact", Boer continues, "that these laws are presented as given by the deity is yet another signal of the dominance of the sacred in an allocative economics" (Boer 2007, 41). Furthermore, as we have seen, sacred law mandated the extraction of tribute, designated for the deity, but accumulated by male scribes, priests, and kings.

I return now to the recognition that econo-patriarchal systems are inherently violent, especially to women, but also to subordinate men. Sacred econo-patriarchal systems are particularly violent for they are imbued with the authority of the deity.

Econo-patriarchy and/as violence

The major reason that some theorists have questioned the usefulness of 'patriarchy', Hunnicutt argues, "is because of its false universalism", whereby the term patriarchy has been used "to imply a fixed and timeless structure that obscured differences in context and reduced all gender relations into one form" (Hunnicutt 2009, 558). Hunnicutt nevertheless retains 'patriarchy' as a conceptual tool, identifying its distinctive features in a way similar to Johnson, but preferring the phrase "varieties of patriarchy":

> The concept of patriarchy is especially useful for theory building because the term evokes images of gender hierarchies, dominance, and power arrangements. A theory of varieties of patriarchy would retain gender as a central organizing feature, maintaining a hierarchical emphasis and focusing on social systems and social arrangements that reinforce domination. The concept of patriarchy is also useful in that it keeps the gaze directed toward social contexts rather than toward individual men who are motivated to dominate (Hunnicutt 2009, 554).

"When patriarchy is used simplistically", she summarises, "it obscures the complexity of gender systems, rendering them inevitable and universal. However, if a theory of patriarchy is constructed that theorizes about variation, it has the potential to illuminate different forms of male domination" (Hunnicutt 2009, 559). She too recognises the intersection of pa-

triarchal systems and economic systems, citing the interplay between capitalistic and patriarchal systems, stating: "These mutually reinforcing systems of domination structure gender relations in such a way that economic domination takes gendered forms" (Hunnicutt 2009, 560).

In the section which follows, I turn to three biblical stories from the books of Samuel and Kings which I will use inductively to discern the contours of sacred econo-patriarchy. Here I follow Hunnicutt, who proposes "that theory building proceed inductively".

> In keeping with the feminist tradition of theorizing from the ground up, such an undertaking would begin by mapping varieties of patriarchy. In mapping varieties of patriarchy, we would document their characteristics and dimensions and track how the victimization of women is taking shape across different patriarchal systems. While mapping varieties of patriarchy and the victimization of women, we would be attentive to men's social location. Mapping would capture both the structural and the ideological manifestations of patriarchy, recognizing their link to victimization of women and recognizing the possibility that ideology and structure may not always be in sync. Furthermore, mapping varieties of patriarchy and the victimization of women would focus on overlapping hierarchies such as race, class, and age, noting how these interlocking hierarchies work together. Finally, mapping would document power relations not in a top-down fashion but instead by recognizing multiple 'sites' of power (Hunnicutt 2009, 568).

1 Kings 12:1-16

The first story from the books of Kings is a stark example of the violently destructive nature of econo-patriarchy. Told in 1 Kings 12:1-16, we have the story of the division of the united monarchy after the death of Solomon. Representatives of the northern tribes confront Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor, because they are being exploited economically: "Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you" (12:4). The variant form of this story found in the Septuagint, 3 Reigns 12:24p-t, is even starker: "Your father made his collar heavy upon us and the food of his table heavy. And now if you will ease up on us, then we will be subject to you" (12:24p). Here there is direct relationship between the villages' having less because the king has too much. The king's

table is heavy with produce from the villages, obtained as tribute to God, but consumed by the king and his royal court (West 2022; West 2023).

The immediate response of Rehoboam is to postpone the negotiations by turning first to "the elders who had served his father Solomon" (12:6) in the Hebrew text (and to "the elders of the people" in the Greek text (12:24q)). The counsel they give is for the king to heed the demands of the people. Not persuaded by this counsel, Rehoboam next turns to "the young men who grew up with him and served him" (12:8). These are the second-generation beneficiaries of the temple-city royal state; they have grown up with eating from the heavy-laden table of economic exploitation. Their counsel is that Rehoboam should be even more exploitative, demanding more tribute in the name of God (12:10). They articulate clearly the logic of the sacred system of econo-patriarchy.

It is important to note the language of their response: "Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!' But you shall speak to them, 'My little finger is thicker than my father's loins! Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions'" (12:10-11). These royal court-based elite males derive their own related forms of subordinate masculinity from the dominant masculinity of Rehoboam, thereby affirming the dominant form (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, 834-835, 844, 848; Carman 2019, 311-316). "The young men" provide Rehoboam with a hyper-masculine vocabulary with which to justify the logic of economic exploitation. Rehoboam is a bigger and better – more virulent – 'man' than his father. His econo-patriarchy will be more virulent and violent than his father's.

The people reject this form of econo-patriarchy, rejecting Rehoboam's leadership. The northern and southern kingdoms of ancient Israel divide, never to be reunited. The cause of this division is Solomon's and Rehoboam's exploitative econo-patriarchal system.

This story from the books of Kings demonstrates the contours of econo-patriarchy and its inherent violence very well. The next story, a more familiar story for those of us, including Ezra Chitando, who have worked with the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (the Circle), is the story found in 2 Samuel 13:1-22.

2 Samuel 13:1-22

Having established the basic economic and patriarchal dimensions of the sacred econo-patriarchal system, we consider a story from within the early monarchy of David. Even here econo-patriarchy is evident, in the very earliest forms of monarchy when monarchy was still a form of chieftainship. David's Jerusalem city-temple system is not yet a fully developed city-temple state system, but there are clear indications of econo-patriarchy (Wittenberg 1988, 23).

The story of the rape of Tamar, told in this text, has been a Contextual Bible Study resource since 1996 (West and Zondi-Mabizela 2004). Within the Ujamaa Centre we have also grappled with this text in terms of masculinity, asking whether there was any evidence in this text of redemptive forms of masculinity. I remember well long discussions with Ezra Chitando about this story when we attended the "4th Pan African Conference of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians: The Girl Child, Women, Religion and HIV and AIDS in Africa", in September 2007, in Yaoundé, Cameroun. The title of my paper was "'Why Are You So Low, Son of the King...?' Patriarchy, Power and the Construction of Biblical Masculinities", in which I publicly probed how we might re-read this story as a story about redemptive aspects of masculinity, as well as a story of violence against women. The outcome of this collaborative reflection was published in a volume edited by Ezra Chitando and Sophie Chirongoma, and reflects my preliminary analysis of econo-patriarchy (West 2012). Since then I have returned to this text again and again. Here in this essay I reflect on how econo-patriarchy summons Amnon to patriarchal violence.

Like the "young men" in Rehoboam's royal court, Amnon has grown up as one of the privileged economic and patriarchal elites in the court of king David. The story begins with the reader being told that Amnon, the son of David, loved Tamar (13:1). The Hebrew אהב (love) offers no clue to what is to follow; the word denotes 'love' in the most positive sense. I have used this aspect of the story to point to a redemptive moment in Amnon's masculinity. He loves his sister, Tamar. If we pause at the end of verse 1 we do not have a rapist, but a man who loves his sister. So how does Amnon's love turn to sick lust, for from verse 2 it is clear that Amnon becomes infatuated and then frustrated "because of his sister Tamar", so much so "that he made himself ill, for she was a virgin, and it seemed hard to Amnon to do anything to her" (13:2). This shift from love to lust

is ominous, but still Amnon does not act on his sick sexual fantasies about his sister.

Everything changes when his cousin Jonadab, another royal elite male, reminds Amnon of his econo-patriarchal 'rights'. The Hebrew word order and emphasis is instructive: "For what reason are *you* so depressed/weak, son of the king" (13:4). The emphasis is on 'you' (using an independent pronoun) and 'son of the king' (placed at the end of the sentence). Jonadab recognises Amnon's psychological state, but cannot understand why the eldest son of the king, who is the ideal elite male under the king and under God, should be disturbed in this way. Surely, he cannot want for anything. Jonadab draws out Amnon's dilemma, in terms of his kinship with Tamar and the cultural and religious constraints of his society (13:4). Up until this moment, Amnon has allowed his kinship with Tamar and the juridical cultural and religious constraints of their society to constrain his desire. Jonadab, like the young men of Rehoboam's court, situates Amnon above such constraints, reminding him of his elite male econo-patriarchal position.

As I have already noted, "the role of the judiciary in the Ancient Near East was to oversee the workings of allocation", including the control of women and patterns of kinship (Boer 2007, 41). Boer asks: "How does allocation take place?" The answer is instructive: "Through the decisions of the deity, which now stands in as a code for those with power to make decisions concerning allocation", including kings and the son of the king (Boer 2007, 39). Jonadab reminds Amnon of his econo-patriarchal 'right' to allocate Tamar to himself. As the judge Samuel warned the male elders who asked for a king to replace the leadership of judges: "This will be the juridical practice [משפט] of the king who will reign over you: he will take ... (1Samuel 8:11).

Econo-patriarchy operates, as we have observed from the previous text, with a hyper-masculine understanding of elite royal males. Jonadab characterises Amon as 'weak' (דל), in verse 4, which can, as I have indicated above, be translated as 'depressed'. However, the psychological and the physical are connected in this word, for later, as Amnon asserts his physical masculinity over Tamar, the narrator refers to him as 'stronger' (חזק) than her. Like Rehoboam and his young men, Amnon asserts his male dominance in sexualised violent terms.

Lest we forget, my central point here is that economy and patriarchy are inseparable in the ancient world. This is not a story of a bad man, it is the

story of two interlocking systems. Tamar resists these interlocking systems as they close in on her (13:12-13). But the systems remain intact, which is why David, though angry, does nothing when he hears about what has happened (13:21). Absalom avenges Tamar by killing Amnon (13:22, 28). But the systems remain. Indeed, Absalom replicates Amnon's econo-patriarchal rape as part of his attempted coup, seeking to become king (16:21-22) (West 2021a).

Tamar herself, of course, is a beneficiary of the econo-patriarchal system as a daughter of the king (West 2021a). But as a woman, even a royal elite woman, she is vulnerable to exploitation within the econo-patriarchal system.

1 Kings 21:1-16

My final example connects with the previous two examples. The story in 1 Kings 21 takes place in the northern kingdom, where we find that the econo-patriarchal system that the people rejected in 1 Kings 12 has resurfaced. Ahab is an econo-patriarchal king, operating within the same system as David, Solomon, and Rehoboam. This story, like the story of Amnon and Tamar, also has a woman as one of its key characters, Jezebel. Unlike Tamar, however, Jezebel exploits econo-patriarchy for her own household's benefit. She is an agent of econo-patriarchy.

As with the story of Rehoboam, the contours of econo-patriarchy are quite clear. Ahab is the king, hierarchically the highest-ranking male immediately beneath God within the econo-patriarchal order (Nissinen 2016; Moore 2021). When he cannot get what he wants through appropriate juridical processes (21:2-3), he becomes depressed (21:5), like Amnon. In this case, it is his wife, herself a royal Phoenician elite (1 Kings 16:31), who summons him within econo-patriarchal terms: "Are you not king of Israel?" (21:7).

What is significant about this story is that it is not Ahab who then acts. It is his wife Jezebel: "I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite" (21:7). In other words, she will take the vineyard of Naboth. The story then recounts in detail how Jezebel goes about taking the vineyard of a subordinate male. She uses juridical processes, in the name of the king, to instruct subordinate elite males: "she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal" (21:8). First, they are to use cultural and reli-

gious ritual as the pretext to summon Naboth; second, they are to use cultural and religious law to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy and treason; and third, they are to use cultural and religious law to judge him and execute him (21:9-10). The narrator makes it clear that precisely what she instructs, in the guise of the king, is done exactly as prescribed (21:11-13). Subordinate elite males did exactly as Jezebel "sent to them" (שלח) (21:11). This echoes the words of 2 Samuel 13:7, where David "sent (שלח) to the house of Tamar" (13:7), summoning her to go to her brother Amnon. Within econo-patriarchy those summoned by the king must comply. Within econo-patriarchy, the summons of the king is a form of violence. Econo-patriarchy is violence.

What is particularly significant about this story, what it adds to our understanding of econo-patriarchy, is that econo-patriarchy is a cultural and religious juridical system. Furthermore, this story demonstrates that women are a constitutive element within econo-patriarchy and may also at times be overtly complicit with econo-patriarchy, using the system for their own household's benefit. Jezebel does not consider the impact of her actions on Naboth's wife's household. Naboth and his family are subordinates in the econo-patriarchal system, and so Jezebel 'takes' in the name of the king. Econo-patriarchy does not offer any protection to Naboth's wife and family. With Naboth executed, Jezebel summons Ahab to "arise", to be an econo-patriarchal elite man, and to "take possession" of Naboth's family land (21:15).

African econo-patriarchies

The trajectory within African biblical and theological scholarship concerning African masculinities, pioneered by Ezra Chitando, requires further work (Morrell & Ouzgane 2005). My argument in this essay is that we must locate analysis of African masculinities within the intersection of African patriarchal systems and African economic systems, whether indigenous or postcolonial.

My emphasis is on econo-patriarchy as a system, in the same way as racial apartheid was an 'econo-racial' system, a form of racial capitalism (Sebidi 1986, 14-32). Johnson's work is particularly useful because he too emphasises the systemic dimensions of patriarchy, and is clear about the distinctive features of the system: men dominate within political, economic, legal, religious, cultural, educational, military, and domestic domains; core

cultural ideas are associated with men; societal attention is focussed on men and boys; men have an obsession about control (Johnson 2014, 6-13). My argument is that given its systemic nature, there cannot be an 'acceptable' or "palatable" (Nadar 2009) form of econo-patriarchy. There was no acceptable or palatable form of apartheid (and there is no acceptable or palatable form of racism). The recent (2021) South African film, "#WeAreDyingHere" (Vermooten 2021), makes this terrifyingly clear. The war on black women's bodies perpetrated by patriarchy is portrayed using imagery from the apartheid war on black South Africans. Patriarchy, as Hunnicutt and Sarojini Nadar establish, is inherently violent. As my biblical examples demonstrate, econo-patriarchy is inherently violent.

The question that emerges from this analysis is how we might understand notions of 'African masculinity' which are not dependent on any form of econo-patriarchy. There is hard work ahead of us. Two African biblical scholars provide guidelines for this task.

Makhosazana Nzimande points the way in her incisive analysis of 1 Kings 21:1-16, one of the texts I have analysed above. "Whatever happened to the struggles of Naboth's wife?", she asks, refusing to allow the silence of the text within its econo-patriarchal world to be the final word (Nzimande 2008, 246). This story, she insists, "posits a serious challenge to [African] readers on both sides of the coloniser /colonised divide, women and men alike" (Nzimande 2008, 246). While celebrating African queens and African queen-mothers as women, Nzimande recognises that, like the biblical Jezebel, their power is derived from econo-patriarchy. Her "postcolonial *Imbokodo* reading", she demonstrates, "seeks to read with sensitivity towards the marginalised and dispossessed, those at the receiving end of the Queens' and Queen Mothers' policies" (Nzimande 2008, 243). She is not denying the gender oppression and marginalisation of women, both in the Hebrew Bible and in contemporary African postcolonial settings. However, she insists, "accentuating gender oppression over and above the pernicious social dynamics and ramifications of the royal abuse of power and the exploitation of the poor in the hands of women, as Jezebel's dealings with Naboth so clearly demonstrate, is a dangerous exercise" (Nzimande 2008, 243). Instead, she uses her *Imbokodo* hermeneutic to analyse the econo-patriarchal mechanisms by which these powerful women, both in pre-colonial Africa and in the Hebrew Bible, "exploit and dehumanise those over whom they reign" (Nzimande 2008, 243). "While *Imbokodo* historically acknowledges the presence and activity of such women of high standing", she concludes, "it urges that they do not entirely aid

our efforts at liberation unless they are decolonised and de-ideologised" (Nzimande 2008, 243-244).

From Nzimande's "brave" (Arao & Clemens 2013) analysis we can take at least two substantive contributions to our understanding of African masculinities. Econo-patriarchy is both a pre-colonial and a post-colonial African system, and econo-patriarchy constructs both men and women.

But how does it construct them? Biblical work on masculinity emphasises the vertical construction of gender and masculinity (Creangă 2010; Conway 2019), so work in African masculinities might usefully reflect on econo-patriarchy's construction of masculinity as not only a hierarchy among men (Morrell & Ouzgane 2005), but also a hierarchy including women. As biblical scholars Stephen Moore and Janice Capel Anderson demonstrate, a hegemonic conception of masculinity in the ancient world "was less a dichotomy between male and female than a hierarchical continuum where slippage from most fully masculine to least masculine could occur" (Moore & Anderson 1989, 250). In their biblical example, "the prime exemplar of masculinity in 4 Maccabees is a woman" (Moore & Anderson 1989, 252).

Jonathan Jodamus too offers a useful guide in our task of interrogating African masculinity. He situates his analysis of Paul's masculinity within African quests for "redemptive masculinities" or "liberating 'more peaceful and harmonious masculinities'" (Jodamus 2017, 68). Here he is citing my own work (and the work of the Ujamaa Centre) on "alternative" and "redemptive" masculinities (West 2012), and Ezra Chitando's and Sophie Chirongoma's introduction to African notions of "redemptive masculinities" and "liberating masculinities" (Chitando & Chirongoma 2012, 1; citing Morrell 2001, 7). What Jodamus's analysis demonstrates, however, is that while Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:5 may seem to embrace a form of vulnerable masculinity, "this text actually re-inscribes notions of dominant masculinities and indeed hypermasculinity" (Jodamus 2017, 68). He elaborates:

> At first glance, it seems that his [Paul's] presentation of himself as weak by standard cultural rhetorical assumptions detracts from his masculinity and in fact renders him (un)masculine and effeminate. At a second glance, however, it turns out to be a rhetorical move in which he manages to assimilate and subsume his deficient (un)masculinity in that of Christ's regulatory body. This, in effect, turns out to be a demonstration of hypermasculinity that

> only re-inscribes andronormativity and patriarchy from the ruling social system (Jodamus 2017, 86).

Jodamus's equally brave analysis also offers us a substantive contribution to our understanding of African masculinities. As long as our understandings of African masculinity participate in the system of econo-patriarchy, they cannot subvert the system, and so end up reinscribing hegemonic forms of masculinity (see Jodamus 2017, 86).

I discern another significant contribution in a line of thought which Jodamus invites but does not develop. He says, and it is worth quoting this in full, invoking as he does the work of Chitando and others:

> Chitando and others write about the insurmountable burdens placed on men in contexts rampant with HIV, unemployment, and poverty where men are required to succeed at all costs even in contexts of death. In these contexts, the hypermasculinity of Paul simply adds to the pressure and simply re-inscribes the idea of men as providers, protectors, priests, and as people all-powerful, instead of recognising the value in men simply being human, which is exactly what the death of Christ has the capacity to envisage. It could even be argued that the death of Christ achieves this humanness. In death, he portrays the possibility to recognise frailty and humanity (Jodamus 2017, 86-87).

Jodamus aptly summarises here the econo-patriarchal system and how it constructs masculinity. But what if, as Jodamus invites us to ask, we understand the death of Jesus as the death of econo-patriarchy? Here is an appropriately radical theology for a post-econo-patriarchal African church.

Alongside the work of Nzimande and Jodamus, I have added further reflections on econo-patriarchy. My contributions, using three biblical texts, have emphasised the economic dimension. Patriarchy, these biblical texts demonstrate, is always implicated in male economic control; it is always econo-patriarchal. When men do not have the control they desire over the labour and resources of other men (Rehoboam), over women's bodies (Amnon), and over the land of subordinate men (Ahab), their masculinity is questioned and so threatened. The response is violence. The violence is activated, it should be noted, not by an individual but by a system. Masculinity is systemic. I have named this system as the econo-patriarchal system.

What my analysis does, I hope, is to summon us to look not only at cultural systems when we reflect on masculinity. We must consider economic systems as well. Furthermore, I have suggested that the death of

Jesus offers us a theological resource for contemplating and working towards the death of econo-patriarchy.

The Ujamaa Centre, with which Ezra Chitando has collaborated for many years, has constructed Contextual Bible Studies on each of these biblical texts (West 2012, 2013, 2020, Forthcoming). In each case, local communities have used and will continue to use these biblical dialogue partners to discern the contours of econo-patriarchy. The summons towards *African* understandings of masculinity, issued by Ezra Chitando (Chitando 2016a), requires that communities of ordinary African readers and hearers of the Bible join us in reflecting on a post-econo-patriarchal Africa.

Conclusion

My essay analyses the systemic features of patriarchy, and recognises that the economic is a constitutive feature of patriarchy. The notion of econo-patriarchy offers us, I have argued, other lines of analysis for understanding African masculinities. In order to demonstrate the usefulness of the concept, I have engaged with three biblical texts, discerning in each the contours of econo-patriarchy. Alongside my own interpretive work, I have drawn on the work of other African biblical scholars, assembling an array of potentially useful biblical and theological resources with which to take on the task of working towards a post-econo-patriarchal African masculinity. The task is immense, for how do we envisage the concept of 'masculinity' outside of its econo-patriarchal construction. Yet persevere we must. The alternative is to continue to live within the violence of econo-patriarchal systems.

Working *with* organised local communities for whom the Bible is a significant and sacred text, biblical stories like these offer resonant resources for particular communities to reflect on their own local African econo-patriarchal systems. As African biblical and theological socially engaged scholars, we are summoned by both these sacred texts and our communities to continue the work we have begun.

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