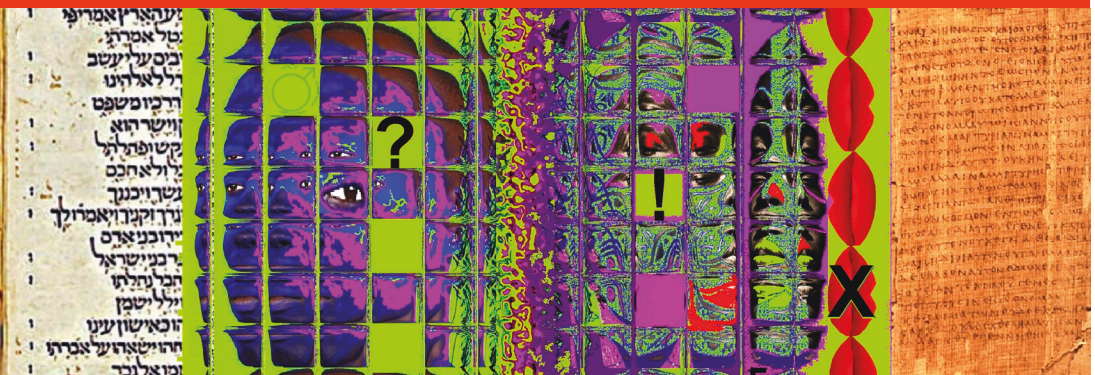


Joachim Kügler, Rosinah Gabaitse, Johanna Stiebert (Eds.)

THE BIBLE AND GENDER TROUBLES IN AFRICA



22 Bible in Africa Studies

Études sur la Bible en Afrique
Bibel-in-Afrika-Studien

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Volume 22

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Joachim Kügler,
Ezra Chitando, Rosinah Gabaitse, Masiwa R. Gunda,
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The Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa

edited by

Joachim Kügler, Rosinah Gabaitse, Johanna Stiebert



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Foreword

Joachim Kügler (with Rosinah Gabaitse & Johanna Stiebert)

Following the conference on “Bible and Practice” held at Bamberg, Germany, in 2009, the idea of dedicating a volume to the same theme but with special focus on Africa was born. And the result was not only a book, (BiAS 4)¹, but a series of meetings also. Since then the University of Bamberg, on the initiative of the Chair for New Testament Studies, holds a biannual conference on *Bible in Africa Studies*. This conference is jointly organized with colleagues in the fields of Theology and Biblical Studies, and other related fields in Africa. The conference has the aim of deliberating on pressing issues in the world and, more particularly, in Africa. The initiative started with the first meeting, held in Germany in 2010 at the imposing Kloster Banz (cf. BiAS 7), with the second held in Gaborone, Botswana, in 2012 (cf. BiAS 17) and the third, structured according to the regulations of a Humboldt-Kolleg, held in Windhoek, Namibia, in 2014 (cf. BiAS 20).

At Windhoek, those who attended the conference on religious, social, and political issues relating to *The Bible and Violence in Africa* decided by a clear majority that the next BiAS-meeting should deal with *The Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa*. Regarding the location, the majority favored the idea that the conference of 2016 should be held at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare. It was especially Dr Obvious Vengeyi, who shouldered the burden of organizing all the necessities for the meeting. Everyone who knows somewhat about the socio-economic challenges experienced by Zimbabwe under the reign of the “the other son of God” during the agony of his last years, will understand that preparing an international conference under these circumstances did not mean less than what Germans call a “Herkulesaufgabe” (Herculean labour). At the end of the day we had a wonderful meeting at the University of Zimbabwe, superbly organized by our hosts at Harare. We cannot thank Pro-

¹ All the volumes of BiAS series are listed at the very end of this volume.

fessor Vengeyi and his supportive friends at Harare enough for all that they have achieved for the BiAS family!

The discussions at Harare were characterized by two phenomena which participants from the West would not readily have expected. First, the fact that the topic of gender troubles attracted much more men than women: both the participants and the presenters of papers were predominantly male. Some participants suspected that women scholars were not well informed about the event but the call for papers was sent out to so many scholars – male and female – all over sub-Saharan-Africa – that this is not a very convincing explanation for the preponderance of men at this gender conference. It may probably be more correct to understand this as a symptom of the somewhat awkward feelings of disconcertion among male academics in contemporary Africa when it comes to the gender topic.

This goes along with the second observation: while in Germany – and many other countries of the West – male academics attending a gender conference would mostly be part of the gender fairness movement, many of the male participants at Zimbabwe gave the impression that for them gender debates are something that should be fought against, because they are something ‘unbiblical’ and ‘un-African’, threatening their masculinity. I [JK] will never forget how these feelings came to the fore at an unexpectedly long and most vivid discussion following the presentation of Kudzai Biri on single women in Zimbabwe (cf. her article in this volume). In an almost eruptive way so many men – most of them ‘professional Christians’ as biblical scholars and/or pastors of Pentecostal or mainline churches! – uttered the wish to get rid of the colonial heritage of Christianity, which destroyed pre-colonial gender order, especially by fighting against traditional polygamy. It is in this line that women (and men) standing up for gender justice often are attacked as “coconuts”² – brown on the outside, white on the inside. One sees them

² Although coconuts are delicious and healthy food, the expression is meant derogatory and shows that racism is not a Western privilege. Insinuating that African feminists or womanists are brain-washed by Western/white/colonialist ideology is an unfair stereotype of course. On the other side it also has some truth in it since championing the cliché of a real African woman staying at home, caring for children and kitchen, results in declaring that every woman participating in any public discourse, be it academic or political, is doing something un-African. The mere fact that a woman is speaking publicly or publishing texts in books or periodicals makes her a “coconut”. Of course, this

as agents of a foreign Western agenda, which causes gender troubles – understood as troubles among the genders³ – by inviting African women to challenge the traditional ideal of the submissive woman. As a non-African non-woman, I cannot say if African women in this point really need any incentive from abroad, but it is obvious that no culture, no country and no continent is an island in modern times of mass communication, and intercultural exchange might be a characteristic of human development since ancient times. It is at least highly probable that even without any colonial past Africa would have to face dramatic changes and developments in many socio-cultural fields – including gender concepts, which by the way have changed in so many details through the times and keep changing permanently. Only 50 years ago horse-riding was typically male in Germany, while it is now typically female, most fashionable among teenage girls. While long golden ear-rings are seen as typically female in many cultures, it was typically male in Ancient Egypt, a privilege of the king as ‘the man of the men’. However, these changes mostly happen without being noticed and without touching the basic structure of patriarchy. What African (and many other) societies experience now is much more, it is a fundamental challenge of this structure and men who fear for their power have every reason to be worried about this kind of gender troubles. The question is, if the gender justice movement is just a kind of fashion, which one can fight and stop, or if it is a wave unstoppable. If it is a wave the alternative is: either you learn to swim, or you drown. The water is no enemy to those who know how to swim, and men who have learned that the topic of gender justice is dealing with their own liberation too, might finally experience that there is plenty of life outside the iron cage of traditional macho-masculinity.

simple fact usually is overseen silently when women engage in re-establishing patriarchal gender role models. But even the most conservative woman participating in public discourse shows that – in the words of Bob Dylan (1964) – “the times they are a-changing” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7qQ6_RV4VQ).

³ Obviously, nobody understood ‘gender trouble’ according to the concept of Judith Butler, who coined the expression. Firstly, she would see patriarchal gender order as something that is making troubles, and she would, secondly, also say that ‘doing gender’ (the cultural pressure put on every person to adapt to standardized, heterosexual gender norms) in itself is a problem, a suppressive, dehumanizing process. According to Butler ‘undoing gender’ is necessary because gender is trouble. Cf. J. Butler, 1990, *Gender trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.

Unfortunately, many of those who spoke out for traditional gender order during the Harare conference did not deliver articles for this volume. Therefore, we cannot document their arguments adequately in this volume. On the other hand, we had the chance to integrate a lot of articles that were not read at the conference of 2016. We already have done so in previous BiAS volumes only this time considerably more so. Due to various factors the peer review process took a long time so that we could not finish editing as early as planned but we hope that this volume was worth waiting for. I am extremely grateful that my dear Humboldtian friends and colleagues, Johanna Stiebert and Rosinah Gabaitse, came to my help and shared with me in the burden of editing this book, although they had not even taken part in the Harare conference. Without their highly effective help this volume would not have seen the light of the public before the next BiAS conference.

We also have to pay tribute to the tremendously supportive work of Mrs Irene Loch and we do so with great gratitude. Finally, we say thanks to our student helper Johannes Löhlein who – as a special service to our readers – created an index of the biblical texts mentioned in this volume.

The editors dedicate this volume 22 of BiAS series to LILLY PHIRI, a scholar who was a strong fighter for justice but died far too young. Born 1983 in Kabwe, Zambia, she studied Theology in Kitwe in Zambia. From 2006-2011 she worked as a Minister of Religion for the United Church of Zambia. Later, her interest in gender issues, especially in the context of HIV/AIDS led her to South Africa where she continued her studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, under the auspices of Sarojini Nadar and Gerald West, two internationally renowned authorities of Contextual Theology/ Biblical Studies. In her three degree-projects (Honours, Master, and PhD) accomplished there, she developed a theology with a clear option for the marginalized. For example, she connected the theological concept of human dignity as *Imago Dei* with the rights of sexual minorities, especially of men loving men, in the context of HIV/AIDS. Methodologically she contextualized theological systematics with empirical studies, especially in her home country. In 2016, after a research stay at the University of Leeds, UK, she applied for a post-doc research stay of two years at the University of Bamberg, one of the few German centers for Bible in Africa Studies. In her project she planned to go about the gender topic from a new perspective by examining the religio-cultural semantics of breast-feeding, something typically feminine, but with a clear “queer” potential. She wanted to find out how

the patriarchal theology of Ancient Christianity interpreted and used the topos of breast-feeding. Her special interest was to find out why ancient Christian texts like the Odes of Solomon⁴ developed a cross-gender concept of God and Christ (as a breast-feeding father or son) without leaving behind the patriarchal framework of their time. Her idea was to contextualize these ancient Christian concepts with the traditional African milk symbolism of her Zambian culture. Shortly before being awarded an Alexander von Humboldt Scholarship for this thrilling project, Lilly Phiri passed away in 2017. As academics we cannot set her an epitaph of stone, but we can try to build her a monument of critical ideas honouring her spirit. So, let us go on working *in memory of her!*

⁴ The Odes of Solomon are Christian songs from the 2nd -3rd century CE. Several times the odes mention divine milk given by God (Father or Son), e.g. 8:16; 14:2; 19:1-4; 35:5. Cf. Michael Lattke, *The Odes of Solomon. A commentary (Hermeneia)*, Minneapolis 2009; Joachim Kügler, *Why Should Adults Want to Be Sucklings again? Some Remarks on the Cultural Semantics of Breast-feeding in Christian & Pre-Christian Tradition*, in: L. Togarasei/ J. Kügler (eds.) *The Bible and Children in Africa (BiAS 17)*, Bamberg: UBP 2014, 103-125: 108-109.



Introduction

The Bible, the Church, and Gender Troubles in Africa*

Ezra Chitando

A Sketch of the Situation

Across cultures and in different historical periods, the church has had a significant say in the “gender order,” namely, how women and men must relate in society. This is because the church has grown into a powerful social institution, with the power to have a voice in how society must be organized. The church’s theological approach to reality, the traditions it has inherited, as well as social, economic and political factors have all played a part in how the church understands the roles of women and men in society. In many African countries, the church has made massive contributions to health, education and politics, and is rightly regarded as a major actor in the quest for development. In this paper, I seek to reflect on the church’s engagement with “gender troubles” in Africa.

From the onset, I need to emphasise the point that “gender troubles” are a universal phenomenon. I have had opportunities to hold gender training workshops in the Nordic countries, among others. I have been struck by the ongoing “gender troubles”, despite the investment that has been made towards gender parity in these countries. In the USA, Donald Trump courted controversy due to his reckless remarks concerning women. This precipitated the historic Women’s March in Washington, DC and across other parts of the world in January 2017. In Germany, the boardrooms continue to be dominated by men, despite the calls for redress and activism to change the gender order. Therefore, my focus on “gender troubles in Africa” is not due to the idea that Africa has the worst forms of “gender troubles,” but is a result of the fact that I have

* This paper was presented 2017 as my public *Humboldt lecture* in the setting of the University of Bamberg, Germany, but to a mixed (academic and non-academic) audience. Consequently, it minimizes scholarly references and thus may serve here as a general introduction to the topic of this volume.

been directly engaged with the church and Africa's "gender troubles" for many years.

The paper is divided as follows: in the first section, I specify the interpretation of the key concepts used in this study. In the second section, I outline how the church has interfaced with "gender troubles" in Africa. In the third section, I reflect on two of the strategies and approaches that could be utilized to make the church more effective in addressing challenges relating to gender in Africa. In conclusion, I argue that the church is well placed to contribute towards embracing justice and peace in Africa through adopting a prophetic stance in relation to gender.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

In the humanities, most debates are rendered futile due to participants having different understandings of the key terms used in the debate. It is also an established fact that scholars hardly agree on any definitions, given the fact that the very concept of a definition does not have a satisfactory definition! However, it is helpful to have open or operational definitions of concepts in order to assist in establishing the sense in which key ideas will be used in specific contexts.

First, the church. The sheer number of volumes on the history, identity and key beliefs of the institution known as the church is bewildering. The church is a very complex and dynamic historical, religious, political, economic and social institution. In this paper, I use "the church" primarily to refer to the "historical mainline Catholic and Protestant" formations that were instituted during the missionary era in Africa. Catholic and Protestant missionaries were largely responsible for the evangelization of sub-Saharan Africa. They set up mission stations, schools and hospitals. More critically for this paper, they introduced ideas and ideals relating to what they saw (and what current church leaders still see) as acceptable standards of behaviour by women and men in society. While the Orthodox and Coptic churches are found on the continent, these are not the focus of this presentation. Similarly, the vibrant African Independent Churches (AICs) and Pentecostal churches deserve a separate analysis. I should, however, hasten to add that they both influence, and are influenced by, developments in the mainline churches.

Second, gender troubles. Here, I should begin by breaking one of the cardinal rules of defining, namely, that one cannot define an entity by saying what it is not! However, in this paper, I must declare that by fo-

ocusing on “gender troubles” I am not suggesting that there are no, “gender joys.” Far from it! Indeed, there are numerous examples of “gender joys” in Africa. Here, a wife and her husband are working together in their field; there, a court makes a progressive ruling regarding women’s rights to equal inheritance, and over there, the President is a woman. More examples could be provided to demonstrate that it is not all doom and gloom on the gender front in Africa. Yet, still we must speak about “gender troubles” in Africa, and indeed, everywhere else. Even as many African countries have made tremendous progress in ensuring that women get equal pay to men at the workplace (whereas this is not the case in some countries in the global North), there is still a deep-seated assumption that men lead, and women follow.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995), Africa’s foremost woman theologian, maintains that “gender troubles” emerge from unequal distribution of power between men and women in society. The dominant ideology operating across most societies is patriarchy, a code word for, “rule by the fathers/men.” Various scholars within the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (hereafter, the Circle), a grouping of determined activists (Chitando 2009), have charged that patriarchy suffocates women by prioritizing men’s interests. In this context, “gender troubles” emerge from systems of domination and oppression, whereby one group is accorded privilege and status over the other.

“Gender troubles” in Africa (and elsewhere) cease being a matter for academic reflection when we remember that they have life and death implications. Who dies and who cares are issues that are rooted in gender. It is gender which determines whose life is rated more important than the other. Which child (a boy or a girl) will go to school is part of the “gender troubles” in Africa. In the area of HIV & AIDS, where I have worked and reflected on for several years now, the life and death implications of “gender troubles” loom large. To summarize: in this paper, I use “gender troubles” to refer to the problems that emerge from the unequal distribution of power between men and women in African societies. Predominantly, power has tended to be vested in men, with women being regarded as second-class citizens.¹ I will put the term in quotes

¹ Here, I will not enter the debate regarding the impact of colonialism and missionary religions on the “gender order” in pre-colonial Africa. Ideologically, I am more fixated

throughout the paper as I am convinced that the situation it describes is neither permanent nor desirable, and that it must be changed.

Third, Africa. Again, I will break the rules of definition. Africa is NOT a country, although many Germans still think so, and it is not even simply a continent. There is not one, but many Africas. The six letters that make up the word “Africa” have done a very good job in hiding massive geographical, historical, economic, political, religious, ethnic, racial, language and other differences. However, these differences do not exclude the possibility of making some valid generalizations. In this paper, I concentrate mainly on sub-Saharan Africa as this is the area that I have operated in for a number of years now. This is not to say that North Africa is not part of Africa, or to suggest that there are no “gender troubles” in this particular part of the continent. Although there are regional and local variations, the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa share some similarities, especially in relation to gender norms and values.

The Church and “Gender Troubles” in Africa

From the missionary period to the present, the church has interfaced with gender in Africa, for better or for worse. While some African cultural nationalists want to accuse the church of bringing disorder and division to Africa, it is important to appreciate that there has always been tension across the gender divide throughout history. Having said this, one must still concede that the missionaries and their successors have not always been as creative as they need/ed to be in responding to gender issues in Africa. In this section, I seek to highlight some of the key areas where the church has faced some challenges in relation to gender. I shall focus on three such challenges, namely, first, the insistence on male headship; second, the silence around sexual and gender-based violence and third, the ongoing challenges that women leaders continue to face in the church.

with the concrete Africa that I encounter in the present. For a spirited defense of the pre-colonial African past, see for example Segueda 2015.

“I am the head of this house, and I have my wife’s permission to say so”
– Male headship as a divine injunction

The sub-heading is derived from some declarations that I have seen in some homes I have visited, especially in Zimbabwe. On the one hand, there is an effort to take the sting out of the declaration: the man who is declaring that he is the head of the house requires his wife’s permission to make the statement! On the other hand, it brings to the fore issues of hierarchy, power and authority within the household. The church in Africa has tended to endorse the patriarchal stance where the man is the head of the house. Here, there is a combination of conservative readings of the Bible and indigenous strands of patriarchy.

Men’s claim to leadership at the household level is generally supported by the church in Africa. It is given a veneer of divine legitimacy and there is consistent claim that “every institution needs a leader,” and that in the case of marriage, God ordained the man as the leader. From my workshops and interactions with church leaders across many parts of Africa, a number of arguments are put forward to support the ideology of male headship. First, there is the mythical/biblical idea that Adam was created first, and that Eve was created second, and from Adam’s rib. From this narrative, the headship of all men/husbands everywhere was secured, and the subordination of all women/wives everywhere was sanctioned. This is reinforced by appeals to Pauline ideas regarding men’s headship. Second, it is contended that men’s superior physical strength and the capacity to defend the homestead makes it logical for men to be the heads of households. Third, following the introduction of paid labour, the reality that more men are in formal employment has been used to support the idea that they should be the heads of families. Other arguments relate to women’s alleged emotional approach to issues, that men’s headship is historical (“it has always like this since time immemorial”), that the ancestors decreed that men should always lead, etc.

Despite the brilliant critiques by the Circle and other gender activists who have shown the major flaws of arguments in favour of institutionalizing men’s headship at household level, the church has actively reinforced this ideology. It does this through its active teaching and advancing of the notion that men have been selected by God to lead at the household level. The suggestion is that this is part of the “divine order of things,” and that to challenge this paradigm creates chaos. Alternatively, the message is altered to suggest that the men who head households

must lead, but in justice, tenderness and mercy. Their headship is still guaranteed.

Although there are economic factors (particularly relating to the need to protect the transfer of wealth within the family line across generations) that are at play in the tendency to favour the boy child in the home, it can be deduced that patriarchal notions informed by religion lie behind the idea and practice. Evidently, the patriarchal dividend is not limited to the global South but is a world-wide phenomenon. A recent report from the UK indicates that boys aged five to 16 receive an average allowance of 10.70 pounds (13.30) per week, while girls the same age set get just 8.50 (\$10.60) (Daily News, UK, 24.01.2017, accessed 26.01.2017). The patriarchal reasoning here (in the UK, Africa and other settings) is that it is important to train boys to be able to handle money effectively, as they shall be responsible for protecting and increasing the wealth of the family. Girls, on the other hand, have items bought for them. The understanding is that they will be married into other families, hence do not quite need lessons in business early on in life. However, in real life many daughters have done exceptionally well in looking after their parents, even after they would have married.

Faced with the reality that declaring men as heads of families has resulted in many men adopting dictatorial attitudes, the church in Africa has sought to promote “palatable patriarchy.” This is a form of patriarchy that is sensitive to the rights of women and children. In this scheme, the church calls upon men to exercise their power responsibly. Husbands are called upon to remember that their headship does not imply enslaving their wives or bossing their children. Instead, they are supposed to remember that their headship is for service. However, as I have noted above, the headship of the man is not contested. He is simply being asked to be a little more generous, understanding and loving.

The church in Africa’s struggles with “gender troubles” associated with the idea that God has crowned the man as the head of the family are related to the refusal or inability to accept women’s inherent equality to men. As I will argue below, the church must recover its prophetic voice and insist on the fundamental equality of women and men everywhere. Men and women are the heads of their families, if there must be any head at all!

Silence/ Inaction/ Misaction over Sexual and Gender-based Violence

The second challenge that the church in Africa faces in relation to “gender troubles” is closely related to the foregoing. The notion of the man as the head has led some men to become perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence. Granted that some women do violence to their male partners, it remains true that the bulk of the survivors/victims are women. Based on equal power relations, sexual and gender-based violence is a global phenomenon. Many women and some men suffer in silence because of the stigma that is associated with it.

Expressed in physical, psychological, economic and other forms, sexual and gender-based violence prevents individuals and families from achieving their full potential. To live life in its fullness becomes impossible in contexts of sexual and gender-based violence. Consequently, sexual and gender-based violence has a negative impact on the health and well-being of many individuals, families and communities. Despite the increased awareness of its effects, it continues to be perpetrated.

The church in Africa has struggled to address sexual and gender-based violence effectively because of a number of reasons. Firstly, there is the response of silence (Chitando & Chirongoma 2013). In this regard, there is silence regarding the occurrence of sexual and gender-based violence. It is completely off the radar of the church for the most part. Silence, however, has the danger of ignoring this major social challenge. Silence goes hand in hand with secrecy. The net effect is that sexual and gender-based violence is not brought to the fore in the church. Many women, children and some men continue to lead lives that are less than whole because of its effects.

In many instances, however, the church is aware of the damage caused by sexual and gender-based violence. Unfortunately, in most cases there is inaction. The church remains unmoved, either maintaining that domestic violence belongs to the private realm, or that any action will threaten the stability of the sacred institution of the family. Inaction leaves many members of the church and society frustrated, as they are fully aware of the potential which the church has in addressing sexual and gender-based violence.

Sadly, sometimes when the church does finally act, the actions are sometimes the wrong and less helpful ones. There is misaction when Church leaders ask women who are facing sexual and gender-based violence to remain quiet and only “take it to the Lord in prayer.” It is wrong when

the church fails to confront men who are known to be perpetrators of sexual and gender-based violence because they pay the highest amounts in tithes. There is also misaction when the church attempts to resolve the issue by simply transferring the priest/reverend who would have been exposed as a perpetrator of sexual and gender-based violence.

I must concede that there is growing awareness of the reality and impact of sexual and gender-based violence by the church in Africa. The sensitization and awareness raising done by gender activists over the years has not been vain. Some church leaders preach against sexual and gender-based violence and have actively sought to undermine the culture of silence, inaction and misaction. During the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-based Violence, some church leaders invite specialists to interact with members of their congregations. Others utilize and distribute theological literature on sexual and gender-based violence. However, a lot more remains to be undertaken if the struggle for gender justice is to succeed.

Exclusion, Marginalization and Stigma: The Experience of Many Women Religious Leaders

It requires a separate study to reflect on the debate relating to women's ordination in Africa. Whereas some denominations in some countries now ordain women into the ministry, many others do not. There are historical, cultural, political, ideological and other reasons behind the refusal by some churches to ordain women. However, there is need for vigilance: the ordination of women, in and of itself, is not a sufficient indicator of the church's success in addressing "gender troubles." I now focus on the third example of the church and "gender troubles" in Africa. This relates to the exclusion, marginalization and stigmatization of women who take up leading roles within the church itself.

In this section, I will reflect on the experiences of women leaders in the Catholic and Protestant churches in Africa. Whilst the Catholic Church does not ordain women, there are women who dedicate their lives to the service of the Church as nuns. The picture which emerges is that women leaders in the church face serious forms of gender oppression. This is due to the patriarchal nature of the Church and society that I referred to at the beginning of this paper. Although women are the majority in terms of membership, the paid and officially recognized positions in the church are dominated by men. Biblical verses such as 1 Cor 14:34 saying

that women should remain silent in church have been used to marginalize women in many African church contexts.

Writing from the context of Nigeria, Sr Rose Uchem (nd) argues that many male priests do not want to accept the nuns as equals in ministry. In some instances, lay members also do not accept women's leadership within the Church. The net effect has been the marginalization and exclusion of women leaders within the Church. As Uchem argues, the major challenges facing women religious include denial of full participation in ministry, despite the creative work done by many inspired women leaders and limited financial support.

It is important to acknowledge that the effects of gender socialization run deep. In some instances, it is women religious leaders themselves who hesitate to stand up boldly. From childhood, they would have heard the message that men are the rightful, divinely appointed leaders. Even their own grandmothers and mothers might have passed down the same message of male headship and female followership (Eze, Lindegger & Rakoczy 2016). In such contexts, women religious leaders might doubt whether they are at the same level as their male counterparts.

The church has struggled to fully embrace women leaders due to its attachment to patriarchy. There is a tendency to incorporate women into leadership structures, but without accepting them as full equals. In some instances, there are only half-hearted efforts to be politically correct. Such tokenism often means that women who are deemed too radical or "difficult" are left out of leadership positions in the church.

The Church in Africa as an Agent for Gender Justice: Some Proposals

How can the church in Africa overcome "gender troubles?" How can it become a transformative agent in the quest for gender justice? What can the church do in order to promote abundant life for all (Chitando & Njoroge 2016)? The task is definitely a daunting one, given the multiple factors that generate "gender troubles." In this section, I seek to highlight two areas that can assist the church in Africa (but also, globally) to become an agent that spearheads social transformation. I am proposing that through relevant and progressive theological education and embracing transformative masculinities, the church can contribute towards gender justice.

Theological Education/Religious Studies in Africa for Gender Justice

A longer narrative is required to trace the history, achievements and challenges of theological education in Africa (see for example, Phiri & Werner 2013). What is clear, however, is that there is an urgent need for theological education in Africa to take gender issues much more seriously than is the case at the moment. Essien & Ukpung (2012:287) identify inadequate theological education as a major challenge in the struggle for gender justice in Nigeria, and, indeed, in Africa. It is worrying to discover that many church leaders who have undergone (advanced) theological training in Africa and abroad continue to uphold myths of male superiority and female subordination.

One major strategy, closely related to my second proposal below, is to remove the association of gender with “women’s issues.” It is critical that students of theology (and religious studies in Africa) appreciate this basic truth: there are no “women’s issues” that are not “human issues.” There are no “women’s rights” that are not “human rights.” It is by ensuring that during the course of their training students of theology/religious studies constantly interact with the question of gender justice. This must not be confined to an elective course on Theology/Religion and Gender/Women, but gender issues must be mainstreamed in the curricula of theological institutions/universities in Africa.

Effective theological education that engages the issue of gender in competent ways will significantly reduce (one would hope it would eliminate) faulty interpretations of the Bible that continue to sponsor “gender troubles” in Africa. It would equip graduates of theological institutions/universities to become advocates of gender justice. They will be better placed to resist historical, cultural, economic, political and other factors that sponsor gender inequality. They would be more equipped to challenge myths of male headship, question sexual and gender-based violence and promote equality and justice for all. They will be bold enough to take up the prophetic ministry of protesting against injustice.

Transformative Masculinities: Men working for Gender Justice in Africa

It is crucial for men in the church and beyond to partner women in the quest for gender justice. This is a movement that the World Council of

Churches (WCC) Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiatives and Advocacy (formerly Ecumenical HIV & AIDS Initiative in Africa) has described as “Transformative Masculinities.” Through a series of workshops, publications (see for example, Chitando & Chirongoma 2012) and advocacy work, the WCC has challenged men in leadership positions in church and society to work with women for gender transformation.

Male gender activists from within the church have a lot of scope to respond to “gender troubles.” The first critical step in this process is to acknowledge the insights of Elize Morkel (2015:141) when she advises that “The first requirement for men to change sexism in the church is to admit that it exists, and that it is subtle and insidious.” Secondly, we who are men need to master the art of listening, which is not a gift that we as men have in abundance. Morkel elaborates on the need and challenges that we who are men face regarding listening:

Women have an advantage when listening is required. As women living in a male-dominated world we already know much about the world of men: we have been required to listen to them (particularly in the church) for most of our lives! For men, it is harder. Once men have started undertaking reflective tasks of looking inwardly and listening to women, they can start taking positive action (Morkel 2015:141).

Morkel also suggests that men can partner with women by assisting women’s participation by sharing power and encouraging women to be direct and ambitious (2015:142). This theme has also been amplified by the Circle, which calls for men and women in the church to join forces in order to transform Africa. Transformative Masculinities seek to encourage boys and men to stand with girls and women in the struggle for gender justice. They endeavour to have men who question the ideology of male headship, confront sexual and gender-based violence, and act in partnership with women, both in the church and in society. Such men are not “saints” who are without fault, but are human beings who are motivated to work for gender justice.

Conclusion

The church in Africa faces many challenges in relation to overcoming “gender troubles.” In this paper, I have highlighted three areas in which the church has been implicated. These are, promoting male dominance, silence in relation to sexual and gender-based violence and the marginalization of women in the leadership of the church. I proposed transform-

ative theological education and transformative masculinities as possible strategies for equipping the church to become more effective in addressing gender inequality in church and society. It is by recovering and expressing its prophetic voice that the church can inspire revolutionary action in relation to gender inequality. According to an Ethiopian proverb, “when spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” When women and men, young and old, homosexual and heterosexual, from diverse ethnic and political backgrounds come together, they can transform “gender troubles” into “gender joys” in Africa.

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Genesis 1-3 and a Gender-equal Society

The Problem of Reading Etiologies as History

Masiwa Ragies Gunda

Abstract

In most cases, trained and ordinary readers of the Bible read the text of the Bible from a historical perspective. This chapter, through critical document analysis of Gen 1-3, avers that these narratives are etiological and not historical, that complications of interpretation emerge from reading these etiologies as historical narratives. While a predominant number of scholars supporting patriarchal norms and status quo as well as feminists challenging this patriarchal status quo have tended to operate with a subconscious understanding of these narratives as historical or operate subconsciously within a historical paradigm, this chapter proposes an acknowledgment of the etiological nature of these narratives. As narratives the stories in Gen 1-3 seek to explain and not to lay down facts of origins but rather interpretation of origins, as well as creating and fostering a new reality among the readers or audience. They are narratives that are already ideologically fixed and designed to justify and legitimize the status quo or to discredit the status quo in the scheme of life and relationships as supposedly ordained by God. Once taken from this perspective, Gen 1-3 cease to be God speaking but rather men explaining the status quo and assigning a role to God. What is made by men can be undone by men, is the call in this chapter.

Introduction

Many a time, I have been asked to answer questions from concerned Christians regarding the historicity of materials found within the Bible, especially, the marriage of Cain and his encounters with other people when it appears that there were only Adam and Eve in the whole world (Gen 4:12-17). Where were these other people from? This paper is motivated by such questions and the historical motivations that are implied in such questions and readings of the Genesis Primeval narratives in Gen 1-11. Some of the key contemporary issues that have been dealt with, using this historical approach to these narratives are Gender and Sexuality. There is little debate surrounding the observation that “historically, religion and sacred texts have contributed to the marginalization of women. Religion and sacred texts have provided the platform for male

domination of the society” (Okon 2011:184). Religion and sacred texts have provided strong justification for male domination, female subjugation, and of late diversity condemnation, “as the will of God.” This paper reiterates an observation that has been made by other scholars, especially from the feminist block, that the creation narratives of Gen 1-3 have been the bedrock upon which gender equality and sexual diversity has been curtailed if not assailed. This paper also makes another observation that the reason why these narratives have played this infamous role is because they have been wrongly assigned a “historical status”, as if they were a proper record of what actually transpired in time and space. This mistaken assumption regarding the historical value of these narratives has led to the sustaining ideas of the divine origins of gender inequality as well as heteronormativity. The third key observation to be pursued in this paper is that these narratives are best understood as etiological and ideological, as literature, such that most, if not all, interpretations across the scholarly divide are largely undermined by their “historical reading” of the narratives, further complicating the conceptions of gender and sexuality in contemporary communities dominated by readers of the Bible and believers. The dominant historical and confessional approaches “to the Bible easily fall into the double structure of fear of power and threatening with power” (Kügler 2013:202). This paper will, therefore, argue that when read as etiological and ideological, these narratives allow for a critical engagement with the concepts of gender and sexuality for a gender-sensitive society.

In tackling these issues, this paper will be divided into three main sections; in the first section, focus will be put on the Bible, gender inequality and sexual diversity. This section will seek to outline and highlight how the Bible has been a resource for entrenching and sustaining gender inequality while entrenching and sustaining heteronormativity as divinely ordained characteristics of the human race. As the main actors in the production and interpretation of the Bible have always been men, it will be shown how “the Bible [is understood] as uraeus when it is linked to reading the Bible and therefore exhibiting “Cobraness” on a semantic level” (Kügler 2013:192). This section will also show that most readers and interpreters of these narratives have always read based on an assumption that these narratives are historical. In the second section, focus will be put on the Gen 1-3 narratives, with the intention of showing that these narratives are not historical but etiological and ideological to a certain extent. The final substantive section will focus on a re-

appraisal of the etiologies for transformation. Acknowledging that these narratives are not historical is not a rejection of their usefulness for contemporary societies, rather, it actually helps in getting the right approach to their appropriation. We cannot try to appropriate an etiology as if it were history or historical. This paper will demonstrate in this section that when read as etiologies, these narratives can become new resources for the promotion of gender equality and tolerance and acceptance towards sexual diversity. The importance and complexity of the biblical text is captured succinctly by Kügler when he writes on the dichotomy of the sacred and canonical nature of the text of the Bible;

In Christian communities the Bible is usually both a sacred text as well as a canonical text. This is not the same. While sacredness is linked to magic and cult, canon is linked to corporate identity, delimitation, and organization of power. Canonical texts are primarily powerful instruments of groups and only in second line power tools of individuals. Canonical texts have a specific message which serves to build up collective memory and corporate identity. Canon propagates the norms and formative values of the specific community and in this manner influences the thinking and acting of the individual members of the group. That is how canonical texts create a link between individual identity and collective identity. That means that canonical texts always have a clear ethical dimension, which of course is even more true of the biblical canon which contains large parts of outspokenly normative texts... The biblical canon, like any canon, does not stop its delimitative function once the corporate identity is established, but continues to delimitate – now within the group. The canon originates out of semantic polarization, but it does not finish this polarization. On the contrary, the canon fosters continuous polarization. This is highly precarious as there is a rather straight way from delimitation to elimination (Kügler 2013:192-193).

The Bible, Gender Inequality and Sexual Diversity

In 1895, Elizabeth Cady Stanton shocked the American public by making statements and pronouncements that challenged the core of the American society but which core was equally present in many other societies, then and now. In her words towards the end of the 19th century, Stanton accused the Bible of being at the heart of the deliberate ploy to make women inferior while making men superior.

The Canon and Civil law; Church and State; Priests and Legislators; all political parties and religious denominations have alike taught that woman was made after man, and for man, an inferior being, subject to man. Creeds, codes, Scriptures and Statutes, are all based on this idea... The

Bible teaches that woman brought sin and death into the world, that she precipitated the fall of the race, that she was arraigned before the judgment seat of Heaven, tried, condemned and sentenced. Marriage for her was to be a condition of bondage, maternity a period of suffering and anguish, and in silence and subjection, she was to play the role of a dependent on man's bounty for all her material wants (Stanton 1895).

While Stanton was silent on the subject of sexual diversity, her words on gender inequality are equally instructive on the manner in which Church and State, especially in Africa today have also ganged up to promote a teaching of heteronormativity as the only sexual expression that is divinely ordained. With the Bible read as a canonical text and infallible Word of God, the Bible is a powerful text that is to be feared and can be used to instill fear in others. According to Kügler (2013:202), “[t]his double structure almost makes it impossible for the ordinary reader to really confront his/her own life with the biblical message. My impression is that fear is the most important reason why we try to avoid direct confrontation.” What Stanton did in 1895, was to confront the biblical text with her own experiences as a woman in American society.

In the context of Africa, the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians took up a similar perspective to that of Stanton when propagating the understanding that gender inequality was entrenched and sustained by a conspiracy between the Bible and African culture, as they became pillars for the continued subjugation of the African woman (Dube 2001, Wasike 2001:175, Essien & Ukpong 2012:286). Clearly, in discussions on gender and sexuality in Africa, African culture and sacred texts have been touted as authorities giving directions on how men and women must relate, and in most cases, men have been given the privilege of being rulers and women the burden of being the ruled. Young boys are, from an early age, taught to be dominant and assertive while young girls are taught to be submissive and caring, as they are both prepared for adulthood. In this context, we could go further and assert that the Bible and African culture are understood not only sacred but as canonical and therefore legitimate instruments through which delimitation of membership and status is carried out. Through these instruments women have been excluded from the platform of equality and sexual minorities have been eliminated from the status of being human. The key question in this section is: how is the Bible used to entrench and sustain gender inequality and heteronormativity? The gender biased reading of the Bible gained traction within the Church because:

In church history, the line between the powerful interpreters and powerless recipients is often identical with the line between clergy and lay people. There was also a clear gender bias as the status of clergy was strictly reserved for men only (as is still the case in many churches all over the world – also in Africa). Those who have power decide on the interpretation of the formative texts and by doing so gain more power. The authorized interpreters carry the Bible as a uraeus at their forehead (Kügler 2013:194).

Mary Evans (1984:14) has done an extremely good job in summing up the way in which the Bible has been used to justify gender inequality. In doing so, she highlights four key arguments that have also been widely cited in African communities. The four arguments are:

- a. Woman was created after man hence she is secondary to him. This is in connection with the creation narrative beginning in Gen 2:4b, in which Adam is created before everything else while Eve is created after everything else. Being first, is taken to mean seniority and superiority hence Adam represents the dominant position of all men over all women.
- b. Woman was taken from the man hence she is a by-product of him. This argument is also based on the narrative beginning Gen 2:4b and applies directly to the section where God takes a rib from Adam to make Eve. In this context, woman is a very small fraction of the man and as she is a by-product, she cannot exactly be considered an equal to her source, much in the same way that man cannot be considered an equal to God, who is his source. This understanding is also used to support the gender imbalance that exists between men and women.
- c. Woman is named by the man hence she is the man's subordinate. In most African communities, the superior has the privilege of naming his/her subjects. Giving a name to someone or something is understood as a show of power and authority. Parents name their children, pet owners name their pets and therefore, as Adam names Eve, it implies that Adam was superior to Eve.
- d. Woman was created to be a helper for the man hence she is subordinate to him. The concept of a helper is one that is most widely used to refer to the relationship of husband and wife. Helper is understood as someone that is not equal to the one being helped and, in most cases, illustrations of helpers used are those of maidservants and menservants and subordinates and juniors at work, who are all important for the role they play but who can

never be equated to their masters and bosses. This is an understanding that is equally attested in 1 Cor 11:3, which presents a hierarchy with God, Christ, Man and Woman (cf. Kügler's article in this volume).

Interestingly, all the four arguments above are based on the creation narrative in Gen 2:4b-3, which links up with the Fall narrative, whose own contribution to the subjugation of women cannot be understated. As observed by Stanton (1895), it is through the Fall narrative that woman is accused of bringing sin into the world. This narrative also acts as a perfect ruse and excuse for denying women equality with men for fear that they can lead men astray like Eve. What is also very clear in this reading of the creation narrative is the underlying assumption that this narrative is historical, that it is not a hypothetical reconstruction of what might have happened billions of years ago for men to be so dominant over women. Neither is this text read like a work of literature that seeks to construct a new reality by creating and sponsoring a particular perspective on gender relations and sexuality. Instead, the narrative is read like a historical narrative, which factually relates what actually happened. This patriarchal reading of the Bible, which is excellently summed up by Evans has not gone unchallenged. Phyllis Trible (1978) responded to this patriarchal reading by redeeming the text while inverting the above outlined arguments. While Trible acknowledges the mythical nature of these narratives, her arguments against the patriarchal readings betray a historical paradigm as a base upon which her work relied. In a point by point rebuttal, Trible argues that:

- a. Woman is created last (Gen 2:22) and last is superior in the scheme of creation. She cites the creation of human beings on the sixth day of creation in Gen 1:26-28 and points out that even though human beings are created last, they are clearly superior to all those that had been created earlier. The "first is better" argument, therefore, does and cannot be applied to the order of creation because of the precedence in Chapter 1 of Genesis.
- b. Woman is to be a helper (Gen 2:18) is also placed within the broader context of the Old Testament, where God is often regarded as a helper (Isa 10:14; 54:4). In all the cases where God is regarded as a helper, at no point is it implied that God is inferior to the children of Israel or any of the people that God helped. In fact, we are aware of people that are far more superior than us that are our helpers. Trible, therefore, argues that for being made a help-

er, woman is in no way being made inferior maybe she is actually being made superior. The word helper here could be profitably split into two related concepts – benefactor and servant – as both forms of helping. The patriarchal reading looks at woman as a servant while Tribble suggests woman could actually be a benefactor.

- c. Woman is made from the rib of the man (Gen 2:21-23). According to Tribble, while it is true that woman was made from the rib of the man, it must be noted that man did not voluntarily and willingly give his rib, instead, man was immobilized by God hence woman's creation is the "act of God" and not the generosity and providence of man. In effect, for both man and woman, life originates with God hence man is not superior from that perspective.
- d. The man names the woman (Gen 2:23). Tribble argues that the text states that "she shall be called woman", whereas regarding all other creatures the man would call them. The change in the manner of naming suggests man has no total control of woman. If naming is to signal superiority, is it not instructive then that Eve is the one who names their first-born son (Gen 4:1), suggesting she may have been superior not only to the child but also the father.

These arguments have found many takers among feminist scholars as well as others who sympathize with the cause of the feminist movement. The arguments are quite convincing, especially because they are also supported by cross references to other texts in the Bible. However, for the purposes of this study, it is important to note that these arguments appear also to betray an assumption that the narratives under study (Gen 1-3) are historical. This use of historical lenses in approaching these narratives is therefore shared by both those who champion the patriarchal reading as well as those who are contesting such readings.

On the subject of sexual diversity, the Bible and African culture have also emerged as the pillars for the dominant position that is disparaging of sexual minorities on the continent alongside other reasons including cultural imperialism by the West. The conventional and dominant reading of the Bible on human sexuality has emphasized the male-female dichotomy of Gen 1:26-28 and Gen 2:7, 20-23 to argue that there are only two components to human sexuality. There is the female which must desire the male and the male which must also desire the female, these

two components combine to produce the only sexuality that is acceptable to God, that is, heterosexuality. According to proponents of this position, heterosexuality is the norm and only sexuality that is divinely ordained bringing about the concept of heteronormativity (Nabushawo 2004:293, Gwamna 2006:5, Chemhuru 2012:10). From this perspective, sexual diversity is looked upon as equivalent to sexual deviance hence sexual minorities are frowned upon and considered social deviants that are bent on destroying society or disrupting harmony in society. These readings are also characterized by the use of historical lenses in approaching these narratives in Gen 1-3, a problem I also observed as bedeviling the readings of these narratives from both a patriarchal and feminist perspective. The texts are assigned a historical status and thus are used as authorities based on historical facts. This historicizing of texts is considered inappropriate and largely produces misleading readings.

The above position, dominant as it is, is not the only way in which the Bible has been used in discussions of human sexuality in Africa and beyond. There are other scholars and readers who have been sympathetic to sexual minorities and who have stood up against the general homophobic environments in which sexual minorities have lived always as “unconvicted felonies” (Goddard 2004:84). From this perspective, the male – female poles have been taken as the extreme points on a continuum of human sexuality with many other individuals lying in-between these two extremes. That God created everyone with the *Imago Dei* is greatly emphasized hence all persons – heterosexuals, homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender, transsexual, intersex and asexual – are all created by God (Gunda 2010, Chitando 2008). The implications of this understanding are far reaching, if all possess the image of God, what right does anyone have to disparage against those who carry the image of God? This is further strengthened by the realization that sexuality is inert and not chosen by an individual, that which is inert can only come from God and if it comes from God, who are we to try and condemn it? It is, therefore, argued that the creation narratives of Genesis do not in any way absolutely speak against sexual diversity.

What is clear in all these positions is the unmistakable “historical” status assigned to the Genesis narratives. Readers from across the divide appear to share the same assumptions for different purposes and reach different conclusions but the historical framework is upheld by both sides. While there is fundamental disagreement between the two main standpoints, they however, remain united in that both views assume the

narratives are historical – that they relate to what actually happened and how it happened (Williams 2014:5). As long as these texts are approached from the assumption that they are historical, they will continue to fuel disputes regarding their import and function in contemporary society (Davies 2000), especially on gender imbalances and sexual diversity.

Genesis 1-3 as Etiological and (to an extent) Ideological Narratives

What is the nature of these narratives that continue to inspire so much prejudices against the emancipation of women and the acceptance of sexual minorities? This section seeks to demonstrate why these narratives should be read and understood as etiological and ideological, thereby implying that to read them productively, one must develop tools and ways of approach that acknowledge this reality of the nature of these narratives. According to Davies (2000:1), “Genesis 1-11 is Israel’s wonderfully constructed fiction about the origins of life and the beginnings of humanity.” There is a tendency among readers of assuming that word “fiction” is derogatory when applied to biblical narratives yet it is used by Davies, and I concur with that usage, to designate a “type of literature.” Most cultural and traditional conventions, customs and moral teachings are packaged and articulated through various works of fiction, meaning “Genesis 1-11 is a powerful, cultural document” (Davies 2000:1). According to Kügler (2013:210), “fictional texts do not depict reality but create reality. In doing so, they, however, have to use elements of the commonly known reality. Even the weirdest fantasy novel has to work with pieces of the old, well-known world. Even things which are perfectly new and never existed before combine fragments of the existing world in themselves. What is new is the combination, not the elements.”

We can, therefore, best equate Gen 1-11 with our own African folktales and fables whose introductions include phrases such as “A long time ago...”, “In a far far away country...”, “A long long time ago, when lions could speak...” These folktales and fables were told and retold and were considered very important by the communities even when adults knew they were fiction. Their importance did not depend on their historicity but rather on the lessons they could impart to the young members of the community. In Murewa, Zimbabwe, there is a story told that says;

A long time ago, two mountains fought and one was defeated and was pushed to its current location and the victor returned to its current loca-

tion. In the process of fighting and pushing the loser, a pathway was created, which is still visible to this day.

These stories sought to explain why things are the way they are in the present and sometimes they sought to instill in youngsters certain character traits such as honesty, hard work and bravery.

What motivated these traditional folktales and fables was a desire not to “relate what actually happened”, which is the domain of history but “rather they try to hypothetically suggest what could have happened in the past for things to appear as they do in the present” (Davis 2000:4, Meyers 1993:117). Stories that seek to explain the reasons for phenomena, names and traditions, whose origins are difficult to establish historically are not history but etiological hence the narratives in Gen 1-11 are better understood and read as etiologies. Etiology comes from the Greek aetiology, which means “giving a reason for” used mainly to denote the study of causation or origination (www.dictionary.com). They are hypothetical explanations of the traditions, customs and phenomena whose origins are historically impossible to establish. At the same time, picking on the observations by Kügler (2013) that etiologies or fictional literature, do not only seek to explain the *status quo*, but that they also actively to construct a reality, it means through these forms of literature, societies could create new realities by combining old patterns with new innovations to produce a new worldview and a new reality.

Etiologies, therefore, are not neutral hypothetical explanations but are highly ideological since they seek to make explanations and to create new realities from the viewpoint of the narrator. An ideology is a body of ideas or a system of beliefs held by an individual or group. Etiologies are, therefore, mostly constructed from the perspective of the dominant ideology of a given community. One of the key ideologies behind the etiologies of Gen 1-11 is “patriarchal ideology”, which is a system of beliefs and ideas centering on the dominance of men over women and children. Through this patriarchal ideology, the Israelite society stressed ideas on the desirability of men dominating women in all areas of social life. Patriarchal ideology is born out of patriarchy, which is regarded as “the rule of the father” and comes from the Greek word "πατριάρχης" (patriarkhēs), which means "father of a race" or "chief of a race, patriarch", (from πατήρ patēr, "father") and ἄρχω (arkhō), "I rule", "I am the head". Historically, the term patriarchy was used to refer to autocratic rule by the male head of a family. However, in modern times, it more generally refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by adult men

(Wilson 2000:1493-1497). Based on this philological definition, a more elaborate definition is provided by Marilyn French (1985:239), who writes:

patriarchy is the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influences, and resources.

Whatever power, influence and resource is given to women, it is largely given in trust and to be used in service of the patriarch or the patriarchal system. Women who are accorded such “privilege” are working for the system and may not necessarily be liberated. It is largely reckoned by most feminist scholars, that patriarchy is “a system of social structures, and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women” (Walby 1990:214). The narratives in Gen 1-3 are, therefore, etiologies developed from a patriarchal perspective and seek to justify why men dominate women in most spheres of life, they are working in service of the patriarchal system obtaining in ancient Israel and remain useful in contemporary patriarchal societies. Alternatively, the same narratives could actually be reckoned as the foundation upon which patriarchy is constructed and sustained, as fictional narratives that are used to construct a new reality, that is, they are designed to construct a society in which men dominate and oppress women in the name of God. Being part of the canonical text, this construction becomes almost impossible to challenge for group members because they are presented as divine.

Another ideology behind these etiologies is “heteronormativity”, which denotes a worldview or an attitude that promotes heterosexuality as the only normal or preferred sexual orientation or sexuality. Within Christian circles, heteronormativity is derived from Creation theology in which case, the male and female are taken or understood as halves that are designed to unite and complement each other to realize their wholeness as well as to achieve their charge of procreating (Van Klinken 2011:165). Heteronormativity is the ideology that has been sustaining the opposition by most churches and Christians to same-sex sexual relationships or sexual diversity. The dictum “Adam and Eve not Adam and Steve” has been widely used in Christian circles to drive the complementarity point home. Only a man and a woman can complement each other in the ways desired by God as illustrated in the creation narratives of

Gen 1-3. Heteronormativity or heteronormative are words derived from two words, heterosexuality and normative. By implication, therefore, heteronormativity is the ideology that propagates the view that only heterosexuality is the normative human sexuality. Everything else that is not heterosexuality is devious and wrong. Coming from an environment in which Israelite neighbours understood sexuality and sexual practice in the duality of “penetrators and the penetrated”, these etiologies are critical in constructing a reality that understood sexual practice as not simply about penetrating or being penetrated but a consideration of the result of the penetration. Penetration was not simply for the pleasure of the penetrator, as widely suggested in the Greco-Hellenistic environments of the time, for the ancient Israelites and Jews, penetration was strictly for procreation hence only when a man penetrates a woman was sexual practice considered normal and acceptable (Foucault 1990, Halpern 1990, Boswell 1980, Crompton 2003). These mythical narratives are not simply explaining what is observable in Israel but are constructing an alternative reality to that which was prevalent among her neighbours.

To better understand the ideological nature of etiologies, one needs to listen to creation narratives from matrilineal and patrilineal societies. The Genesis creation narratives are coming from a patrilineal society and are based on patriarchal ideology and heteronormativity, laying the blame for the disruption of the harmonious relationship between human beings and God on the doorstep of women, while among the Bemba people of Zambia who are a matrilineal community, a man became a man due to disobedience. Man was punished for failing to obey the instructions he had been given by God while woman retained the natural state that humanity had from the beginning (Kaunda & Kaunda 2016). These variations are ideologically steeped, showing how etiologies are manipulated or influenced by ideological standpoints.

The narratives in Gen 1-3 can only be etiologies because they lack the key traits of historical narratives, which are date, place and author. History is about events that happened in space and time, hence historical records must clearly state the date and place of origin. Historical narratives must, without fail, answer the questions: when and where? Once approached from this perspective, it is clear that these narratives are not historical because they speak of what happened “in the beginning” (Gen 1:1) or “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens” (Gen 2:4b), clearly, these are statements that one does not find in historical narratives but in folktales and fables. It is also interesting that these

narratives do not provide information on the geographical location of events and places such as Eden. Where was Eden? In Gen 2:8, we are informed that the Lord God planted a Garden in Eden in the east! How can one ever locate such a garden? East of what? There is simply no location that could be, with certainty, identified as fitting this geographical location. Similarly, how does one, created after these events got the information of what was happening at the beginning of time? If God is the creator, as is supposed in these narratives, any narrative that tries to describe what God did cannot be a historical report. For not satisfying these expectations on historical narratives, we argue here that these narratives are not historical. Since the narratives attempt to offer explanations on phenomena that clearly have no discernible historical origins, these narratives must be understood as etiological by which we mean they are hypothetical explanations of observable phenomena or as social constructions that attempt to create a reality, that must bind all members of the constructing society such as the apparent dominance of men over women and the prevalence of persons with a heterosexual orientation as opposed to those of other sexual orientations.

The strength of etiologies lies in their appropriation of that which is observable hence creating or woving an intricate almost un-falsifiable narrative forcing its readers and hearers to give it a historical status, which it does not inherently have. Etiologies start from the present realities and then begin a hypothetical reconstruction of why the current state obtains. It can also collect pieces from the present reality to create an alternative reality and as etiologies are presented as describing the work of God, they will become normative for the society of believers. From these observations, patriarchy and heteronormativity, which are the bases upon which gender inequality and the rejection of sexual diversity are built will remain very difficult to fight, especially in Africa mainly because they are sustained by the narratives in Gen 1-3, which are being read from the assumption that they are historical when in actual fact they are etiological. As constructed realities enjoying the status of normative texts, the Bible becomes a powerful tool for the self-understanding of the people who read it. Approaches to the Bible will be in such a way that readers put themselves on the same side with the Bible, just as the Egyptian king and his cobra;

That is why we usually admit being criticised by the Bible only in minor things: I should be more polite to my neighbours, I should drink less, I should donate more for the poor, I should pray more intensively and more often, and so on. In fundamental things which are really relevant

for our whole existence we don't seek the confrontation, because we know that the biblical cobra is dangerous. If we look at it from the wrong perspective, it might cost us our life; at least the life we are used to. Avoiding that is reasonable, and that is why most of us are using the Bible as a critical norm for others but not for ourselves. The life and behaviour and thinking of others are in contradiction to the Bible and must be given up. Our own practice, our own life, our own thinking, however, need some minor correction and improvement at most (Kügler 2013:197).

Re-appraising ideological etiologies for transformation towards Gender-equal and Sexual Diversity affirming societies

I must begin this section by acknowledging that the rehabilitation work, done by Tribble and other feminist biblical scholars as well as sexual diversity affirming biblical scholars, among them myself, on the text of the Bible has helped in questioning the conventions on gender and sexuality. As with gender, patriarchy and heteronormativity are socially constructed and religion and sacred texts, such as the Bible, are invoked to reinforce and entrench such systematic manipulation of power and privilege by giving the systems a divine origin. In short, through the use of religion and sacred texts, it is easy for men and heterosexuals to argue: "We rule and dominate you because it has been so designed by God!" The attempts to challenge these conventions have done a great deal but have not been exhaustive hence the need to continuously look for ways to improve the voices for equality. Like earlier scholars questioning the validity and relevance of these texts in constructing and sustaining gender imbalance and sexual stigmatization of sexual minorities, we cannot avoid the foundational texts and their power because as Kügler (2013:198) observes;

it does not make sense to even try to escape the influence of power completely. The only thing we can do is to organise a play of checks and balances. In relation to reading the Bible, this would for example mean that we strengthen ourselves, the readers, in a way that allows us to overcome the fear that seduces us to use the power of the Bible against others instead of daring to confront ourselves with it. We need to learn how to avoid the dichotomy of either being the victim of the cobra or being the one who uses it as a power tool to dominate others. We have to learn, so to speak, to look at the cobra from the side (Kügler 2013:198).

As observed earlier in this paper, what has weakened attempts to rehabilitate the texts and challenge the patriarchal and heteronormative read-

ings of the Gen 1-3 narratives has been the failure to question the historical status that has been assigned to the primeval history narratives of Gen 1-3. In attempting to counter convention in the manner Tribble went about it, the redeeming scholars have sought “to identify loopholes in these stories... thereby inviting accusations of attempting to re-write history” (Davies 2000:4). This accusation is powerful, especially when given to believers who are informed that the alternative perspectives are meant to challenge God and not socially constructed systems. Even victims of these systems come out as defenders of God, when in actual fact, they are merely defending the systems that continue to exploit and oppress them. It is in this context that I am tempted to agree with Kügler (2013) that what we need is a literary-fictional reading of these narratives. A similar approach has been widespread in African communities, that used this approach to interpret folklores and fables that were told to children as part of the edutainment programmes in different communities. According to Kügler (2013:208), “a literary-fictional reading in the attitude of “serenity of art” could even allow us to read those texts and simply ask what they mean. In a second step, one could ask: What happens to me when I read these texts, what are their effects on me?” (Kügler 2013:208). Putting these questions to the creation narratives could go a long way in constructing a newer and liberating understanding of the texts and their impact in contemporary communities. The text of the Bible, as a canonical text is different from technical manuals, which we read and throw away once we have mastered the machines for which they have been written, its information will not change, and it is not usually affected by place and time. A machine in the USA, Europe or Africa can have exactly the same manual and be operated in exactly the same way. That however, is not the case with the text of Bible, the meaning and impact of these texts is contingent upon other variables and when read like technical manuals, there is a danger that sacred texts

can lead to severe conflicts, especially when it is not possible (or at least very difficult) for the reader to relate the information provided by biblical texts to extra-textual reality. In Western culture, this is the case when it comes to the miracle stories which tell of things that are simply not possible according to our post-enlightenment concept of reality. That is why these stories caused historical criticism and all the debate around that since the 18th century. And even ordinary Western readers have problems reading these texts as non-fictional as it is so difficult to decipher the narrated events as facts to an extra-textual reality, yet African readers not influenced by the historical framework predominant in Europe since

enlightenment will have no problems reading and accepting the miracle stories (Kügler 2013:200-201).

The consequences of literary-fictional reading would be better understood as special kinds of effects. Iser explains that literary texts are not vessels containing a certain message but are half-open structures which lead the reader to a certain kind of ‘making sense.’ Literary texts don’t make sense in themselves; it is the reader who in the act of reading makes sense of the text (Kügler 2013:205).

With this in mind, the most sustainable way of reading these narratives is by first accepting that these narratives are etiologies and not history, therefore, they do not state facts of what actually happened, rather they try to hypothetically and ideologically suggest what could have happened in the past in order to justify why things are the way they are (Davies 2000:4). Africans never had problems in interpreting folklores because they knew they were not dealing with history, yet they appreciated the lessons embedded in these fictional stories. Similarly, contemporary tourists to Egypt are not scared of the King’s cobra, according to Kügler (2013:198), they approach the cobra “from the side” and “we don’t get scared, first, because the mythical framework of Egyptian royal theology is no longer the framework of our own life. Therefore, we do not fear the Egyptian king and we do not believe that he really is (was) the representative of divine powers. The second reason why we are not frightened is that we have learnt to see this uraeus as a piece of art. We look at it from an aesthetical point of view.” Etiologies begin from observation – why are men working so hard to feed their families (in those communities where men are the breadwinners while women are confined to indoor chores)? Why do women endure so much pain in childbirth yet continue to desire more children? These are questions that demonstrate the existence of a certain condition, which is persistent hence the need to encourage people to continue with and sustaining that condition. How can we make people continue to do this in spite of the pain and risks? Etiologies are developed to deal with these present realities whose origins lie beyond the reach of history and natural science. Such narratives are told in all societies and are approached from the perspective that they are not historical but important. This is the approach that most Africans take to deciphering folktales – the importance of folktales is not in their historical value! Instead, folktales were and are important because of their social value. However, as time and contexts change, folktales can be re-interpreted to reflect the changed circumstances or

new ones are constructed to create a new reality. It is, therefore, not disrespectful to the Bible to use a similar approach.

I would now like to propose applying this attitude to the Bible as well, not as the only way of reading it, but as a good way of reading it -at least, if we try to avoid the fatal collusion of power and fear which seduces us to use the Bible as ideological uraeus and produce violence, first of the verbal and then of the physical kind. Reading the Bible with the same attitude we use for literary-fictional texts (like novels or poems) seems very much preferable to me than the normative reception which shows all the negative effects that the victims of church history have experienced in the past and continue to experience in the World Christianity of today (Kügler 2013:199).

Gen 1:1 – 2:4a is a narrative that is widely accepted as having been influenced by the Babylonian creation myth, the *Enuma Elish*, yet it must be acknowledged that it is not simply an adopted creation etiology but rather an adopted and adapted creation etiology. The adaptation of this narrative actually ended up creating a fundamentally different reality to that created by the original *Enuma Elish*. The following are the fundamental modifications that are brought about by the Gen 1 creation narrative; creation of a monotheistic society, as opposed to a polytheistic society of ancient Babylon, creation of separate divine and created entities, in which God is not part of created universe in any way, creation of equality of all persons through the famed Gen 1:26-28 verses, as opposed to the discriminatory systems of Babylon that looked at some people as better than others. These verses have economic consequences, particularly the way the Sabbath is configured, as a day of rest for all not only for the elites and that rest is not through the benevolence of the masters but a right emanating from God. This is a new reality being constructed by Israelites who experienced the life of a subjugated people with no rights whatsoever except those benevolently bequeathed to them by their masters. This is what we get when we ask Kügler's (2013) first question in literary-fictional reading of the Bible, that is, what do these texts mean? This text is actually meant to construct a new reality and it is not surprising that throughout the Old Testament, reference is made to Israel to remind that they should respect and not oppress the stranger because all people are created by God and carry the image of God (Exo. 12:48-49, Deut 16:11-14, Josh. 8:33, Psa. 94:6, Amos 9:7). Israel constructed this etiology to create a new reality and Israel is constantly reminded, especially by the prophets of the universality of God (cf. Jonah). As a second step in this literary-fictional reading of the text, what do I get

from this text, knowing what it was meant to achieve? This is a text that should be understood as a basis for advocating for the equality not only of the different races, but the different genders and sexualities as well because it acknowledges there is a fundamental unity that binds all as human beings. It is a text that was disgusted by the discriminatory tendencies of ancient Babylon and sought to subvert such, this is a text that can today be used to subvert all discriminatory systems that continue to exclude and eliminate others from the pedestal of being children of God. Patriarchy and heteronormativity cannot stand against this text when understood as a text that sought to construct a new reality to guide the Israelite community especially after the Babylonian experiences.

While the first creation narrative clearly is one designed to construct a new reality, and it is a revolutionary text that engenders equality among the multiple diversities to which we are exposed today as it also dealt with various diversities that ancient Israel was exposed to, the same cannot be said of Gen 2:4b-3, which has the second creation etiology and the Fall narrative. These narratives are best understood as “tales describing or justifying the existence of hard work for men and painful child bearing for women” (Meyers 1993:117) as well as the subjugation of women by men in most communities. Beginning with our first step question, we can quickly highlight that according to these narratives, the creation of human beings came in stages – men first and women second (Gen 2:7, 20b-22), that there is a diversity among human beings that is qualitative and complementary (Gen 2:23-25), that God was initially part and parcel of his creation, mingling with it (Gen 3:1-8), that the relationship between God and human beings was negatively affected by the actions of the woman (Gen 3:9-13), that in the aftermath of the disruption of the relationship between God and human beings, men were to become leaders and providers for their families, women were to be subservient to men, become mothers in pain (Gen 3:17-24). This narrative is an etiology in the sense that it seeks to explain some aspects of life that we experience but cannot historically explain, such as, hardwork, labour pains, enmity between human beings and snakes, the domination of women by men. Applying the first step question clearly shows these are not historical explanations but rather hypothetical explanations meant to justify and legitimize the status quo. While the first narrative sought to create a new reality, that reality is diametrically opposed to the reality expressed in Gen 2-3, because the reality of Gen 2-3 is one that actually justifies exclusion, discrimination and elimination of supposed enemies.

What does this text do to its readers? This is a text that can continue to engender gender imbalance, exclusion and discrimination, especially when read as canonical text, which is taken as normative hence one to be followed. However, from a literary-fictional perspective, this text should be subordinated to the first narrative because it re-presents a reality that is similar to the reality that was revolted against by the Gen 1 narrative. Gen 2-3 were constructed to legitimize the usurpation of power by men in ancient Israel at the expense of women and children hence cannot be taken as a normative text for contemporary societies especially because among the prophets, what it articulates is constantly rejected as the design of the God of Israel. If it engenders in the reader a sense of superiority or inferiority of some human beings and not others, then it is not part of the reality that was meant for Israel. What stands out as in tandem with the initial narrative is how it constructs human beings as relational beings in need of companionship, companionship does not create hierarchies of domination but platforms of collaboration and respect. Re-reading the text of the Bible this way does not take away its importance, rather it acknowledges that

The text of the Bible is not identical with the divine revelation. God does not reveal a text; God reveals himself. God did that in the history of Israel, in Jesus Christ, and does so through his people today. The status of the Bible is that of the supreme testimony to revelation, but not that of revelation itself. That is why it is not heresy to acknowledge the human character of the biblical texts (Kügler 2013:206).

For what benefit do I get from reading the text of the Bible for me to dominate and oppress others? Would that bring cohesiveness to families and societies? Readings that bring about exclusion, rejection and stigmatization cannot be encouraged, even if they are in the Bible, especially if they are etiologies; rather they need to be confronted. These texts, however, continue to be read with prejudice because

Most Christians, and I include myself explicitly, are not really open for conversion as they are already Christians. That is why we tend to avoid any encounter with the Bible that might pose uncomfortable questions to our life. When we read the Bible as Christians, we usually do that in the firm conviction that we and the Bible belong to the same side, i.e. the right one. Remember, the cobra always looks into the same direction as the king. If we were to encounter the Bible as a text that tells us something new and unexpected, then we would have to admit that we, our thinking, and our living are not in full accordance with what the Bible says; we would then also have to admit that perhaps we ourselves belong to the non-believers and sinners (Kügler 2013:196-197).

Conclusion

The Bible contains many narratives that are told from a socio-theological perspective because Israel always understood herself as a religious and theological community. In the process of constructing her identity, Israel created etiologies among many other literary forms to tell her story, to create her identity and to order her society. The narratives in Gen 1-3 are among the etiologies that are found throughout the Old Testament. When read as etiologies, and not as historical, these narratives clearly show the revolutionary nature of Gen 1, a blueprint for the construction a new and definitive Israelite understanding of reality, in which all persons are to be respected and accorded rights, including the right to rest from work exertions. This revolutionary text when so read, can become a revolutionary text even in contemporary communities, suffering as they are, from multiple forms of deprivations, discriminations and exclusions. However, the narrative in Gen 2-3 is clearly one that was told to legitimize the domination of women by men and needs to be subordinated to Gen 1 in constructing an understanding of what brings harmony and cohesion to society. The importance of these narratives is not in their historicity, which they do not have, but rather their importance is in the embedded lessons that we can deduce from them.

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The Biblical Gender Culture and the Status of Women in Nigeria Today

Theophilus Ugbedejo Ekeh

Abstract

Over the years there has been a constant domination of women by men particularly regarding the performance of socio political and religious roles in the Nigerian society. Women are most times considered inferior to men and less rational, and are, as such, discriminated against and perpetually subjugated. Biblical texts which have patriarchal background are often used in backing up arguments that present the woman as secondary and subordinate to man. This work aims at reviewing some of such texts which have, for ages, been used to support the subjugation of women.

Introduction

There is an erroneous belief in most world cultures that women and men are not equal in their person. This has led to so many forms of mishandling and maltreatment of the women folk. Women are generally seen as the weaker sex and so are subjected to a subordinate position in the family, in the Church and in the society at large. In most of the Nigerian socio-cultural settings, male children are, for example, given greater preference to the female, because it is believed that it is the male child that eventually keeps and protects the family lineage. Some theologians have also committed such an error in seeing the woman as of less value than the man, and even biblical passages are used to support the subordination of women.

Men have in the course of time come to assume the superior position over the women and so do not think that the woman can attain any social or political height in the society. Even though there is a growing rate of awareness in the modern time that women are also capable of assuming positions which men have always reserved for themselves, a greater percentage of women still suffers discrimination, exploitation, oppression and injustice, particularly in Africa where certain socio-cultural beliefs and norms that are patriarchal in nature have made it impossible for women to be seen as equal to men.

Women are, sometimes, even seen as sources of evil. Witchcraft is particularly seen as an activity of the women, even though it is known that men in greater numbers are involved in it. Often times, widows are suspected as having directly or indirectly killed their husband. They are made to undergo psychological traumas by being subjected to certain dehumanizing rituals to free themselves from such suspicion.

This work sets out, in view of the problem mentioned, to review such biblical texts that have been used over the centuries to perpetuate the subjugation of women, particularly in Nigeria.

Clarification of terms

In the discussion concerning the biblical gender culture and the status of women in Nigeria today, there is need to clarify the following concepts: Sex and Gender.

In the context of this paper the term sex has to do with “either of the two main categories (male and female) into which humans and most living things are divided on the basis of their reproductive functions” (Soanes 2000:1049). The fact of belonging to either of the both categories is also termed sex (*ibid.*). Sex in the context of humans generally describes “biological and genetic differences between men and women” (Tuyizere 2007:111).

Gender, on the other hand, can be described as “the socially constructed roles, activities and responsibilities assigned to women and men in a given culture, location or time” (*ibid.*). The various roles that are identified with the different sexes are usually learnt from childhood and they vary from one place to another and from one culture to the other. These roles are not static; they also undergo change over time according to the understanding of the people of a given generation (Uchem 2005:46).

In defining the concept of gender, however, cognizance is to be given to the fact that gender has been hijacked by some feminists in the quest to neutralise the natural and biological reality of both sexes: male and female. In 1995, it was unanimously agreed upon by the participants of the World Women Conference (Under the umbrella of the United Nation) in Peking, to replace the concept sex (In relation to sexual polarity of male and female) with the term gender. This was with a motive of promoting and encouraging all other sexual practices that are not heterosexual (Kuby 2014:8-11). A major facilitator of this project is Judith Butler, a professor of rhetoric and philosophy at the University of Cali-

fornia, University of Columbia and the European graduate school in Switzerland. Her goal is the destruction and the total eradication of the identity of man and woman. This piece defers categorically from and rejects such ideology, and rather upholds and acknowledges the natural state of man and woman. And here too, the normal definition of gender as it concerns the social roles of man and woman in the society is retained and maintained.

We shall now go into the review of certain biblical passages that are mostly used to perpetuate the oppression and subjugation of women.

Review of Biblical Gender Understanding

A few passages of scripture and their interpretations which have been mostly used to support the abuse and oppression of women in Africa and particularly in Nigeria shall be here reviewed.

The Precedence of Man to Woman (Gen 1-3)

In the biblical and Ancient Near Eastern culture, the man is considered in the story of creation to have precedence to the woman. The creation story in the book of Genesis gives the understanding that God created the human person at first as man and then as a woman. "God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). There seem to be some kind of primary status given to the person of the man in this account. He, man is mentioned first; though one would argue that "Adam" there stands for "the human person". This is reflected in the writing of people like St. Thomas Aquinas who claims that man alone has the image of God. This is found in the following reflection of his:

The image of God, in its principal signification, namely the intellectual nature, is found both in man and in woman. Hence after the words, "To the image of God He created him," it is added, "Male and female He created them" (Gn. 1:27). Moreover it is said "them" in the plural, as Augustine (Gen ad lit. iii, 22) remarks, lest it should be thought that both sexes were united in one individual. *But in a secondary sense the image of God is found in man, and not in woman: for man is the beginning and end of woman; as God is the beginning and end of every creature.* So when the Apostle had said that "man is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man," he adds his reason for saying this: "For man is not of woman, but woman of man; and man was not created for woman, but woman for man" (Summa Theologica I, qu. 93, art. 4 ad 1).

Still in the book of Genesis, there is the second account of the creation of humankind which is literally and visually more elaborate than the first (cf. Gen 2:4-25). In this account, the creation of the man is also given preference. He is the one originally created out of the soil (*Adama*) which literally explains why the man is called Adam (cf. Gen 2:7). He is a component of the soil and God's spirit (*ruach*) that was blown into him through his nostrils. The woman eventually comes as second. She is created out of the man. It is from the rib taken from the side of the man that she is made. "This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! She is to be called woman, because she was taken from man (Gen 2:23). This theology of the creation of man and woman forms the tradition that is responsible for the basic and fundamental gender understanding in the biblical and Semitic world.

The fact that the woman is said to have been created out of the rib of the man gives room for wrong interpretations that present the woman as inferior to the man; That the woman is a product of just a single rib of the man, poses a temptation for the interpreter to see the woman as not equal to the man. This has found expression even in some later writings of the Bible. St. Paul, for example, instructing the Corinthian assembly on dress code in the church, says:

"But for a man it is not right to have his head covered, since he is the image of God and reflects God's glory; but woman is the reflection of man's glory. For man did not come from woman; no, woman came from man; nor was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man: and this is why it is right for a woman to wear on her head a sign of authority over her, because of the angels" (1 Cor 11:7-10).

Even though the later part of the passage tries to neutralise the above statement of Paul, by saying that in the Lord, however, the woman is nothing without the man, and the man without the woman and that though woman came from man, man also does come from a woman and that everything comes from God (cf. 1 Cor 11:11-12), the first statement remains still as the conviction of the author that the man is superior to the woman. This also comes up clearly in 1 Timothy:

"During instruction, a woman should be quiet and respectful. I give no permission for a woman to teach or have authority over a man. A woman ought to be quiet, because Adam was formed first and Eve afterwards, and it was not Adam who was led astray but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin" (1 Tim 2:11-14).

The author makes allusion here to the Genesis account of the creation and the fall of the human person. First, he implicitly claims that the man is superior, because he was created first, and second, that it was the woman who fell into sin and not the man. Paul's reasons are clearly rooted in an age-old supremacy struggle between man and woman. In any case, Scott Hahn claims that the statement that women should keep quiet in the church is not universally binding, meaning that it was a word for the situation at the time (cf. Hahn 2009:1140). Uchem, however, observes that:

"in African societies, as elsewhere, the traditional gender roles are usually maintained by a system of patriarchy, which sees men as pre-eminent human beings and women as secondary ... whose roles are meant to complement those of men. Men are not generally seen as complementing women and this one-sided notion of complementarity is, therefore, problematic. Women are perceived as existing for men and not really as human beings in their own right" (Uchem 2005:46f.).

Such thoughts as this do not put into consideration that the human being, male or female is taken also from a man and a woman: Man and Woman have to unite to produce another human person. This shows how very important each of the sexes is. The biological composition and appearance of each of the sexes do not really matter in the discussion on their importance. Each of the sexes is unique and special and important. The common sense of the need for the unity of the man and the woman to generate another life is expressed in the biblical second account of creation in Gen 2:18-24.

The Yahwist author is of the conviction that the man alone was not complete and fulfilled, and that he needed a partner who can, in unity with him be fruitful. The narration of the formation of the woman from the rib of the man, which is mostly taken as an argument by myopic bible interpreters to mean male domination, speaks in this sense for the unity, the importance and the indispensability of both of them.

This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! ... This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife and they become one flesh (Gen 2:23-24).

In general, the Genesis creation story is such that tries to explain the natural union and attraction that exist between the man and the woman. Though the accounts are to some extent influenced by the environment of the biblical authors, the basic truth contained in them is that man and woman cannot do without each other. Joseph Ratzinger, later Benedict

XVI, explaining Gen 2:23 in his work "*Die Heilige Schrift. Meditationen zur Bibel*" says:

There may be a notion behind it, like it is contained in Plato's myths that the human person was originally in a round form, which means that he was in himself, and was complete and satisfied in himself, but it was Zeus who, punishing him for his pride, divided him into two parts, so that he continues to always look for his second part, always on the way, to become a whole again. The biblical story does not talk about punishment, but the idea is there, that the man is not fully complete in himself - in his sense, he is on the way to find his wholeness in the other; so that he can only in togetherness as man and woman be "whole". This is contained in the prophecy that the man will leave his father and mother and be united with his wife and both of them will be one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24)

(Ratzinger 1980:26. My own translation from German to English).

Ratzinger concludes that the love between man and woman has been there from the origin of the human family, and that the partnership between man and woman has been the plan of God from the beginning.

The Woman as a Helpmate to the Man (Gen 2:18ff.)

The notion of woman as a 'helpmate' to man has its origin from a literal reading of the second account of creation, particularly in Gen 2:18ff. "Yahweh God said, 'It is not right that the man should be alone. I shall make him a helper.'"

According to Uchem,

"... the biblical notion of woman as 'helper' has, for many years, been understood as an indication of her lesser status in relation to the man. /.../ This has been at the root of gender inequality in the church and has reinforced myths of male superiority, and female inferiority and functionality in the different cultures of the world. This is evident in the numerous anti-women sentiments and teachings of many fathers of the church" (Uchem 2005:49).

Preachers and other interpreters of the bible have made claims that it is God's plan for the woman to always be a helpmate to the man, meaning that she remains a kind of servant to the man.

According to Scott W. Hahn the term *ezer* which is usually translated as "helpmate" in the Bible is mostly and foremost used for God, particularly in Pss. 30:10 and 54:4; this implies that the woman as a helpmate is not to be subordinate to man. He observed that Eve as a woman served as the spokesperson for Adam as a human person and as such stands already as a person with responsibility (Cf. Scott, Hahn, p. 1140).

Ezer as used in the creation narrative should also, according to Michael Muonwe, be understood in the sense of “companionship” that depicts equality, unity and affinity (cf. Muonwe 2014:130). Uchem commenting on this sense of affinity and the attraction between man and woman as presented by the Yahwist author says:

While this story originally served to explain the observable bonding and attraction between men and women, with time it picked up the cultural gender biases of male superiority and female inferiority of the communities of the authors and their subsequent interpreters. A literal mindset, which is opposed to the symbolical and mythological consciousness characteristic of the milieu in which it arose, was imposed on the story. Over time, the symbol of the rib, which was meant to convey a sense of one-ness became a tool of oppression. The symbol of the rib is taken to denote weakness, inferiority and a secondary place in creation. However, those who advance these views fail to reason that the woman who was supposedly made from 'human stuff' (the rib) might be superior to the man who was supposedly made from 'dust.' (Uchem 2005:49).

Though Uchem's analysis here may sound funny, it is quite important that a second thought is given to such interpretations of the scriptures that make the woman always look inferior. The togetherness of man and woman is based on the foundation of the dignity of each human person, created in the image and likeness of God, who created them as man and woman. St. John Paul II in view of this, maintains that the term “helper” in Gen 2:18, 20, in a sense, suggests a certain “complementarity” (John Paul II 2006, 1997:160f.). The pope particularly stressed this fact in his letter to the women in which he stated:

“Woman complements man, just as man complements woman: men and women are *complementary*... Womanhood and manhood are complementary *not* only from the *physical and psychological points of view*, but also from the *ontological*. It is only through the duality of the “masculine” and the “feminine” that the “human” finds full realization” (John Paul II 1996: Nr. 7).

The Naming of the Woman by Man (Gen 2:23; 3:20)

In the Ancient Near East, just like it is in most parts of Africa, the giving of name to a person or to a thing signifies possession. The giving of the name “Woman” (Gen 2:23) and “Eve” (Gen 3:20) to the female person by the man in the Yahwist's story of creation, accounts sometimes for the maltreatment of women by men. Just like every other creature that the man gave a name is given to him by God to serve him, so does the man see the woman (also as a creature he gave a name to) as his property,

and this accounts for the reason why, sometimes, and in some part of Africa, the number of wives a man has and is able to give a name to by the virtue of marriage, is used as the yardstick to measure his success and achievement (cf. Mobolanle 2008:33).

The practice of paying the so-called bride price (dowry) in several cultures of the world and particularly in many parts of Africa, is particularly a factor that makes many men see the woman as the possession of the man (Uchem 2005:63f.). Here, one can see a link to the “naming” of the woman. After the payment of dowry, the woman becomes the wife of the man and begins to bear the family name of the man. This practice has been misunderstood by many who eventually see their wife as a property (some women have resorted today to keeping their family name or taking double name after marriage).

Some men go to the extent of making sure that their women, who are their acclaimed possession, do not have right to own properties. In some marriage settings in Nigeria, it is the man who is in total control of the finance of the family. Through this mechanism of financial power men continue to control and dominate the women. The financial dependence of the woman on the man has largely contributed to so many forms of abuse of the woman in the family and the society at large.

Woman as the Gateway to Sin (Gen 3:1-6).

According to the Yahwist, sin originated from the snake (representing the devil) through Eve - a woman (cf. Gen 3:1-6). Women are usually, because of this, taken to be easily susceptible to falling into sin than men, and are mostly seen as the gateway to sin like Tertullian, a church father expressed:

"Woman, you are the devil's doorway. You led astray one whom the devil would not dare attack directly. It was your fault that the Son of God had to die; you should always go in mourning and rags".

(<http://godandbutterfly.net/anti-woman-quotes-by-church-fathers/>,
browsed on 1.12.2016)

Also, in a statement on women, attributed to St. Augustine, one discovers the following anti-women sentiment: "It is also the natural order among humans that women serve men and the children their parents; for there too is right that the weaker intellect serve the stronger". With his patriarchal upbringing in North Africa Augustine could make such a statement that presents the woman as the "weaker intellect". He had witnessed the maltreatment of his mother by his father. In their days

women were like slaves to their men. The men were their Lords and could do whatever they wanted with them. This greatly influenced some of Augustine's thoughts and teachings that have also eventually influenced some traditions in the Church (cf. Angenendt 2015:71f.).

The anti-women remarks of St. Augustine and of others have been proved wrong in the modern time. There are many great women of our time who cannot just be relegated to being of "weaker intellect". The Church, as such needs a reorientation in her teaching and attitude concerning women. She needs to be much more benevolent to them like Jesus Christ, its head was and is. Cognizance should be given here to the fact that God honoured Mary, a woman by making her the first tabernacle of the world by the virtue of her being the Mother of Jesus Christ, our God and saviour. Womanhood is by this singular act of God given a greater dignity (cf. Lk. 1:26ff.). This can also be seen as an emancipation of womanhood from the age long subjugation and oppression they suffered; this is particularly exemplified in Elizabeth the cousin of Mary who expressed the fact that she was set free by God from public humiliation for being barren, for God gave her a son (John the Baptist) in her old age (cf. Lk. 1:24-25). This should particularly be a point to be considered for the liberation of women from the humiliation they have suffered for centuries for being considered always as "gateway" to sin and its consequences. The attitude of Jesus to the adulterous woman is also quite exemplary and prophetic in this regard (cf. Jn 8:3-11). And the fact that it was a woman that first saw Jesus Christ after his resurrection and was first given the Good News of the resurrection should also be considered (Mk 16:9-11; Jn 20:11-18).

The Woman is to be ruled by the Man (Gen 3:16)

"To the woman he (God) said: I shall give you intense pain in childbearing, you will give birth to your children in pain. Your yearning will be for your husband, and he will dominate you" (Gen 3:16).

The text is one of those influenced by the patriarchal environment of the authors of the Bible. According to Josef Scharbert, the Yahwist author expresses in it his deep feeling for the suffering of the women of his time. The author would have observed the disappointing experiences of many women who needed to be loved, and offered all they had for it, but were dominated and maltreated by the men, and could not do otherwise. They had no choice, but to still give in to such men who only used them to satisfy their desires, like slaves and later dumped them. The author

hereby sees sin as the cause of such hard and punitive maltreatment of women by men (cf. Scharbert 1983:58f.).

J. Scharbert, however, observes that the Yahwist author knew in his time quite well how untrue the common saying “the weaker sex” in regard to women is, and as such constructed his story of the origin of sin in the world, in such a way that the man was also made to fall into the same boat of sin with the woman. For the fact that he fell into the same sin committed by his wife, even though it was through the hand of the woman, he also can be considered weak. He was also given his own punishment (cf. Gen 3:17-19).¹ J. Scharbert concludes that the Yahwist composer eventually made sin, by his story, an ancient problem of both man and woman in union (humanity) (Scharbert, 56). This is expressed by St. Paul when he proclaimed: “No distinction is made: all have sinned and lack God's glory, and all are justified by the free gift of his grace through being set free in Christ Jesus” (Rom 3:23-24).

Women in many parts of Nigeria have continually suffered discrimination and condemnation, because they are considered, as we have seen as the gate way to sin. Such believe would have influenced the instruction that women should keep quiet in the assemblies (church), for they have no permission to speak, and as such should remain subordinate to men. It is further claimed that it is shameful for the woman to speak in the assembly (cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35; also 1 Tim 2:11ff.).

The author of the letter may have had some negative experience with the women of his time, but his reflection in this particular passage are not justifiable and have not put into consideration, at all, the fact that man and woman are both created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26-27). I do not wish to challenge the teaching authority of the author(s) here, but it is good to point out, that although, the words were inspired by the Holy Spirit, the author(s) also had some human sentiments and were influenced by a certain patriarchal background. Such statements should be deeply and carefully reflected upon and discerned for our time.

¹ Observing the punishment given to the man for his sin, one discovers that it is not just a punishment for the man alone, but for the entire human race including the woman, for there are also women in several cultures who are involved in the cultivation of the land. And considering the last sentence: “For dust you are and to dust you shall return”, one notices that both men and women return to the dust to become dust eventually.

With the salvation brought by Christ, the human race as a whole (men and women) is supposed to be set free from any slavery of sin. "Thus, condemnation will never come to those who are in Christ Jesus, because the law of the Spirit which gives life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:1-2). And when it is said in Gal 3:28: "There can be neither Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male or female-for you are all one in Christ Jesus", it means that the freedom from the yoke of sin which was on all humanity is for everyone. Just like, Eve and Adam fell into sin in union as man and woman, so is every man and woman in union as part of humanity saved by Christ. Women, particularly in Africa should also, in view of the observation above, be set free from the joke of sin and its consequences and enigma.

The Woman is to submit to her Husband (Ephesians 5)

"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, since as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his wife".
(Eph 5:22-23)

This text is also most times quoted to support male domination of women, without taking into cognizance the preceding verse that says: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21). The author of the epistle, using Christ and the Church as a picture, succeeded to some extent, in pointing out the unity and the importance of both man and woman, in the sense that Christ cannot exist in the present time without his Church and the Church too cannot exist without Christ, who is the head, just as the body of human person cannot exist without the head and the head without the body. This eventually goes for the communal living of both man and woman. A world of only men certainly would have been quite boring; the same with a world of only women. This, by implication, will also mean the end of the human race, for both: man and woman are always needed for procreation!

As seen above the passage of Eph 5:22 can be positively understood, but many bible interpreters have given wrong interpretation to it. Many preachers, particularly in Africa have taken the passage as backup for their domination over the woman. They are only able to see in the passage the element of superiority of the man by the virtue of him being the head, which was actually influenced by the author's patriarchal orientation. Christ is both human and God; He is perfect and without sin, but

the visible Church on earth has not yet attained perfection. So, even though the Church is fully the body of Christ and can never be separated from Christ the head, it is still, humanly speaking, on her way to perfection (cf. Rom 8:18ff.).

Considering the analogy above some preachers become biased, even though the equality of man and woman was already expressed at the beginning of the passage. They literally put the man in the place of Christ, as if the man is without sin, and the woman in place of the Church that is still on her way to perfection. This idea has, as we have already seen, dominated the mind of so many thinkers of the past and even today. The woman is always the devil and must be controlled and subjected und subjugated by the man. In view of this Uchem maintains that

“... to say, today, that the Bible is inspired is to affirm that the biblical authors were aided by the action of the divine Spirit to articulate and put into writing certain messages and lessons for the people of God concerning their relationship with God and with each other in God's plan for their salvation. Often, these divine messages and lessons were expressed in human terms and mindset reflective of the culture and times of their human authors, and in fact, enmeshed in the cultural matrix of their original location and context. Hence, there is need for a new and painstaking interpretation that takes account of new developments and insights now available to us, but which were not available to the biblical authors and earlier interpreters” (Uchem 2005:53f.).

Conclusion

There is a serious need for a new understanding of the person and the role of the woman in the African setting, and in particular in Nigeria. They are no less human being than the men and so must be regarded and treated as equal with men. Uchem also corroborates this point by saying:

Gender equality is a situation whereby both men and women are equally recognized and respected as human beings both in fact and in practice. It refers more to equality of social, political, economic, cultural and religious opportunities for both men and women rather than to biological sameness. It is not about denying differences and natural functions. Gender equality is rooted in the fact that men and women are equally made in God's image (Uchem 2005:47).

It should also be taken into cognizance that while the sex of a human person is natural and permanent (notwithstanding the fact that some

operations are carried out today for the sake of some sex transformation), gender which has to do with the role played by the different sexes, is human in nature and changeable in accordance to the cultural milieu and understanding of the people at a given time (Igube 2010:19-20). That is to say, that what a woman may not be allowed to do today in certain socio-cultural setting, because she is a woman, may be allowed in the future as a result of enlightenment. Women were in former times, for example, not allowed to cast votes in Europe, today they are not only allowed, but have become fully integrated into politics as to be voted into special offices.

Thus, there should be generally a critical and considerable understanding and interpretation of such biblical passages that have been for long used to perpetuate the domination and maltreatment of women, especially in Africa and in particular in Nigeria. So many women have suffered a lot of abuses, because of such interpretations that are not objective. And the fact of the complementarity of man and woman which has been expressed by J. Ratzinger (Pope Benedikt XVI) and St. John Paul II as highlighted in this piece should be given much attention in the interpretation of such biblical texts that are gender oriented. Thus, such overly exaggerated feminists' positions that in reaction to the patriarchal systems, seek to relegate men totally to the background are also to be reconsidered in the light of "complementarity". The dignity of none of both parties is of no less value compared to the other. Both are created in the image of God (cf. Gen 1:27) and remain of equal dignity.

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The Unmerited Marginalization of Victims of Gender-based Sexual Violence in 2 Samuel*

Menard Musendekwa

Abstract

The book of 2 Samuel provides two incidents of rape and sexual violence. One is the rape of Tamar by her brother Amnon (2 Sam. 13:14). The other is the rape of David's ten concubines by Absalom before all Israel (2 Sam. 16:21-22). This research looks at the destiny of these victims so as to stimulate responsible response to the plight of victims of rape and sexual abuse. The unfair treatment of victims in 2 Samuel raises the question: How should victims of rape and sexual abuse be treated in society? A feminist theological hermeneutic may be the guiding methodology in dealing with matters concerning those who are marginalized on account of sexual abuse even by perpetrators who have been punished accordingly. Marginalization of victims of gender based sexual violence seems to be the general trend in the book of 2 Samuel but cannot be a model for modern societies.

Introduction

Apart from various major themes in the book of 2 Samuel, it has also contributed the theme of unmerited marginalization of victims of gender-based sexual violence¹. The monarchy state of Israel's governing system was established by Saul and continued by David. Despite most of David's achievements, he contributed to the impact of sexual violence as can be picked in 2 Samuel. David, as king of Israel, like Saul is pictured as being an imperfect human being but rather was a sinner. Although he repented, the impact of his sin was carried through his posterity. The sin of taking Bathsheba before and after assisting the death of Uriah had serious consequences on his children and concubines. That equally had

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¹ Roux (2012: 56) defines sexual violence as 'any kind of violence enacted through sexual means or targeting the sexuality of another regardless of age'.

great impact on David which shows that though he repented God did not let his sins go unpunished. God reprimanded David through the prophet Nathan who prophesied that David's wives would be taken publicly, and his children were going to cause many troubles for him.

While various methodologies have been used in the study of 2 Samuel, it is critical in this paper to note that using feminist hermeneutics or feminist reading of this book helps discover hidden truth regarding how victims of abuse suffered marginalization.

From a feminist hermeneutic one may note that those who fall victims to abuse are marginalized in society. The forerunner of feminist theology is Phyllis Trible whom Brueggemann (1997:98) considered as 'the most effective interpreter of the Old Testament'. Her feminist stance raised 'awareness of the patriarchal accent of the Old Testament'. A feminist hermeneutic is therefore a methodology that is based on feminist theologies which has three models. These are liberal, social constructionist and naturalist. The current research pays particular attention to social reconstructionist model which holds that those in power dominate over most if not all moral values in a bid to serve their own interests. (Cahill 2001:121). According to Cahill (2001:121) feminist hermeneutics is therefore a theory of interpretation which is "suspicious of and resist all reigning world views or interpretation of 'the way things are'. What seems natural or divinely ordained simply reflect the propaganda of the power elites". Feminist ethics are one among varieties of liberation ethics (Gorringer 2001:125).

Earlier on, however, there are circumstances which require attention as far as the marginalization of victims of sexual violence. The death of Saul resulted in David being able to consult Saul's son. David earlier on requested for the return of Michal his wife whom Saul had given into marriage to Paltiel (1 Sam. 25:44). David send Abner to restore Michal (2 Sam. 3:13). Despite how much she was loved by Paltiel, Michal was taken. Paltiel followed crying for her but was eventually forced to return. He was one of the male victims of abuse in 2 Samuel.

It is equally sad to note that despite the abuse of Paltiel, the man who mourned his wife as he saw her departing, Michal received a rebuke from David saying that she had to die without bearing any child. Furthermore, David's taking of Bathsheba and arrangement to eliminate her husband Uriah in 2 Sam. 12 was a demonstration of impunity of its own kind. Eventually impunity of violence in authoritarianism of the ancient

Israelite monarchy resulted in the institutionalization of marginalization of victims of gender based sexual violence.

The curse pronounced on David by Nathan (2 Sam. 12) after taking Bathsheba and killing of Uriah requires attention. In response to David's sleeping with Bathsheba, the Lord spoke to David through Nathan that the sword will remain in David's house (2 Sam. 12:10). It had not taken long before David received divine punishment. And secondly, in verse 11-12 the text says:

“This is what the Lord says, 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad day light. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel”.

Amnon's Sexual Abuse of Tamar

In fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy Amnon raped Tamar before he was put to death by Absalom. Sailhamer (1994:244) considers this incident parallel to the 'sin of David to Bathsheba. Tamar, a girl whose beauty attracted to her half-brother Amnon, was victim of sexual abuse. This was something unheard of in Israel. Tamar never expected that to happen. Amnon was advised by a friend to take advantage of the existing relationship among them. He camouflaged himself in false illness upon which he requested the attendance of Tamar.

According to Phiri (2006:293) rapists could either be strangers as it is the case in Gen 34 or a family member or a friend such as the case in 2 Sam 13. In most cases men are silent. In this case David was silent and even Absalom silenced Tamar. She had to grieve silently. Phiri (2006:303) further claims that silence would discourage the victims from appealing' especially when perpetrators are given light punishment.

Both Tamar and Amnon were quite aware of the evils associated with what was about to happen. The culture of Israel was against incest. A young woman who lost her virginity before marriage was no longer marriageable in ancient Israel. Once virginity was lost, honour and security departed (Akanni & Waenzana 2006:395). People who lose their dignity and self esteem are drifted to the margins of society.

This is perceived through the deceitful acts of Amnon which lured Tamar to his bedroom. He even made a formal request to David so that Tamar could even visit him in his bedroom. This presupposes that it was

even not permitted for his half-sister to visit him. Despite that he capitalized on the permission of the father to fulfill his envious desires. Amnon did not fear God. He only wanted to satisfy his uncontrolled passion and demonstrated psychological weakness (Muneja 20:111).

On the other hand, Tamar pleaded that this was not permitted in Israel. Rodd (2001:44) attests that Tamar's appeal to Amnon not to rape her was because this was contrary to Jewish customs. He further alludes that customs were quite stronger than today since "the ethics of the society were enshrined in such custom and bind the community together..." This suggests that failure to adhere to the customs disintegrated the community of Israel which eventually thrusts some to the periphery. Rodd (2001:45) alludes to Robert P. Carroll who described the Hebrew term *nbala* (to commit folly) as idiomatically depicting "some outrageous act contrary to the good of the community" In the same way this goes contrary to the ethic that holds the community together.

Manyonganise uses the story of Tamar as a model for defying acts of abuse against women by church elders and modern-day prophets in Zimbabwe where there are various records of abuse. She hails Tamar for speaking against the abuse. The Tamar story of 2 Sam. 13:1-22 could be used for the transformation of Prophetic Pentecostal churches into being safe spaces for women. Tamar did not keep quiet but spoke and revealed the abuse. Those women raped by people they trust should have the courage to name and shame perpetrators of rape and gender-based abuse. This story provides a context of resistance against acts of violence and abuse (Manyonganise 2016:280-281).

Israel's tradition did not permit incest. It could have been much better by far if at all Amnon could have advanced such a request to the father. Tamar referred this as an abomination to Israel and that if at all that could have been done only through the father's permission. This was going to damage Tamar's life and potentially to damage Amnon's reputation in the family.

Amnon did not take heed of Tamar's plight but deceitfully lured her into his bedroom before and raped her once. According to Gerstenberger (2002:62) "the forbidden behavior damages a recognized common good, life together and the harmony of one's own group". Once the common good is damaged, the unity of the community gets lost and disharmony and divisions are created which eventually shift some to the periphery. He also suggests that Tamar's plea to Amnon to have properly requested for her from their father can be better understood in context with Gen

20:12 where “in emergencies not even marriage with a half-sister was completely impossible”.

Tamar became vulnerable. She had no strength to overpower the masculinity endowed on Amnon (2 Sam 13:14). Amnon disowned the morality of Israel. Tamar, having been raped became the object of shame for the rest of her life. Keil & Delitzsch (1975:399) elude that Tamar was an “innocent sufferer who suffered for the affection with her sick brother” Amnon hated her. Tamar was disgraced and Amnon was considered wicked (2 Sam 13:13).

The worst scenario is that Amnon hated Tamar once he satiated his lust and forced her out of the room. According to Evans (2000:193), Amnon had nothing more to do with her. Enans makes analogue to David’s treatment of Uriah whom he hated that he hoped him dead. To Tamar this was ‘a greater wrong to send her away’ (v16). This was an insult to Tamar that she became so dejected and desolate. According to Baldwin (1988:26) once Tamar lost her virginity “would have no future”. Keil & Delitzsch (1975:400) defines the desolate condition of Tamar as the condition of “one laid waste, with the joy of her life hopelessly destroyed”. In this way she was isolated or excluded from society Baldwin (1988:250). It was outrightly clear that something evil had happened to her. After abuse, Amnon did not want to see Tamar anymore. Baldwin (1988:249) eludes that Amnon “continue in confrontation with his evil deeds”.

Amnon’s sin is regarded by Manyonganise (2016:173) as not simply incest because “Tamar was not forbidden to Amnon and consequently, his crime was not incest but rape, which is reprehensible at all times, but particularly so when it involves a brother and sister”.

According to Evans (2000:193) Tamar tore her dress which was a simple of virginity to demonstrate that she was now an outcast. This may reflect that she lost her position in society and was going to be marginalized. This annoyed Absalom. Even David himself was very angry. He was equally bitter about the incident. David’s moral failures plagued him most especially the rape of Bathsheba. This could have been the reason why David lacked moral stamina to rebuke and punish the unrepentant Amnon (Manyonganise 2016:148).

The disgraced Tamar was discharged from Amnon’s room by force and was locked out. It is reasonable to consider the Hebrew of 2 Sam 13:15 (BHS):

וַיִּשְׂנְאָהָ אֲמֹנּוֹן שְׂנְאָה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד כִּי גְדוֹלָה הָשְׂנְאָה אֲשֶׁר שְׂנְאָה מֵאַהֲבָה
 אֲשֶׁר אֶהְבֶּה וַיֹּאמֶר־לָהּ אֲמֹנּוֹן קוּמִי לְכִי:

English translation is,

“Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, ‘Get up and get out!’” (NIV).

The text indicates how intense the hatred (שְׂנְאָה גְדוֹלָה מְאֹד) of Amnon over and above the love he had before. He then discharged her in order to eliminating her; ‘Get up! Go’ קוּמִי לְכִי.

In verse 20 Tamar ‘was left desolate’ (וַיִּשְׁמָמָה) for Amnon had in verse 22 disgraced/humbled her (עָנָה). The story turned when Absalom ran away from his father after assassinating Amnon. According to Muneja “the narrative of 2 Sam 13 & 14 is one of the major building blocks of the succession narrative, it is understandable that Absalom was the prospective heir second to Amnon. The murder was motivated by political reasons because Absalom wanted to be the next king” (Muneja 125-126). However, it is also significant to note that which ever way perpetrators of sexual abuse are eliminated, that would never compensate for the loss of dignity of the victims.

Was that worthy for Absalom to run away after killing a culprit such as Amnon? Much more questions may be raised when David mourned Amnon. Absalom’s return was surrounded by events that are related to his plight to reconcile with his father David. Hoping that Joab could have mediated reconciliation, he turned a deaf ear to Absalom’s messengers until Absalom set the field of Joab on fire (2 Sam 14:30). This was the time when Joab responded and eventually reconciled Absalom to his father David (2 Sam 14:33).

David’s pardoning of Absalom was an outcome of his great love. For Absalom it was an opportunity to take up kingship over Israel. When Absalom mobilized an army, David ran away leaving Absalom an opportunity (2 Sam 15:1 ff). Absalom enquired from Ahithophel on what to do to secure kingship. Ahithophel’s advice came as if from the Lord and advised him to lie with his father’s concubines (2 Sam 17:20-22). This is what the prophet Nathan had prophesied that David’s wives were going to be taken publicly (2 Sam 12:11-12).

Absalom Abuses His Father's Concubines

Absalom was deceived by Ahithophel to sleep with his father's ten concubines in the presence of all the nation of Israel. It was a public spectacle in fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy (Henry 1991:471) Absalom's taking of his father's concubines made sure that David was deposed (Evans 2000:209). There are various similarities with the Tamar-Amnon incident. Both cases were fulfillment of Nathan's prophecy. In both cases someone advised the perpetrator of rape. The rape in both cases was an abomination for Israel. Both were cases of rape. The victims of the consequences were marginalized. Both perpetrators were eventually eliminated.

The differences were that Amnon lured Tamar into privacy and ensured that all that were there had gone, leaving him and his sister alone while Absalom raped his father's concubines publicly.

Does fulfillment of prophecy justify what have been predicted? David had demonstrated no sign of hating Absalom. He still loved him despite his rebellion. David even arrived at the point of imploring Joab to preserve the life of the rebellious Absalom when he went into battle with him. However Absalom was exposed to risk when his beautiful hair helped him to hang in a tree. This paved an opportunity for Joab to kill him and failing to take heed of David's instructions. The battle was over when only Absalom was killed. Despite all the evil things Absalom had done, David mourned him uncontrollably.

Before going any further, it is significant to note the destiny of Tamar. Tamar lived a desolate life under the care of Absalom. The text clearly reflects that only what survived of Tamar was her name which was given to Absalom's only surviving child (2 Sam 14:27). Absalom's daughter Tamar got married and was a 'beautiful woman' (NIV). The text is not clear about the whereabouts of Absalom's two sons, but scripture confirms that Tamar was the only surviving child since at his death Absalom had erected a pillar which he named after his own name since he had no son (2 Sam 18:18).

The principle of inheritance was missed here except that Absalom finds his daughter Tamar having been defiled by the name of his sister who died desolate. The incident of Zelophehad's daughters who inherited their father's lot could have been considered as precedent (Num 36). The possible remembrance of the name Tamar could have been secure when the name was given to Absalom's daughter, who rather than his name

being remembered upon her, remembrance was upon a pillar!! This made the name Tamar forgotten.

David Marginalizes his Ten Concubines

After the death of Absalom, David returned from exile. He marginalized his ten concubines who had been victims of Absalom's abuse (2 Sam 20:3). The story clearly stipulates that David sent his ten concubines under guard into a room, where they were given food, but he never slept with them again. Henry (1991:471) refers this to "imprisonment" and "confinement" since they were "defiled" and were not to be seen in public to prevent public spectacle and shame to David. According to Evans (2000:223) "Absalom's defilement of these women meant that they could no longer form part of David's court, neither were they eligible for normal marriage". They were not allowed to appear publicly since this could father insults on David as people could continually reflect on it once they appear. Though the victims of abuse had not contributed anything to what happened they became victims of the consequences.

"When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them, but did not lie with them. They were left in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows" (2 Sam 20:3 ^{NIV}).

Was it necessary for David to marginalize his concubines? It does not sound necessary when considering that David's wife Michal was taken from him and given into marriage to someone yet after the death of Saul he demanded for her return. David denied his concubines their conjugal rights. According to Baldwin (1988:279) they remained in 'virtual widowhood'. However, they were in factual widowhood since they had no husband until they died. David never allowed them freedom. David who took someone's wife could not be expected to act like that on his wives. A man who even married a widow, Abigail, should not have behaved towards his concubines in that manner. They were victims of abuse. He should have taken over his wives with the understanding that they were objects of abuse. David's concubines died as widows. They were living as widows of the living husband. They were not even divorcees. They were widows. A king used his post to marginalize his wives.

In Search of Applicability

Tamar and the ten concubines were victims of sexual violence. However there is no good reason to marginalize them since they were victimized and violated. Kelly (1998:178) has this to say:

The sexual violation of a person does not only affect his or her body. It affects them precisely as persons. It is the person who is raped or abused, or dehumanized by being turned into a commercial object for some consumer's use. Whenever a person is 'de-personalized' by being used merely as the object of another's sexual gratification or displaced aggression, we are faced with a grave sexual sin...

Sexual violence in this instance does not consider the dignity of the other but takes the form of patriarchal injustice. This would not only account to victims of sexual violence but also any other violence inflicted through toxic patriarchy.

This aspect is supported by Gilham (2004:94) who established that sin is the fundamental cause of the global problem of gender-based violence. In this regard, he focuses on 'marriage relationships' which on one hand are the centre of gender-based violence and central to the biblical understanding of gender on the other.

According to Roux (2012:51) the church in Africa is doing little to combat sexual violence since 'some teach and preach in ways that support gender-discrimination and sexually violent practices; others even openly advocate it'. Some even do not have space to talk about it and hence indirectly support it. Roux (2012:54) content that 'some cultural beliefs and practices are inherently related to power and gender, and are inequitably powered and gendered, creating a situation in which SV is condoned as culturally acceptable'.

Muneja, shares this view when he gives reasons why perpetrators of violence are not publicly exposed. He argues that "African culture has the tendency to shy away from issues related to human sexuality". (2012:111). Even when the poor and women speak out, they are not heard (Muneja 2012:117). In some African cultures like the Barbeig culture of Tanzania, a raped woman must be married to the one who raped her. African cultures would justify segregation as the victim of sexual abuse would not be acceptable in the community (Muneja 2012:117). Rape survivors are viewed negatively by churches as they follow the trends in 2 Samuel. This phenomenon was also related to persons with HIV who are also regarded as outcasts in the church (Muneja 2012:120). The victimisation of rape survivors "is an obvious

phenomenon to both victims of rape as well as persons with HIV” (Muneja 2012:122).

Evaluation

It is a great challenge that those in authority to reprimand the evils of society are morally deprived by their own unjust practices. David’s immorality deprived him courage to reprimand his children who eventually perpetuated his immoral behavior as divine punishment on himself. The unmerited marginalization of victims of gender-based violence illustrates the marginalization of the vulnerable people in society.

Toxic patriarchy results in establishment of sanctions against vulnerable ones. Feminist hermeneutic as a branch of liberation theology help us to interpret the vulnerability of victims of sexual abuse. One sexual abuse incited another, drifting the abused to the margins of society. We may therefore conclusively say those in the margins of society are suffering the impact of toxic patriarchy. Once we see some people in the margins of society we account to their condition.

Those in the margins need care and company, though the damage of abuse is irreparable. Attitude towards the abused should change. Culture that victimizes the abused should be condemned. Violence and abuse should not be condoned. The abusers must be punished and society must change attitude towards victims of sexual abuse.

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when
GOD
created
the
man
She
was
just
trying
!

The Wife of Potiphar, Sexual Harassment, and False Rape Allegation

Genesis 39 in Select Social Contexts of the Past and Present*

Johanna Stiebert

Abstract

The story in Gen 39 depicts Joseph as hero and Potiphar's wife as villain. Yet, because the story is sparsely told, it permits ambiguities. Consequently, while most biblical interpreters vilify the wife of Potiphar, she also has some staunch defenders – including among those who seek to reclaim her as an African woman who brings blessings to Joseph and Israel. This paper explores some details, subtleties and possibilities of the story before turning to its toxic interpretive potentialities in present time, more particularly the context of rape culture and the revelations of #MeToo.

Introduction

Gen 39 tells the story of Joseph in the service of Potiphar in Egypt, and of Potiphar's wife who desires Joseph and, when he refuses her aggressive advances, accuses him – falsely – of attempted rape.

This paper examines the story from a range of perspectives and explores first, how toxic attitudes and prejudices of times past are ingrained in the text and secondly, how present social climates continue to fertilize such attitudes and prejudices. As such, this paper attempts to make a contribution to biblical rape culture readings. While there exists a wealth of interpretive literature on violence in the Bible¹ – including on sexual violence – rape culture readings seek to navigate between the world of the biblical text and a discrete contemporary context. In this paper I will

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¹ E.g. BiAS 20 (Hunter & Kügler, eds. 2016) as well as the literature listed there.

interface Gen 39 with rape culture phenomena of the present, focusing particularly on examples from my own UK context. I argue that rape culture manifestations of the past and present are broad in scope, insidious and damaging – not least, because rape culture contributes both to downplaying the harmfulness of sexual violence and to the perpetuation of rape myths.

The paper begins with a demonstration of how narrative elements such as characterization and intertextual verbal echoes consolidate negative stereotypes pertaining to foreign women. Ethnicity, I argue, is central to maligning Potiphar's wife. In spite of efforts to defend Potiphar's wife – on account of her husband's infertility, for example, which for some commentators justifies or mitigates her actions – the trope, familiar from folklore already, of the evil temptress or spiteful liar, persists.

Characterization

Joseph

It is clear from the way the story is told who of the three main characters is good and who is not. Joseph is clearly 'the good guy'. YHWH is with Joseph, bringing about his success (39:2, 5). Victor Hamilton points out that insistent mention of YHWH (eight times in vv. 2, 3, 5, 21, 23) is particularly striking, because outside of this chapter the tetragrammaton is almost entirely absent in the whole Joseph narrative (1995:459).² For Robert Davidson this is indicative of 'providence, which is silently, but surely shaping the unfolding drama' (1979:233). Judith McKinlay, in a similar vein, states that YHWH's care for Joseph reassures and prepares for a happy outcome (1995:71). Joseph's good looks (39:6) might also be a sign of his divine favour: after all, other men of the Bible who are favoured by God (most notably David) are also good-looking (1 Sam 16:12). Stuart Macwilliam refers to beauty applied in this way as 'a halo' (2009:285). He concedes that the beautiful may ultimately receive God's blessing but contends, too, that in the short term, beauty renders vulnerable. Examples are the beautiful Sarah and Bathsheba, for instance, who are rendered vulnerable to rape when powerful men – Pharaoh (12:11,

² The one exception is Jacob's appellation in his deathbed blessings (49:18).

15), Abimelech (20:2), David (2 Sam 11:2-4) – desire them (2009:272).³ Macwilliam also sees Joseph's beauty as signaling short-term threat and long-term blessing.

When his master's wife propositions him, Joseph refuses, telling her that his master has entrusted him with everything, withholding nothing, with the exception only of his wife and that to follow her command for sex would be a wickedness, a crime against God (39:9). Joseph does not succumb to insistent demands and runs away when Potiphar's wife propositions him again (39:12). Eventually, he goes to prison accused of something he did not do (40:15). Even in prison YHWH remains with him (39:21, 23), showing him *chesed* ('love, loving kindness') (39:21).

There is perhaps some of Joseph's familiar cockiness, which had already infuriated his brothers (37:8), in the words to his master's wife: 'Look, with *me* here, my master has *no concern* about *anything in the house*, and he has put *everything that he has* in my hand. *He is not greater in this house than I am*, nor has he kept back *anything* from me *except* yourself ...' (39:8-9, NRSV, italics added for emphasis).⁴ Joseph was sold by slave traders and bought by Potiphar (37:36, 39:1) and the claim to autonomy of this slave when addressing his master's wife could be interpreted as unusually strident, even haughty.⁵ Alternatively, it may convey Joseph's

³ McKinlay also makes the connection between beauty and vulnerability, referring to the beauty of all of Sarah, Rachel and Joseph. The beauty of all three is enmeshed in stories of deception and trickery. Sarah is passed off to Pharaoh as Abraham's sister (12:10-20); Rachel is switched with her less desirable sister Leah (29:21-30); and Joseph is falsely accused of rape (Gen 39). As McKinlay points out, while Gen 39 shows gender-reversal in terms of the desiring gaze (see below), Gen 12 & 29 remind us that men can be devious and tricksters, too (1995: 76).

⁴ Hamilton, however, sees no arrogance here, only completeness, which is stressed through fivefold repetition of the word *kol* ('all'): the completeness of Joseph's dedication to Potiphar, of Potiphar's trust in Joseph and of YHWH's blessing (1995: 461).

⁵ Hagar after conceiving begins to despise her mistress Sarai (16:4). Sarai appears to regard this as insulting and insubordinate, because she first complains to Abram (16:5) and then abuses Hagar (16:6). Hagar's receipt of a theophany may signal that she has divine support (16:7, 10-11) but she is nevertheless addressed as the slave of Sarai (16:8) and told to return and to submit to her (16:9), suggesting that in the hierarchy deemed proper, slaves ought to remain subordinate and subservient. Also, while Hagar is promised abundant descendants (16:10) the generous blessing is tempered, given that her son Ishmael will be 'wild' and live in hostility with his brothers (16:12). Later, Sarah finds fault with Hagar's son because he is *mocking* her son (21:9). Again, it appears that the slave's son, like his mother before him, is deemed to be behaving in

confidence and righteous courage – even in the face of pressure and temptation. The Rabbis speculated that Joseph was tempted and that the story shows him overcoming his temptation. In the retelling of the Qur'an, too, it says 'She made for him; *and he would have made for her* had he not beheld the proof of the Lord. ... He was indeed one of Our dedicated servants' (Ibrahim 2017:80, italics added). Whatever the case, the story is clearly designed to demonstrate Joseph's piety – even under duress.

Potiphar

The second character, Potiphar, is also more good than bad. This is conveyed above all through his association with both Joseph and YHWH. Potiphar recognizes that YHWH is with Joseph (39:3) and Joseph finds favour in Potiphar's eyes (39:4). YHWH blesses Potiphar's house (39:5). The events that lead to Joseph's wrongful imprisonment, moreover, occur in Potiphar's absence, which has the effect of exonerating him. It is Potiphar's own wife who tells him that Joseph attempted to violate her and she can produce a garment that seems to provide hard evidence for her accusation. Given the seriousness of adultery,⁶ Potiphar's reaction of anger seems reasonable and – while in line with – also more restrained than what it says in Proverbs: 'For jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he shows no restraint when he takes revenge. He will accept no compensation, and refuses a bribe no matter how great' (6:34-35, NRSV). Potiphar's imprisoning rather than executing Joseph might indicate either his capacity for leniency and mercy, or his believing and trusting Joseph, or mistrusting his wife's fidelity, as in Roger Young's film *Joseph* (1995) starring Ben Kingsley as Potiphar (cf. also Davidson 1979:235). Either would be another point in Potiphar's favour.

a way that is perceived as inappropriate given his station. The verb 'to mock' has the same root that underlies the name of Sarah's son, Isaac. Ishmael's objectionable action, therefore, is literally that of 'Isaac-ing'. Sarah is angered by it to the point of insisting on the eviction of Hagar and Ishmael (21:10). It emerges clearly from Gen 16 and 21 that Hagar is expected to behave with submission. No such submission is evident in Joseph's words to Potiphar's wife. This could be in part because he is male, because he is Hebrew, and because he is expected to be obedient above all to his God.

⁶ The clearest indication of this assessment can be found, alongside the prohibitions in Torah (e.g. Exod 20:14), in Proverbs 6–7.

Potiphar's Wife

The bad character here is clearly Potiphar's wife. Her namelessness already may convey some measure of disdain – although it is not uncommon for women of the Hebrew Bible (whether named or unnamed) to be identified in relation to male relatives, most often fathers or husbands. Her being a *foreign woman* also plays on negative stereotypes that are well developed in the Hebrew Bible.⁷ Potiphar's wife sees Joseph and commands him to lie with her. After he refuses her with a wordy and articulate rebuff and invokes his loyalty to his master and to his God, she pesters him day after day (Hebrew *yôm yôm*), indicating harassment (39:10), or, in Meir Sternberg's assessment, 'poisonous' conduct and 'sexual assault' (1985:424). One day, when there are no witnesses, she takes hold of his garment, indicating physical force, and again commands him to lie with her (39:12). After Joseph escapes, she calls out to her servants, in order to drum up support in the absence of witnesses. Finally, she concocts a lie, claiming that it was *Joseph* who wanted to lie with her and that he escaped when *she* cried out. The reversal, for Hamilton, serves 'to underscore the blatant nature of her lie' (1995:467). She repeats the lie to her husband, making him secondarily responsible, because it was *he* who brought Joseph into their home. Thus she sends an innocent man to prison for what was clearly considered a grave crime, namely attempted rape and adultery. If she ever admits her culpability, as in the Qur'an (Sura 12:51), where the wife says, 'It was I who sought to seduce him, and indeed, he is one of the truthful' (Ibrahim 2017:83), we are not told in Genesis. Instead, Potiphar's wife fades from the story completely, leaving Joseph in prison for years – before his meteoric rise to become Pharaoh's second-in-command. Most commentators pick up on all the clues – overt and covert – that cast Potiphar's wife in a negative light. Hamilton is one typical example, saying of her that she 'is not only seductress and prevaricator, but she is a "subtle mistress of syntactic equivocation"⁸ and someone who will resort to fiction and fabrication to get her revenge (1995:469).

⁷ See below.

⁸ McKinlay also makes much of Potiphar's wife's subtle use of language. Hence, McKinlay sees considerable irony inherent in the reapplication of the word 'hand': in v.6 Joseph states that Potiphar left all in his hand but in v.12 it is he who leaves his garment in his master's wife's hand. According to McKinlay, 'repetition in v.13 makes sure that the point is not lost' (1995: 73). Moreover, 'hand' has multiple meanings, including

Characterization is clear-cut in Gen 39. There are three main characters⁹ of which two – Joseph and Potiphar’s wife – are particularly active. Whereas Potiphar is named and his wife is not, Potiphar has no speech, whereas she does. Only Joseph is all of named, subject of active verbs and a character whose direct speech is recorded. In this story Joseph emerges as favoured by Potiphar and YHWH, as well as self-controlled and pious. Potiphar’s wife is a foil to Joseph and the villain of the piece. Her lies contrive a complication in the story, which temporarily suspends Joseph’s success. But the clue that he *will* ultimately thrive is there all along in that YHWH is with him. This signals to the reader that Joseph’s fortunes will improve. His story continues; the story of Potiphar’s wife ends with her lies.

Intertextuality

Intertextuality is understood here as a literary form of inner-biblical exegesis, whereby biblical texts are brought into relationship with and mutually illuminate each other – notably, through verbal echoes. This assumes a process where later texts deliberately recall earlier texts – or, where earlier texts are, possibly purposefully, edited to make links with later texts. I am in agreement with Michael Fishbane one of the chief proponents of inner-biblical exegesis that due to ‘difficulties in assigning absolute dates to biblical texts’, a historical sequence of such a process is unwise to delineate (1980:343).

Particular emphasis in this section is placed on biblical texts that pertain to sexual humiliation and rape. The purpose of this is to provide a fuller understanding of the sexual overtones in Gen 39, where the gendered directionality of sexual exploitation departs from the considerably more common pattern of male abusers and female victims.¹⁰

that of power. Whereas Joseph asserted his power in the household, now the power has moved to his master’s wife.

⁹ YHWH is another character. YHWH is with Joseph (39:2, 21, 23) and causes all in his hand to prosper (39:3, 23), blessing Potiphar’s house (39:5) and disposing the chief jailer to favour Joseph (39:21). Peripheral characters, all of whom are unnamed, are the Ishmaelites who sell Joseph (39:1), other members of Potiphar’s household (39:14), the king’s prisoners (39:20, 22) and the chief jailer (39:21-23).

¹⁰ See below. Also less common in terms of its mention in the Hebrew Bible is male-male sexual violence. Such is threatened in isolated places – most clearly Gen 19:5 &

Genesis 37

Intertextual echoes add further layers of depth to the story. Hence, Joseph is twice endangered by a garment: the impressive robe given to him by Jacob his father (37:3) incites his brothers' jealousy and they bring this same garment, blood-covered, to their father as fabricated 'proof' of his violent death (37:23, 31-33). Two chapters later, Joseph's garment becomes a token of evidence of his alleged attempted rape. The word for garment in each story is a different one: the special robe Jacob gives to Joseph is a *k^etōnet passim* (traditionally, a cloak of many colours, although the meaning of *passim* is uncertain and it might also refer to many patterns or layers, or indeed to something else). The word for the garment Joseph leaves in Potiphar's wife's hand after escaping her aggressive advances is the much more common *beḡed*. Still, association between the two incidents is clear.

Sexual Violation in 2 Samuel 13 (Deuteronomy 22 and Genesis 34)

The uncommon noun pair *k^etōnet passim* (construct + plural absolute) also creates one of several verbal echoes with another story of rape (this time not just an accusation of rape): namely the story of 2 Sam. 13 where David's firstborn son Amnon desires, deceives and then rapes his sister Tamar. Again, as in the Joseph story, the setting is one where witnesses are absent. The word *k^etōnet* occurs just seven times in the Hebrew Bible. It occurs five times to designate the robe that sets apart Joseph (37:3, 23, 31, 32, 33); it occurs once to describe the special tunic (*k^etōnet-bad qōdeš*, 'holy linen garment') worn by the high priest on the holy day of Yom Kippur, the Great Day of Atonement (Lev 16:4); and it occurs once more to describe the robe of David's daughter Tamar, adding that such a robe (*k^etōnet passim*) was worn in times past by royal virgin daughters (2 Sam 13:18). After she is raped and cast out by Amnon, Tamar tears this very robe (2 Sam 13:19),¹¹ puts ashes on her head and goes forth crying aloud in ways that express and perform her grief, desolation and

Judg 19:22. For some elaboration on this topic see Stiebert & Walsh (2001). The absence of female-female sexual practice, inclusive of sexual violence, is notable and I discuss this very fully elsewhere (Stiebert 2016: 114–32).

¹¹ The garment once signified her status as royal virgin daughter (2 Sam 13:18). The tearing, or rending (from the verbal root *q-r-*) of the garment, which traditionally signifies grief (cf. the actions of Reuben, 37:29 and Jacob, 37:34), also performs the loss of this status and, maybe, of the tearing of her hymen (2 Sam 13:19).

wrongful suffering. The rare word *ketonet* is one of several elements linking the stories of Joseph and David's daughter Tamar.

Another link is the word *yāphâ*, 'beautiful' (Gen 39:6; 2 Sam 13:1). It should not surprise that the same word is used for both Joseph, a male, and Tamar, a female. As David Clines (1995:214–43) explains, in modern societies, even where males and females mingle fairly freely, there is none the less pressure to think in binary gendered terms. This sometimes has the upshot of distinct vocabulary: for instance, to designate good-looking males or females. Hence, 'handsome' or 'rugged' is appropriate of a masculine male and 'pretty' or 'beautiful' of a feminine woman. The social contexts in the background of the Hebrew Bible appear to have separated male and female spheres much more rigorously than many modern social contexts. Both male and female beauty appear to have been admired (though there is more frequent reference to good-looking women) but there is no separate terminology and no implication that a beautiful male is feminine – as there is in English, for instance, with an expression such as 'the pretty man'.¹² Tellingly, the exact same descriptors are translated 'graceful and beautiful' of Rachel at 29:17 (NRSV) but 'handsome and good-looking' of her son Joseph at 39:6 (NRSV). Gender certainly has impact on translation!

Macwilliam, we recall, has pointed out that beauty can render a person vulnerable to sexual threat. While this applies to both Joseph and Tamar, it is also the case that their beauty makes them sympathetic victims. It is not the case that everyone in the Bible who is vulnerable to sexual assault incites sympathy. Joseph's sister Dinah, who is raped¹³ by a local prince (Gen 34), or the virgins of Shiloh (Judg 21) are not specified as beautiful and the text accords them no sympathy on account of being violated. In these two narratives rape is above all a matter of male family members' compromised honour;¹⁴ there is no focus on the female indi-

¹² Some commentators do interpret Joseph as feminized in Gen 39 – both on account of his beauty and his being the object of sexual desire (see below).

¹³ As will be briefly discussed below, there is no complete agreement among commentators that Shechem rapes Dinah. For a summary and references, see Stiebert (2018: 32–33 and n.12).

¹⁴ Male honour comes to the fore in the details of Dinah's brothers' revenge: they retrieve their sister and kill all males among the rapist's people. Moreover, they do so on account of Dinah's defilement (34:7, 25–27). Their justification is that their sister was treated 'like a whore' (34:31). For Pitt-Rivers (1977) the notion of damage inflicted by

viduals, no insight into their perspective, and no acknowledgment of their suffering. But Tamar is described quite differently and with more detail: as a royal daughter, a virgin, as beautiful and obedient; after putting up resistance, she is physically overpowered by her brother who has deceitfully engineered a situation where they are left alone, with no witnesses or protectors. Pleading with her brother to negotiate a marriage with their father and not to cast her out, so as to right the wrong done to her as best as can be, Tamar is evicted. All these narrative elements serve to construct Tamar as a tragic figure, even an ideal tragic figure, who did nothing to incite or to deserve the violence and shame inflicted on her. The rape took place unobserved by any witnesses in Amnon's private chamber but the omniscient narrator tells it in a way that makes very clear that Amnon is the villain and Tamar the innocent victim (Stiebert 2016:189 and n.235).¹⁵

As already alluded to, other texts of the Hebrew Bible depict matters differently. The laws of Deuteronomy 22, for example, make a distinction between a situation where a man 'meets and lies with' a virgin woman who is already betrothed *in a town*, or *in an open field*. If the sex act takes place in a town, both the man and woman are to be stoned to death – because the woman could have cried for help and been heard. In an open field, however, because the woman might have cried out and not been heard, only the man is to be stoned to death. If a man 'meets and lies with' a virgin not yet engaged, however, the 'solution' is that the man pays a fine to the woman's father and marries her, without possibility of divorce (Deut 22:23-29). At least two things emerge from these laws:

- first, adultery is considered a very serious crime: hence, sex with an engaged woman incurs the death penalty for one or both parties;

female shame on male honour is pivotal to the story. In Judg 21 it is also the male family members (fathers or brothers, v.22) who are mentioned as feeling slighted by the seizure of their women. The implication is again that male honour is central and must be appeased. Male honour is also a theme in 2 Sam 13 where Absalom takes vengeance on Amnon because he humiliated Tamar (vv.22, 32). Fuchs even argues that Tamar is little more than 'a catalyst for the conflict between villain and hero' (2003: 201).

¹⁵ Virtually all commentators are agreed on this point. The maverick reading by Reis (1998) is an exception. My rejection of Reis's argument is detailed elsewhere (Stiebert 2016: 189–91).

- secondly, men are considered initiators of sex and women as property of men.

Unlike in many modern definitions and codifications of rape, *consent* is not a topic. A woman not betrothed who is raped is married to her rapist without mention of her agreement and without possibility of divorce – a virtual invitation to rape marriage.¹⁶ Also evident in Deuteronomy 22 is that the woman's collusion is to some extent assumed: hence, if a woman does not scream loudly, the indication is that she is co-responsible. The subtext is that there are victims of rape who are considered 'more deserving' than others. Tamar is decidedly undeserving of rape; the narrative portrays her as wholly innocent. The woman who lies with a man in the town but is not heard screaming is – by implication – co-responsible and deserving of capital punishment.

Aspersions are also cast about Dinah in Gen 34.¹⁷ These go back as far as rabbinic interpretation and target particularly the detail that Dinah goes out to see the women of the land (that is, foreign women, 34:1). This is taken to mean that Dinah, essentially, has it coming. Dinah's consent or otherwise to sex with Shechem, a Hivite prince, receives no mention. The text provides no insight into her perspective. Indeed, some commentators have proposed that Dinah may not have been raped (Bechtel 1994; van der Wolde 2002).¹⁸ Gen 34 uses three verbs to de-

¹⁶ It is possible that the law covers also sex between a consenting man and a consenting unbetrothed virgin. Such might more appropriately be called marriage by elopement. Still, the fact that Deut 22:28 refers to the man seizing, or laying hold of the woman is suggestive of force and absence of consent. The meaning of 'rape' (from Latin *raptio*, 'abduction') has shifted over time. The word used to refer to the seizure of a person (most often a woman) for the purpose of sexual intercourse, e.g. 'The Rape of Helen', 'The Rape of the Sabine Women'. *Removal* of a person (most frequently removal from the sphere of protection of either the natal or spousal family), not *consent*, was determinative of *raptio* in this more archaic usage. With Helen, for instance, the fact that Paris of Troy *takes her away* from her husband, Menelaus of Sparta, is what constitutes the rape. According to some versions, Helen goes willingly, or consents. In modern understanding such would not qualify as rape. Nowadays, 'rape' pertains most often to the sexual (usually penetrative) assault of a person *against that person's will*, with consent being one determinative factor.

¹⁷ For a sample of the many studies that recognize and explore intertextual links between the stories of Dinah and Tamar, see Stiebert (2016: 183 & n.218).

¹⁸ The memorable retelling from Dinah's viewpoint in Anita Diamant's novel *The Red Tent* depicts the relationship between Dinah and Shalem of Shechem as a romance (1997).

scribe what Shechem does to Dinah: *l-q-ch*, 'he took', *š-k-b* 'he lay (with)', or 'he had sex (with)' and '*-n-h*, 'he debased (her)' (34:2). Technically, none of these three verbs means 'to rape' and Dinah would be debased, or lowered in status, whether she consented or not. This is so, because sex with someone other than one's husband and probably (given the dominant ideology of the Hebrew Bible) especially with a foreigner, lowers a woman's status and economic worth.

Lyn Bechtel argues that the reaction of Shechem after sex with Dinah is atypical of a rapist. Hence, 34:3 states that Shechem's being was drawn to Dinah, that he loved her and spoke to her heart. Again, there is no mention of Dinah's reciprocity, or otherwise. Bechtel considers Amnon's reaction following his rape of Tamar – of feeling intense loathing for his victim (2 Sam 13:15) – the likely response to rape. In both narratives, however, it is clear that the women are considered defiled and 'damaged goods' even though, in the case of Tamar, it is made abundantly clear that Tamar did all she could to avert rape (2 Sam 13:12-14). Also, there is in both stories a clear discrepancy of power. Not only are Shechem and Amnon men and both, presumably, physically stronger than their female victims (as is made explicit in 2 Sam 13:14), they are also both socially *powerful* men. Shechem is a prince of the land, or region (34:2) and Amnon is the royal firstborn (2 Sam 13:21).¹⁹ Both are indulged by their fathers.²⁰ Shechem's father Hamor does all he can to negotiate a generous and accommodating settlement so that his son can marry the woman he wants (34:8-10, 24). In Amnon's case David does not punish his son; he is only said to be 'very angry'. As I have argued elsewhere, possibly even incestuous rape is – while considered acutely improper – not illegal when a woman is unmarried or unbetrothed (as Tamar ap-

¹⁹ The NRSV follows the Septuagint translation and one Hebrew manuscript from Qumran. The Masoretic Text does not mention that David would not punish Amnon, because he loved him, for he was his firstborn. Instead, the Masoretic Text only states that David was 'very angry'.

²⁰ Joseph is also indulged by his father (37:3-4), as is Absalom (2 Sam 18:33). The daughters do not fare nearly so well. Jacob does nothing when he hears of Dinah's defilement (34:5) and rebukes his sons for taking violent revenge (34:30). David, meanwhile, visits Amnon who is pretending to be ill (2 Sam 13:6) but only sends for Tamar (2 Sam 13:7). His response to her rape is anger, not action (2 Sam 13:21). Vengeance is left to Absalom (2 Sam 13:28-29).

pears to have been).²¹ Hence, while even King David is culpable for adultery, a powerful man like Amnon can have sex with whomsoever he chooses, even by force, even with a virgin sister, as long as he does not violate another man's wife (Stiebert 2016:192–94).

A further intertextual link between the two stories of sexualized violence in Gen 39 and 2 Sam 13 is the span of two years. After two years Tamar's other brother Absalom arranges for the murder of Amnon (2 Sam 13:23). Throughout this time Absalom has harboured ill feeling towards Amnon on account of the disgrace and rape (from '*n-h*', 2 Sam 13:22, 32) of Tamar. Joseph, like Tamar, is debased. He is not, like Tamar, raped – but he is accused of attempted rape and falls from his high status in Potiphar's household to be imprisoned. Where after two years Tamar was avenged, after two years (41:1) Joseph is restored.

A final intertextual link is that both sexual violators – Potiphar's wife and Amnon – utter the same command: 'lie with me!' (39:7, 12; 2 Sam 13:11). This is no invitation; it is an order. In response, Joseph and Tamar resist by invoking what is right and what is not. Joseph alludes to his master and his God, and reminds his abuser that she is his master's wife and obeying her suggestion would be improper, wickedness and a sin (39:9). Tamar addresses Amnon as 'my brother' – possibly to remind him what is proper of a sibling – and then implores him not to do something so vile, which would shame her and make him like one of the scoundrels in Israel (2 Sam 13:12-13). Joseph refers to his master, Tamar to the king; each invokes the authority immediately above the sexual violator.

Multiple verbal echoes establish a clear connection between the stories of Joseph and Tamar. Beauty renders both Joseph and Tamar vulnerable to powerful sexual predators. Beauty also renders both sympathetic. Both are entirely innocent and virtuous. Because Joseph is male and because YHWH is with him, he can escape sexual violation. Both Joseph and Tamar suffer disgrace but receive (at least some) restoration after an elapse of two years.

²¹ The clearest indication for this is that Tamar is identified with reference to her brother Absalom (2 Sam 13:1, 4) to whom she appears to be closest (most likely because they are full, not just half-siblings), as well as with reference to her brother Amnon (2 Sam 13:2) and, though less directly, with reference to her father (2 Sam 13:1, 18). There is no mention of a husband, or betrothed husband-to-be.

Genesis 38 (and the Motif of The Foreign Woman)

Intertextual links exist also between Gen 39 and the preceding chapter²² where a foreign (that is, Canaanite) woman, also called Tamar,²³ practises deception (by posing as a roadside prostitute) and is successful, going on to bear two sons to Joseph's brother Judah.²⁴ In Gen 39, meanwhile, a foreign (that is, Egyptian) woman practises deception (posing as a victim of attempted rape) and sex does not take place. Intriguingly, Joseph does go on to marry a daughter of Potiphara, priest of On (41:45). Is this Potiphara the same man as Potiphar? The names are certainly very similar. Is Asenath, his daughter, even a daughter also of Potiphar's wife? The Rabbis speculated about this. Joseph and Asenath, like Tamar, have two sons. In both stories – whether the sexual wiles are ultimately admired (as with Tamar), or maligned (as with Potiphar's wife)²⁵ – a foreign

²² Hamilton notes that the word *beqed* ('garment') occurs with reference to both Tamar's (38:14, 19) and Joseph's garment (39:12). He notes, too, that a homonym *bagad* is used of marital unfaithfulness (e.g. Jer 3:7-8; Mal 2:14). This could hint, he proposes, at Joseph's temptation to commit adultery – especially if the garment he leaves behind is an undergarment (1995: 465). If the word is designed to create a verbal echo with Gen 38, however, it is unlikely to pertain to an undergarment: in Gen 38 *beqed* refers to the garment that identifies Tamar to others as a widow. Joseph's *beqed*, analogously, would be a garment that readily identifies him – perhaps a garment worn by household servants.

²³ For possible intertextual echoes between Gen 38 & 2 Sam 13 (the two stories of different women called Tamar) see Reis (1998: 60), with whom I disagree (see Stiebert 2016: 187–88 & n.228).

²⁴ McKinlay emphasizes different connecting elements, pointing out that Tamar uses Judah's garment (according to the text a cord and staff, 38:25) to prove her innocence, while Potiphar's wife uses Joseph's garment to attempt to prove his guilt. To me this is a less neat parallel. McKinlay's question concerning the juxtaposition of the two stories, however, is compelling: does Potiphar's wife deconstruct the positive act of Tamar, or does Tamar set up a standard by which Potiphar's wife is harshly judged (1995: 75)? For McKay, too, the two consecutive chapters are connected, with Gen 38 neither intruding on, nor disrupting the story of Joseph. Instead, both are parts of a sequence of women seeking elaborate ways to procure a child. The sequence begins with Sarah, Rachel and Leah and continues with Tamar and Potiphar's wife. Only Potiphar's wife is thwarted. McKay suggests the reason for this is ideological: because like (also Egyptian) Hagar, any child by her could never be deemed legitimate (1999).

²⁵ Tamar is declared righteous (38:26) and her daring scheme is rewarded with twin boys (38:27). She is remembered and praised in later writings (Ruth 4:12). Potiphar's wife is unsuccessful in her scheme to lie with Joseph. If she does have a child (Asenath?) we are not told so explicitly. She fades completely from the story, never to be mentioned

woman is sexual, as well as suggestive of more than a hint of danger and of much deception.

The trope of the dangerous foreign woman is evident in many parts of the Bible, notably in Proverbs, where the seductive adulteress is depicted as ‘strange’ (*zārâ*) and ‘foreign’ (from *n-k-r*) (Prov 7:5). True, some chosen men of the Hebrew Bible do have foreign wives: hence, there is Moses’ Midianite wife Zipporah (Exod 2:21) and his nameless Cushite wife (Num 12:1), as well as Joseph’s Egyptian wife Asenath (41:45).²⁶ Moreover, David has a Moabite great-grandmother, Ruth, who married his Israelite ancestor, Boaz (Ruth 4:13, 22). But the dominant ideology is that foreign women are beguiling and dangerous and should be avoided. There are plenty of memorable examples to confirm this: Samson is defeated in part by his attraction to Philistine women (Judg 14 and 16), most famous among these Delilah; and wise King Solomon is brought low by his many foreign wives of whom it is said that they turned his heart after other gods (1 Kgs 11:1-10; cf. Neh 13:26). This is the age-old trope ‘blame the woman!’, familiar since Adam accused God with the words ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me the fruit from the tree, and I ate’ (3:12, NRSV).²⁷ Very often a woman blamed for something happens to be foreign. The ‘foreign woman’ is something of a double whammy: dubious on account of gendered and ethnic prejudices. Notorious examples are the Moabite women who seduce the men of Israel at Shittim, inviting them to worship their gods (Num 25), Phoenician Jezebel, a veritable byword of evil women, who is blamed for turning Ahab to the worship of Baal and Asherah (1 Kgs 16:31), and also the foreign wives who fan the wrath of Ezra, because they ‘pollute’ the holy seed (Ezra 9:1-2).

again. If Joseph’s wife Asenath is Potiphar’s wife’s daughter, this would be an ironic twist, ‘rubbing in’ Potiphar’s wife’s failure.

²⁶ Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph and Asenath, moreover, are two of the twelve tribal heads of Israel. There are, indeed, two ways of attaining the number of twelve tribes: one counts all of Jacob’s twelve sons (including Levi and Joseph), while the other excludes Levi (whose descendants receive no tribal lands) and counts Joseph’s two sons with Asenath instead of Joseph.

²⁷ There is a hint of reminiscence of these accusatory words also in Potiphar’s wife’s articulation to her husband, ‘The Hebrew servant, whom you have brought among us...’ (39:17, NRSV).

To be clear: Potiphar's wife is not the only sexually forward woman in Genesis and not *all* sexually forward women incite outrage or disgust. There are Lot's two daughters who ply their father with wine in order to conceive offspring (19:30-38); there is Leah who tells Jacob that she has acquired conjugal rights in return for her son's mandrakes (30:16); and there is the widowed Tamar who devises a daring plan to seduce her father-in-law to become pregnant with sons (Gen 38). Outside of Genesis we also have Ruth, who, adorned and anointed, positions herself, by night, in a private corner by the side of a possibly drunken Boaz, whose feet (or loins)²⁸ she uncovers (Ruth 3:3-8) – which is certainly suggestive of sexual possibility. Again, this plan transpires in marriage and the birth of a son, Obed.

Athalya Brenner (1985) points out that female sexual assertiveness in the service of producing a male heir for Israel is – in terms of the Bible's ideology – acceptable. Ideally – though there is some leeway in desperate circumstances²⁹ – this male should be a legitimate heir. This exonerates all of Leah, Tamar, Ruth and even Lot's daughters.³⁰ When the purpose is *not* the conception of a male Israelite, however, then female sexual

²⁸ The Hebrew word for 'feet' (*raglayim*, a dual form) can be a euphemism for genitals. Hence, 'hair of the feet' (Isa 7:20) probably pertains to pubic hair. Also, when David urges Uriah to go and wash his 'feet' (2 Sam 11:8), he is encouraging him to have sex with his wife (i.e. to ejaculate, in a bid to cover up David's adultery with and impregnation of Bathsheba). It is ambiguous whether Ruth uncovers Boaz's feet or loins.

²⁹ Tamar should rightfully have been given to her deceased husband's brother Shelah in order to conceive a legitimate son. When Judah fails to arrange this, Tamar seduces him instead. Judah is not Tamar's legitimate sexual partner and does not lie with her again following the conception of Perez and Zerah (38:26). The sons are, however, regarded as rightful heirs to Judah's line (Ruth 4:12). Lot's daughters' scheme, which involves deception of their father by getting him drunk, can only be excused by their belief that there is no other man with whom to conceive offspring (19:31). The names of the sons, Moab ('from the father') and Ben-Ammi ('son of my people') hardly hide their incestuous origins, possibly suggesting that the daughters are proud of the lengths they were prepared to go to to have offspring.

³⁰ The story of Lot's daughters can be (and has been) read in a variety of ways. On the one hand, the narrator expresses no explicit criticism of Lot's two daughters. Their risky plan succeeds and each gives birth to a son. This could be interpreted as divine reward for resourcefulness in difficult circumstances. On the other hand, there may be implicit criticism of the daughters in that their sons are the ancestors of the Moabites and Ammonites, traditional enemies of Israel. I discuss the wide variety of interpretations of this story elsewhere (Stiebert 2016: 156–65).

assertiveness is associated with lasciviousness and rejected – as in the case of both the adulteress in Proverbs and Potiphar’s wife. Moreover, to repeat a point just highlighted, sexual forwardness – whether of the approved procreative variety or not – is associated particularly with foreign women: Canaanite Tamar, the women of Moab, Ruth the Moabite, the Egyptian wife of Potiphar.

Race, Ethnicity and Africans in the Hebrew Bible

The distinction between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’³¹ is often blurred but relates to biological versus sociological factors.³² Accordingly, ‘race’ refers to physical and genetically determined characteristics, including colouration of skin, hair and eyes, while ‘ethnicity’ refers to cultural factors, which include nationality, regional and religious customs, and language. ‘Black’, ‘white’, ‘yellow’ and ‘brown’ constitute racial categories. Race, therefore, is ultimately determined by how one looks, while ethnicity is determined based on the social and cultural groups to which one belongs.³³ A person can have more than one ethnicity but just one race, which may be ‘mixed race’. Racial categories can be very imprecise and

³¹ For a full discussion see Kivisto & Croll (2011).

³² Comparable with this in some ways is the distinction between biological sex (e.g. male, female, intersex) and socially constructed gender (e.g. masculine, feminine, gender fluid). Whereas gender but not sex has long been interpreted as highly variable, this has also come to be challenged, with the assertion that sex, too, is both socially constructed and spectral. Both sex and gender are increasingly becoming understood in less and less binary ways, including in biblical studies (Guest et al 2006; Hornsby & Stone 2011; Guest 2012). Race and ethnicity are becoming deconstructed in comparable ways, in that the essentialism of race in particular and the political, particularly colonialist, relationships with both concepts are being questioned and challenged (Kivisto & Croll 2011: 4–5) though not as palpably as yet in the context of biblical studies.

³³ In practice there is frequent overlapping and blurring. Islamophobia may be an example of prejudice based on ethnicity, because Islam is a religion and has adherents all over the world and with markedly different appearances. But Islamophobia is often aimed particularly at persons of colour, including, sometimes, at persons who are not actually Muslim but who are perceived to ‘look like Muslims’ on account of being ‘brown’, or ‘looking Pakistani’, or wearing clothing identified (rightly or wrongly) as ‘typically Muslim’. Technically, anti-Semitism is racism targeted at Jews (irrespective of their religious beliefs or practices), whereas anti-Judaism is ethnically motivated hatred of followers of the religion of Judaism. In practice, the two are difficult to separate. As has been pointed out, too, the Jewish people are difficult to classify as ‘a race’. Both anti-Semitism (e.g. Patte 1988) and anti-Judaism (e.g. Levine 2007) have been identified in the New Testament.

persons designated 'black' may have a wide spectrum of colouration that might intersect with the colouration of persons designated 'brown' or even 'white', because other markers (e.g. of bone structure, hair texture and facial features) are also factored into assigning race.³⁴

'German' or 'South African' are ethnic taxonomies and, while some may be widely (even reflexively) associated with racial categories (e.g. 'German' with 'white') these are nevertheless distinct from racial categories. 'African' is often applied to designate 'black' races. Among South Africans, however, there is some vocal resistance to this, on the grounds of ethnicity, with white South Africans also asserting status and identity as Africans (e.g. West 2018, *passim*). South Africa, of course, has a history of institutionalized racism in the form of Apartheid policy, which categorized persons into 'black', 'white' and 'coloured'. Those who would be designated 'white' South Africans on the basis of this, are also claiming status as Africans, arguing that their identity is formed in crucial ways by their location. Hence, some resist being called 'European', because their association is with a location on the continent of Africa not Europe, regardless of where their ancestors may have come from. Similarly, there are different preferences concerning the self-designations 'Black American', 'African American' or 'Afro-American', with some emphasizing American and others dual ethnicity and/or race.

With regard to race, ethnicity and Africa in the Bible, this complex and important topic has been widely and deeply discussed. Critical race theory, with focus both on the Bible and on the dynamics between text and interpretive context, has emerged both in African settings (e.g. Mosala 1989; Adamo 2006) and among African American scholars in the USA (e.g. Wimbush 2001; Smith 2017). This includes also prominent womanist voices, again both from African (e.g. Oduyoye 1986; Dube 2000) and US (e.g. Weems 1988; Smith 2018) settings.³⁵

It is certainly the case that African locations and African people 'played [both] a major [and] minor role in Israel's destiny' (Adamo 2001:3), even

³⁴ An extreme example is an albino offspring of black parents who has white skin but is nevertheless categorized 'black'.

³⁵ For a single-volume work reviewing the presence of Africa and Africans in the Hebrew Bible, see Adamo (2001). Additionally, there are multiple collections providing ample evidence for the breadth and variety of African perspectives in biblical scholarship (e.g. West & Dube 2000; Page 2009), as well as Holter's excellent overview spanning several decades (2002).

if academic interpretation frequently plays this down, thereby effecting ‘de-Africanization of the Bible’ (Adamo 2001:1). In terms of race versus ethnicity, there are occasional suggestions in the Hebrew Bible that there is some awareness of people from Cush³⁶ looking distinctive. Hence, there is reference to the Cushite’s distinguishing skin (Jer 13:23) and to a people tall and smooth (Isa 18:2, 7). There is no strong indication beyond such categorization, that either skin colouration, or other characteristics pertaining to ‘race’, has an attendant hierarchy, with some (cf. ‘white’ in the Apartheid hierarchy) being favoured, or privileged, or more empowered than others (cf. ‘black’ in the Apartheid hierarchy).³⁷ While some colouration appears to be admired (e.g. David’s ‘ruddy’ look, which could pertain to a reddish or bronzed skin tone, 1 Sam 16:12), there is also indication that ‘white’ and ‘black’ in their biblical usage depart from the racist associations familiar in much of Western-centric history (see Edwards 2018).³⁸ Not only is there very little preoccupation with skin colour, but ‘black’ is associated with beauty (Song 1:5) and ‘white’ with skin disease (Num 12:10).

There is much more evidence of identifying and of differentiating between persons on account of ethnic markers – such as association with a region, language, or worship of a deity other than or alongside YHWH. And here we do see evidence of hierarchy. When the Ephraimites are targeted for destruction, they are identified on account of their pronunciation of the word ‘Shibboleth’ (Judg 13:5-6). Presumably, the Ephraimites could not be identified on account of just their physical features. There are also very many ethnic references in the Hebrew Bible and sometimes these pertain to groups of persons who are to be kept apart from the people of Israel. Ezra 9:1, for example, lists Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amo-

³⁶ Cush is translated variously in the Hebrew Bible, including as ‘Ethiopia’ or ‘Nubia’. Holter discusses the complexity of translating geographical terms such as this one (1997). I am leaving the term untranslated and transliterated here.

³⁷ Kivisto & Croll also mention that with such racialized categorization the hierarchy also determines ‘hypodescent’, i.e. that mixed race aligns with the status assigned to the subordinate category (2011: 2). The opposite (i.e. assignment to the dominant category) would be ‘hyperdescent’. Hyperdescent appears to have occurred when Joseph’s sons by Egyptian Asenath become ancestors of Israel’s tribes (see note 25, above).

³⁸ It is certainly the case that enslavement of ‘Africans’ (or, descendants of Ham) was derived from and justified using the biblical text (Goldenberg 2003). On race, the New Testament and the anachronism of ‘race’, see Ehrensperger (2013).

rites, lamenting that intermarrying with women from these peoples has caused inappropriate mixing of the holy seed (v.2). Nehemiah adds that this has also transpired in offspring sometimes not speaking ‘the language of Judah, but ... the language of various peoples’, a clear ethnic marker (Neh 13:24).³⁹

Much of the Hebrew Bible is specifically about projecting a strategy or ideology that favours and promotes one group – be this the Hebrews, the people of Israel, or the Judeans (there is some variety in this, depending on assumed historical backdrop and circumstance). I am in agreement with Cain Hope Felder in terms of how this operates and quote in full his words, pertaining particularly to Gen 10, which details the families of Noah’s sons, according to genealogies and nations, and their geographical spread:

Rather than any objective historical account of genealogies, the Table of Nations ... presents us with a theologically motivated catalogue of people. The Table not only ends with the descendants of Shem but does so in a way consciously stylised to accentuate the importance of the descendants of Shem among the peoples of the earth. About this, the author of the genealogy in 1 Chron 1:17-34 is most explicit inasmuch as of all the descendants of the sons of Noah those descended from Shem receive the most elaborate attention In this long progression, the theological presuppositions of a particular ethnic group displace any concern for objective historiography and ethnography. The descendants of Noah apart from those of Shem are increasingly insignificant and gain access to the text only as they serve as foils to demonstrate the priority of the Israelites. The subtle process being described may consequently be called ‘sacralisation’ because it represents an attempt on the part of succeeding generations of one ethnic group to construe salvation history in terms distinctly favourable to it as opposed to others. Here, ethnic particularity evolves with a certain divine vindication and inevitably the dangers of rank racism lie just beneath the surface (Felder 2009).

In Gen 39, too, this dominant ideological thrust is in evidence. The opposition between, on the one hand, Egyptian Potiphar (39:1, 2, 5) and

³⁹ The story of the Tower of Babel (11:1-9), which tells of how one shared language became many, often mutually unintelligible, languages, is usually read at face value, as a story of punishment. For those who value diversity and consider the multiplicity of human cultures a gift, such an interpretation can be problematic. For a compelling alternative reading see Pyper (2018).

Potiphar's wife⁴⁰ and, on the other, Hebrew Joseph (39:14, 17), who is the recipient of YHWH's favour (signaling special status and election) drives home the point that this is another story illustrating the superiority of YHWH and – by implication – his people over other people and – by implication – their deities. This is in line with the 'we-are-better-than-you-and-our-God-is-better-than-your-God' stories. The antics of Moses and Aaron in the court of Pharaoh are another example (e.g. Exod 7), as are Samson's call-out to YHWH and his victory over the Philistines during celebrations of Dagon (Judg 16), the victories of YHWH, the ark and Samuel over the Philistines (1 Sam 6–7) and Elijah's show-down with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18). In all of these, a Hebrew agent of YHWH (Joseph, Moses, Samson, Samuel, Elijah) triumphs over foreign persons (Egyptians, Philistines, Phoenicians). These foreigners, complete with their deities (though no Egyptian deities are mentioned in Gen 39), are inferior, even caricature-like. Given the ethnic particularity and attendant divine vindication identified by Felder, this does not work out well for the (Egyptian) Africans in this story, particularly for Potiphar's wife, who is maligned on account of being a devious woman *and* a foreigner, and as such tainted by stereotypes of foreign women.⁴¹ As will be discussed below, even a liberationist reading (Adamo 2013) cannot erase the negative subtext ascribed to Egyptians on account of their ethnicity.

Readings in Defense of Potiphar's Wife

Aside: Is Potiphar a Eunuch?

Potiphar, who acquires Joseph, is twice called a *sārīs* of Pharaoh (37:36; 39:1). This is amplified with two additional descriptions for him: first, the construct-absolute *šar hattabbāchīm*, 'the high officer of guards' (cf. 37:36;

⁴⁰ The Egyptian identity of Potiphar's wife is implicit but not stated explicitly. Her referring to Joseph as a Hebrew man (39:14) and Hebrew slave, or servant (39:17) clearly demarcates him from her own and her husband's ethnic identity.

⁴¹ See note 4, above. Whereas Joseph is, like Hagar, a slave, he is, unlike her, male and Hebrew. Whereas Potiphar's wife is depicted as exploitative and abusive, the exploitation and abuse of Sarai/Sarah and also Abram/Abraham (while present in the narrative of Gen 16 & 21) are very much played down in terms of how the story is generally interpreted. This is due in part to the clues given as to ethnicity and being bearer of promise.

39:1) and secondly, the gentile *mīsrī*, ‘Egyptian’ (39:1). The designation *śar*, variously translated ‘captain, chief, prince’ or similar, alongside Potiphar’s role of working directly to Pharaoh, indicates that he is of very high rank. Potiphar is also repeatedly referred to as Joseph’s *‘ādōn* (39:2, 3, 7, 8, 16, 19, 20) including by Joseph himself (39:8) and this is a term indicative of power and usually translated ‘master’. Potiphar’s status as *‘ādōn*, moreover, is contrasted with Joseph’s status as *‘ebed* (39:17, 19) – that is, ‘servant’ or ‘slave’. It is not at all surprising that Potiphar is Egyptian – the designation might even seem superfluous – although it is twice more repeated (v.2, 5) and, on top of that, it is twice more stated that events are taking place in Egypt (37:36; 39:1). The emphasis, consequently, as already stated above, is likely to be deliberate – possibly, to contrast with Joseph’s *Hebrew* ethnicity, which goes on to be mentioned twice as the story progresses (v.14, 17).

The designation *sārīs* has piqued interpreters’ interest – not least, the interest of those interpreters who seek to explain, justify and even defend Potiphar’s wife’s actions. As with other Biblical Hebrew vocabulary, the best way to probe this word’s meaning, given that there is no recourse to native speakers, is to look at other occurrences, at cognates and at translations. The term *sārīs* is used again one chapter later, of two of Pharaoh’s officials who are in prison with Joseph (40:7). Both are also – like Potiphar – designated *śar*: one is a chief of cupbearers, the other of bakers. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible *sārīs* is also the word used to refer to attendants of women, such as of Queen Jezebel (2 Kgs 9:32), and Queen Esther (Esther 4:4). It also pertains to the official appointed to restore the possessions to the woman whom Elisha has helped (2 Kgs 8:6), as well as to other, seemingly important, royal officials, such as of King David (1 Chron 28:1), of the king of Israel (that is, of the northern kingdom) (1 Kgs 22:9), of the king of Persia (Esther 1:10), of the king of Babylon (2 Kgs 20:18; Isa 39:7; Daniel 1:1-18), possibly the king of Assyria, who has a Rabsaris (literally, ‘a chief *sārīs*’, cf. also Isa 39:3, with reference to the king of Babylon) (2 Kgs 18:17), and of the king of Judah (2 Kgs 23:11; Jer 34:19), including of Jehoiachin (or Jeconiah) (2 Kgs 24:12; Jer 29:2). A *sārīs* is among those selected for execution by the king of Babylon at Riblah (2 Kgs 25:19) and several of them are captured by Johanan along with soldiers, women and children, after the slaying of Gedaliah (Jer 41:16). A *sārīs* is often associated with non-Israelite royal courts and with foreignness: hence, the *sārīs* in Isa 38:7 is identified as Cushite; *sārīs* is in a parallel construction with *nēkār* (‘foreigner’) at Isa 56:3; Jezebel is Phoenician, and others are functionaries in Egyptian or Persian or Babylonian or Assyrian courts. But association with foreignness is not consistent, because the role of *sārīs* also exists, according to Hebrew Bible accounts, in the courts of Israel, including in David’s and in Jehoiachin’s courts.

Sometimes, *sārīs* is translated ‘officer’, or ‘official’ or ‘palace official’ and sometimes it is translated ‘eunuch’ – not least, because the Hebrew term appears to be a loan word with cognates in both Syriac and Arabic that pertain to someone impotent, or emasculated. It is unclear whether these

special and high officials were actually and always eunuchs, who could be entrusted, for instance, with supervision of royal women on account of their impotence. Whether *sārīs* pertains primarily to a high official, or whether it has the specific meaning of ‘eunuch’,⁴² whether there was a transition in meaning (e.g. from general to specific, or from specific to general) and when such a transition might have occurred, is not clear. There is disagreement among interpreters whether Potiphar was *just* a high official, or a high official who was *also* a eunuch. And, quite how ‘eunuch’ is understood is also significant for interpretation.⁴³ Potiphar *has a wife* – that much is clear – but it is not clear whether he could have penetrative sex, let alone father children.

Ron Pirson: Joseph in Potiphar’s Fertility Scheme

A number of commentators make a case for Potiphar’s wife as sexually frustrated and, possibly, as desperate to mother a child. Hence, whereas Hamilton rejects the translation of ‘eunuch’ *because* Potiphar is married (1995:458), Ron Pirson argues differently, that Joseph is caught in a fertility-scheme contrived by Potiphar in collusion with his wife. In Pir-

⁴² The word ‘eunuch’, referring to a castrated male, particularly one entrusted with guarding women’s living areas, is from the Greek. It combines the Greek words *eunē* (‘bed’) and *ekhein* (‘to hold’) and, consequently, means, more literally, ‘bedroom guard’. The English word ‘chamberlain’ also pertains to a servant of the bedchamber and is, similarly, ultimately derived from Latin *camera* and Old Saxon *kamera*, ‘vault’, via French *chambre*, with the meaning ‘bedchamber’. While there is no evidence of castrated male attendants in English contexts, there was clearly some fascination with eunuchs here too. This is most in evidence in William Wycherley’s Restoration comedy *The Country Wife* (1675). In this play rake Harry Horner pretends to be a eunuch in order to cuckold upper-class wives, who are readily seduced. The (rather daft) play is based on a much darker ‘comedy’, *Eunuchus*, by second century BCE Roman playwright Terence (which is apparently based on a yet earlier Greek play by Menander 342/41–290 BCE). In Terence’s play Chaerea impersonates a eunuch servant in order to encounter Pamphilia, a slave woman with whom he is infatuated. Chaerea ends up raping her – which is ‘resolved’ with his feelings of shame and by eventually marrying her. The toxic subtext of this ‘comedy’ is acutely disturbing. Marriage may be presented as a ‘solution’ to the rape of an unbetrothed virgin in the Hebrew Bible, too (Deut 22:28-29), but from my own perspective it appears as nothing other than a prolongation and legitimization of sexual violence.

⁴³ McKay points out that ‘eunuch’ can refer to a male castrated before puberty, who is sterile and incapable of sexual arousal, or to a male castrated later in life and, while sterile, capable of sexual congress. McKay is correct that whichever we choose may affect our interpretation of Potiphar’s relationship with his wife (1999).

son's scheme Potiphar, who is the first to notice Joseph,⁴⁴ creates excellent conditions for Joseph to sire a child with his wife – both through his promotion of Joseph and through his apparently frequent absences from the household. Both Pirson and Heather McKay note that Joseph finds favour in Potiphar's sight (39:4). McKay is right to raise this point:

‘Interestingly, Esther is the only person other than Joseph of whom it is said she “found favour in his sight.” As we are quite clear what the phrase means when it is applied to Ahasuerus and Esther, why are we less certain of its meaning for Potiphar and Joseph?’⁴⁵

In other words why do we dismiss the idea that Potiphar, too, is attracted to Joseph? Pirson's argument goes as follows: he notes, first, that it is ‘remarkable’ that the biblical author ‘grants Potiphar's wife so much space to ventilate her grievances’, asking, ‘why does he do so?’ (2004:248). Next, he points out that Potiphar's wife makes the explicit accusation of Joseph's attempted rape *only* to the members of her household, stating that the Hebrew man came to insult (so the NRSV)⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Pirson notes further that Joseph's beauty comes into focus *before* Potiphar's wife is mentioned (2004: 251). Bach points out that in a retelling of the story in Testament of Joseph it is Potiphar's wife who sees and rescues Joseph (1993: 334).

⁴⁵ Esther makes a request in the form of a question, ‘if I have found favour in the king's eyes...’ (Esther 5:8; cf. very similar, 7:3). It is clear from 2:17 that Esther's beauty has caught the king's eye, so that ‘[he] loved Esther more than all the other women; of all the virgins she won his favour and devotion...’ (NRSV). Esther was, apparently, admired ‘by all who saw her’ (Esther 2:15) and the king's ‘love’ is probably better understood as attraction or infatuation. It is not impossible that Potiphar was similarly struck or enamoured with Joseph. While not denying homoerotic possibilities, another explanation could be, as Kügler proposes, citing also Dan 1:4 (referring to the handsome men selected for the service of the king of Babylon) and 1 Sam 16:18 (where the good-looking David enters the service of Saul), that rulers did not wish to have anything other than good-looking servants about them (2017: 2). Physical beauty in the Hebrew Bible is admired in both females (such as, Sarah, Rachel, David's daughter Tamar, Abishag, or Esther) and males (Joseph, David, and Absalom) – though more frequently in females. On male beauty, see Kügler (2017), Macwilliam (2009) and Clines (1995). The latter proposes (1995: 212–43) that beauty is a key marker of biblical masculinity.

⁴⁶ The Hebrew verb here is from the root *ts-ch-q*, which is best known for the etymology of the personal name *Yitschaq*, Isaac (21:3, 6). This name is accounted for by Isaac's father Abraham's surreptitious amusement or disbelieving laughter, on being told his wife Sarah would bear a child in her advanced age (17:17-19). Sarah also laughs (derivatively?) and then denies doing so (18:12-15). Occurrences of the verb are confined almost entirely to Genesis (i.e. 11 of a total of 13 occurrences, 17:17, 18:12-15, 19:14,

them, by attempting to lie with her, but that she cried out with a loud voice, so that he fled, leaving his garment behind (39:14-15). In her words to Potiphar, she says, instead, that the Hebrew slave whom he brought into their midst came in to her⁴⁷ to insult her but that when she raised her voice and cried out, he left his garment beside her and fled outside. Pirson proposes that, like the preceding chapter, where Tamar devises a clever and daring plot to conceive a child with Judah, this chapter is about a clever scheme to facilitate an offspring – this time, for Potiphar. As Potiphar is a eunuch, Joseph, like other (albeit female)

21:6-9, 26:8 and 39:14 & 17). The verb appears, as a participle, to describe an action of Ishmael's (21:9), of which Sarah disapproves so vehemently that she orders the eviction of Hagar and Ishmael. Ishmael's action is often translated as 'playing' (NRSV) but literally means 'Isaac-ing': is Ishmael imitating Isaac, or behaving in a manner Sarah considers appropriate only of her own child, as opposed to her slave's son, who is, however, Abraham's first-born and thereby a potential rival? The verb appears again in the third of three occurrences of the wife-swap tale, where a local ruler is told that a patriarch's wife is his sister (see Gen 12, 20 & 26). In Gen 26 it is Isaac who tells Abimelech that Rebekah is his sister. But Abimelech observes Isaac doing something to Rebekah that leads him to conclude that Rebekah is not Isaac's sister but his wife (26:8). Again the verb describing Isaac's action (this time an imperfect) is from the root *ts-ch-q* and this time NRSV translates 'fondling'. The verb, consequently, is variously translated 'to laugh, mock, insult, play, fondle, joke'. Given the occurrence in 39:14 & v.17, where it clearly pertains to unwanted sexual advances, the suggestion has been made by Scholz that Isaac's sexual act with Rebekah is also 'less playful' and rather more 'rape-prone' (2010: 91). Moreover, Ishmael's action towards Isaac could also have been one of sexualized humiliation, which might account for Sarah's seemingly spontaneous and harsh demand for Hagar and Ishmael's expulsion. At 19:14 the verb applies to Lot's sons-in-law who believe Lot to be 'jesting' (NRSV) when he urges them to leave Sodom immediately. In two other occurrences, outside of Genesis, the verb appears to describe reveling (NRSV, *ad loc* Exod 32.6) and entertainment that is designed to humiliate (Judg 16:25). Kalmanofsky discusses another Hebrew verb, *y-n-h* [*sic* – to read, '-n-h], sometimes translated 'rape' and also used in the Samson story. She cites Scholz to suggest that this verb, too, is used in a deliberately ambiguous way to suggest that Samson is emasculated through Delilah and the Philistines' attempted rape (vv. 5, 6, & 19). For her Samson being forced to 'play' or 'perform' for the Philistines (vv. 25, 27) further accentuates sexual subtexts (2017: 11, n.9). The nuance of the verb *ts-ch-q* in its various occurrences is tricky. Sometimes, though not always, it incorporates sexual overtones, including sexually threatening ones.

⁴⁷ Pirson points out that the expression 'to come in to' (39:17) echoes other descriptions of sexual intercourse, e.g. of Judah and Tamar (38:18), Abraham and Hagar (16:4), Jacob and Leah (29:23), Rachel (29:30) and Bilhah (30:4) (2004: 257 & n.32). Most of these instances of sex transpire in conception.

servants before him (namely Hagar and Bilhah) is expected to stand in for someone who is believed to be infertile. Pirson argues that Potiphar, who is first to appreciate Joseph's good looks, the one who purchases him and the one to entrust him with the running of his household (39:4) with virtually no restrictions,⁴⁸ is an active participant in the fertility scheme (2004:253, 256). Pirson also draws attention to the differences between the two statements Potiphar's wife makes. Talking to the household members, Joseph is the 'Hebrew *man*'; talking to Potiphar, he is the 'Hebrew *slave*';⁴⁹ talking to the household members she accuses Joseph of having come to 'insult *us*'; talking to Potiphar, Joseph has come to 'insult *me*'. The detail about Joseph's attempt to lie with her is included only in the words to the household members. Pirson's argument is that Potiphar's wife – following the failure of her plan to use Joseph for sex and conception – devises a way to save face before her household members: by accusing Joseph of attempted rape and retaining his garment as proof (2004:258-259). According to Pirson, Potiphar was in on the plan, and this is why Potiphar's wife expresses her annoyance at Joseph not 'doing his job' – but she does not accuse Joseph of attempting to lie with her in her words to her husband (2004:259). Potiphar, who had created an excellent setting for Joseph to impregnate his wife, is angry (39:19). Joseph's imprisonment – rather than the death penalty, which, so Pirson, would have been appropriate for attempted adultery – is the punishment. Pirson's interpretation is possible because this biblical story – like many other stories of the Bible – contains gaps

⁴⁸ According to 39:6 the one matter not in Joseph's charge is Potiphar's food (cf. 43:32, where the notion of Hebrews and Egyptians eating together is designated an abomination to Egyptians). Joseph himself identifies the sole restriction on his life and activities in Potiphar's house to concern sexual access to his master's wife (39:9). Joseph identifies adultery as a great wickedness and sin against God (39:9). Presumably, because food and sex are frequently associated in the Hebrew Bible (notably, in Song of Songs), as is fully expounded by Stone (2005), rabbinical (see Gen. Rabbah 86:6) and modern commentators alike have argued that the two restrictions (pertaining to Potiphar's food and wife) are one and the same. Hamilton adds that at Exod 2:20-21 Jethro's invitation to Moses to eat bread is followed by marriage to one of his daughters, with food and sex (in marriage) again being associated (1995:461).

⁴⁹ For McKinlay this change accentuates Potiphar's wife's clever use of language. Hence, the word 'slave' (or 'servant') adds also betrayal of his master's trust to the charge of sexual exploitation (1995:74).

and ambiguities that allow for a variety of ways to fill these gaps (McKay 1999).

David T. Adamo: Redeeming Potiphar's Wife for Africa

Alongside Pirson, there are other defenders of Potiphar's wife. For David Adamo, for instance, the end justifies the means. While he does concede that Potiphar's wife's actions constitute 'misbehaviour', even 'a total lie', he points out that the final upshot is blessing (2013). Events lead to redemption; prison leads to an opportunity to interpret dreams and to Joseph's rise in Pharaoh's court; the Hebrews are brought to Egypt and people are saved from famine. Adamo also exonerates Potiphar's wife on the grounds that she 'like any normal human being' has 'great desire for children'. The use of 'normal' (as so often) is problematic: is it *not* normal *not* to want children, for instance? Adamo also excuses Potiphar's wife because she has 'a handsome young man in her house and a misunderstood personal vision' – plus, in both Israelite and Egyptian culture, he asserts, 'a slave girl is automatically sexually available to her master': so, by implication, why should not Joseph be available to his mistress? (2013) Again, this is problematic. Is assault now Joseph's fault, because he is handsome? Is something acceptable just because it is a custom?

Adamo's ultimate agenda becomes clear when he admits to his 'effort to identify the presence of Africa and Africans in the biblical period' (2013). Adamo's contribution in this respect has been a very significant one (cf. Adamo 2001). He is indeed correct that the presence and contribution of Africa and Africans in the Bible has often been played down or ignored, and he is right that pointing out Africa and Africans in the Bible illustrates that Christianity is not a foreign religion but an African religion also. I also agree that contributions of African heritage and identity have been 'denied or unrecognised as a result of outright prejudice and ignorance' (2013). I am less sure, however, of his claim that 'the recognition of the African heritage of Potiphar's wife is not only gratifying but promotes African heritage and identity' (2013). Might Gen 39 not instead promote prejudices *against* Africans and anyone else labeled not-Hebrew and therefore 'foreign' for that matter (cf. Felder *op cit.*)? Such prejudices label anyone 'other' as deficient but especially foreign *women* as sexually uncontrolled, carnal, deceitful, not-of-God, nasty and vengeful. Indeed, othered women, African women, women of colour more generally, have suffered disproportionately from just such prejudice and ste-

reotyping. Hence, such stereotyping has justified the brutal treatment of black slave women in antebellum North America, for example, because they were typecast as bodily, carnal and more animal than human, therewith mitigating and justifying both widespread sexual and corporal abuse (Edwards 2018). While I sympathize with and applaud Adamo's purpose of drawing attention to Africa and Africans in the Hebrew Bible, I do not consider his attempt to liberate and celebrate Potiphar's wife successful. Instead, in line with Felder, I regard the story of Gen 39 to promote damaging prejudices and ethnic hierarchies detrimental to women labeled 'foreign', which includes Egyptian (that is, African) women.

Select Feminist Interpretations of Potiphar's Wife

There are other defenders of Potiphar's wife, notably, a number of feminist interpreters. One is Alice Bach who uses post-biblical texts 'to fill some of the gaps of the biblical story' and thereby 'to free the reader from the patriarchal codes that have controlled traditional readings' (1993:319). As part of her endeavour, Bach gives the name Mut-em-enet to Potiphar's wife, which confers a modicum of individuality. Bach also points out what she considers the injustice and double standard of praising Abigail in the David story (1 Sam 25), while vilifying Mut-em-enet. Both women have obstacle husbands – Nabal and Potiphar – who are in the way of a match with a more desirable man – David or Joseph.⁵⁰ But due not least to patriarchal ideology, Abigail's pursuit of David is deemed proper and Mut-em-enet's improper.

Heather McKay also names Potiphar's wife – calling her Rahpitop ('Potiphar' backwards), which, she points out, also happens to be a plausible Egyptian name. McKay also does not depict Rahpitop as evil villain but – rather like Adamo in some ways – as an ordinary woman, no worse, if also no better, than others.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Before we claim that Potiphar's wife is 'obviously' horrid and Abigail not, it is worth pointing out that Nabal's sudden death is (almost suspiciously) convenient. Halpern (2001: 77) speculates whether Abigail murdered Nabal and considers evidence of such a deed to be only thinly veiled in the text. Abigail was the last to see Nabal alive, he died suddenly in reaction to Abigail's words, and she stood to benefit from his death (being now free to marry David) (1 Sam 25:36-38).

⁵¹ In this highly imaginative analysis, McKay interprets the story through two different lenses: first, that of the dynamics of the management of a small hotel, or similar estab-

Judith McKinlay's feminist, gender-sensitive reading, meanwhile, demonstrates that our interpretation of Gen 39 is affected by other texts we read in and outside of the Bible. As she points out, no biblical text is read in what she calls 'solitary confinement'.⁵² Because none of us live in a vacuum, when we pick up a Bible, whether we are conscious of it or not, we read its texts with an awareness that it is 'Scripture' – that is normative to oneself or to others in terms of faith and belief. McKinlay also points out the way the story prejudices us towards Potiphar's wife. She is a non-Hebrew in a text that favours Hebrews as the people of God; she is a woman in a patriarchal world and she sets the obstacle for Joseph, the Hebrew hero, who is singled out by YHWH. Moreover, she endangers two men: if sex had occurred, Potiphar would have been cuckolded, and Joseph would have fallen from God's favour. She is also a woman who abuses her power. Read differently – which we are not encouraged to do by the story – this could also, McKinlay suggests, be a story of a woman 'refusing to be a possession and taking upon herself the role of subject' (1995:73). Like Adamo, McKinlay, argues that Potiphar's wife could be seen as 'an agent of transformation' bringing long-term betterment for Joseph and for Israel (1995:74) – but McKinlay also raises questions that Adamo does not raise. Does not this story, McKinlay asks, 'reinforce certain assumptions and stereotypes' (1995:74)? And further, is not the reader at risk of going along with these? McKinlay does not resolve or answer the second of these questions – but it is one I will return to shortly.

For all these alternative readings – by Pirson, Adamo, Bach, McKay and McKinlay – negative evaluations of Potiphar's wife predominate. And, given the face-value reading of the text, this is legitimate. After all, Potiphar's wife abuses her power, demands sex with the crass command 'lie with me!' and pesters Joseph day in, day out. When Joseph refuses and

ishment (therewith seeking to approximate the running of Potiphar's large household) and secondly, that of social anthropological explorations of aggression and violence, particularly low-level domestic violence. The effect is of turning the 'pasteboard figures' into psychologically plausible, life-like, three-dimensional figures.

⁵² McKinlay reads Potiphar's wife in relationship with other biblical women – Sarah, Rachel, Eve, Ruth, the temptress of Proverbs, Susanna – to make connections with and attempt to illuminate Potiphar's wife in a number of ways. In doing so she demonstrates convincingly that any biblical text is never just a story in isolation and also that biblical texts carry ideological subtexts.

escapes her demands, she becomes angry and lies about him, sending Joseph to prison on false charges.

Moving Towards the Present

Potiphar's Wife Imagined

All kinds of things are said or implied about Potiphar's wife in both scholarly interpretations and in the story's reception or afterlives, in retellings or in art – including that she is a beautiful, beguiling woman and a deceitful evil temptress. Some of this is reminiscent of the trope and public understanding of Eve⁵³ or Delilah (Blyth 2017) – even though Eve is nowhere in Gen 2–3 described as beautiful, or evil, or a temptress and Delilah in Judg 16 is hardly deceitful. Like Eve, Delilah and also Jezebel, Potiphar's wife is, without much more legitimacy, eroticized in art and popular culture.⁵⁴ Nothing is said in the text about Potiphar's wife's beauty or desirability. Elsewhere, maybe, adulteresses are temptresses – notably in Proverbs 6–7,⁵⁵ where the adulteress who leads men to the chambers of death (Prov 7:27; cf. 5:5), first stalks her victims (Prov 6:26), decked out like a prostitute (Prov 7:10) and then seduces them with her 'smooth tongue' and words (Prov 6:24, 7:5; cf. 7:21 and 5:3) and her enticing eyelashes (Prov 6:25). While Potiphar's wife with her blunt and rather unsexy 'lie with me!' is hardly smooth-tongued – until she concocts the lies that sentence Joseph – she resembles the adulteress of Proverbs in that she chooses her moment when her husband is not at home (Prov 7:19; Gen 39:11) and seizes her victim (Prov 7:13; Gen 39:12). Perhaps she even has Egyptian linen like the adulteress (Prov 7:16) – but eroticism is mostly read into this story.

⁵³ McKinlay, too, suggests Eve as another 'conversation partner' for Potiphar's wife, explaining that woman characters of the Bible conjure up other woman characters. She asks, whether this might be a 'Genesis-type story of sin avoided, and unsuccessful temptation, with Joseph a second-chance Adam?' (1995: 78).

⁵⁴ McKay points out that 'what age and beauty we imagine for her' profoundly affects the way we interpret Potiphar's wife (1999).

⁵⁵ McKinlay also recognizes affinities between Potiphar's wife and the strange woman of Proverbs (1995: 76-78).

Reasons for the Story's Existence and Sustained Popularity

So, why is this story there? Is it, because it is true? Davidson finds the events recounted perfectly plausible, 'a recurring human situation, one version of the eternal triangle theme' (1979:233). Did it happen just as it is written? There is absolutely no independent or extra-biblical proof for this. As with so much in the Hebrew Bible, there is no shred of evidence for the existence of such revered figures as Abraham, Joseph or Moses. Even where David is concerned, with some archaeological inscriptions referring to 'the house of David' – notably the Tel Dan inscription – there is nothing verifying any of the detail of the many vivid biblical stories of David. Moreover, the events of Gen 39 are depicted as occurring in private – with only Potiphar's wife and Joseph present. But the story is attributed to neither and is told by a nameless, omniscient narrator. Indeed, no part of Genesis gives any clue as to its authorship or divine origin. The tradition of including Genesis in the Torah of Moses, or of the Torah of Moses having equivalence with what are now the first five books of the Bible, is much later than anything in Genesis.

So, maybe the story of Gen 39 is just a good story. It appears to be a variant of a story that circulated widely in the ancient and less ancient Near East, as well as beyond: a story about scorned women crying rape when they are rejected. It is true that there are numerous such stories, as is fully explored by Shalom Goldman (1998). Goldman illustrates that the topos of the handsome young man desired by a married woman who tries to seduce him, whose advances are rejected and who, enraged, turns to her husband and accuses the young man of rape, for him to be punished, vindicated and going on to rise through the ranks, is among the oldest recorded ones of folklore. There are Egyptian variants about Bata and Anpu ('The Tale of Two Brothers', e.g. Papyrus D'Orbiney) that predate the story of Joseph and there is the story of Bellerophon in the Iliad (Book VI).⁵⁶ Other stories are decidedly later than that of Gen 39, such as the Qur'an version (Sura 12) and the Sefer HaYashar where the woman is called Zuleika. All these stories testify to the popularity and versatility of the topos.

⁵⁶ The hero Bellerophon is desired by a royal woman called Anteia. When Bellerophon rejects her, she accuses him of attempted rape. First her husband and then her father is afraid to kill Bellerophon, because he has been a guest to them. Instead, Bellerophon is sent on an apparently impossible mission – which he, of course, achieves.

Wide circulation cannot affirm historicity. There are many other stories in wide circulation – such as of men slaying dragons and of daughters desiring and seducing their fathers. But we know that dragons – even dinosaurs – have not coexisted with humans. Clinical studies have also shown that daughters do not have erotic desires for or seduce their fathers – except in very rare and bizarre and pathological circumstances (Stiebert 2016:33–44). Instead, some such stories are widespread because they probe illicit fantasies or to work out anxieties.⁵⁷ It seems more likely that the topos is prevalent because of men’s anxieties of their wives desiring younger more handsome and more virile men (perhaps, because *they* find themselves desiring younger, beautiful men or women!) – and that such anxieties are way more prevalent than wives attempting to seduce young men and then making false rape allegations.

Genesis 39 Today

In antiquity the story of a scorned woman who exerts revenge through a false allegation of rape was compelling and popular. Due to the gaps and ambiguities in Gen 39 there are multiple possibilities of interpretation – as already demonstrated. But how might the story resonate today and how might the gaps and ambiguities be filled now?

My vantage point is the present-day UK. I consider my own context to qualify as a rape culture – that is, a context where sexual violence occurs and sexual violence is widely normalized and sometimes, such as in popular culture, even glamorized.⁵⁸ Toxic attitudes that promote rape myths – including the suggestion that women very often lie about being raped – are part of rape culture. Kathleen Daly makes the point that the designation ‘rape culture’ can be very wide, referring to rape itself, as well as to a continuum of other sexual violence, and also to ‘domination and exploitation in a diffuse and metaphorical sense’ (cited in Phillips

⁵⁷ J. Cheryl Exum (1993) makes such a case for the three Genesis stories where a patriarch passes his wife off as a sister (Gen 12, 20, 26). Again, this is unlikely to have been a commonplace occurrence but, as Exum argues convincingly, the stories do probe men’s fears and fantasies of their wives having sex with other men (cf. Scholz 2010: 93).

⁵⁸ The designation ‘rape culture’ originated within the feminist movement of the 1970s. For a clear introduction to the concept of ‘rape culture’, including its manifestations in popular culture, see Phillips (2017: 1–34). For a succinct popular source, see also Walton (2017).

2017:13). The designation, albeit with qualification from context to context,⁵⁹ is none the less helpful and observations from my setting are likely to have application for other contemporary rape culture contexts also.

Sexual violence in the Bible has received plenty of scholarly attention (e.g. Tribble 1984; Scholz 2010). The designation ‘rape culture’ has been applied to biblical texts before (e.g. Washington 1997; Kalmanofsky 2017). But rape culture readings of biblical texts, where an interpreter navigates between biblical texts and present-day contexts with a view to exploring the various ways in which rape culture, gender violence and religion intersect, are still new, with a just-published volume offering several examples (Blyth, Colgan and Edwards 2018). This paper offers an attempt to heed the volume editors’ call and begin a conversation about Gen 39 in my present context, which is still reeling from the impact of #MeToo. I also hope that it will provide fillips for reflection in other settings, including African settings.

First, the story might tell us that rape in antiquity as now was considered a serious crime.⁶⁰ After all, even attempt of rape is punished by imprisonment. Given the wider context of both the Hebrew Bible and my own setting, this claim needs to be adapted. The text confirms, rather, that *adultery* is considered a serious crime – a notion widely supported by Torah, the David story, prophetic metaphor, and Proverbs. What we understand as rape, the violation through sexual force of a person’s autonomy and integrity through disregard of their consent, is *not* either widely or explicitly condemned in the Hebrew Bible. Indications of this are multiple: the virgin women of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh are abducted by the men of Benjamin, because this is preferable to the tribe of Benjamin dying out, or to breaking an oath (Judg 21); Bathsheba is ‘taken’ by David and David is punished for adultery and the murder of Uriah – but not for rape; female captives in war (Deut 21:11) are not asked or wooed:

⁵⁹ To give an analogy, the word ‘democracy’ can apply to classical Athens and modern-day India, while again demanding qualification to account also for marked differences. The term is nevertheless useful for designating multiple social structures.

⁶⁰ That rape is considered a serious crime even in a rape culture context where arrest and conviction rates for rape are low and sexual violence mainstreamed is not a contradiction. The seriousness of the crime of rape is indicated, for instance, in that the maximum penalty for attempted rape in the UK is imprisonment for life (section 3/1 and 3/2 of the Sexual Offences Act 1985).

following a preparation ritual they are simply taken – that is raped – as part of the loot; female slaves are given to patriarchs to produce children – again, with no mention of consent. In all of these examples the victims are less empowered – because they are physically weaker, or classed lower in social terms.

It strikes me as valid to call the societies reflected in such texts rape cultures. The term, again, refers not only to rape itself, which takes place in all of these texts, but also to rape-supportive attitudes, such as the implication that the mass rape of women in Judg 21 offers a solution to a problem, or that David's later marriage to Bathsheba somehow makes amends. The application of 'rape culture' to biblical texts is not new. Harold C. Washington, uses it to argue that 'sexual assault is viewed as a manly act and women are regarded [in the Hebrew Bible] as intrinsically rapable' (1997: 252). Particularly if one accepts the Bible as a sacred and authoritative text it is important to be mindful of its toxic potential, such as its implications of rape being 'not so bad', particularly when the rape victim is not only a woman but also of lower rank (such as a captive or servant). This is particularly relevant because indications are that those more socially empowered (like Potiphar's wife in Gen 39) continue to be more widely believed than those who are not. Joachim Kügler (2017), among others, thus points out that even though there is a reversal here from the usual pattern, in that it is a *woman* who sexually harasses a *man* (see below), Gen 39 nevertheless demonstrates that sex and power are intimately entwined. The story confirms that sexual abuse is about abuse of power, be this physical or social power.

In England this is borne out by multiple scandals in multiple locations (of which Rotherham⁶¹ and Rochdale⁶² are among the most publicized), which all share in common long-term and highly-organized abuse of vulnerable girls and women. Contemporary statistics confirm what the

⁶¹ The Rotherham sexual abuse scandal was long-term and large-scale. Much of public attention has focused on ethnicity, because the majority of the abused girls were classified as 'white' and 'British', while the majority of convicted abusers were classified as 'Pakistani' or 'British Asian'. See, 'Rotherham child sexual exploitation scandal'. The case has also revealed that the situation is more complex than this and that there also exist/ed organized networks of abusers who were not Pakistani/British Asian and victims who were.

⁶² The scandal has (finally) received public attention and several sex offenders have been prosecuted ('Rochdale Grooming Scandal' 2018).

Bible, too, imparts: namely, that women are more vulnerable to rape than men and that disadvantaged women are most vulnerable of all. In the Hebrew Bible these disadvantaged women are rendered vulnerable on account of their social class, or ethnicity; in my context, too, Black Minority Ethnic (BME) women and disabled women – that is, women who are especially vulnerable on account of intersectional factors⁶³ – are disproportionately at risk of sexual violence, as well as less likely to report rape or receive a hearing in court.⁶⁴

Several commentators point out that there is a departure in Gen 39 from the usual gendering and directionality of rape discourses. More commonly male aggressors target females – the thugs of Judges 19 who gang rape the Levite’s wife, Amnon who rapes Tamar, David who sees, desires and takes Bathsheba, for instance. Perhaps this reversal accounts for those commentators and artists who have feminized Joseph.⁶⁵

Kügler, for instance, notes, ‘Im patriarchalen Symbolsystem bewirkt der sexuelle Übergriff der Herren-Frau eine „Entmännlichung“ Josefs und bringt ihn in die als „typisch weiblich“ definierte Situation bedrohter sexueller Integrität’ (2017).⁶⁶ Michael Carden, albeit with reference to Gen 37, goes even further, referring to Joseph as ‘a flaming young queen... [a] prettified affront to normative manhood’ (2006:53). Notable is that the aggressor – yes, unusually, a woman – is in a position of power over Joseph: she is Joseph’s master’s wife. While she may not be physically strong enough to overpower Joseph – as Amnon overpowers Tamar – she is like David and Amnon exploiting her social or class power.

In resisting her, Joseph, while socially inferior, is asserting his masculine autonomy: as Kügler puts it, ‘Er nimmt sich als Mann das Recht se-

⁶³ For examples of how and with what effect BME women are particularly discriminated against in the USA, as well as on intersectionality and discrimination, see Smith (2018).

⁶⁴ For support, see the statistical analysis of callers to Rape Crisis UK.

⁶⁵ Bach proposes that the verbal echo, with the same words of physical beauty applied first to Rebekah and then to Joseph, might serve to feminize the latter (1997: 47 n.13).

⁶⁶ My translation is as follows: ‘In the patriarchal symbolic system the sexual violation enacted by the master-wife effects the “demasculinization” of Joseph and brings him into the “typically feminine” sphere of threatened sexual integrity.’

xueller Selbstbestimmung, das ihm als Sklave eigentlich nicht zusteht' (2017).⁶⁷

Maybe this story highlights the important truth that males, too, can be victims of sexual abuse. Maybe this story demonstrates that women can also be aggressors, perpetrators of gendered violence and abuse. Both are valid. While reliable rape statistics are notoriously difficult to obtain, there is no doubt that boys and men are victims of rape.⁶⁸ While reported rapes of females are considerably higher than those of males, there is some evidence to suggest that males also report less often even than females. Recent revelations by former child actors and footballers and from the contexts of churches, children's homes, and sporting clubs (both in England and well beyond), have made clear that males as well as females have been victims of very widespread sexual abuse, again underlining the validity that our context, too, is a rape culture.

By far most often sexual abuse is perpetrated by men. By far most often females are victims not perpetrators of sexual violence. A recent publication by Laura Sjoberg, entitled *Women as Wartime Rapists: Beyond Sensation and Stereotyping* (2016) is at pains to point out how rare sexual abuse by women is – but also that it does exist. Citing examples from Ilse Koch at Buchenwald to women as rape facilitators and rapists during the Rwandan genocide and wars of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Serbia and very recently in the context of ISIS, Sjoberg investigates this relatively rare phenomenon – which is not less dreadful for being rare. She also points out, however, that the victims of these women rapists are also most often *female* – not, as in the Joseph story, male.

So, there is something else (alongside the prejudices pertaining particularly to foreign women) that worries me in my contemporary context about the story of Potiphar's wife. And this brings me back to McKinlay's caution that we as readers need to be vigilant when reading Gen 39. There is no dispute that Potiphar's wife's behaviour is appalling: she is a privileged woman, the wife of a powerful man, who abuses her power over Joseph, a Hebrew slave, by commanding and pestering him for sex, seizing (or perhaps, groping) him and then accusing *him* of attempted rape and sending him to prison. As we have seen, the motif of the re-

⁶⁷ My translation is as follows: 'As a man he asserts his right of sexual self-determination, to which his slave status does not actually entitle him.'

⁶⁸ One source of statistics and support services is Rape Crisis UK.

jected, angry, vengeful and deceitful woman is not uncommon in folklore.

Unfortunately, too, the myth of false rape allegation being widespread persists, even in the absence of any indication that such is actually common. The myth that women regularly accuse men falsely of rape – because they were sexually rejected, because they did not find sex enjoyable, or because they regret sex – is common right up until present times and has been markedly ‘in the air’ throughout the revelations of the viral #MeToo campaign. The accusation that women are revising the past to jump on a new bandwagon is sadly common – such as the suggestion that actresses were happy to advance their careers through sex with powerful men and then to cry rape when this was expedient.⁶⁹ The effect of this is to downplay sexual assault, to downplay the often very powerful role of the men in these cases, and to ignore the much more self-evident fact that women in particular have been harassed and raped over a long expanse of time and with alarming frequency.

Are there examples of women who have falsely accused men of rape? Yes. Do such allegations harm innocently accused men? Absolutely.⁷⁰ Not long ago Jemma Beale became a hate figure in the British Press for making multiple false rape accusations, one of which led to the imprisonment of a man whose name was later cleared. In eerie reminiscence of the Joseph story, Mahad Cassim, one of the accused and falsely convicted men was of a minority ethnic group and imprisoned for over two years.⁷¹ The story of Jemma Beale created intense publicity in England and she was a target of the kind of hatefulness and vitriol usually reserved for child killers. Again – there is no dispute about Beale having acted despicably (although there were also some ameliorating circumstances in the case – Jemma Beale is highly likely to be acutely mentally

⁶⁹ This is the implication of Harvey Weinstein’s shrewd lawyer. See ‘Benjamin Brafman: “If a woman has sex to help her Hollywood career, that is not rape”’ (2018).

⁷⁰ A moving letter illustrates the profound and lasting damage (Anonymous 2014). There are also support groups for men who have been wrongly accused of sexual violence (e.g. Accused.me.uk).

⁷¹ Noam Shazah, another man against whom Beale made charges, which were also subsequently dropped, fled (Metropolitan Police 2017) – again, like Joseph. It is not unlikely that both Cassim and Shazah fled because they did not expect to stand a chance in court – possibly, in part due to explicit or implicit bias on account of ethnicity.

ill)⁷² – but the rarity of such cases needs to be kept in mind – especially alongside the great frequency of rape cases that are not reported, not brought before court, or which do not transpire in guilty verdicts even where evidence is quite strong.⁷³

Conclusion

The story of Potiphar's wife is a good story, with a clear-cut hero and villain, with elements of tension, titillation, and a happy resolution. Here Joseph's early prospering in Egypt is threatened by Potiphar's wife's interference, which creates a narrative complication. Joseph withstands harassment and ultimately rises to even greater heights while Potiphar's wife fades from the story. The good win out; the bad disappear. Even with a good story, though, it is important to be mindful of its implicit assumptions and of the ideologies it conveys. In the case of Gen 39, these ideologies pertain to prejudices regarding women and ethnicity. Moreover, the story perpetuates a rape myth that has not by any means gone away – namely, that women lie about being raped because they regret having sex with someone, or, as in this story, out of spite or for attention. When this does happen in contemporary times – such as in the case of Jemma Beale – media focus is disproportionate. The effect of this is that the rarity of false rape allegation is downplayed. The much likelier scenario for which there is considerably more evidence, that the majority of rape survivors do not report rape to the police – not least, because of fear of not being believed also receives very little attention.

The Hebrew Bible confirms much else that is still relevant today in terms of sexual violence: that rape is most often perpetrated by men against women, that men can also be victims of sexual abuse, that socially disadvantaged women are more vulnerable to rape than socially empowered women or men, that rape is a crime of abuse of power, that rape is sometimes downplayed and even normalized. Because the Bible remains a book of influence and authority it remains particularly im-

⁷² As Williams observes, 'no one turns their life into a construct of bogus victimhood for fun' (2017).

⁷³ For one of many articles calling out such discrepancy, see 'False rape allegations are rare – rape is not' (2017). For an independent fact-check, see 'False rape allegations: "serious, but rare"' (2013). According to one source, false rape allegation is pursued with particularly harsh rigour in the UK (Laville 2014).

portant to be alert to its toxic potential – especially in a context where harmful assumptions and ideologies continue to provide fertile ground.

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“Do not touch my anointed!” (Ps 105) – An Analysis of Sexual Violations in Zimbabwean Religious Movements

Clive Tendai Zimunya & Joyline Gwara

Summary

This paper investigates various cases of sexual ‘misconduct’ by men of the cloth that have surfaced in newspapers and social media platforms such as sexually abusing or raping a congregant. The paper argues that because of the immense influence and power that such charismatic individuals hold on their congregants and the perception that they get their powers and ordination from God, their followers usually turn a blind eye and perceive them not as the perpetrators, but rather as the victims of malicious individuals trying to get money from them, thus perpetuating a vicious cycle of sexual violations. The paper argues that a certain level of brainwashing is involved leading to the abuse of power by church leaders and the vulnerability of female congregants. The analysis underscores the need to recognise church leaders as humans and not as demi-gods which will go a long way in ensuring that sexual predators are kept in check.

Introduction

There is no greater influence in a believer’s life than that of the religious leader, and religious movements throughout history have demonstrated this point. Over nine hundred believers lost their lives in the suicidal deaths of people in Jonestown in Guyana in 1978 under the influence of their charismatic leader Jim Jones, who for years had been subjecting his people to mental and physical abuse (Bromley et al 2002:93). The power and influence that these charismatic leaders hold over congregants is so immense that practitioners do not even see the danger that the leader poses, even when one is in plain sight. Because of the economic and political problems that Zimbabwe is currently facing, many people have sought recourse in the new churches which preach the message of hope in the form of a promise of wealth or miraculous recovery from ill-health. Although it should be noted that such churches have given people a glimpse of hope for a better future (as evidenced by the ever-growing numbers of congregants by the Sundays), they have how-

ever brought with them a number of issues that need to be addressed. Apart from the fact that the bulk of the congregants, most of whom are people who are suffering the most in Zimbabwe, are coerced into making monetary sacrifices to the church in the name of ‘seeding,’ ‘tithing’ and so forth, there has emerged a new trend of sexual abuse within the new churches. The media is abounding with stories of women (both married and single) who have been sexually abused by the charismatic leaders in the name of ‘healing and deliverance.’ This paper investigates the nature of such abuses, the methods, mind-set and biblical verses that are used to coerce congregants into abuse. Those people who are brave enough to come out and speak against the abuses that go on in the church are demonised as money-mongers who are only out to tarnish the image of the charismatic preacher. To this end, the paper also seeks to outline the mind-set of the other congregants, who are quick to place blame on the abused rather than the abuser based on certain biblical verses. The methodology employed in this paper is participatory observation as the researchers have been to different churches trying to unearth patterns of thought that are similar to all charismatic leaders as revealed in the nature of their preaching, a philosophical analysis of reports that are readily available in various newspapers, both print and electronic, is also important in outlining clearly what this paper seeks to unearth.

Sexual misconduct in church

It is important at this juncture to outline what sexual misconduct in this context is supposed to mean. By sexual misconduct here is meant conduct that is of a sexual nature towards a congregant from a leader in the church, especially the main leader of the church (Crouch 2000:36). Such conduct can be in the form of a sexually oriented way of preaching about a specific individual in the church or sexual advances or requests for sexual favours towards a member of the church physically or in the form of word of mouth, over the phone, or through texting (on various social media platforms). An important feature of all these advances is that they are usually not welcome by the victim (Crouch 2000:36). Although such advances are not welcome, the victim may be cleverly coerced into submission through the inducement of fear or through the showering of gifts and other niceties of life.

Reports of such abuses in the church abound in today’s media. In 2003, a local prophet Madzibaba Nzira, the self-proclaimed leader of the Jo-

hanne Masowe WeChishanhu apostolic sect (JMC), was arrested on seven counts of rape and handed a thirty-two-year imprisonment term (www.pindula.co.zw). In his defence, Nzira claimed that he had not ‘raped’ the women in question but was just following the will of the ‘spirit’, which directed him to ‘heal’ the women in a sexual way (www.pindula.co.zw). He claimed that the arrest was an orchestration by his ‘enemies’ who had long been plotting his demise thereby abdicating all responsibility. It is not clear how many women suffered this type of abuse at Nzira’s shrine, but speculation is that these seven were just a tip of the iceberg. Amazingly, at Nzira’s trial, many women from his sect thronged up to support him through his trial, assaulting prison wardens, court officials and police officers in the process, creating havoc that was of an unprecedented extent (www.pindula.co.zw). It is alleged that the women in question were chanting something along the lines of ‘you cannot do this to our God’ (www.pindula.co.zw), which was a revelation of the enormous influence that Nzira had on his (especially female) congregants.

Another case in contemporary Zimbabwean history is that of Martin Gumbura, leader of RMG Independent End Time Message church, who was arrested in 2014. It is alleged that Gumbura coerced the most beautiful young female congregants into sexual relationships with him in exchange for school fees. On top of having eleven wives and thirty children, it is alleged that Gumbura raped four women and threatened to have evil spirits cast on them in the event that they refused or reported the assaults (www.nehandaradio.com). Gumbura was then handed down a fifty-year sentence which he is currently serving at a maximum prison in Zimbabwe. Again, surprisingly, female congregants from his church, as well as his eleven wives, were in full support of their leader, accusing the victims of planning to ruin Gumbura’s reputation. From these two cases a common trend can be noticed.

In another recent case, Prophetic Healing Deliverance Ministries (PHD) leader Prophet Walter Magaya is alleged to have had a sexual affair with a female congregant at his church, one Ms Petronella Donhodzo Mandaza (www.nehandaradio.com). Through some recorded telephone calls, it was confirmed that Magaya was having a sexual affair with the young lady, who was making demands of amounts of money as high as one hundred thousand dollars (www.nehandaradio.com), money which supposedly was to be paid to the girl from church coffers. Apart from that, Magaya was also arrested in 2016 for allegedly raping one of his female

congregants who happened to be a university student, though later the victim withdrew the charges in vague circumstances. More female congregants came out revealing their abuses from Magaya (www.nehandaradio.com). Unlike the previous two cases, Magaya was not tried or sent to prison for any of the sexual misconduct cases. However, just like we saw in the two cases involving Gumbura and Nzira, Magaya was quick to defend himself citing that the complainant (s) (including those who never sought to bring him to trial) were simply out to tarnish his name and/or extort money from him. Further, Magaya's congregants were in full support of him when they turned out in their numbers at the Harare Magistrate's Court singing chants of praise when he was offered bail. In their eyes, Magaya's 'enemies' had been put to shame and God had 'exposed' them.

In the fourth case to be considered, we find another self-proclaimed prophet Wilson Duncan Kwambana, founder of Mount Olives Church who was arrested in 2013 standing trial for rape charges. He is alleged to have raped a young lady in the Inyanga mountain area as well as many other female congregants. In an affidavit that Kwambana himself swore to, he admitted to having lured a young lady and raped her, deflowering her in the process, under the guise that it was the will of the Holy Spirit (www.nehandaradio.com). The victim alleged that Kwambana had 'prophesied' that she was endowed with spiritual gifts and that it was only through these sexual encounters with him that the spiritual gifts would manifest (www.nehandaradio.com). Amazingly, even the victim's boyfriend agreed that his girlfriend be abused this way, revealing the extent of the pastor's influence. Again, supporters of Kwambana all placed the blame on the complainant, accusing her of seeking only to destroy the image of the 'man of God.'

The last case to be considered is that of a United Kingdom based Zimbabwean pastor Dr Walter Masocha of the Agape for All Nations Ministries who was arrested in 2014 for allegedly sexually abusing his female parishioners, including a minor (www.thepatriot.co.zw). It is claimed that women flocked to his church, affectionately calling him 'daddy' (as a father figure), occasionally fighting to get hold of the preacher's sweat cloth or sitting on his lap (www.thepatriot.co.zw). However, in 2014 allegations of sexually abusing his congregants came to light and he was arrested. Some of his followers accused the victims of bringing their church and, especially, their pastor into disrepute (cf. www.thepatriot.co.zw).

We hear that pastor Valdeci Sobrino Picanto of Brazil (www.wn.com) claimed that he had the power to extract demons causing marital misfortune by using his anointed ‘manhood.’ The logic behind such a practice was that if the pastor has sexual intercourse with a woman, then when the pastor’s semen becomes anointing to the woman’s body and when the pastor removes his penis from the woman, then an extraction of demons occurs. So, it was meant to be doubly beneficial to the woman. Obviously, such an extraction exorcism cannot be performed on men but is cleverly designed specifically for women. It is claimed that many women fell victim to this ‘extraction’ until a disgruntlement erupted between the church leader and one of the women who then exposed the pastor’s shenanigans. Not surprisingly, some of the women that were tangled up in this orchestration were married women, who perhaps saw this as an opportunity to get their marital lives fixed.

A trend or pattern can be observed within these cases. There is some form of sexual misconduct on the part of the pastor or church leader which goes on undetected or ignored. When it comes out, either through the victims reporting or otherwise, the victim becomes the perpetrator in the eyes of other congregants and the perpetrator is viewed as some sort of persecuted martyr. It is important to investigate possible explanations on why and how this happens.

Human nature

Thomas Hobbes and other realist thinkers such as Machiavelli who hold a mechanistic view of the world suggested correctly that human beings were by their very nature selfish. Left to their own devices, human beings have a tendency of doing only that which is beneficial to them (Hutchinson 2009:14). Even actions that seem benevolent in nature ought to be viewed with suspicion since there could be other motivations behind such acts such as gain and glory. The world, such realist thinkers suggest, is like a state of nature where it is a survival, not of the fittest, but of the smartest. The cleverer one is, the higher their chances of survival. Without proper checks and balances, complete power and immunity from control can bring out the worst in human beings as evidenced by the Jonestown massacre mentioned earlier in this paper. Jim Jones was left unchecked to do what he wanted to his congregants, assuming a divine influence and power over them (Hutchinson 2009:14). In such a scenario, reason, which is supposed to warn that a psychopath is at the

helm of the group, is suspended and groupthink takes over, wherein people feel invulnerable and under the wise instruction of the man of God.

Groupthink occurs when group members surrender their critical and evaluative reasoning in order to align their beliefs with those of the group they belong to, in this case, the church and its leader. Groupthink can be perceived as a radical form of group conformity. Two major ideals can be observed in groupthink namely closed-mindedness and the pressure to agree. In this situation, group members tend to do risky things when they are with members of the group, things that they may not do when they are alone.

But some can argue that faith by its very nature is devoid of reason. Religious leaders long recognised that for faith to take hold of an individual then a certain level of brainwashing, coercion and threatening that ensure that reason is completely surrendered needs to be in place. We often hear modern preachers making prophecies that do not come true and explaining the non-occurrence of the prophecy on the lack of faith on the part of the congregant, but the following Sunday people still flock to the same church. Throughout many years preachers preach to their congregants that that specific year is their year of breakthrough from whatever will be problematic in their lives, but at the end of each ‘successive year’, the problem is still persistent. Some are even asked to give up on important medication in the name of faith with devastating consequences. In economically difficult times where unemployment is at its peak and people are struggling to make ends meet, we find charismatic preachers driving posh cars and sending their children to overseas schools while the congregants themselves make unbelievable tithes and offerings while they wallow in poverty. The question is, are such people not reasonable enough or where has their reason vanished to?

The problem lies in the misconceptions that congregants usually have towards their leaders. Instead of portraying themselves as fallible humans like the rest of us, the leaders give themselves an exalted status, akin to that of God. They portray themselves as personal messengers of God’s message, having a personal relationship with God. The example of prophet Sanyagore quickly comes to mind. This pastor made headlines after proclaiming that he had God’s mobile number and could communicate directly with God via phone. As Thomas Hobbes rightly pointed out, the more human beings are left to their own devices without any overarching guidelines to keep them in check, their worst comes to man-

ifest. The pastors are left with no mechanism of keeping them in check since they hold a 'supernatural' and Holy position in the eyes of their followers. But surely, this cannot be all there is to why people fall prey to sexual misconduct from the pastors themselves.

Another interesting fact that fuels sexual misconduct amongst the church leaders, especially in Zimbabwe and most sub-Saharan countries where such churches are thriving, is the economic factor, which has inadvertently affected women the most. According to Sarah Wedge (2013:17), women in Africa are bearing the heaviest brunt of economies that are not functioning properly for a variety of reasons. She explains that they are culturally expected to be married at a certain age, typically between eighteen to twenty-five years. After this age, the pressure on the women to get married becomes so intense both from friends and relatives, to such an extent that they begin to take active 'steps' in ensuring that this cultural expectation becomes a reality. Unfortunately, in a country like Zimbabwe where unemployment rates are very high, eligible men who could marry such women become scarce, since most eligible bachelors will be financially unstable to marry. This coupled with the fact that men are statistically fewer than women (<http://countrymeters.info/en/Zimbabwe>) leaves the sphere of potential marriage partners tightly squeezed.

Upon realising this reality, women of all ages become desperate to either find a marriage partner or keep one (if already married) since competition to have the married one is also very high. In fact, married men, who are often in their early to late thirties, would have become somewhat financially stable and able to provide for the women, making them prone targets to desperate single women who perceive them as potential marriage partners as well. Wedge explains that this is the reason why in these modern churches, women greatly outnumber men (2013:19). Either they are looking to find a partner in the church (since it is generally believed that men who go to church are more desirable marriage partners than those who do not) or looking for help from the 'man of God' to secure any other good marriage partner, or, in the case of married women, to help maintain their homes from potential desperate prowlers. This is why sermons where the preachers are talking about marriage or sexual issues are very popular with church goers since they reveal a sense of commonality of problems amongst the female congregants. The more the pastor assures them that their marital life will be blissful, the more the church gets more congregants.

This situation of desperation is a good recipe to make women vulnerable to sexual predators in the church. It is interesting to note that some modern-day preachers emphasise the need for a one-on-one prayer session with their female congregants (www.newsday.co.zw/2017/11/pastor-gets-60-years-preying-congregant/). It is not enough to get deliverance during church service, but more is needed. Some pastors schedule such meetings in their private offices, yet some hold such meetings in their homes (www.chronicle.co.zw/salvation-army-pastor-rapes-woman-19-in-church-office-hotel). Yet some insist that they meet their congregants at fancy hotels and lodges where the bill is typically on the congregant. It is in these one-on-one sessions that the women leave themselves vulnerable to being sexually abused. Apparently, such sessions seem to be exclusively for women (though men occasionally attend). One reason for this is that the women in question expose all their marital or relationship problems to the so called ‘man of God.’ Nothing is spared, since the pastors emphasise that for a thorough deliverance they should get all information, more or less like what happens when a person visits the doctor’s office and divulge everything so that a proper diagnosis can be made. In these private sessions, women divulge information such as the following:

- how they want to secure a good job or successfully complete their studies,
- how they are finding it difficult to find a marriage partner/boyfriend,
- how they want their husbands/boyfriend to be faithful,
- how they want their homes/relationships to be happy and/or exemplary,
- how they are being abused physically and emotionally by their spouses/partners,
- how they are being sex-starved by their husbands who do not come home,
- how their husbands ‘underperform’ in bed, and
- how they are not happy in their homes and all the other fallibilities that come with their husbands/partners that they want the man of God to fix.

According to Andrew Parsons (1997:23) the most dangerous information a person could ever share with anyone is information that points to their weaknesses making them vulnerable. He cites that this knowledge has since been used by politicians in manipulating both their followers and

their enemies alike. For instance, if a politician knows an incriminating secret of one of their followers, this gives the leader control over the follower since they can always threaten the follower by divulging such information. This ensures a high degree of allegiance to the leader on the part of the follower to the leader. In fact, it is believed that the more incriminating secrets political leaders know over their subordinates, the more the leader will have more power over them or become more authoritarian, since the followers would be afraid of having their secrets revealed if they decide to go against the leader.

On the other hand, if a politician knows their opposition's weaknesses, then they can manipulate these to their advantage, forcing the opposition to submit. This principle works so well in all spheres of life, including relationships, where many people have lost partners to their friends, since they would have told such friends all the problems they will be having (including problems of a sexual nature) with their partners which becomes dangerous knowledge in the friend's hands. The same goes for these church leaders. In the event that the pastor knows all the problems that the woman is having, especially if the problems are of a sexual nature, the woman automatically becomes vulnerable to the church leader. In an infamous letter claimed to have been written by King Leopold of Belgium in 1883, he advised church leaders (at this time missionaries going to Africa) to use confession sessions as mechanisms for collecting information necessary for control. Anecdotes of women who have been raped in such sessions abound and this is perhaps one of the explanations why, while some cases are more obvious.

In the cases that came earlier in this paper on Magaya, Gumbura, Kwambana, Nzira, Masocha and Picanto it can be seen that the pastors all turned out to be sexual predators who took advantage of women who had made themselves vulnerable by divulging some personal information or desperately seeking help of one sort or the other from the pastors. It should be noted, however, that it is not all cases that women make themselves vulnerable to the pastors. In some cases, the pastors are aggressive in their approaches when their initial advances get turned down by the cleverer female congregants. A case in question is that of Bright Ndebele, a pastor in a Bulawayo based Adventist church, who was alleged to have aggressively forced himself on a female lawyer who happened to be one of his congregants (www.bmetro.com). According to the report, the woman had been invited to the pastor's office to work on some food logistics for an impending church conference. After the meet-

ing, it is alleged that the pastor had requested a hug from the woman who turned him down. But the pastor would not have it that way and forcibly grabbed the woman by the waist pressing her against himself and grabbing her buttocks in the process (www.bmetro.com). The woman threatened to have the matter heard by the church elders, but the pastor is claimed to have bragged that they would not do anything to him since there were no witnesses.

The woman initially did not press any charges but after receiving sexually suggestive messages from the pastor, she decided to report the matter to church elders who supposedly turned a blind eye to the issue which enraged her into making reporting the matter to the police (www.bmetro.com). This case highlights a significant number of traits that can be observed. First, the pastor is clearly a sexual predator who does not seem to mind whether the woman is vulnerable or not. Second, the pastor is adamant that the matter would not go anywhere since he has the backing of the church which is most likely to believe his word rather than the congregant. Third, the church elders turn a blind eye to the abuse. And fourth, as was observed in all the other cases, the church members place blame on the woman rather than the perpetrator. This raises the important question, why? An answer to this is to be found in what can be called the ‘touch not my anointed’ philosophy.

Touch not my anointed philosophy

All the church leaders who have been implicated in the various sex scandals mentioned above had one common defence mechanism, that is, they have the backing of the church. They typically defend themselves by either placing the blame on the women in question; that the women are the ones who made sexual advances first (which is also a possibility), or by claiming that the women in question are out to extort money from them or to bring their names into disrepute, which they characterise as the work of the devil. The women themselves are characterised as workers of the devil, sent by the devil himself to bring the pastor (and his ministry) down. The women are also characterised as being in need of deliverance from this demonic spirit that has sent them on this endeavour. And, the pastors characterise themselves as being the ‘anointed’ few, specially chosen by God to lead others into salvation. The pastors claim that they have special powers to destroy such ‘enemies.’ A look at the Madzibaba Nzira example cited above reveals the women who went

to cheer him at his trial shouting that their 'God' should not be touched, alluding to the fact that the touch not my anointed philosophy was at play.

More often than not, the pastors use threats to that effect citing biblical situations where the children of God were spared from enemy harm by God himself when such enemies had tried. The women are characterised as the biblical Jezebel (in the book of 1 Kings 16-19) out to destroy the men of God's reputations. The touch not my anointed philosophy is taken from the Book of Psalms in the Bible, specifically Psalms 105:15 which reads "...touch not my anointed and bring them no harm."

This particular verse is interpreted by the pastors as meaning that no one should threaten or challenge their authority (since they get claim their anointing from God), even in situations where the pastors themselves are at fault. The original meaning of the text refers to all members of God's chosen people as anointed ones (Psalms 105:14) which effectively means that no one should harm any believer. The verse is used to silence potential opponents since it is claimed that there are unknown retributions that can come from God to the person who exposes the 'anointed.' Understood this way, the verse becomes a threatening tool to potential opponents of the pastors. It is this verse that the pastors cite when their sexual misconduct comes to light. Instead of them admitting to their misdeeds and interpreting the verse as referring to all members of the congregation as the 'anointed', they reinterpret the verse arguing that the victims are the ones who are attempting to 'touch' the man of God as the only one who is 'anointed.' This is reminiscent of the biblical narrative of Potiphar's wife in Gen 39. According to Johanna Stiebert (see her article in this volume), this narrative vilifies Potiphar's nameless wife for throwing herself at Joseph while painting a picture of Joseph as the hero or 'good guy' of the narrative. The story does not make an attempt at showing what role Joseph of Potiphar himself could have played in his wife's actions towards Joseph but only paints the men as YHWH's anointed while the woman is portrayed as a seductive evil temptress aimed at destroying YHWH's chosen people. This characterisation of Potiphar and Joseph as anointed while Potiphar's wife is portrayed as a villain can be observed in modern day Zimbabwean pastors who are involved in sexual abuse cases.

Not only are the victims deemed to be attracting retribution from God by exposing their leaders, those who support them are also thought of as attracting the same wrath. This explains why congregants usually rally

behind their pastors, rather than the abused victims to ensure that they avoid attracting God's wrath. This statement has become so famous amongst those preachers who happen to get away with it to such an extent that the victims are indeed seen as being cursed by God for exposing one of His own, as in the case of Magaya, who went scotch-free after his victim decided to withdraw charges. Perhaps the withdrawal was as a result of fearing God's wrath as explained herein. The dropping of charges was explained by the preacher as God's way of 'shaming' his detractors. Yet in reality the verse can be used by the victims against the perpetrators to accuse the predator and call divine punishment on him since the victims can be considered as God's anointed as alluded to in Psalms 105:14.

But a question could be posed: reason can clearly show that when a misdeed has been committed wrongdoers are to be held accountable, so why is this not so? The answer is to be found in a certain level of brainwashing that goes on in these modern churches. The self-proclaimed prophets are given such an exalted status such that grown men and women view their prophets as more important than their biological parents, if not their own lives. This exalted status, coupled with some miraculous performances in church by the prophet (performances that act as verification of their authority from God) contributes to the suspension of reason. Again, as Manyonganise (2016:273) also notes, the economic challenges that characterised the Zimbabwean landscape over the past decade also contributes to the brainwashing. Because people are seeking refuge from these economic challenges they make themselves susceptible to being misled by some individuals who promise them success. This makes them seem like they are willing to be brainwashed.

On top of this, the Zimbabwean congregants find themselves in a society that, like the narrative of Potiphar's wife, is predominantly patriarchal and looks down upon women. Such patriarchal thinking makes women vulnerable to powerful men in all spheres of life, be it in church, business or social life. These are fertile grounds for influencing or swaying the minds of such congregants in favour of their male pastors. Once reason is suspended this way, the prophet now indoctrinates his/her congregants into believing all that they say. Hence when the prophet is exposed as having done something wrong, the brainwashed congregants would rather place blame on the accuser rather than the accused.

But in the history of philosophy of Christian religion, we find church fathers such as St Augustine (354-430 AD), St Thomas Aquinas (1225-

1274 AD), and St Anselm (1033-1109 AD) arguing for believers to combine reason with faith, and not to have blind faith as we observe today. St Anselm, for example, is known for arguing for faith seeking understanding, which incorporates the importance of reason in a Christian’s faith. This goes to show that the brainwashing that is going on in today’s churches is specifically used by clever individuals who direct it at unsuspecting congregants who hold them with such high esteem. The Bible is especially instrumental to this cause. Certain verses are interpreted to suit what the pastor wants his congregants to believe. The original meaning of these texts is deliberately ignored or modified so that the congregants, most of whom are not familiar with contextual analysis of the texts themselves, would simply take what the pastor says as what the text actually means. Sexual predators are lurking in church because of such deliberate but subtle brainwashing that goes on, and the touch not my anointed philosophy as outlined earlier. As a warning, this paper advocates that modern day charismatic preachers should be viewed with the same level of caution as one would watch a tamed lion. Although the lion appears tame, it however remains a dangerous predator that can potentially cause serious harm. The same goes for the preachers, who may appear as harmless ‘men of God’ but nevertheless still remaining human, whose nature is greatly self-serving.

Conclusion

It was seen in the foregoing paper that in the world we live in today, several factors have left women in church vulnerable to some predatory individuals. Because of health-related, economic and social hardships, women flock to these new churches that offer the promise of healing and deliverance from all their problems. At the helm of such churches are the charismatic style male preachers and prophets whose brainwashing techniques leaves them vulnerable to sexual advances, some of which they cannot resist. When such sexual misdeeds come to light the pastors and their followers typically blame the victims, citing them as individuals sent by the devil to bring the prophet down. That being the case, it was seen that there is a need to preserve some reasoning discretions that can enable the congregants to view their leaders with some level of caution.

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Standing on the Side of Mrs Job

An African Cultural Hermeneutical Study

Mark S. Aidoo

Abstract

The complex nuances of justice for women in the Ghanaian Akan context bears similarities with Job's wife in the book of Job. A dialogue between such perspectives open up avenues for exploring cultural ways of affirming the worth of partners who are given very little recognition by their spouses using African Cultural Hermeneutics. While it is tempting to only look at the justice of God's relationship with Job, justice for Job's wife in relation to how the husband treats her also matters. The paper further draws on the setting of an Akan traditional court to show other legitimate cultural and scholarly ways of addressing justice and disconnectedness between Job and his wife in the book of Job.

Introduction

This paper aims at highlighting the complex notions of justice in the Ghanaian Akan cultural system that explores ways of affirming the worth of women who are given very little recognition by their husbands. The Akan generally comprises of various linguistic and cultural groups mostly in the southern part of Ghana stretching even beyond the borders of Ghana in the east and west to neighbouring countries yet shares similar dialects, sometimes intelligible across the groups. The Akan constitute about 40 percent of the entire population of Ghana. The major ethnic groups that make up the Akan include Ahafo, Akuapem, Akyem, Anyi, Asante, Assin, Bono, Kwahu, Mfantse, Sefwi, and Wassa. The paper draws from the experiences of Job's wife whose identity seems to be overlooked to offer other legitimate and scholarly ways of addressing the disconnectedness in the book of Job between Job and his wife using the Akan traditional court system. The book of Job undoubtedly narrates a dramatic story about "human relationships in the light of suffering" (Mbuvi 2010:762). It combines prose and poetry with heightened emotions to reveal the forms of family life, disputation lament, trial speeches, ironies in relationship, and curses from a sufferer. The story is in-

deed a masterpiece; beginning with a happy family, then moving to scenes of disasters, suffering, and ending with a happy family celebration. Such was the case between Mr and Mrs Job.

In the book of Job, the monologues and dialogues appear to interact with each other into a continuous drama, yet the plot leaves many gaps for the reader. One of such disconnected units is the relationship between Mr and Mrs Job in the opening prose section of the book (Chapters 1-2). As Katharine Low (2013:5) observes, the interaction between Job and his wife is a small part of the story yet raises many unanswered questions about motivations, meanings and messages. Low admits Job's response to the wife that she talks like one of the foolish women denies her a place in the community. Such gender stereotyping raises questions like what responses does the Akan society offer to husbands who deny their wives of their social identity in the course of maintaining their integrity and piety?

I approach these discussions using African Cultural Hermeneutics. This approach in biblical studies makes the social cultural context a subject of interpretation (Adamo 2001:7-10). It assumes that a cultural and contextual variable can enable the interpreter to arrive at some meaning in an obscure text. Meaning is influenced by cultural and ideological realities and not necessarily on the text in its historical context. It is also an interdisciplinary approach that uses culture to influence interpretation of the biblical text, and "a process of unceasing mutual redefinition in which cultural appropriations constantly reinvent the Bible, which in turn constantly impels new appropriation, and biblical scholars find themselves, in their professional capacity, haunting video stores, museums, and other sites of cultural production" (Exum 1998:35). In this sense, I use the Akan traditional court process as a cultural variable to examine the relationship between Mr and Mrs Job.

Akan Traditional Values of Family and Justice

The Akan family system thrives on communality similar to the African concept of Ubuntu, extolling the maxim, "I am because we are." Akan societies rely on the enduring customary systems that establish complimentary roles and principles for community living when seeking redress in families although it is influenced by postcolonial and postmodern systems. What affects one part of the body affects the whole body and what happens in one family affects other families. Inherent in such

systems is the traditional court for arbitration that ensures harmony. In marriage that is the bedrock of a family, critical situations that necessitate a call for redress may be when one's rights are violated yet the culprit does not make any effort to broker peace. In such matters, anyone including a complete outsider of a particular family may send a complaint to the elders for the case to be addressed. That is to say, the setting for seeking redress in the Akan traditional court of justice is an open one whereby anyone can raise charges or serve as an advocate for the other.

The family house is the primary context for seeking redress in marriages. The family head (*ebusuapanin*) or his representative presides in such matters when the elders of the family meet. Among the Akan, however, any elderly person with integrity may be called to sit as an arbiter or a panel member. In situations where the litigation seems to go beyond the family, the traditional governing authorities led by the chiefs and queen mothers may be petitioned to help resolve the problem. Yaw Adu-Gyamfi (2012:262) describes the role of the chief this way:

As head of the community, the chief is responsible for maintaining social order by dealing with antisocial acts within the community. To achieve this, he is a legislator and arbitrator. He settles disputes between his sub chiefs on matters of inheritance, succession, and land. Individuals and families also seek the chief's arbitration when necessary. In his role as arbitrator, the chief maintains a court, where he acts as the chief justice and members of his council sit as jurors.

Like the chief, the queen mother operates a court system where social and marital problems can be addressed. The queen mother also employs the services of the *okyeame*. Beverly Stoeltje (2003:5) succinctly affirms their judiciary role saying,

Paramount queen mothers also hear cases involving various kinds of domestic problems, not only those between a man and a woman, but those involving extended family members in a household or tenants in a house. These queen mothers, as well as those in the smaller towns (who are known as *obaa panin*), do not have a formal court, but they do have one or more linguists (*akyeame*) through whom litigants speak to the queen mother and who report her questions and directives back to the litigants. They may also have numerous other elders, relatives, or servants who attend the hearing of cases. No matter how small a queen mother's domain may be (neighborhood in a small city or a small village) or how important she may be, she has the authority to hear cases in her domain and pronounce the outcome, providing guidance and direction for the resolution of conflict in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

The above assertion points to the idea that the queen is supposed to be the judge and counselor of the community especially on family issues. She must be the beacon of hope for people who have challenges in their homes.

Undoubtedly, the traditional governance system in Africa has been under enormous challenges. As Alexander Kesse (2010:12) rightly observes, “During the second half of the 1940’s and much of the 1950’s, opposition against ‘traditional rulers’ within the late colonial societies was a widespread phenomenon. Everywhere in West Africa, chiefs came under attack.” The colonial masters in Africa were very suspicious of the chiefs so they did all they could to diffuse their authority and influence in society. The rise of democratic governments in Africa further affected the institution of chieftaincy in various ways. Some countries abolished the chieftaincy when they gained their independence. In Ghana, however, the chieftaincy institution continued to play an active role in the life of the people and that achievement has resulted in the preservation of a number of traditional customs. The *Cultural Policy Document of Ghana* (2004:6) upholds the institution of chieftaincy as “the kingpin of Ghanaian traditional culture (whose) contemporary relevance is generally recognised.”

Among the Akan, the chiefs and queen mothers sit with elders or councilors when adjudicating matters. The councilors are from the royal tribes and clans. Prominent among the team, however, is the traditional spokesperson called the *okyeame*, usually mistranslated as traditional linguist (Yankah 1995:1). The *okyeame* could either be a male or female; the males usually serve the kings and chiefs while the females serve the queens. Although the *okyeame* is an official of the royal court, s/he must not hail from a royal family. They are chosen among the ordinary citizens, for it is a taboo for a royal to serve as *okyeame*.

Kwesi Yankah (2005:1) describes the role of the *okyeame* as “the most crucial diplomatic and communicative position within traditional Ghanaian political hierarchies.” The *okyeame* serves as a chief consultant of the chief. He explains that “Being counselor and intermediary to the chief, he [or she] is responsible, among other things, for enhancing the rhetoric of the words the chief has spoken” (Yankah 2005:3). The *okyeame*’s role is reserved for persons with eloquence and knowledge who can serve the community as ritual leaders, legal experts, and mediators not only between persons but also between human beings and spiritual beings. The *okyeame* also plays a double function by serving as the

advocate for the citizens and people in times of need. No one may speak to the chief or a person in authority without directing it through an *okyeame*. It is the *okyeame* who serves as the link between the authorities and the ordinary people and vice versa (Aidoo 2018:102-105).

The dynamic position of the *okyeame* creates a situation where the *okyeame* can get closer to the people and attend to their daily issues in life. Where the *okyeame* suspects conflict, s/he can initiate a process for conflict resolution without being invited. Where the complainant notifies the *okyeame*, it must be forwarded to the chief or queen mother and a traditional court is empaneled. In this sense, the *okyeame* becomes the voice of the voiceless and an advocate for the downtrodden.

The Akan society recognizes the rights of individuals, as well as notions of human dignity and respect, and these rights are protected within the social order. However, it seems odd for an individual to press for the rights since such claims come with consequential appeals upon the claimant and always tend to distort the communitarian spirit of society (Gyekye 1996:156). It is helpful for one's rights to be diffused into the communal rights. The maxim *wo nyenko da nye wo da* (literally 'your neighbour's day is your own day') gives credence to the idea that one must not look for the downfall of the other. This is because the effect of any mishap on the neighbour also comes on all others. Anything that affects one's neighbour would necessarily require the other's support. Everyone, therefore, ought to be the brother or sister's keeper. Such an understanding usually makes victims choose to plead for the discontinuance of the litigation if that would bring harmony to the families and society.

When a need arises for councilors to meet to address a family problem, the *okyeame* has to call the meeting to order and declare the purpose of the gathering. Thereafter, the victim would be asked to speak first through the *okyeame* and the other party has the right to interrogate the complainant. After hearing both sides and their witnesses, the panel meets separately to discuss the issues to arrive at a consensus and judgment. The panel often says *yerekebisa aberewa* (literally meaning, "we are going to consult the old woman") when they want to meet separately to confer. The *aberewa* "old woman" motif is used figuratively to mean seeking for wisdom. The chief, although part of the panel, is not expected to join in the wisdom seeking conference.

After the wisdom seeking, the *okyeame* as the spokesperson pronounces the judgment on behalf of the councilors. The verdict reached after con-

sulting the *aberewa* cannot be challenged except by the chief or queen mother. Akan custom holds that protest against an *aberewa*'s verdict is unacceptable because it is regarded as an affront to the gods and ancestors. Yankah's (2005:180) point is worth noting that "whether or not his [or her] speech is an elaboration of another's, the *okyeame* acts on behalf of a realm that must not be defiled." All the opposing parties thereafter extend their appreciation to the panel and the one at fault will be expected to compensate the winner of the case.

In Akan, two words that translate the word justice are *atentenenee* and *per ye*. *Atentenenee* is a combination of two words: *aten* means "judge" and *tenenee* means "straight," "right". As such, inherent in justice is the ability to put something straight. Also, the words *per* means "equal" while *ye* means "do". Hence, *per ye* has to do with promoting equality. Justice is best served when social inequalities are arranged in such a way that things are put in the right perspective and the greatest benefit is accrued for the least advantaged of the society (cf Rawls 1971:302). Failure to seek fairness for an injured party, in Akan though, amounts to injustice.

Humanism and communitarianism are the overriding concern in justice. The Akan believes that the human being must be regarded as an object of moral concern (Gyekye 1996:67). Insults and acts that dehumanize a person are not acceptable. In the words of Fordjour (2016:3), "language must be used with circumspection because it has the tendency to cause havoc." Since a neighbour's issue is one's issue, the words one uses against another would not only injure the other but would turn to affect the one who uses it. H. M. Majeed (2014:99-112) cogently argues that among the Akan, moral ethic including justice is structured bearing in mind its consequential character. Everything comes with its consequence. Such a notion lies on the premise that one cannot say anything to the other and not suffer its consequence. Likewise, retributive justice is acceptable in the sense that good actions produce good consequences and bad actions produce bad consequences. Majeed (2014:105-107) further argues that such a consequential notion does not follow the formalist concept of justice of the Western world. It is also not utilitarian or libertarian *per se* but thrives on the intrinsic moral worth of the communitarian society.

Let us now look at the biblical narrative about Mr and Mrs Job from the Akan cultural tradition to highlight some of the spousal abuses. Such analysis will plunge us right into issues of advocacy.

Advocating for Mrs Job

Chapter 1 of the book of Job begins with the family of Job. The intuitive reader is given the opportunity to have some pre-knowledge about the relationship between Job and the household but not the wife. Mr Job is a man who desires that his children follow his example by maintaining a close and intimate relationship with God. After the festive days, Job would bring his seven sons and three daughters close to where he is, sanctify them and offer burnt sacrifices on their behalf (Job 1:4-5). The habitual act of Mr Job does not include his wife although she is part of the household. The silence about Job not offering sacrifices for the wife may be an authorial style but it is deafening. Did she offer her own sacrifices? Or was it because she did not sin to necessitate a sacrifice? It may not be out of place to conjecture that this silence is a deliberate plot to point to the kind of relationship between the couple. Mr Job was not concerned about his wife's relationship with God.

When the Satan, with God's permission, kills members of Job's household and destroys property in the first attack, the wife was spared. The Satan was to stretch out his hand and touch all that Job had, and Mrs Job is not a part of all Job has (1:11,12). In the second attack on Job, the Satan's aim was to strike Job's flesh and bones (2:5). David Shepherd (2008:90-91) draws on the Genesis tradition of marriage and presents a cogent argument to the effect that the Satan's attack on the flesh and bone of Job is an attack on Job's wife since she was Job's flesh and bone. Marriage, by implication, has made the two become one flesh (Gen 2:24). An attack on Job's flesh is an attack on Mrs Job's flesh. Shepherd (2008:92) tactfully notes that "the Satan's insistence on the destruction of Job's bone and his flesh is a reminder that Job's wife is in fact a crucial part of him, insofar as she is the part of him which is necessary for his securing of the future of his house." The story seems to portray that the wife is not a necessary part of Job's bone and flesh. Above all, Job does not consider his wife as a victim of the disaster. Hence, Job declares, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" (1:21a), to highlight the fact that he alone has lost everything.

Chapter 2 also begins with a scene in the heavenly realm where dialogue between God and the Satan ensues. The scene is portrayed as a form of a heavenly council that examines the integrity of human persons. After examining Job, God allows the Satan to inflict him once more. "So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord, and inflicted loathsome sores on Job from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head" (Job 2:7). Job si-

lently accepts his suffering but his unnamed wife breaks her silence to question Job's reaction. Her voice is heard only in her outcry to her husband: "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God and die" (2:9).

In the history of interpretation, Job's wife has suffered in various ways in the light of her words "curse God and die". Augustine calls her *diabolic adjutrix* and Calvin says she is *organum Satani*. For Dhrome (1984:19), she plays the role of Satan's agent and an intermediary between the Satan and Job. Norman Habel (1985:96) says, "She is clearly not a patient comforter who, like the friends, waits seven days before presenting her ideas." David Atkinson (1991:29) sees her as someone who is angry with what God is doing and got it all wrong by suggesting that Job gets his peace at any price. For Robert Alden (1995:67), Job's wife is a counselor who suggested that his husband does something to influence his own death. Ellen van Wolde (1995:204) and Francis Andersen (1974:93) claim Mrs Job was subtly used by the Satan as an agent to tempt her husband. Such descriptions isolate the wife from the afflictions; she is not a victim but an agent. One wonders why her feelings after losing ten children are not worth any consideration from the author and commentators.

Although Seow (2007:358-373) is quite sympathetic to Mrs Job when he points out various halo that depict her image positively as a calm, loving, and supportive wife, he concludes by saying that Job's wife is neither hero nor villain for her function in the book is rather a literary and theological one. Such paintings, in my view, also reveal Mrs Job's social identity. What words of comfort can a dear wife give a suffering husband? Can she continually say that all would be well? If Mrs Job's remark to Job to curse God has a theological function, can one see it as an imprecation against God like the psalmist? Brueggemann (1985:53-54) rightly justifies the harsh imprecatory language in scripture that what is said to Yahweh may be scandalous but still the speaker is committed to whatever must be said, and though the speech is unguarded it has an order and form of its own and the community can identify with it.

Katherine Low's view that Mrs Job's words serve as an important mechanism in a grand Christian scheme to portray Job as a model of piety (2013:5). Does uplifting Job's piety warrant demeaning Mrs Job? Was Mrs Job's advice really foolish? Considering the impact of the words of Mrs Job on Mr Job's life, empowering him to change from passivity to assertiveness, Job got it all wrong. F. Rachael Magdalene (2006:211) strongly objects to unsympathetic critics who claim that Job's wife is a

fool, that there was nothing good in her, or that she wanted Job dead. She argues that such comments are insensitive to women's reality at the time, and that the wife believed in the husband's integrity and innocence by her raising her question to Job (Magdalene 2006:213). In my view, for Mrs Job to find her voice in the midst of perceived betrayal and sidelining means a lot. She has risen above her sufferings making her express concern about the plight of Job. In fact, up to this point Job has not spoken a word to the wife but this does not prevent her from breaking the silence.

Mrs Job suffers abuse for responding to a problem arising out her marital bond that directly affects her. Mrs Job in response maintains her honor after going through all the emotional, psychological, and physical loss of children, wealth, as well as enduring the pain from a suffering husband. She accepts her husband's reaction of putting her to shame for taking the initiative of helping her husband to confront God. Atkinson (1991:28) makes a pertinent observation about the way some judge Mrs Job:

Or are we here simply seeing the wife's own misery? It is so hard to live near someone who is suffering and to be utterly unable to do anything. Our own frustration is often turned to irritation with the one who is in pain: we blame the suffering person for causing us such discomfort. Job's wife suggests that he is as one already dead: why not cut the remaining suffering short by cursing God and provoking him to strike Job down?

By implication, the wife of Job sees the problem of her husband and the family as her own problem. She cannot imagine herself deserting her husband in such a situation, but the painful sores and the eruptions of skin she sees on her husband is taking a toll on her.

Mrs Job's counsel and question, in the view of Job, draws her into the company of foolish women whose unethical behavior and speech bring about divine wrath. Job's accusation, "You speak as any foolish woman (הַנְּבִלֹת) may speak" (2:10), is very strong and bitter. S.R. Driver (1896:256), Robert Gordis (1978:31-52), J. Gerald Janzen (1985:56), and Alan Cooper (1979:234) explain that the word נְבִל is not in the context of intellectual ability but in religious and moral discernment. A similar reference is in the case of "A fool (נְבִל) says in his heart, "There is no God" (Ps 14:1).

Among the Akan, when a man insults the wife as *kwasia* "fool" it is taken lightly, but it is a taboo for the woman to say that to the man no mat-

ter what. Such inequality calls for rethinking. The maxim goes *yennse barima kwasia* (literally, “one cannot say to a man you fool”). Akan ethical values, however, frown on the use of offensive language especially vulgar, profane, and insulting words. It expects all to be decorous in the use of language. Although men may get away when they insult their wives, such a behaviour is not encouraged.

Job needs to understand that it is inappropriate to liken the wife to “foolish women.” Job’s insult quickly shuts her out with his reply by shaming her, likening her to foolish women. The Akan abhors anything that brings shame. The maxim goes, *fer na owu dze, fanyinam owu* (literally “between shame and death, death is preferable”). This means it is much better to choose death than to be put to shame. By shaming her, Job dehumanizes his wife. Job’s reply makes his wife to lose her voice for good. Loosing one’s voice and fading out of the drama can be likened to the end of a person. Lilian Klein (1995:188-189) observes that Mrs Job is “the only character in the entire book who speaks without verbalizing a process of reasoning.” In fact, she is not ready to argue with her husband, so she keeps quiet. Mrs Job’s return to silence certainly does inform the reader that she needs an advocate.

Allowing such a painful situation to go unnoticed amounts to injustice. Mrs Job needs a friend and an advocate. If the response of Mr Job that dehumanizes Mrs Job can go unchallenged, her silence must elicit the intervention of an advocate. She is truly an assertive woman who dares to show Job the right thing to do. Her assertiveness does in deed produce a kind of positive effect on Job. Later in the story, Job curses the day he was born (3:1-26) and struggles to maintain his integrity before his friends with a strong voice. He also attacks God as being unfair to him (6:4; 9:24; 10:8-14; 13:23; 16:7-14; 19:7-12; 29:2-26). It is the wife’s question that conceivably moved Job into speaking and made Job’s protestations against God possible. No wonder, God justified Job after all his protestations (42:8). Emily Gravett (2012:106-107), however, claims that her speech depicts her as some sort of frustrated woman and that she “may end up sounding like an impatient nag here – a wife who finds her husband’s integrity and faith ridiculous and wishes for him to do something about her troubles.” Job who says that his wife is speaking like a foolish woman turns around to confront God after all. Why should Mrs Job be silenced after all?

Elsewhere, Job complains that his wife has also deserted him saying, “my breath is repulsive to my wife” (19:17a). Perhaps, she could not bear

the shame of living with a man who lives in ashes, full of skin disease and pain. If Job dies, she will be free from enduring further stench from the sores. Perhaps she may even find another man who would protect her. As long as Job lives, she will have to face her shame and disgrace. This may lead her to lose her positive shame that Bruce Malina (2001:49) explains as sensitivity about one's own reputation and sensitivity to the opinion of others. Since in the Mediterranean world it is the woman who symbolizes the corporate aspect of corporate honor and shame, the man has a responsibility to protect both corporate honor and the woman (Malina 2001:53). Women are said to achieve honor through the positive value of shame that is "characterized by deference and submission to male authority, by docile and timorous behavior, by hiding nakedness, by sexual exclusiveness, and by modesty in attire and deportment." (Klein 1995:151). Perhaps, Mrs Job feels that above everything else, Mr Job is not in a position to protect her honour and that will lead to her shame. She therefore needs to bring a suggestion that will help her safeguard part of her honour. Such may be possible if Job dies.

Hartley (1988:83) observes that Job's affliction caused the alienation between him and the wife. Job concentrates on his own suffering to the disadvantage of the wife who is his partner. In fact, the alienation did not start after the affliction. It rather got worse when both suffered the loss. Job chose to blame the wife when she was blaming God. One may rather look at it as a situation where pain is regulating the passion of Job's wife, because her world has been shaped by the husband's calamity. Robert Alden (1994:66) may be sympathetically right in suggesting that readers should not be too hard on Job's wife. For him, an implication of Job's answer to the wife is that she was not supporting him in his time of tribulation. For Job, the suffering was *his* suffering. He was not looking for answers or strength to resist God who had brought that calamity upon him. Being sentimental and judgmental at that point in time is not an option Job expects. Such an attitude, in the mind of Job, is what foolish wives do, and Job is uncomfortable with that. He prefers to protest silently than to raise his voice against his suffering. He is not ready to listen to his wife's opinion. He fails to recognize that friendly advice is like medicine to the soul and a good advice from a friend is like perfume that brings joy to the heart (Proverbs 27:9). Again, a heartfelt advice heals brokenness with time. In fact, "Mrs Job suggests that an alternative course of action must be taken to lodge the objection to God's brutal deeds. Job's wife offers Job this alternative, she gives him the

option of dying proudly in resistance to the violence of God's law" (Magdalene 2006:238). Mrs Job needs commendation for offering an alternative.

The above analysis of a biblical narrative gives room for contextualization and application in the Akan society. It is apt to point out that advocacy for Mrs Job has far reaching implications for Akan families. The next section highlights the nature of justice suitable in Akan society and proposes what an advocate can do.

Promoting Justice for Mrs Job in Akan Society

Justice has various definitions because the context provides its meaning. It is a concept that has moral, religious, philosophical, and political origins (Coninck, Culp, and Taylor 2013:17). While justice is theologically founded in the being of God and closely tied to love, grace, deliverance and salvation (Mott 1996:557-558), socio-political analysts look at justice in the context of fairness and liberties (Rawls 1971:5-17). The prophet Amos explains that to do justice is to do that which promotes life (Amos 5:14-15). In this light, the object of justice is hope for the poor, oppressed and underprivileged.

Justice is a multidimensional quest that seeks to address issues of love, correction, compensation, conservation, distribution, redistribution, equity, equality, fairness, inclusion, civility, criminality, communality (Coninck, Culp, and Taylor 2013:17-18). It covers notions like doing what is good, being right in law, avoiding discrimination, and promoting redemption. As such, one can say that justice is a complex phenomenon. African worldview is essentially religiously oriented but subscribes to life in terms of doing what is right. As such, social concerns are contingent on religious convictions. An individual's concern is closely tied with the will of the gods for the common good of the community. That is to say, individual and social concerns must not be in conflict with religious demands; the latter shapes the former. The views of the supernatural thus shape social justice.

The survival of society is largely dependent on the health of the family (Riggs 1996:107). Marriage, the bedrock of the family, is a social institution where people freely enter into for the betterment of all parties, and yet not for one's own selfish gain. Sandra Seubert (2015:3) says that insisting on justice in the family becomes problematic because of the structure of society. In other words, the family system creates an obsta-

cle for justice. She argues that the nature of the family tends to overlook forms of injustice that some of its members suffer. It threatens the rights and well-being of some of its members. Children are not treated on the same level as parents, and women are not treated the same as men. According to Seubert (2015:8), if society seeks to give freedom to its members, then it must appreciate that freedom includes conditions of justice in the family. Familial relationships must challenge injustices that distort the harmony of society.

Social justice in traditional Africa is not based on a written code and does not operate on the principle of sameness or equality. That is to say, the same punishment may not be prescribed for the same crime – a crime is judged depending on who commits it, where it is committed, and how it affects the harmony of society particularly the gods. However, the consequential nature of justice means that if a part of the society suffers, all the society suffers. As such, traditional authorities need to be concerned about the use of deterrent justice to restore and promote social relationships, especially between men and women. Reconciliation and the restoration of social harmony are also the objects of judicial proceedings, and not retribution (Shorter 1977:47). Where there are claims to betterment of everyone and advocacy for all persons to be treated well, justice is said to be in place.

The open system of the Akan must enable advocates to stand up for dehumanized spouses. The Akan society must preserve the role of the *okyeame* and seek it to empower people to play such roles. It takes the advocate like the *okyeame* to interfere in situations where a family member feels dehumanized. In patriarchal societies like the Akan in Ghana, men stand in positions of authority and define the rules. Such societies are structured in a way that makes justice more often than not favour the men than the women. Where normative systems and tribal laws ignore or justify verbal abuse and domestic violence against women, what remains will be the prevalence of violence. Likewise, where men and women are treated differently and made to live in different worlds, social justice may remain a mirage. As such, there is the need for a reappraisal of indigenous customary laws and systems that promote injustice for the underprivileged and voiceless. There must be preferential options for women in traditional Akan society so that they can be treated equal to men. Dehumanized women stand in need of special protection. In this light, standing in for wives whose husbands verbally abuse them may be in the right direction.

Conclusion

Discourse on social justice cannot be separated from complex life situations and experiences of people. For the Akan, moral ethics drive the wheels of social justice and which are not written codes. Social justice is designed to promote relationship, reconciliation, and the well-being of all. As such it is acceptable to take a preferential option for the underprivileged. Standing on the side of those who suffer like Mrs Job because their husbands ignore them when there is disaster in the family matters. Job does not do her any good by choosing to be silent and choosing not to console the wife after the loss of her ten children. And when she protested to fight for her honour after he has been afflicted with sores, Mr Job silences her by remarking that she is speaking like one of the foolish women. Such actions and inactions of Mr Job towards the wife dehumanize people and must open doorways of justice. Being unsympathetic to the emotional and psychological feelings of Mrs Job is an act of injustice.

For social justice to be established, the role of the *okyeame* matters. People who suffer need social advocates from society. Where are those whose hearts yearn to see justice in their neighbour's family, desire to be the *okyeame*, social advocates, and councilors for victims of discrimination and abuse, and to volunteer as spokespersons for victims in the traditional courts to put things straight and promote equality? If Mr Job suffers physically, Mrs Job also suffers emotionally, psychologically, and socially. She cannot enjoy the hugs and sexual unions. The Akan society would consider Mrs Job as not-a-human being if she deserts her husband in the time of suffering. Overlooking the tragedy of a mother losing seven sons and three daughters in one day after nurturing all of them, can make one say that Mrs Job does not deserve empathy for she advises her husband to curse God and die. Job's concern was to protect his honour before God and not his wife. And when the wife protests, Job thinks that she is not supporting him in his time of distress. At best, Job must understand that for the wife to speak to him means she is supporting him and he has to reciprocate. The failure to accept that support amounts to injustice. And this calls for an advocate to speak for her as she cannot fight for her personal rights in Akan thought.

Taking a preferential option to advocate for Mrs Job is an acceptable task of liberation and a form of solidarity for social justice. It is a way to show positive feeling toward others, sympathizing with them and helping them for the sake of promoting a better society. Such is the essence of

community. Doing what is right for others is a critical demonstration of justice and addressing issues of social justice is a constitutive dimension of traditions of the Akan, and equally a critical task of Christian faith and mission.

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Gen
1:27

in the image of **GOD** created he him; male and female created he them
בצלם אלהים ברא אתו זכר ונקבה ברא אתם

Land Inheritance as ‘Justice’ for Women

Numbers 27:1-11 and its Import for Women’s Plight in Post-colonial South-Eastern Nigeria

Ucheawaji Godfrey Josiah

Abstract

The status of the woman in post-colonial South-Eastern Nigeria calls for a redress. As such, this work accentuates Yahweh’s perception of rights justice (ken) towards women in Num 27:1-11. It utilizes the literary/grammatical approach to studying the key words within the text. It submits that Zelophehad’s daughters understanding of their covenantal status in the society; coupled with their corporate efforts, devoid of violent confrontation served as a veritable weapon for sustaining their group’s hegemony. As a result, a promulgation, and execution of woman’s inheritance law which favoured them and other women in ancient Israel emerged. This work thus provides a useful tool for women’s rights interest groups against the new (colonial) form of male hegemony in South-Eastern Nigeria. It also becomes relevant to the discourse of women’s rights in Nigeria.

Keywords: *inheritance, justice, precolonial, colonial, postcolonial, South-Eastern Nigeria*

Introduction

Land and space occupied a vital position in the life of ancient Israelites, especially those in the era of the “conquest”¹ who were on transit to

¹ The 14th century Israelites, were mostly faced with the challenge of “conquering” space. However, these “landless” wanderers had opportunity of becoming land owners through “conquest”. See the work of Merrill, F. Unger, 1954, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 158-166. Again, in the light of written archaeological evidence relevant to the Israelite occupation of Canaan, scholars have posited that the process by which Israel gained possession of the land remains unclear. That is to say, some scholars are of the opinion that Israel gained access into the land through invasion, and others argue that it was through independent immigration and settlement, while some group hold that it was through gradual penetration in search of pasturage, See John H. Hayes and J. Maxwell Miller’s discussion

Canaan at about the fourteenth century B.C (Robertson, 1996: 79-108). Nevertheless, prior to the “conquest” as the narrator presents in Numbers 26, Yahweh had ordered the numbering of Israelite males from age twenty and above (26:1-2). This is in preparation for land distribution and inheritance, as Numbers 27 suggests. The opening verses of Numbers 27 reveal the attempt to excise the name of Zelophehad from among his clan in the apportioning of land. Also, this ploy is perhaps strategic for the exclusion of his five daughters from land inheritance, especially given the fact that their late father Zelophehad had no sons. Subtly, a different model other than patriarchy² is enforced. Although the Hebrew understanding is that God owns the land and as such dictates the rules of inheritance (Packer & Tenny, 1980: 393), the account of Numbers 36 on the five daughters of Zelophehad seems to reveal an attempt to prevent justice in spite of its enforcement by Yahweh especially in favour of a female group (Num 27:6-11). This attempt by the male group of Manasseh clan is perhaps a way to establish a hierarchical

on “the Israelite Occupation of Canaan” in *Israelite and Judean History*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977, Pp. 213-297; Either ways, the fourteenth century which characterized the exodus of the ancient Israelites from Egypt which climaxed in the entering of the land at least through the conquest of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-27).

- ² According to Carol Meyers (2012), the term “patriarchy” in reference to ancient Israel, typically assumes both male dominance of the household and male control of society-wide functions although rarely articulated. To her, ancient Israel was not patriarchal. She holds that such concept is an anthropological construct of the 19th to the early 20th centuries; in fact, a “Western, constructed concept and not a ‘social law’ or an immutable feature of all societies”. She claims that the fact is largely unknown to Biblical scholars. Patriarchy is a social system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. Some “patriarchal” societies like the South-Eastern region of Nigeria are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Nevertheless, Mimi Haddad’s “President’s Message” is highly enlightening regarding the created purpose of the woman by God. She holds that God’s remedy for Adam’s loneliness is Eve, whom he celebrates with the Hebrew word *ezer*, meaning a *strong help* or *rescuer*. She traces the meaning of the word *ezer* in Psalm 121:1-2, holding that it portrays God’s rescue of Israel and thus becomes a hermeneutical key which helps us understand Eve’s and woman’s created purpose. See also, Mimi Haddad (June 1, 2013), *Mutuality* (<http://web.a.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=cc21d32b-a627-4f80-a239-b5d33c3c953b%40sessionmgr4009>; Accessed Sept. 7, 2018). This position thus suggests that the Biblical model of relationship between the man and woman is not intended to be oppressive, although there are resonances of oppressive tendencies in some Biblical episodes like Num 27, 36.

hegemony of the male group of the clan which could be better understood in the light of heterarchical model³ as opposed to patriarchy.

It is interesting to note that in the account of Num 27:6-11, Yahweh affirms the rightness (Heb. *Ken*), or as it were, the appropriateness of the claim by the daughters of Zelophehad who challenged the excision of their father's name by their apparent exclusion from land inheritance. Observably, Yahweh never makes mention of inter/intra clan marriage nor did He refer to the jubilee code in the plains of Moab as recorded in Num 27:6-11 rather, He overruled the male group hegemony. However, in Num 36:1-13, the male leaders of the clan introduce the Levitical code on jubilee in relation to inter/intra clan marriages of Israelite women with reference to land distribution; a scheme which receives Moses' approval. This they propose as prerequisite and eligibility for any female with the quest for land inheritance. However, a cursory look at this episodes (Num 27:6-11 and 36:1-13), suggests a deviation from a status-quo (women inheritance of land as justice) established hitherto by Yahweh in Num 27:6 to a new position which restricted women from land inheritance as evident in Num 36:1-11. Although to an extent the above corpus validates a limited rights of Israelite women to inherit land (Ndekha,

³ This model is suggested by Carol Meyers as preferred to the commonly used model which views ancient Israel as a strictly patriarchal society in which men dominated women. In fact, she suggests that societal structure and gender hierarchy were much more complex hence her proposal of the term "heterarchical" model. She holds that there is no "single set vertical hierarchical relationships" but rather "multiple sources of power" that at times overlap and can outrank or be unranked depending on different situations. Simply put, heterarchy allows the existence of hierarchies but does not situate them all in a linear pattern. Rather it acknowledges that different power structures can exist simultaneously in any given society, with each structure having its own hierarchical arrangements that may cross-cut each other laterally. Accordingly, Meyers suggests that women's status and roles fit in with such a model, depending on the context(s). She maintains this position given the fact that at times a woman's role could be subservient to a man, while in others a woman could have a higher social rank, even if ad hoc, than that of a man (see, the account of Deborah in the book of Judges 4-5). Meyers strongly believes that the use of the heterarchical model provides a more complex and enriching understanding of gender relations in ancient Israel. In a nutshell, while Patriarchy may suggest a system of hierarchy, that is to say for instance, if A is above B and B is above C, then A is above C., in heterarchy, A is above B and B is above C and C as well is above A. Meyers however, does not infer gender equality of males and females. See, Carol Meyers' Chapter 10: "Gender and Society: Reconstructing Relationships, Rethinking Systems" (2012: 180–202). See also, Carol L. Meyers "Was Ancient Israel a Patriarchal Society?" *JBL* 133, no. 1 (2014): 8–27.

2014: 41), it also appears to be a breach of normative justice delivered by Yahweh in favour of a female group in the plains of Moab (Num 26:1-3; 27:6-11). It thus suggests that the quest for justice implies the presence of oppression, marginalization and social maladies (Davis, 1974: 28, 29). In other words, the call for justice especially by the brother-less daughters of Zelophehad in Num 27:1-4 is an indication of certain oppressive manifestation. Thus, the work focuses on the heterarchical trend encapsulated in Num 27 & 36 with the aim to redress the plight of the post-colonial South-Eastern Nigerian⁴ women as well articulated by Judith Van Allen in her 1972 article titled: “‘Sitting on a Man’: Colonialism and the Lost Political Institutions of Igbo Women”. She highlights how gradually, Igbo women’s “political power” which was based on the solidarity of women, as expressed in their own political institutions such as their market networks, their kinship groups, and their right to use strikes, boycotts and force to make their decisions take effect, became eroded as a result of colonialism. She buttresses the foregoing by adding that “the experience of Igbo women under British colonialism shows that Western influence can sometimes weaken or destroy women’s traditional autonomy and power without providing modern forms of autonomy or power in exchange” (Allen 1972: 165). Although Allen speaks of Igbo women’s political power in the pre-colonial era and its subsequent erosion during the colonial and post-colonial eras, her work becomes a rallying point for women solidarity in achieving a common purpose – a fact which resonates through Num 27:1-11. Given the forgoing, an ex-

⁴ The South-Eastern People of Nigeria are the Igbo ethnic group which constitutes 18% of Nigeria’s over 131 million population. The Igbo lived traditionally in semi-autonomous villages, which consisted of the scattered compounds of 75 or so patrikinsmen; related villages formed “village-groups” which came together for limited ritual and jural purposes. Villages commonly contained several hundred people; but size varied, and in the more densely populated areas there were “village-groups”. See the *National Geographic*, generated from <http://www.locgovt/law/foreign-news/article>, See also, Allen 1972. More to this, the experiences in Igbo land regarding women inheritance are quite dissimilar. This is so because the Ohafia people of the South-Eastern Nigeria operate a matrilineal system where females are regarded even above males. This is a form of female-group hegemony over the male which also characterizes the heterarchical model. For the matrilineal nature of Ohafia, See Omiko Awa & Gordi Udeajah, 2016. “Ndi Igbo: Girl-child and inheritance rites” <https://guardian.ng/art/ndi-igbo-girl-child-and-inheritance-rites/>.

ploration of some key words in the selected texts of Numbers 27 & 36 may be insightful. Hence, the literary/grammatical approach is utilized as a platform for the critical analysis of selected words related to land inheritance in the selected Old Testament texts in focus.

THE PLACE OF LAND IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Robertson Palmer (2000: 7-12) in addressing the theme of *land* under the Old Covenant holds that *land* began with Paradise theologically though its paradisiac nature was lost in the fall of humanity. He further posits that *land* belongs to the *Lord of the covenant*. In Leviticus 25:23, the *Lord of the covenant* declares “the land is mine, and you are strangers and my tenants.” He further states that “all the blessings flowing from the land come ultimately from the hand of the Lord.”

In relation to ancient Israel’s land, Walter Brueggemann (2002: xiii) shows the importance of land in the Bible, as well as its importance in contemporary society. He explores important theological trends that have an immense influence on, and practical implications for the study of land. He further asserts that “land entitlement leads to earth occupation.” Interestingly, he describes two modern day examples where the ongoing ideological force and cost of the claim of the “promised land” leads to violence. The first example concerns the territorial ambitions of the modern State of Israel that lead to unrestrained violence against the Palestinian people. The second is that the same ideology of entitlement has in a derivative way been used as a rationale for the colonization of other parts of the earth (including Africa).

Nevertheless, G. J. Volschenk (2001:180) emphasizes the interrelationship of God, land, people and the Torah. This important interrelationship is structured in a triangular manner. He categorically states that land is *the central theme* of biblical faith. Land is a way of organizing biblical faith. In other words, Biblical faith has to do with Yahweh, his people, his covenant, and his land. Hence, the Bible thus describes the relationship between God and Israel; Israel is a “landless” people whose whole history and life must be understood in terms of the hope for, and in response to the promise of land. Succinctly, Israel is the “landless” on the way to the Promised Land. As a landless people, yearning for land,

Israel is presented by means of several images, namely, sojourners, wanderers and exiles (Brueggemann 2002:5-8).

Interestingly, in Leviticus 25:23, we understand that although the land was given as a gift to Israel, it was still owned by God, so as divine landlord God retains authority over how it should be used. Hence, Israel's whole economic system is subject to God's critique. The gift of the land to live in and law to live by, are intrinsic to the way God shapes Israel to be a 'model' people. This important hermeneutical principle helps to unlock the relevance of the Old Testament for our own ethical construction in many areas, *including concerns relating to gender and land inheritance* since the land functioned as a moral and spiritual barometer in the Old Testament (Wright 2005: 38-41).

The Zelophehad's Daughters Episode in Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1-13 and Joshua 17:1-6

The dominant trend among scholars has been to see Numbers 27 as an earlier legal action and Numbers 36 as a later emendation to the legislation that resulted from the former (Crusemann 1996: 362; Moreso, Boniface-Malle 2006: 208 and Kizhakkeyil 2009: 415-16), see the legislation in Numbers 36 as simply an upgrade of the one in Chapter 27. It was as a result of necessity that the promulgation in chapter 36 arose. Either ways, the accounts call for an evaluation. Accordingly, Yael Shemesh (2007: 84-85), observes that the listing of the names of the five daughters of Zelophehad alongside the names of the Israelite males in Num 26:33; 27:1; 36:11 and Joshua 17:3 has a great implication given the biblical tendency to omit the names of women who are central to the plot. Given this background, a closer look at Num 26:1-2, reveals the fact that the particular census done by Moses and Eleazar, in the plains of Moab near Jordan, was meant for the new generation and was for the purpose of land inheritance (Num 26:53).

And as it were, Zelophehad was entitled to an inheritance among his family, but in Num 26:33, the narrator, introduces an intriguing story regarding Zelophehad, the son of Hopher. According to the narrative, Zelophehad was part of the generation of the Israelites who departed from Egypt under Moses' leadership, and died during the forty years in the wilderness (Num 27:3). He had no sons but five daughters: Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah, and Tirzah. As a result of his death, and in the absence of a male child from him, he had no successor except his five

daughters. The introductory part of Numbers 27 pictures a brave and intelligent attack by the daughters of Zelophehad on what a typical patriarchal society would call the 'status quo'- female exclusion from land inheritance. These daughters of Zelophehad question their outright exclusion from their father's inheritance given the prevailing circumstance of their father's death (Num 27:1-4). Interestingly, such bravery, receives a positive commendation from Yahweh who enforces justice, though, after Moses' consultation with him. Notice the words of Yahweh:

And the LORD spoke unto Moses, saying: The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shall surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father's brethren; and thou shall cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them (Num 27:6-7).

Yahweh's position above raises some assumption when considered in the light of Numbers 36. Whereas the daughters of Zelophehad were considered and declared by Yahweh as eligible to inherit their father's land (Num 27:6-11), the seeming denial, perhaps, borne out of personal sentiments by their family leaders in Num 36:2-13, suggests an attempt to pervert justice. This ploy becomes so evident especially amongst the male relatives of the Manassite clan to which Zelophehad belonged as they apparently approach Moses. Such trouble was engineered in their effort to disinherit the daughters of Zelophehad of their father's property through their policy of female exclusion from inheritance (Num 27:1-4) and by their imposition of specific marriage restrictions upon any women who inherit under this rights (Num 36:2-13) even after Yahweh had declared them entitled (Num 27:6-7).

The fear of these male leaders is evidently clear in their argument, for they thought that through these daughters of their brother, their family inheritance (land) would be ceded to another tribe by reason of their marriage to another clan (Num 36:3). Moreover, these leaders realize the provision of the jubilee code (Lev. 25:1-55) and become more apprehensive about what happens to their land after fifty years, if these women should be allowed the rights to inheritance and later get married outside their clan (Num 36:4). Notice that even Moses is swayed by their "logic" that he considers their position "right", and as well as "the commands of Yahweh" (Num 36:5, 6). In fact, adding that the command of Yahweh is that the daughters of Zelophehad marry whomever they think best, but with the clause that "they may marry only within the family ties of their father's tribe" (Num 36:6). Here we see the heterarchical tendency

emerging again. It is interesting however to understand the difference between the “rightness” of Yahweh’s verdict in favour of the daughters of Zelophehad and the “rightness” of the claim of their kinsmen. Observe, in Num 36:2 this male group acknowledge Yahweh’s verdict in favour of the female group of same Manasseh clan (Num 27:6-11). There appears to be a gap in the two accounts of the same verdict given by Yahweh which both accounts suggest was given in the plains of Moab by Jordan near Jericho (see, Num 26:63; 27:1-11; 36:13). In Yahweh’s verdict in the account of Numbers 27, there is no mention of inter/intra clan marriage; no allusion to jubilee. On the other hand, in Yahweh’s ruling in the narrative of Numbers 36, there is the mention of inter/intra clan marriage and allusion to jubilee and is credited to Yahweh as the arbiter who pronounced his verdict in the plains of Moab. In the former’s account, Moses consults with Yahweh (Num 27:5), and makes Yahweh’s verdict (of granting the five daughters of Zelophehad an inheritance alongside with their uncles), a statute of judgment (Num 27:11) although the author does not explicitly record whether or not Moses made the verdict known to the male group of Manasseh clan after consultation with Yahweh. However, in the latter’s narrative, Moses regards the concern of the male group as genuine even without consultation with Yahweh although the text appears as if the consultation was made earlier (Num 36:15), perhaps this could be the consultation he had with Yahweh in the plains of Moab (Num 27:5). If this be the case, Moses’ pronouncement in the name of Yahweh could be motivated by sympathy for the male group of the Manasseh clan, whose fear is the ceding of their inheritance to other clans should the five daughters of their brother, marry outside their clan. Their grouping to seek for redress from Moses is a portrayal of a male group solidarity to counter the female group hegemony earlier gained through the solidarity of the five daughters of their brother Zelophehad.

Nevertheless, the account of Joshua 17 records the insistence of this female group who remind Joshua and Eleazar the priest, of Yahweh’s verdict to apportion them their father’s inheritance. This, Joshua complies accordingly (Joshua 17:3-4). In this episode, the actual fulfillment of Yahweh’s injunction (Num 27:6-11) to mete out justice (inheritance) for the five, with no conditions attached, is recorded.

The forgoing reveals the extent of struggle for relevance (especially as it relates to land inheritance) between male group (elders of Manasseh clan) and the female group (daughters of Zelophehad) of ancient Israel.

The above illuminates the struggle between male groups and the female especially in the South-Eastern Nigeria during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Nevertheless, the subsequent section will take a critical look at few Hebrew words used in relation to this struggle in the ancient text as such will shade further light on the context.

Analysis of Some Key-Words in Numbers 27:4-7 & 36:4-5

Although *ken* (Num 27:7a) is used in Modern Hebrew for “yes,” it carries a deeper meaning in Biblical Hebrew. For instance, in Joshua 2:4 and Amos 5:14, the word *ken*⁵ is a particle used to indicate the affirmative and is also an indication that something is rightly expected, thereby conforming to some known or normal standard (see Judges 12:6).⁶ When used alongside the Hebrew *dibber* (word), as is the case in Num 27:7; 36:5, it carries the meaning of that which is in order or right. Moreover, within the covenant circle, particularly that between Yahweh and His people, in a world of uncertainty, *ken* epitomizes principles and moral values offered as an alternative way of living especially, according to justice and integrity (VanGemerem 1997: 664, 665). In other words, given the situation where fear of the unknown in every facet of life is the order of the day, having a covenant relationship with Yahweh becomes the essence for steadfastness and security, and such covenant requires the individual or group to live in accordance with justice and integrity. Some of the synonyms for *ken* are integrity, equity, honesty, uprightness, something that is right, just, honest, true, veritable, correct. It

⁵ Although in the KJV this particle adverb is not evident it is, however, obvious in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensis* (Hebrew Bible, Masoretic Text or Hebrew Old Testament), edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph of the Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, Stuttgart, Fourth Corrected Edition, Copyright © 1966, 1977, 1983, 1990 by Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft (German Bible Society), Stuttgart.

⁶ The war between the Gileadites and Ephraimites is such that the Gileadites devise a war strategy which involved the pronouncing the word *Shibboleth* which is the standard way of pronouncing. It happens that the Ephraimites rather than pronouncing the word in accordance with the word pattern, pronounced it as *Sibboleth*. The *ש* (shin) is replaced with *ס* (sin) by the Ephraimites. However, *ש* (shin) is the form, conforming to the normal standard of pronouncing the word *Shibboleth*. The inability of the Ephraimites in pronouncing the word accurately cost the lives of forty-two thousand of that tribe as recorded in Judges 12:1-7.

could also mean rightly, justly, aptly, something morally upright or honest and right (Holladay 2000: 160).

The Hebrew *ken* has its LXX equivalent *orthōs* carrying the idea of something pertaining to, or conforming closely to an accepted norm or standard, something that is done correctly as recorded in Luke 7:43⁷ or something done normally as found in Mark 7:35⁸ (Gingrich 1983: 141). Given the following, the word *ken* thus carries the idea of justice, a moral obligation. In this breath, the request for inheritance by the daughters of Zelophehad is adjudged nothing short of needed justice even in the face of male dominance. In the same vein, the justice declared in favour of the brother-less daughters of Zelophehad is not only needed for brother-less sisters in South-Eastern Nigeria region in the struggle for land inheritance but also for women's groups (like market women etc) in that region.

An important phrase also used Num 27:7b is *nathon thithen*. This phrase has two words of the same root: *nathon* – verb qal infinitive absolute. This is followed immediately by another verb of the same root: *thithen* – verb qal imperfect 2nd person masculine singular. When an infinitive absolute is placed before another form of the verb from the same root, it is to emphasize the kind of action in view. Therefore, the Hebrew infinitive absolute followed by the finite verb often implies “the absolute certainty of the action” (Meyers 1988:99), while the qal imperfect expresses an ongoing situation in the present (Futato 2003: n.pg). In this regard, Moses represents the highest court of justice, bequeathed with the obligation to execute Yahweh's verdict of justice in favour of the five daughters of Zelophehad. And the absolute certainty of this obligation is represented in the use of an infinitive absolute in conjunction with a qal imperfect- *nathon thithen*- giving, you (Moses) shall give – a divine directive being accentuated. The underlying point here is that Yahweh as the arbiter gives a mandate for justice through his mouthpiece, Moses and thus validates the action though projected into the future. This is a call for laws or statutes of equity in South-Eastern Nigeria.

⁷ The adverb ὀρθῶς used in the Greek text carries the idea of something correctly or rightly done or said. Jesus responded to Peter who gave a suiting answer to his question regarding the two debtors of whom the one forgiven was un-forgiving instead of reciprocating.

⁸ The text talks of the faith of the Syrophenician woman whose daughter was not normal but received healing and began to speak normally as it were.

Again, *w^ehā^abar^etha* as a phrase appears in the text (Num 27:7b) with the key word being *'ābar*. The word *'ābar* as used in the 'hiphil' form describes the movement of people or inanimate objects. In this verse however, *'ābar* being used in the hiphil form, serves as a causative of the qal, that is, the original form (root) of a Hebrew word. It is also used in a *declaratory* sense (Kelley 1992: 111). The word *'abar* has its LXX equivalent as *kataschesis* which carries the idea of "holding back, restraining, delay". It could also suggest "possession" or "taking into possession" (Acts 7:5; 45) (Gingrich 1983: 104). The main idea of this verb is that of movement, and as a rule it is the movement of one thing in relation to some other object which is stationary. Therefore, in this case, there is an order by Yahweh for the transfer (cause to move) of ownership rights to land inheritance to the daughters of Zelophehad, by the elders of the Manasseh clan. Here we see Yahweh's verdict not to restrain the female group from inheritance as a measure against the male group dominance as it were but then instituting the female group hegemony as the case may be. Perhaps Yahweh's declaration is borne out of the fact that this female group at that moment was marginalized. This also remains relevant in the struggle of marginalized and oppressed women in South-Eastern Nigeria.

In Num 27:7b another used is *'achuzzath* which is related to a common Semitic root of which the verb means "to grasp, seize, or take hold of." But its substantive form designates the property that is held or possessed. In the Old Testament, the noun occurs 66 times most commonly with the idea of land that belonged to or was promised to the patriarchs or the children of Israel as their place of abode. Throughout the Pentateuch and Joshua, the repeated idea is Yahweh's promise made to the ancestors of Israel with respect to the possession of land (VanGemenen 1997: 358-359). Etymologically as stated earlier, the word is related to the concept of "grasping, seizing or holding."

But in the Old Testament, the predominant ideology is that of Israel's possession of land which obviously is inseparable from the providential gift of Yahweh. Accordingly, the first reference to a possession of this kind is on the premise of God's covenantal promise of land. The reference to *'achuzzah* usually implies a gift of property from Yahweh (VanGemenen 1997: 359). In the niphil stem as it appears in Num 27:5, the verb usually means "to acquire property," thus overlapping with the noun *'achuzzah* – "possession." KJV and ASV consistently use "possession" but RSV occasionally renders "property." The majority of its sixty-

six uses pertain to the possession of land (the verb is so used only in the niphāl). The word is also used in conjunction with “inheritance” (*nachalah*) (Harris 1981: 64a). And it could as well mean *land possessed, one’s own land*, and especially as it is in Num 27:7; 32:32, it denotes a *possession by right of inheritance, inheritance* (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1907: 28). So as it relates to the focus of this paper, the daughters of Zelophehad were granted by Yahweh, the rights to inheritance of land alongside their uncles. This is useful in the struggle for rights in South-Eastern Nigeria where the women tend to have little or no rights in their father’s family.

As a follow up to the above, the word *nachalah* in Num 27:7b is a derivation with the meaning as *gift*. It also carries the idea of *portion, a share, property or inheritance* (Brown, Driver and Briggs 1907: 635). According to William Holladay (2000: 234), *nachalah* could mean “hereditary possession, heritage, acquired by individual or family by conquest or inheritance which includes both property (that is, land and buildings) and goods (movable items).” The word has its LXX equivalent as *klēronomia* with the idea of *inheritance* (Mk 12:7; Luke 12:13; 20:14), *possession property* (Acts 7:5; Hebr 11:8). It also denotes the idea of being an heir or a share of something (Eph 5:5) (Gingrich 1983: 109). Interestingly, Louis Ndekha, (2014: 39) observes that the Old Testament word for inheritance *nahalalah* is derived from the root *nāchal* which emphasizes “possession” generally rather than the process involved in it. Particularly, *nahalalah* is a specific allotment or entitlement, usually of land, that has continuity with the past, and ties with a sacred heritage (the Promised Land). In Joshua 17:3-4, the futuristic verdict of Yahweh, declaring the five daughters eligible to inherit property alongside their father’s brothers, fulfils. Hence, this becomes a rallying point of self-awareness for the South-Eastern women in the struggle for rights.

Lastly, the word *yiggāra’* which appears in Num 27:4 and 36:3,4 also appears in Exodus 5:8 *gara’* in the qal form in relation to the increment of bricks by the Jews under servitude in Egypt. Hence, it is used with the idea of not “diminishing” the quantity manufactured as a way of keeping the Israelite-slaves hardworking. It is used to signify evaporation as part of the rain cycle (VanGemeren 1997: 896). In Num 36:1-7 we observe that women were not allowed to marry outside their tribes if they were heirs to family property, in order to avoid diminishing or make a reduction (Exo 21:10; 5:8) in (*gara*) the tribe’s economic standing (Harris, 1981: 384a). In both Num 27:4 and 36:3, 4, *gara* is used in the niphāl

imperfect form. By this usage, in chapter 27, it is used in a frequentative sense, expressing repeated, habitual, or customary action (eg. and his name shall not be remembered again), while in chapter 36, it is used to express actions that are contingent upon other elements in the context (eg. so shall it be taken from the lot of our inheritance) (Futato, 2003: n.pg). The verb is used to indicate the total disappearance of a man's name from Israel (Num 27:4) as well as to indicate the reduction of inheritance of the fathers (VanGemeren 1997: 895). We see in the text that the daughters of Zelophehad gave the reason for suit in Num 27:4 to be the excision of their father's name thus giving their uncles an advantageous opportunity to promulgate a law restricting them through marriage within the clan perhaps to still retain their father's name as they claimed. The forgoing implies that although the five daughters unanimously use the male (father) sentiment to appeal to their uncle and thus gain their desired rights, they equally gave the opportunity to be exploited further through inter/intra clan marriage which restricts them to their clan if they were to inherit property. This possibly could serve as an insight for women's group in South-Eastern Nigeria in their struggle for rights.

The Woman in Pre-Colonial South-Eastern Nigeria

It has been revealed that during the pre-colonial era, there was a non-competitive relationship which engendered a cooperation of the male and female groups⁹. This is evident given the fact that there were both male and female monarchs in Igboland of the South-Eastern axis of Nigeria. This, however, does not suggest a sense of gender equality in any form. In fact, an insight into the Onitsha monarchy of the pre-colonial period reveals the reality of co-regency. The Obi (the male monarch) of Onitsha ruled in conjunction with the Omu (female monarch). In fact, from a general viewpoint, when men/group of men violated women's rights, they were castigated through mystical intercession, rites and by coercive gangs. They could also be ridiculed by a group of women

⁹ Given the patrilineal and patrilocal cultural milieu of the South-Eastern Nigerian people, we cannot totally rule out the presence of "heterarchy" from the region. See, Carol Meyers' Chapter 10: "Gender and Society: Reconstructing Relationships, Rethinking Systems" (2012: 180–202).

and even their (men's) belongings could be destroyed as well (Omonubi-McDonnell 2003: 12-14). From the foregoing, we could see heterarchy in action where different male/female groups claim pre-eminence over each other.

Interestingly, too, during this era, the heterarchical model played out vividly as some wealthy women maintained a high status in the society through the woman-woman marriage. This served as strategy women expressed their status and power independently, through the traditional structure¹⁰. In this form of marriage, a woman paid the brides-wealth to legally acquire marriage rights to another woman. By this arrangement, the female-husband does not sexually satisfy her wife but rather arranges for a kinsman of her choice who meets the wife's sexual needs with the aim of procreation. The female-husband became a husband socially and economically, with claims to any children born by her wife. In fact for the reason of inheritance, these children born, belonged legally to the female-husband and her lineage, and inheritance of the female husband's goods, was not dissimilar to that of the men (Carrier & Murray 1998:258-259). Although Carrier and Murray in their book *Boy-wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities*, observe that amongst the several myths created about Africa, the myth of homosexuality and perhaps lesbianism is absent. In their view, the boy-wives and female-husbands culture of some African societies, especially the recent developments in South Africa where lesbianism and homosexuality had made way into their constitution, calls for attention. This is however true of South Africa in colonial/post-colonial periods. But a keen look at the pre-colonial South-Eastern Nigerian culture of female-husband as discussed earlier reveals something quite different from the South African realities of the colonial and post-colonial eras. Nevertheless, the next segment of this paper will give a description of the crumbling of the pre-colonial South-Eastern women's structures by the western colonialism.

¹⁰ Igbo women had a significant role in traditional political life. As individuals, they participated in village meetings with men. But their real political power was based on the solidarity of women, as expressed in their own political institutions - their "meetings," their market networks, their kinship groups, and their right to use strikes, boycotts and forces to effect their decisions. See Judith van Allen (1972).

The Woman's Plight in Colonial/ Postcolonial South-Eastern Nigeria

Sadly, at the inception of colonialism in Africa, assertiveness and frankness became unwomanly and a history, thus, ushering in a different form of patriarchy. Quoting from Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood* (1979: 88), an Igbo woman (from the South-Eastern part of Nigeria), reminds her husband, who is contemplating joining the British colonial army, that it is a curse among the Igbo people for a woman to sleep with soldiers, "who kill, rape and disgrace women and children, all in the name of the white man's money." In this excerpt, it is implied that the pre-colonial South-Eastern Nigeria was free of the attendant violence associated with military might introduced during the colonial era as advanced militarization became forcefully known in this region. This does not however, infer that there were no traces of rape and violence during the pre-colonial era in this region nor does it exclusively indict the military as rapists, but rather, it reveals the height of violence associated with military might during the colonial period. Observably, colonial military service gave some African men new routes to power and new ways to enforce power, which they never had during the pre-colonial periods. The observation of Judith van Allen (1972:172) below is very informative:

It was a violation of Igbo concepts to have one man represent the village in the first place and more of a violation that he should give orders to everyone else. The people obeyed the Warrant Chief when they had to, since British power backed him up. In some places Warrant Chiefs were lineage heads or wealthy men who were already leaders in the village. But in many places, they were simply ambitious, opportunistic young men who put themselves forward as friends of the conquerors. Even the relatively less corrupt Warrant Chief was still, more than anything else, an agent of the British.

Following the colonial rule, power was placed in the hands of men. They had the mandate to collect and enforce colonial laws. By the way, most women went into agriculture as they had a long economic power and organization at market centers in West Africa. This economic power of women in South-Eastern Nigeria came as a result of their marginalization resulting from the Igbo practice of patrilineal patrilocal marriages where wives are regarded in their husbands' communities as strangers. Given this background, the colonial policies and missions, pressurized women in public activities to withdraw, stay at home and submit to a strong alliance between the colonial state and some ambitious African

men (Hoppe 2002: 236). However, in late 1929, the South-Eastern market women who thrived in their business revolted against the extreme subjugation as it were, of women by some group of men. Given such pressure, women's group quickly regrouped and marched to the warrant chiefs' headquarters. Subsequently, within a month, they rallied to do away with warrant chiefs and native administration. They were able to sack ten native courts, blocked roads, released prisoners from jail, and attacked elite men, burned houses and government buildings. Though in the end, the colonial State, with the aid of soldiers and police stepped in for peace and order, which eventually claimed the lives of 50 women when the troops fired on the crowds. The foregoing reveals the struggle for status between male and female groups, with each exerting its hegemony. This further mirrors the heterarchical situation of the Numbers 27 and 36 which captures the struggle between the male groups of the Manasseh clan and the five daughters of Zelophehad of the same clan.

Summarily, the South-Eastern Nigeria of the colonial/ pre-colonial eras revealed a sense of struggle between groups of males and females. These periods ushered in a system where women had to forcefully struggle for justice in relation to their rights including the rights of inheritance. As a result, they are confronted with legal struggles to claim their rights and redress biases especially in family law concerning marriages, the sharing of property within marriage, inheritance among other concerns (Omonubi-McDonnell 2003: 13).

In addition, in Eastern Nigeria, succession is primarily patrilineal, that is, through male lines. And as such, women (excluding those from Efik and Umon), are not allowed to inherit a woman's or man's immovable property including land. Primogeniture is the rule in patrilineal Eastern Nigerian native law and custom. In the case of death of the father, the eldest son of the deceased acquires the exclusive rights of inheritance of all his father's estate and property. This is because by the virtue of his position, he is the new head of the family and one bequeathed with the responsibility to perform the burial rites of his deceased father, perceived as the last honour (Omonubi-McDonnell 2003: 132-133). The foregoing reveals a prevalence of an instituted male hegemony over the female and also reflects the plot in Numbers 36 where the male hegemony was exerted in spite of Yahweh's verdict to treat the female group as eligible for land inheritance.

In fact, even when the male-control of properties exists in a patrilineal society like the South-Eastern Nigeria, corporate control of land and

other resources was prevalent over individual private. However, during the colonial period, men primarily dominated, holding most key positions such as wage labour, cash-crop production, private ownership of land, colonial government salaries and positions, access to new technologies, and access to Western education leading to better-paid employment. And as such, local men used this relationship with colonial powers to their own advantage, often at the expense of younger men and *all women* (Hoppe 2002: 224 emphasis added).¹¹

In a nutshell, the colonial and post-colonial eras left the South-Eastern Nigerian woman with no option than to struggle for their lost status in the society. This indeed mirrors the situation of the daughters of Zelophehad who were limited by the new promulgation of inter/intra clan marriage which only allows them eligibility only within this provision – a new form of male hegemony. However, the next segment discusses the relevance the narrative of the daughters of Zelophehad recorded in Numbers 27 & 36, for the women's struggle in post-colonial South-Eastern Nigeria.

Import of the Zelophehad's Daughters' Episode for Women's Plight in Post-Colonial South-Eastern Nigeria

Erudition

Erudition in this context refers to the woman's acquaintance with existing knowledge or liberating information regarding her status in the community. There is a possibility that the daughters of Zelophehad were aware of the provision in Leviticus 25:23, which suggests that although the land was given as a gift to Israel, it was still owned by God. They were aware that Israel's possession of land, which obviously is insepara-

¹¹ This kind of gender relationship is what Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza coined into Kyriarchy. This word is used to describe her theory of interconnected, interacting, and self-extending systems of domination and submission, in which a single individual might be oppressed in some relationships and privileged in others. In this case, even younger men are oppressed by fellow men. So, by this model, males could oppress males, females could as well oppress females, even younger men could oppress older men all depending on the situation. See, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Changing the Paradigms: The Ethos of Biblical Studies," in *Rhetoric and Ethic: The Politics of Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 36–37.

ble from the providential gift of Yahweh, is premised on God's covenantal promise and as a member of that covenant people they were equally beneficiaries of the covenantal promise of land as well. No wonder they challenged their exclusion from inheritance of the providential gift of Yahweh (Num 27:2-4). Nevertheless, it appears also that these daughters may have heard of the account of Laban and his two daughters as recorded in Genesis 31:14ff where in verse 14 they enquired if there was any inheritance for them in their father's house although they were married. We see the proposition of their enquiry revealed in verse 43 where it is implied that Laban's concession to Jacob's taking away of several livestock was for the reason of Laban's two daughters – Leah and Rachel. This is evident in Laban's speech where he claims that Leah and Rachel, their children, as well as the cattle were his – Laban's (Gen 31:43-45). So by implication the cattle and slaves given to Jacob by Laban were rather a form of inheritance given to Leah and Rachel even after marriage. As a way to seal the transfer of such inheritance from Laban to his daughters, a covenant was made between Laban and Jacob. It appears that the five daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 27 were acquainted with this episode informed them of their right to inheritance as females though unmarried at this point. Being informed should serve as a weapon for women groups in South-Eastern Nigeria who have been so subjugated with no deep information regarding women's status in the society especially before the colonial era. Therefore, acquaintance with necessary information as did the daughters of Zelophehad remains potent even in the face of the struggle for inheritance in post-colonial South-Eastern Nigeria.

Corporate Effort

Although power was in the hands of the Israelite males who used it to exploit the women, the collective voice of these sisters made a great difference. It led to a promulgation of law by Yahweh, in favour of the sisters and other women who suffered from similar exploitation. This, however, does not promise to be static as we see a reprisal from the male group in Num 36:1-11. The words of Judith van Allen (1972:170) are very instructive for women's group and regrouping in the South-Eastern Nigeria.

...In tackling men as a group, women used boycotts and strikes.... all the women refused to cook for their husbands until the request was carried out. For this boycott to be effective, all women had to cooperate so that

men could not go and eat with their brothers. Another time the men of a village decided that the women should stop trading at the more distant markets from which they did not return until late at night because the men feared that the women were having sexual relations with men in those towns. The women, however, refused to comply since opportunity to buy in one market and sell in another was basic to profit-making. Threats of collective retaliation were enough to make the men capitulate.

Although the excerpt above is focused on precolonial women's group as a strategy against men especially when they (men) refused to clear the market road, it could otherwise become a tool for the women's actualization of their inheritance rights. This is obvious in the account of the daughters of Zelophehad who though perceive injustice from the men of their clan, are not violent in their approach to resolving the matter. Rather, they appeal to the men using the male related language like:

לָמָּה יִגְרַע שֵׁם־אֲבִינוּ מִתּוֹךְ מִשְׁפַּחָתוֹ כִּי אֵין לוֹ בֵּן

lāmmah yiggāra' shem-'abīnu mithuk mishppach^uthu ki 'eyn lō bēn

Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son?

(Num 27:4).

From the foregoing, the strategy used in confronting the male group of the Manasseh clan is a peaceful, conscientious lobby and non-violent approach which could as well yield positive results in South-Eastern Nigeria, especially in the quest for rights including land inheritance rights.

Moral Obligation

Yahweh's use of the word *ken* in Num 27:7 is to call to view in the mind of Moses as well as in the people the principles and moral values offered as an alternative way of living especially, according to justice and integrity. In other words, *ken* carries the idea of justice, a moral obligation. Moreover, the use of the infinitive absolute in conjunction with a qal imperfect- *nathon thithen* – bequeaths on Moses a representative of the highest court of justice and as well the law maker, the obligation to execute Yahweh's verdict of justice– the transfer or moving (*'ābar*) of ownership rights to land (*'^uchuzzah*) in favour of the five daughters of Zelophehad. This is a call for justice, especially in favour of marginalized women (though this may not be limited to women but to marginalized men as well) in South-Eastern Nigeria of today.

In the narrative on Zelophehad's daughters, Moses represents the highest court of justice and as well a law maker who has the obligation to promulgate and execute Yahweh's verdict of justice – the transfer or moving ('*ābar*) of ownership rights to land in favour of the five daughters of Zelophehad. This episode further reveals the role of local courts in the need for justice in matters relating to oppressive tendencies and marginalization especially in postcolonial South-Eastern Nigeria.

Conclusion

This paper harnesses from the narrative on Zelophehad's daughters in Num 27:1-11 on their fight for inheritance right, some guidelines for South-Eastern women's groups in relation to inheritance rights. Here we discover that land inheritance by the daughters of Zelophehad, was a form of justice as declared by Yahweh (Num 27:7). The work further shows that erudition that is enlightenment, as it relates to their covenantal status in the society, is paramount. More so, corporate efforts or solidarity remains a veritable weapon for women's group as shown in the reading. Such solidarity leads to a promulgation of law which favours the five daughters as well as other women in ancient Israel as they were allowed access or rights to inheritance of land alongside their male group (their uncles). This work therefore could be useful in the face of women's struggle for space in an hierarchical society characterized with male-group hegemony, and thus, could serve as weapon for women's rights interest group in South-Eastern Nigeria in particular, and Africa in general.

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Partnering 'Soft Masculinities' in Tackling Violence against Women in Zimbabwe

A Rereading of Numbers 36:1-13

Molly Manyonganise

Abstract

Women in Southern Africa like in other parts of Africa have limited rights to the inheritance of their forefathers/mothers be it at family or national level. Cultural practices and traditional norms are continually being used to disenfranchise women in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular. This is despite the enactment of legal instruments that seek to protect women. The most common reason for this may be that most African societies, Zimbabwe included, are patriarchal in nature and the majority of men in these societies exhibit what may termed in this paper 'hard masculinities.' However, there are some men in Africa who sympathise and empathise with women due to the challenges they face. In this paper, this is referred to as 'soft masculinity.' The intention of this paper is therefore to try a rereading of Num 36:1-13 to find out how women can make use of 'soft masculinities' in championing their cause. To gather relevant data for this paper, unstructured interviews, informal discussions and general observations were used.

Locating myself in the discourse

As a woman living in Zimbabwe, I chose to deliberate on violence against women because I have also experienced it. The first three children in my family are girls and I am told my father abandoned us when my mother gave birth to her second daughter. His family could not stand having their son have a home full of girls and no heir, so they advised him to stay in the city and find a woman who could give them a son. He only came back later, and my mother got pregnant only to give birth to another 'undesirable' daughter. My father simply gave up the search for a son and vowed to take good care of his daughters.

Growing up in the poor rural area of Mhondoro Ngezi (Zimbabwe), my male kin thought it was a crime when at the end of a school term I would come top of my class. It was often suggested that I needed a thorough hiding from my family for challenging the boys in my class. My

father encouraged me on. I witnessed in my community, women and children working hard in the fields while their husbands enjoyed themselves at beer halls. However, when the produce from the fields were sold the women were forced to surrender all the proceeds to their husbands leaving them begging from the same husbands for pittances. Any woman who dared question this 'normal' order of things was met with either verbal or physical abuse. I never saw a man who was arrested for abusing their wives because the police regarded violence within the home as a private matter. Whenever female victims of this violence would seek societal attention, they were often told that '*chakafukidza dzimba matenga*' (what covers the house is the roof). In other words, these women were supposed to endure the abuse and never speak about it.

There were cases where some women opted out of their marriages and would return to their parents' homes. For fear of being told to return the lobola¹, the parents would send their daughters back to their abusive husbands. They were often told '*murume haarambwe*' (a husband cannot be divorced), thus disempowering these women from making decisions that would have saved their lives from further abuse. I witnessed dejected women stripped of everything they had and sent away from homes that they had built at times leaving behind their children because Shona culture says a woman cannot own a child. As I grew up and changed physical spaces, I became aware that violence against women was not confined to the home, but was prevalent in schools, at work places and now even in national politics. The use of violence is therefore a way in which the males at any level, expresses its maleness so that the female remains subdued and silenced. Such a scenario still exists in Zimbabwe today where women are confronted with violence on a daily basis. What this paper intends to do, therefore, is to find out if the existence of 'soft' masculinities in Zimbabwean society can assist women in tackling gender-based violence.

Data for this paper was gathered through the use of structured interview questions. In this case, a convenient sample of ten interviewees was selected in Harare's Central Business District. Six of them were male while four were female. The purpose of the interviews was to establish

¹ This is a Zulu term which refers to the customary token paid by the groom-to-be when he is about to marry his bride-to-be to his in-laws. The Shona equivalent is *roora*.

how useful the concept of 'soft' masculinities in the empowerment of women. The data was then qualitatively analysed using the descriptive model. Before going any further there is need to define the term 'masculinity'.

Definition of Masculinity

Masculinity is not a coherent object that we can generalize about (Connell 1995). Different cultures define masculinity and femininity according to their own social needs (Schiffman and Edwards 2007). However, what most scholars seem to have agreed upon is that masculinity like femininity is socially constructed and like the environments in which they are produced, masculine identities are subject to change (Mugambi and Allan 2010:4). This implies that no social view of masculinity is permanent in any society. According to (Connell 1995) "masculinity is simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality and culture." Chesebro (2001) defines masculinity as "profoundly and ultimately a communication concept, a socially and symbolically constructed notion, that every culture and every era revisits and redefines in different ways." For him masculinities are the characteristics attributed to male behavior when men are in groups. Such a view is important in that it brings out clearly the fact that masculinity is not what men are but what they do. The issue of masculinities is rooted in patriarchal ideology in which men seek dominance over women. In this case, masculinities are socially constituted through complex struggles for the acquisition and reallocation of certain symbols and material positions (Aboim 2010:39). Egodi (2008:3) mentions that race, culture, religion and belief systems, environmental realities and historical experiences influence notions of masculinities all over the world, not least in Africa.

Nowadays, there has been an attempt to differentiate between 'hard' or hegemonic masculinities and 'soft' masculinities. Aboim (2010:46) defines hard or hegemonic masculinity as "the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women." Such masculinities are characterized by virility, power, strength and domination. In order to maintain this privilege of power, hegemonic

masculinities often resort to violence and this violence manifests itself through domestic assaults, sexual harassment, rape, murder etc. Connell (1995) avers that violence becomes important in gender politics among men and it becomes a way of asserting masculinity. The use of violence against women to legitimize their domination actually delegitimises the hierarchical structure of most patriarchal societies those in Africa included.

On the other hand, 'soft masculinities' is one of the concepts that is being developed in a bid to come up with alternative masculinities that are not harmful to women and societies at large. Through such masculinities, though men remain male, they are sympathetic and empathetic to women and their social condition. 'Soft masculinities' are sensitive and progressive. They identify with women and champion the struggles for gender equality and women's empowerment. Generally, sensitivity to women's needs is one of the attributes of 'soft masculinities'. In stead of the term 'soft masculinities' some scholars have used terms like liberating, transformative masculinities. Chitando and Chirongoma (2012:1) have coined the term 'redemptive masculinities'. In their own words the authors said:

We embrace and employ the concept of redemptive masculinities to characterize and identify masculinities that are life-giving in a world reeling from the effects of violence and the HIV & AIDS epidemic.

These alternative masculinities are seen as important if the health and well-being of all people is going to be promoted (Chitando and Chirongoma 2012). My choice of the concept of 'soft masculinities', was guided by the subject under discussion, which is violence against women. As alluded to earlier, this notion denotes masculinities that are non-violent. It is however, important to note that 'soft' masculinities is a contested term. For example, it can be misconstrued for weakness because African cultures in particular do not expect men to be soft, a characteristic which is almost always associated with women. In this paper, the use of the term 'soft' is viewed positively to show that these masculinities are ready to compromise and let go of the privileges that patriarchy accorded them at the expense of women. Kamla Bhasin cited in Chitando (2010:131) argues that:

There are many men who are willing to analyse and challenge patriarchy, who are willing to do soul searching, and who believe that changing the hierarchical nature of current gender relations would benefit everyone.

In this regard, they shun the use of violence as a way of ensuring the subordination and disenfranchisement of women. In order for us to appreciate the concept of 'soft masculinities', there is need for us to make a critical analysis of the different forms of violence that men use especially in Zimbabwe to disempower women.

Violence as a deliberate weapon used by men to disenfranchise women

A critical analysis of the violence against women in the world in general and Zimbabwe in particular shows that most of the violence is perpetrated to disempower, disenfranchise and dehumanize them. It is not only a show of control by the abusive men, but also a reaffirmation of the perceived 'powerlessness' of the abused women. Violence in itself should be seen as a form of communication. It is meant to 'tell' those against whom it is perpetrated to subordinate themselves to those who perpetrate the violence. In other words, the weak that are perceived to be 'incapable' of defending themselves can be silenced through violence from demanding what is rightfully theirs. Women in Zimbabwe experience violence at both the family and the national level.

Violence against women at family level

The major reason for women experiencing violence at family level as in other levels is patriarchy. Families socialize boys and girls differently. McFadden cited in Manyonganise (2010:16) argues that girls are socialized to dependence in African societies. For example, traditionally, women and girls could not contribute to serious family discussions where important decisions were to be made. Most decisions were made on their behalf and they had to obey them. Failure to comply with a decision was/is met with fury and usually it was/is rewarded with violence. The practice of betrothment in Shona culture is a case in point where marriage decisions were made on behalf of the girl child without her consent. The mother of the child could not voice against such a decision since as alluded to earlier a woman does not own a child. Such practices (irrespective of enacted laws) are still rampant especially among the African Independent churches such as the Johane Marange Apostolic Church in Zimbabwe (Chikwature & Oyedele 2016). In the era of HIV & AIDS women and girls are having their rights violated in broad daylight.

Women in marriages are being infected by men who are fully aware that they have the virus. For the mere reason that they were socialized to believe that they cannot challenge their husbands, most of them suffer in silence. When issues of protection came to the fore as a way of mitigating against the pandemic, the male condom was first manufactured, leaving women at the mercy of their husbands who most of the times refused to use the condom even though they were well aware that they were promiscuous. It is therefore not surprising that from the late 1980s to the present, the issue of HIV & AIDS has been a gender issue. As traditional healers lie to men infected with HIV that girl virgins can cure them of the virus, a lot of these little girls are being raped by their fathers, brothers, teachers as well as male relatives. The most tragic result is not only the rape itself but the fact that most of these girls end up testing positive to HIV and in most cases they withdraw from school due to shame or ill-health (Manyonganise & Museka 2010).

Domestic violence characterizes most homes in Zimbabwe and women are the majority of the victims. In 2006 research showed that one in every four women in Zimbabwe suffers abuse in her life time. It was also established that 95 per cent of the victims of domestic violence are women and that 60 per cent of murder cases going through the High Court are related to domestic violence (Mawire, n.d). In two-thirds of the cases of violence, the perpetrator is the woman's husband, partner, or ex-husband; half of the cases involve both physical and sexual violence (Gender Index 2010). However, only recently have activists turned their attention to domestic violence and managed to develop successful campaigns against the bodily harm and emotional abuse that women often suffer in intimate settings (Katalin 2010:1). In Zimbabwe especially, the campaigns gave birth to the Domestic Violence Act and this shall be discussed later.

Violence against Women at National Level

At national level, women have not been spared either especially in the political arena. Since independence, the political participation of women in Zimbabwe has been limited. This to a large extent shows that the Zimbabwean political space is gendered. From the late 1990s, women became aware of their right to actively take part in the governance issues of their nation. Thus, in the year 2000, the rejection of the new constitution was made possible because women had done their part in making

sure that the will of the people prevailed over individual interests. The violence that ensued after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and the 2005 Operation *Murambatsvina* (in which perceived illegal structures were demolished) affected women more than their male counterparts. In Operation *Murambatsvina* the majority of women lost their livelihoods. As they were forced to relocate to their rural homes, these women were relegated to abject poverty. In other words, Operation *Murambatsvina* economically disempowered women.

The above-mentioned incidences coupled with the hyper inflationary environment that characterized Zimbabwe's economy between 2007-2008 mobilized women to participate actively in politics. Though statistics are not readily available it has been noted that more women voted in March 2008 than in any other election in Zimbabwe. In this election, the opposition (MDC-T) garnered more votes than ZANU PF. The Presidential vote, however, did not produce an outright winner. As a result, a runoff was called for and was scheduled for June 2008. Prior to the June election, Zimbabwe witnessed violence at unprecedented levels. What is most noticeable during this period is the feminization of this violence. Supporters of the MDC were tortured, murdered, maimed and raped. Women were killed for either supporting a 'wrong' party or for having a husband or son who belonged to the camp of the 'enemy'. The gang rapes that characterized the violence left the majority of the female victims infected with HIV. The killings and rapes were aimed at silencing the voice of women from national politics. Thus, rape was being used as a weapon of masculine domination. As Egodi (2008:10) correctly notes rape against women is rooted in societal ideological and power structures related to hegemonic masculinities. Raping not only confirms that the male is in control, it also satisfies the desire to dominate (Cohen cited in McFadden 1992), which is inculcated into the male child through a sexist socialization process that defines the male as strong and the female as weak (McFadden 1992:184). Such scenarios call for both legal and social processes that will help in safeguarding the interests and dignity of women in Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwean Law and Violence against Women

In a bid to deal with violence against women in the home, the government of Zimbabwe enacted the Domestic Violence Act in 2007. The objective of this law is to provide for protection and relief to victims of

domestic violence. The Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA) hailed the Bill in 2006 as one which was to reinforce the traditional values of the harmonious existence of the family unit, the respect of each individual's bodily integrity and the need for every individual to enjoy a healthy psychological well-being (Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association 2006). By enacting this law, Zimbabwe was responding to its international obligations as espoused in the various international human rights instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). As mentioned earlier, issues of domestic violence were regarded as private. What this law intends to do is to make the perceived 'private' issues (of violence against women) public for the protection of the victims.

In order to make sure that the provisions of this law are being implemented, the Government of Zimbabwe constituted an Anti-domestic Violence Council which was launched by the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development. The duties of the council are among other things:

- to keep under constant review the problem of domestic violence in Zimbabwe and to
- take all steps to disseminate information and increase the awareness of the public on
- issues of domestic violence in Zimbabwe (Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development 2012).

Unfortunately, women in Zimbabwe have not managed to fully benefit from this law due to several reasons such as:

- (a) Even with the Act in place, cases of domestic violence are on the rise countrywide. The media in Zimbabwe today is awash with reports of women who are experiencing torture and pain within their homes. For example, The *Newsday* of 7 July 2011 carried a story with the headline, 'Machete attack on wife' in which a husband had attacked his wife with a machete after suspecting her of having an extra-marital relationship and in the process hacked off her thumb. On being questioned the husband said he was merely disciplining his wife. The same paper made reference to two more cases of domestic violence in which one man from Chitungwiza (a town in Zimbabwe) had axed his wife after a domestic dispute while in another incident an official from the Attorney-General's Office scalded his wife's buttocks and sprinkled hot spices into her private parts before raping

her. These three cases reveal the embedment of violence against women in patriarchy.

- (b) More often the husband is viewed as the father-figure not only to his children but to the wife also. In this case, culture empowers the man to 'discipline' his wife though he does not answer to anyone. Where there is a domestic dispute, the wife is usually expected to give in and the man to have his own way, failure of which the man's masculine characteristics are exhibited through beating the wife.
- (c) The payment of *lobola* for a woman to be considered to have gotten married reduces them to purchased objects in the eyes of the men, thus they wield the power to use the 'object' in whatever way they deem necessary. In this case, for most men the fact that the man in the third case raped his wife after scalding her buttocks and sprinkling hot spices in her private parts might not ring a bell. It could be a case of "he wanted it (sex) that way". How the woman felt is not considered because from a cultural point of view, the woman is married to serve the best interests of the husband. Once married her interests cease to matter. If the husband wants to have sex, the woman is obliged to provide her body for his gratification regardless of whether she wants to or not McFadden (1992:187). As a result, even with the existence of statutes that refer to marital rape, it remains inconceivable in most communities in Zimbabwe that there is rape within a marriage. McFadden (1992:187) notes that in Africa the resistance to acknowledge this phenomenon (of marital rape) seems to be directly related to the notion of sex as the prerogative of the male. Thus, Olivia Muchena (the Minister of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development) argues that "domestic violence is inextricably linked to gender-based inequalities" (Report of the Women's Coalition of Zimbabwe National Conference 2009:6).

This condition of women is exacerbated by the attitudes of the police who regularly conduct themselves in breach of the Domestic Violence Act. They frequently decline to listen to complaints, investigate their cases and ensure that women are aware of the legal remedies at their disposal (www.sokwanele.com/thisiszimbabwe/archives/6442). Generally, it has begun to be noted that the Act in a way disempowers women. It has become apparent that several women are failing to affirm their rights in terms of the Domestic Violence Act owing to the cumbersome processes required by the legal statute. For example, for a woman to report a case in which they want a protection order, they have to pay five

United States dollars. In addition, they have to photocopy 18 forms that have to be served to each party. As a result, “most women end up withdrawing litigation processes against their partners owing to the tedious and expensive procedures that ought to be followed” (The Herald, 25 June 2011). While advocating for the Domestic Violence Law was a triumph, it needs to be noted that great challenges still lie ahead as women fight to change mindsets of their male counterparts who feel threatened by the law, entrenched values and habits to mention but a few. The aforementioned have militated to a large extent against the success of the enacted law to the extent that the law has largely remained on paper while those that are supposed to be saved by it continue to be victimized. It is clear from the above discussion that the reasons why the Domestic Violence Law has failed to yield the desired results is due to male supremacy as well as the failure by the police to enforce the legal statute. It is in this vein that this paper calls for another approach to dealing with violence against women; that of partnering ‘soft’ masculinities. This paper does not present this approach as a panacea to the challenges that women face in Zimbabwe but presents it as an alternative route. Since the majority of Zimbabweans are Christians, the paper appeals to the biblical text of Num 36:1-13 as offering us more practical ways of deploying the concept of ‘soft’ masculinities.

Looking at Numbers 36:1-13 – Is partnering ‘soft’ masculinities a plausible route in dealing with violence against women?

What is clear from the above discussion is that violence against women is rampant in Zimbabwe. This violence is evident in families as well as national institutions. As one looks at the situation, it would appear that we are a nation that has reached a dead end in as far as violence against women is concerned. A closer look at the Bible shows that biblical inheritance laws are vague, derived more from biblical references and illustrations than from explicit directions (cf. Radford 2000:159). This text is completely silent on women’s rights to inheritance but focuses on sons only. Such a practice finds resonance in African cultural practices and Zimbabwe is no exception. A consideration of this as social violence against women is important. This paper contends that a rereading of Num 36:1-13 may provide other avenues through which violence against women in Zimbabwe can be dealt with. I approach the text not as an Old

Testament scholar but as an academic who focuses on issues of religion and gender.

The background to the story is in Num 27:1ff. Zelophehad had no sons but five daughters. In Num 27:3-4 the daughters confronted Jewish culture which elevated the son as the sole inheritor of the father's wealth. They said:

“Our father died in the wilderness, ... and had no sons. Why should the name of our father be done away from among his family, because he hath no son? Give unto us therefore a possession among the brethren of our father.”

Because in his culture this was not usual, Moses sought divine guidance and in Num 27:7 God concurred with the women. According to Nwaoru (2002), God does not only modify the existing custom, but also declares the daughters right in their demand. “By exonerating the women, YHWH preserves them from possible sanction or from being branded revolutionists.” While Num 27:1-11 has been hailed by feminists as making a remarkable statement about the dignity and value of women, Num 36:1-13 has not been given that much attention. Where it has been subjected to scholarly analysis, nothing commendable has been written about the men who reminded Moses of the daughters' right to inheritance. If anything, they have been lambasted for trying to control the daughters who had demanded a portion of Israel's inheritance. My argument in this paper is that Numbers 36 provides us a window through which we can have a positive view of the men of the tribe of Joseph. Num 36:2 says: “...and my lord was commanded by the Lord to give the inheritance of Zelophehad our brother unto his daughters” (KJV/Speed Bible).

Two things are clear from the passage above. First, the passage shows that irrespective of Jewish law, God recognizes the right of daughters to inheritance. Hence, no culture can appeal to the divine as stipulating otherwise. As such if God changed the rules in the passage above and the patriarchal men in the passage adhered to it, it is highly probable that when the same principle is applied in our African societies, women may begin to be viewed differently. Nwaoru (2002:50) argues that “there is some value in thinking that the biblical approach of redressing the deprived and distressed daughters of Zelophehad can be valid both as source and norm for constructing a new model for contemporary African societies.” Secondly, when the inheritance was finally being allocated, we note with concern “the silence, ... the non-presence of the five

daughters of Zelophehad in the scene before Moses” (Sakenfield 1982:43). As is the case in most patriarchal societies, all the men who stood before Moses could have chosen to forget the case of these daughters. These daughters could have been subjected to the usual social violence that most women in African societies suffer (that is the deprivation of the right to inheritance). However, the men of the tribe of Joseph need to be commended for standing up in the exclusively men’s caucus meeting and reminded Moses not to forget God’s judgement concerning Zelophehad’s daughters as he was allocating the land. From an African Womanist perspective, these are men whom women can partner with, men who are not ashamed of championing the cause of women, men who can bring their colleagues into the remembrance of the worthiness of their female counterparts.

Ways in which women can partner ‘soft’ masculinities

The case of the Zelophehad daughters is proof of the fact that there is room for a shift in favour of the disinherited even in a predominantly patriarchal society (Nwaoru 2002:64). In Zimbabwean communities, there are various ways in which women can partner with ‘soft’ masculinities to tackle the problem of violence. One interviewee who is a member of Padare (a man’s forum on gender) called on women in Zimbabwe to stop fighting a lone battle when he said:

It is important for women in Zimbabwe to realize that there are a lot of men out there who feel for them but are failing to meaningfully support them because most of discourses that are exclusionary. There is need to find ways in which women’s organizations can have collaborative relationships with men’s organizations such as Padare (Taona Muchenje in Harare, 24 July 2011).

For this interviewee, such a collaborative partnership is not only necessary but strategic in that it will enhance mutual understanding between the two groups. Another male interviewee from Padare reiterated this point and said it is most fulfilling for men in his organization to know that women acknowledge their efforts in trying to persuade men who adhere to hegemonic masculinities to respect the dignity and integrity of women. He, however, lamented the fact that at times women make blanket statements referring to all men as insensitive to women’s concerns, something he felt women need to correct since “the efforts of the few need to be separated from the rest” (male interviewee in Harare, 25

July 2011). Speaking on sex health policies, Babatunde Osotimehin, who is the Head of the United Nations Population Fund made a call for the inclusion of men in such activities. Some health experts had raised the concern that most reproductive health programmes sideline men, a strategy which is flawed. However, a 2007 World Health Organisation Report revealed that programmes that engage boys and men and that promote more equitable relationships tend to be more effective (The Guardian, 9 July 2011). Chitando and Chirongoma (2012:1) also argue that instead of adopting an "either women or men" stance, there is a growing realization that only holistic approaches will bring about gender justice.

Another interviewee who is a lecturer at one of Zimbabwe's higher learning institutions highlighted the critical role that men who have attributes of 'soft' masculinities can play in raising awareness on violence against women. The interviewee said these can mobilize men's groups to engage in anti-violence campaigns. In their communities these men and women can come together and spread the message through performing arts. In churches men exhibiting 'soft' masculinities can partner with women in preaching against domestic violence, (female interviewee in Harare, 28 July 2011). Another female interviewee who is a member of the United Methodist Church even suggested the holding of workshops that cater for people at the grassroots level as well as high-ranking officials. If these men are at the fore front they will be listened to by hard masculinities (female interviewee in Harare, 29 July 2011).

Eight out of the ten people interviewed pointed to socialization within the African family as a major contributor to hegemonic masculinities. It is within the family that young boys are taught that they are more powerful than girls and they grow up with a domineering spirit. Presenting a paper at the ATISCA conference at the University of Zimbabwe in 2010, Ezra Chitando made a critical analysis of the socialization processes in African societies and concluded that dictators are brought up in families where one group (men) are taught that they can have unlimited control over the other (women). As such 'soft' masculinities can assist the cause of women by encouraging a change of attitude in the socialization process through bringing up boys who do not exhibit characteristics of hegemonic masculinities.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that like in any other country in Africa, a lot of violence against women is taking place in Zimbabwe. This is despite the enactment of certain laws that try to deal with the problem and a case in point is the Domestic Violence Act. In this case, the paper has suggested a new strategy of dealing with violence against women, that is actively involving 'soft' masculinities in this struggle. The majority of the interviewees concurred that this can be an effective way of dealing with the problem. On the whole, Num 36:1-13 provides a basis for engaging these 'soft' masculinities as we have a good example in the Bible of men who were able to stand and speak good on behalf of women. Engaging men in the fight against violence against women is long overdue, and gender-based violence is never just a woman's issue. There is need to engage both men and women in dealing with this destructive monster.

Interviews

Interview with Taona Muchenje in Harare, 24 July 2011

Interview with a male interviewee in Harare, 25 July 2011

Interview with a female interviewee in Harare, 28 July 2011

Interview with a female interviewee in Harare, 29 July 2011

Interview with a male interviewee in Harare, 29 July 2011

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Women's Sexualized Bodies

Dealing with Women's Sexual Autonomy in Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe

Mavis Muguti & Nomatter Sande

Summary

The increase in studies about gender has brought insightful information about the plight of women in different societies. The patriarchal system is responsible for greasing women injustices. Somewhat, Pentecostalism is among the drivers of the status quo. The control of women permeates all facets of their lives like marital choice, sexual health, birth control and their bodies are perceived as having been designed to please men. Such hegemonic tendencies cement the submission of women through cultural and biblical scripts mostly advanced by men. This paper seeks to explore women's sexual autonomy in the Apostolic Faith Mission Church (AFM) in Zimbabwe. The article uses the objectification theory, and the data is gleaned using conceptual analysis of literature as well as a questionnaire.

Introduction

The issues of gender inequality and gender injustices are continuing to perpetuate in Africa despite the fact that most African countries are signatories to the Human Rights Charter and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa known as the Maputo Protocol. Though many factors account for the gender troubles in Africa, in Zimbabwe, culture and religion affect women more than their male counterparts. Recently, Pentecostalism has created spaces within the Zimbabwean religious landscape, attracting many followers because of its claims of providing divine solutions to the suffering populace. For instance, Chimuka (2013:113) argued that in Southern Africa major cities like Johannesburg, Harare, Gaborone, Lilongwe et cetera, are awash with a remarkable growth of Pentecostalism; with famous slogans such as 'miracle night,' 'evening of deliverance' and personal healings. This article uses the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM) as a case study to understand women's sexual autonomy in Zimbabwe since it is the oldest Pentecostal church in Zimbabwe.

The church and the society have contributed to the oppression of women by subjecting them as mere objects of sexual desire. In this case, the Bible and the Shona indigenous culture ascribe to the sacredness of the bedroom, yet it is a laboratory which breeds violence and abuse against women by men. In the Bible, God has made the bedroom “holy”. According to Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage is regarded as honourable” and in 1 Cor 7:3-4 “...a woman should satisfy her husband’s needs. The body does not belong only to her. It also belongs to her husband”. Most of the interpretation ascribed to this scripture disempowers women and the ‘body belonging to her husband’ is viewed in the areas regarding sex. In essence, the woman has no control over her own body but is in the relationship for the total satisfaction of the man. The Shona uses the proverb, *chakafukidza dzimba matenga* (*what covers the houses is the roof*) meaning there are unrevealed secrets, challenges and happiness. In essence, a woman is supposed to keep what happens behind the four walls of her bedroom a secret regardless of abuse. Thus, the Shona indigenous culture maintains privacy about intimate issues whilst the Bible fosters a culture which takes away autonomy from women over their own bodies. To this Sande (2017a:50) argued that “to date, the concept of equality between the sexes is the most appealing and influential for appraising social structures”. Biri (2012:1) argued that though Pentecostalism claims a total break with the cultural practices it has failed to disentangle the Shona cultural practices within its religious expression. So, understanding the sexual autonomy in Zimbabwe must be placed on the continuum of the Bible, Shona culture and postmodernity.

The subject of women’s sexual autonomy is pertinent, yet not topical in the AFM church and many denominations in Zimbabwe. Consequently, the failure to deal with sexual autonomy has adverse effects such as intimate violence, divorces, and health complications. Machingura and Nyakuhwa (2015:92) observed that in Zimbabwe it is common to find stories about women seeking equality in print and electronic media, but culture is always judging these women presupposing that genuinely raised women accepts being subordinate to men. There are cultural scripts regarding sex which the AFM has not tackled openly. In fact, both the church and the indigenous culture are shy to discuss the issues surrounding sex education. For example, it is not clear about the AFM attitude, feeling, and theological reflections towards notions of how to please a man in bed, safe sex negotiation, “condom use” by a woman, woman’s body image and size. It is against this backdrop that this article

seeks to explore women's sexual autonomy in the AFM church in Zimbabwe. This article uses the word "culture" to refer to the Shona indigenous culture, as put by Chimhanda (2014:306) that about 82% of the population in Zimbabwe are the Shona people. Nevertheless, the Shona culture is a subset of the complex African culture though diluted with the evolving technoscientific and globalising world.

Conceptualising Sexual Autonomy

The notion of sexual obligation in a marriage has a potential to lead to gender injustice and sexual freedom. As such, sexual obligations both in the Shona indigenous culture and the biblical context bring tension to sexual autonomy in Zimbabwe. The Merriam-Webster has defined autonomy as self-directing freedom and especially moral independence and personal autonomy. As succinctly put by Brown (2014:74), sexual autonomy allows one to determine under what circumstances to engage in sexual activities to which they consent. In other words, sexual autonomy is the quality or state of self-governing of one's body and having the freedom to determine how to enhance one's sexual life, with whom and when to engage in sexual activity without coercion from other individuals. Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) would say "always act on the maxim that you wish at the same time to be universalised". Accordingly, the lived sexual experiences of women should determine what can be universalised as a healthy sexual autonomy in Zimbabwe.

As such, it is necessary to understand the meaning of sexual rights. Graupner (2009:1), noted that "sexual rights essentially are human rights in the field of sexuality and sexual behaviour". In this context, it calls for the central idea of human rights uniqueness and autonomy of the women to express their sexuality freely. Human rights are inalienable rights, rights that humans have because they belong to the community of human beings. The same goes for sexual rights; each person has them only because they belong to the community of human beings and no one should take them away. Therefore, at the centre of sexual rights must be the issue of sexual autonomy. Therefore, sexual autonomy, the safety of the sexual body, and sexual integrity must be taught and encouraged in society. Despite all these rights, there are critical questions that come to mind like: are women fully exercising their autonomy or do they exercise it as far as it pleases their husbands? Are women free to stop a sexual act or there's fear of being violated by taking such a stance? Are women free

to make decisions about protection from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), regardless of their partner's wishes? Lastly, are women free to make decisions about being sexual or there is fear of being left for another woman if they turn down the sexual advances?

Women Sexual Objectification: A Theorization

For purposes of positioning, the focus of the paper shifts to the objectification theory which is the theoretical lenses guiding this article to understand women's sexual autonomy in Zimbabwe. This article argues that there are teachings that promote women sexual objectification both in the Shona indigenous culture and the AFM church. According to Bartky (1990) in Moradi (2008:377):

Sexual objectification occurs when a woman's sexual parts or functions are separated out from her person, reduced to the status of mere instruments, or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her. To be dealt with in this way is to have one's entire being identified with the body.

In this regard, the church and culture dictate what a woman ought to do such as labia elongation, having a certain body size and perform certain gimmicks in bed in order to satisfy the man. The theory of objectification posits that women and girls are socialised by culture and society to treat themselves as objects to be looked upon and evaluated based upon bodily appearance. Using this theory, it proposes that in Zimbabwe, men control women and mostly reduce them to sex objects. Philosopher Martha Nussbaum (1995) in Calogero (2012:574), argued using seven qualities that represent attitudes and treatment of women as objects which constitute the idea of objectification. The seven qualities are as follows:

1. *Instrumentality* is the treatment of another as a tool for one's own purposes.
2. *Denial* of autonomy is the treatment of another as lacking self-determination.
3. *Inertness* is the treatment of another as lacking agency and activity.
4. *Fungibility* is the treatment of another as interchangeable with others.
5. *Violability* is the treatment of another as permissible to break/break into.
6. *Ownership* is the treatment of another as something that is owned.

7. *Denial* of subjectivity is the treatment of another as something whose feelings and experience do not need to be considered.

By Instrumentality, women are treated as mere sexual objects for the satisfaction of men. Denial of autonomy suggests that married women lack self-determination in terms of when, where and how to have sex. Inertness in this regard shows that women lack agency and activity—everything is determined by the men. Fungibility is taken to mean that women are treated as objects that can be interchangeable with others such as always fearing that your husband may leave you if you fail to adhere to the strict cultural and church doctrines for married women. Violability means that women are treated as objects that can be violated willfully as in the case of domestic violence. Ownership suggests that women are owned by their husbands as evidenced by the lobola practice. Denial of subjectivity means that women's feeling and experiences are not seriously taken into consideration as indicated by forcing young girls to pull their labias without considering how they feel about it. So, the goal of objectification theory shows the tendency of equating women with their bodies, resulting in adverse perceptions of women's body and beyond.

Feminist theorists have argued that sexually objectifying experiences encountered by girls and women accumulate over time, eventually leading them to internalise the sexual objectification and turn it on themselves. That is, women come to view and treat themselves as objects to be evaluated by their appearance or to self-objectify as noted by Calogero (2012:574). With self-objectification, women become possessed with persistent body monitoring and habitual surveillance of outward body appearance. According to Moradi (2008:378), this may lead to mental health problems such as depression, eating disorders and sexual dysfunctions. Great anxieties and low self-esteem cause all this as a result of greater body shame. Therefore, this article looks at how the Zimbabwean social context impacts how women perceive themselves in the marital institution and society as a whole. In this paper, Objectification is viewed to be in the form of coercing women to do labia elongation, have an individual body size that is deemed sexy, perform in a particular manner in the bedroom. Further, in Zimbabwe and elsewhere, if you look closely, women's bodies have been highly sexualised in music videos, women celebrity photographs, filming and advertising industry. Thus, the media is awash with the objectification of women's bodies.

Methodology

This article is a qualitative research. The research was conducted in the AFM church in Zimbabwe. The reason for choosing the AFM is that the church is the oldest and largest Pentecostal church (Togarasei 2016:2; Sande 2017a). Thus, doing a research on this organization makes findings easy to be generalised to the rest of the population. The data collecting tool was a questionnaire survey. The reason for choosing this tool was based on the nature of the study which is considered as private. In fact, intimate studies on sexuality evoke methodological questions such as: how one can gain access to what is construed as invisible, and to issues that are considered private and personal? Accordingly, the sample consisted of 29 participants. The study targeted specific participants within the AFM church. Four of whom were pastors male marriage officers (PMMO). There were no female marriage officers that participated because there is no female marriage officer in the AFM as yet. The PMMO were selected to participate because they have a more comprehensive knowledge of marital counselling to both those planning to be married and wedding. Ten married women of different age groups 'five young women between age 25-40 years (MWY) and five elderly women between the age of 40 years and above (MWE) were selected. Of the five men, three were young men from 30-40 years (MMY); and two of the elderly were 40 years and above (MME). The choice for married participants was to provide information from the layman's point of view. Ten married pastors were selected, and six of them were male (PMM) and four of them were female (PMF). Besides, providing their marital experience they were also supposed to provide some theological underpinnings of the subject of the study. It was explained to the participants that they were not under any obligation to participate in the study. Although sampling attempted to avoid any bias in terms of gender and age, it should be noted that some participants were biased on how they expressed their views. Thus, meaning was ascribed to these 'thick descriptions' about women's sexual autonomy.

The questionnaire had open-ended questions. The study explored the reasons why women must do labia elongation and what purpose does it serve. Also, it was essential to understand why women should be taught how to please men in bed or vice versa. Further, the study questioned about the possible reasons why women must have a body size that pleases their husband or if there is a body size that pleases a man. Since sexual issues are both private and considered a taboo, the study asked op-

tions for women to negotiate for safe sex if they feel that her husband's behaviour is putting them at risk, and how can this be done. Lastly, the questions explored what happens if a woman is found committing adultery, and what could be the ground to send her back to her family.

The AFM Response: Findings and Discussion

The findings and discussion of this study are done simultaneously. The problem that relates to sex and sexuality is that it is treated as a private matter. Hence, this discussion looks at the private and secret spaces and practices of sex that the AFM is not at liberty to bring into the open. It is true that today's Christian marriage institutions present not only the body of a woman but the status and resources as belonging to the husband. Such a position is also sustained in the indigenous Shona culture. Sande (2016c:31) argued that nowadays families are in danger of destruction because of the shifting identities of marriages. MWE¹ lamented that *"Why is that men are viewed as a slippery substance, statements such as do this to your husband, or else he'll go after other women."* She further explained that *"this forms the rhetoric of most church teachings by women pastors and leaders on various ladies' platforms in the AFM. Such rhetoric leaves woman blaming themselves if the husband is to go after other women."* Such sentiments show that many women live in guilt of failing to please their husbands, as such the status quo is sustained by both the church and the indigenous culture. Another finding by an MWY is that *"It is sad that social systems put women at a disadvantage. For instance, you will notice that most statements come from women themselves, teaching other women on how to please men."* Accordingly, this finding shows mistrust amongst women and an expression of anger about how women leaders in the AFM promote the violation of women's sexual autonomy. Perhaps, the real problem to deal with is, how can the AFM women leaders encourage marriages based on equality, respect for human rights and happiness in the context of Christianity?

However, to contextualise the biblical principles, the AFM women leaders should reflect extensively on indigenous practices that militate against women's sexual autonomy. For example, the practice of Female

¹ All the demographic profiles of the participants of this study are represented by codes as described in the methodological section above.

Genital Mutilation (FGM) needs to be placed in the continuum of culture and Christian ethics. The practice of FGM is common in some African countries. There are many forms of FGM that are used depending on the culture and the ethnicity of the group. The moderate FGM does not involve cutting. Similarly, other African cultures like Kenya use FGM for the marital institution. Refaei et al. (2016:805) defined the FGM as total, partial or injury to the female genital mutilations for non-medical reasons. One important moral reason for the FGM is they reduce female sexual desire so that they remain faithful to their husbands. As put by Mwanri and Gatwiri (2017:2) FGM has four levels; the first is "clitoridectomy" partial or total removal of the clitoris. The second is the removal of the labia minora and clitoris. Thirdly is narrowing of the vaginal orifice by sealing with labia majora. The fourth level links to this essay because it includes the non-medical purpose, but it uses cauterisation, scraping, incising and piercing. This is traditionally operated to girls from few days of birth to teenage and above. The cutting of the external female genital for cultural reasons is done in preparation for womanhood and marriage for young girls. It is originally found in Africa and has been in existence for over 4,000 years. History has it that FGM is believed by African communities to promote easy birth, prevention of promiscuity and to give a girl better chances of marriage. These rites which might include physical mutilation, especially in East Africa are customs and traditional beliefs and a lifeblood of their communities. The FGM was frequently practised by the ancient cultures of the Egyptians, Hittites and the Phoenicians Tanui (2016:20). All PMM, PMF and PMMO were not explicit to establish that the Bible supports the FMG, one pastor stated that "*According to my Biblical studies, I have not read anywhere either in the Torah or the Gospels where the issue of FGM was mentioned*". Thus, if the biblical teaching is not explicit about the FGM, the AFM has a duty to fight cultural practices that oppress and dehumanise women.

Another practice which is similar to the FGM is the labia elongation (LE). The findings showed that the subject of LE is both sensitive and secretive amongst women in Zimbabwe. However, those who grew up in the Zimbabwean society have heard or practised it. According to Katongo (2014:31) LE is defined as the practice of pulling the inner labia minora of the vagina to stretch or elongate them. Further, the process of elongation needs to be practised for an extended period, on a regular basis, with herbal powder and inspections by elderly female members

for ascertaining the growth size. She also reiterates that the practice of LE is for sexual enhancement solely for the satisfaction of the man. At the initiation schools or through older women, the indigenous culture practised LE and taught women how to please men in bed.

Some herbal powder used during LE leaves a lot to be desired. Little if any, research has been done on these traditional products to determine their safety and efficacy. Examples of herbs and medicines used include pawpaw leaves that are dried and made into a cigarette which is then smoked. Some use feathers of a bat which they burn then the powder is mixed with Vaseline and the concoction is then applied on the labia when pulling them. Some use the leaves of a 'Mutohwe' tree in the same manner as paw-paw leaves whilst others use 'nhundurwa' a wild fruit which is smeared on the labia and the resulting effect should be the swelling of the labia but as the swelling goes down it is believed that's when the positive results will be seen. Their use is also poorly regulated, and some of the products may contain adulterated products resulting in possible adverse effects. Vaginal practices have also been suggested as risk factors that may increase women's vulnerability to HIV and cervical cancer as the agents inserted may cause irritation and damage to the mucosal lining. It is a matter of concern how far a woman can go to please her man in bed disregarding how much she is endangering her health. It is also sad to note how far a woman would go to keep her man, who may marry shortly after her death if she is to succumb to deadly diseases like cervical cancer. Such cultural practices have an impact on Christian marriages, and the question is whether the AFM leaders can encourage LE to promote happiness in the marriage? MWE argued that the girls today need to be taught this practice as there is nothing wrong with it, but it preserves the man from seeking extra-marital affairs. Emotionally commenting on LE, PMM a veteran pastor and a theologian contrary said, "*Who did that to the first woman Eve, yet she had a blessed matrimony!*" Consequently, such a position suggests that the AFM pretends that these things do not exist, and mostly draws a parallel to biblical passages without assessing the impact of the practice. While most MWE acknowledged LE, all PMF, PMM and PMMO sentiments proved that there is no scriptural backing for the practice. What seemed to be suggested philosophically was that the greatest sexual weapon is the mind, more than the organ and when the mindset is well focused on each other you create your sexual happiness.

LE is a form of abuse since history has it that some women were taken back to their families because they did not elongate their labia. For most women, this practice is imposed on girls by their family members whether Christian or not. It perpetuates and indoctrinates girls with the notion that women's life mission is to please men, without reciprocity from men. It also sexualizes girls prematurely. MWY complained that:

African culture makes a woman not to have freedom in as far as her body is concerned, and LE is a good example. God created a woman with her labia as it is, but culture says elongate them to please a man, isn't it creating a deformity on our naturalised bodies? Some men who do not like the LE may ask you what is this? I think its high time awareness programs start to run, and they should accept that.

The above sentiments agree with the findings by Batisai (2015:6) who have noted that in Zimbabwe, strides for women to control and own their bodies is hindered by traditional and religious practices, using restrictive symbolisms and frameworks that demand virginity and bride price. In fact, the bride price *roora/lobola* opens room for gender-based violence when a man demands sex from a woman, and silently women feel obliged to fulfil their coded conjugal responsibilities. In her book, *Risky Marriage*, Melissa Browning (2013) discovered in Tanzania, like many other African societies, decisions about sex remain a prerogative of the man, not a woman. Women have neither power to demand their husband's marital faithfulness nor rights to negotiate sex engagement in the home. In some contexts, there are violent consequences if a woman took the initiative in sex matters. For instance, to suggest the use of condoms or to refuse sexual advances from an unfaithful husband, the woman is likely to be beaten or risk abandonment (Phiri & Nadar 2009; Ramjee & Daniels 2013; Browning 2013).

Not all participants saw LE as an oppressive norm. PMMO said that "*The bedroom joy is a culmination of love, communication, spirituality and understanding.*" PMM, who is a senior Pastor explained the LE is very simple it is a cultural practice that has always been there and should be done if one wishes. In other words, it must not be compulsory and must not be done by force but one should do it willingly, and the purpose it serves is that it enhances sexual pleasure during foreplay. PMMO said:

LE is found in the Bible if you check the book of Esther. According to Esther 2:12 "...for six months with oil of myrrh and six months with sweet odours and other things for the purifying of women...." The issues of perfumes, lotions and other things preparations in the order of women, in this context LE was part of the things being talked about in the

scripture. Therefore, LE can make a woman attractive to see and turn on to the man.

In fact, another PMMO elaborated that:

LE helps the woman to feel like having sex if the truth is told, LE is for a woman's benefit than the man, but socially women are shy to say otherwise. LE makes sex pleasurable. In this case, a woman has full control of the sexual experience. If a woman has no LE, the loss is not to the man but the woman's, only most women, do not know what climax is all about hence they excuse when it comes to sex.

Therefore, it is more exaggerated to assume that all LE is done for men, but women are the most beneficiaries of this practice.

The issue of women's sexual autonomy is also tied closely to issues of infidelity in many Christian marriages. Many clergies, laities and believers today in the AFM and other denominations are accused or found unfaithful. Machingura and Machingura (2011:119-154) argued that it's a grave offence in Zimbabwe for a woman to be suspected of being unfaithful, but when married men have mistresses, the blame is on women for not satisfying the men sexually. Machingura and Nyakuhwa (2015:95) explored that the Bible is the ammunition loaded with racial, sexuality, gender and class to exploit women. On the other hand, perhaps from experience women have developed a common saying such as "all men cheat" and the woman is left with nothing but to accept her fate for fear of being a single mother, a status that is highly stigmatised in both cultural and Christian institutions.

The church is mostly mourning the enculturation of the indigenous culture. Sande (2017d:57) argued that "the coalition of religious artifacts between Pentecostalism and African Traditional Religion forms a new hybrid of African Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe". Therefore, it is high time the church reflects, and proffers solutions to the attempts being put by the culture. The AFM church leaders like the PMMO, PMM and PMF explained that in the Shona indigenous communities it was believed that the primary role of a woman was a reproduction, not to express libido. There is a gap of understanding how the duty of a woman can be met, since the Bible gives a blanket answer and does not explain the details. The former Living Waters Theological Seminary (LWTS)² Principal argued that "*the intended purpose of the various holistic empowering church*

² Living Theological Seminary is a training wing of the AFM.

service provides groups such as youth, ladies' department, men's fellowship, girls' fellowship marriage enrichment workshops." It is plausible to note how these structures function. PMMO who is a young married man bemoaned that "On my bachelor's party, there was not much taught but was just told I must satisfy my wife and please her...that was as far as I was taught. I was to discover as I go." Issues of women's virginity are stressed upon girls only and not the boy. Burchardt (2011:681) argued that sexuality and intercourse in Pentecostal youth is sophisticated but enshrined in dating and romance than aspects of marriage and sin. MWE said, "a woman is expected to appear like a virgin even after giving birth thereby forcing a lot of women to put dangerous herbs to their vagina to be tight enough which puts them at risk of cervical cancer yet there is no complaint of man's penis." Some women go to the extent of inserting alum salt, a usage which most healthcare expects are against. This suggests that the burden must be placed upon both parties. In this case, the issue questions whether Christian men are taught how to please their wives in bed? Hence, to balance the equilibrium, there should be a synchronisation of the syllabus taught at "bridal showers" and the "bachelor's party". These two are formalised forums within the church setup that has a role of teaching both men and women on how to please each other in bed. A suggestion, therefore, is that the issue of LE, virginity and penis enlargement (PE) must be discussed before marriage, together with the number of children she is prepared to carry. Batisai (2015:8) argued that the emergence of missionaries in Zimbabwe shaped young women's identities in the colonial period constructing womanhood to basing sexuality on purity as guided by the Bible. The Bible narrative undermines the women's ability to raise questions or negotiate for safer sex. 1 Tim 2:12 says 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.' The obvious meaning of this scripture is that woman must submit to the authority of her husband. The Bible teaches a woman the importance of submitting to her husband's authority like Sarah who called her husband Abraham 'My Lord'; the importance of being a virtuous wife like the Proverbs 31 woman.

One of the questions in this study was whether there could be a valid reason that women must have a body size that pleases their husbands. Some PMM showed that it is just a matter of opinion and differs with men. Some men prefer and are attracted to slim women while others are drawn to and prefer women with big bodies. However, in the AFM be-

side health reasons most women struggle with body sizes and shape and the reason behind is men. While other MWE argued that women's bodies are sexualized for the pleasure of men. Hence, this is seen by a struggle about women's body size. What body size a woman ought to have is many times linked to how it will please the man. One MWY mourned "*I can't recall how many times my friends and family have told me, you are getting too fat, your husband will leave you. Dress in this manner, or else your husband will leave you. Behave like 'a whore' in the bedroom, or else your husband will leave you*". To make matters worse at Ladies Conferences, such the AFM annual ladies conferences at Rufaro Conference centre in Masvingo (which simply means a place of joy and happiness) and in the weekly Thursday meetings known as *KuChina Chemadzimai*, teachings such as these are the order of the day. As if that was not enough whenever there is a bridal shower or baby shower all teachings are narrowed down to the sexualisation of women bodies. What comes to mind is whether the society also considers what women need as rational human beings? Further, is the society also teaching men that if they do not do A, B or C, women will also leave them? From the findings of this study the answer was, "no, it does not".

What is surprising to note is that men, in turn, do not spend much time conversing about how to treat a woman well lest they will be left, but rather they spend more time engaging in masochist conversations that boost their ego and their manhood *bhuru rinoonekwa nemavanga aro* (for a bull is seen by its scars), so goes the Shona proverb. In essence, this proverb simply mean to be a real man you must show that you are a real macho as shown by engaging in multiple sexual relations with women. Having children outside the marital home is not an act that is negatively judged. What is also interesting to note here is that older women are the ones who teach the young women about how to be good for your man. Thus, women become their enemies. Are women's bodies just mean to an end, means to get sexual gratification for men? Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) would say always treat other humans as ends in themselves and never as a means to an end. From the above argument, women's bodies are being objectified.

Furthermore, can a woman complain if not satisfied in bed, findings show that sometimes it ends up bordering on promiscuity? However, it is difficult the extent to which the women are trained to be silent from both the indigenous and biblical position. According to Hodza and Fortune (1979) for the Shona people the love-making practice is decorated

with praises (*madanha* and *zvirevereve*). Thus, *madanha* (praises by women) express how men satisfies or gives the woman sexual pressure. Men use *zvireverere* (praises of women) to describe the beauty, tenderness and structure of their wives. Women are quiet when faced with challenges involving men, but most men are more severe at scrutiny and cover-ups. However, findings from PMF showed that women sex dissatisfaction is no trivial matter. The PMMO, as a marriage officer and a counsellor, his experience was that “*during messy and noisy divorces, we often hear these stories coming out! So, marital dissatisfaction can be a legitimate cause for women divorcing their husbands.*” This finding shows that at times the people are quick to say that the Bible says or does not talk about divorce, yet the lived experiences of women warrant a deconstruction of such scriptures and proffer alternatives and contextualised solutions. Van de Kampa (2013:534) argued that Pentecostal pastors address women than men in matters of gender and intimacy. In fact, most MWE and MWY in this study showed that most men do not satisfy their wives sexually, but only that women either do not say it for fear of victimisation. MWE succinctly said, “If a woman finds where it is done satisfactorily *anoita kupenga chaiko zvekutadza kudzoka kumba* (she clings and never returns home)”. Perhaps, this is why there is a discourse about penis enlargement (PE) in the Christian circles nowadays. Anon. (2014b:1), showed that Makandiwa the leader of the United Family International Ministries (UFI) performed a male organ enlargement miracle on a man who had a penis of the size of a two-year-old. In a different but similar miracle Anon. (2014a:1) argued that Magaya restored a marriage of a man who had *kadora* (small penis) who was failing to satisfy his wife. Although the ideas of (PE) is not openly talked about, it is also an issue of concern to both men and women.

The question that the AFM needs to answer is how then can we bring equality, respect and mutual understanding in the bedroom. There is a belief that if the bedroom is not stable and the women are not satisfied, some prayers will not be answered. To this, PMF said “*Our model is found in Eph 5:21-23, it has to be mutually beneficial. A husband ought to demonstrate a Christ-like sacrificial nature which makes it easier for the wife to submit to, as unto the Lord, not as unto the devil.*” The pulpit teaching should show that marital happiness is accommodative of women’s needs and concerns and the focus must be broader than homiletics or bedroom coaching. Further, MME who is an Elder explained that “*In our traditions, the maternal uncles used to teach boys, while the paternal aunts*

used to teach girls about the nuts and bolts of bedroom gymnasia.” One wonders whether this has stopped because of conversion, or what has replaced these practices. Most MWY and MMY openly admitted that they watch pornography, use vibrators and buy tablets (Viagra) for enhancing sex. The majority accepted that there is something wrong with that and the AFM do not condone such practices. Kaunda (2016:84) suggested that the church should, “promote just-sex in the world”.

Conclusion

The findings from this article show that both the indigenous and biblical scripts are strategically woven together to control, subjugate and manipulate the body, sexuality and resources of women for the men. Women's sexual autonomy revolves around men. Most teachings related to bedroom and sex are biased to please men. Issues surrounding LE, FGM and PE are critical in the discourse of women's sexual autonomy in Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. The finding of this article showed that there is pressure for sexual performance in bedrooms, and some couples are privately resorting to watching pornography, taking Viagra and vibrators to meet the demand. The participants suggested that training should be done to both men and women about sexual autonomy.

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a woman without a man is like a  without 

“Smell Houses”, “Gold Diggers”, “Jezebels”, and “Jesus’ Wives”

Pentecostal Deployment of Biblical Scriptures and the Perception of Single Ladies in Zimbabwe

Kudzai Biri

Abstract

This paper examines the sermonic discourses and deployment of biblical scriptures in Pentecostal Ladies’ fellowships in their teachings on single women or teachings that infringe with single women in Zimbabwe. Do these teachings do justice to the single women and are these fellowships safe spaces for them? The surveillance of these single women unravels attitudes and perspectives towards them. Through an insider perspective, I argue that a deeper engagement with the discourse of singlehood brings to the fore serious and complex theological questions that in turn bring challenges and dilemmas. A tapestry of these dilemmas and challenges find uncritical and inappropriate deployment of biblical scriptures that militate against the welfare of single women. Therefore, an earnest engagement with the discourse is a worthy enterprise.

Introduction

The discourse of singlehood is one of the most neglected and under-researched areas in gender studies. In this study, I argue that both the neglect and under-research that characterise the discourse of singlehood is in part a manifestation of the perceptions and negative attitude that people have about singlehood in Zimbabwe and on the African continent in general. It is also prudent to acknowledge that although we have single men (in their diverse circumstances) most Pentecostal churches have inherited the traditional perceptions and attitudes towards singlehood. It is mostly the women that are single, and it is these single women and not the single men that have become the focus in society and have become a bone of contention. During the Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa (ATISCA 2011) Conference in South Africa, Kempton Park, the subject of singlehood was brought up but it was glossed over. During the short time of debate that centred on single women as ‘husband snatchers’ Lovemore Togarasei

asked a very crucial question that the researcher embraced as she carried studies on singlehood;

We have ministers of religion here, the negative image that we have concerning single ladies in our churches, how do we deal with that and how do we teach singlehood in our churches?

This was an important question that required honest responses as it dealt with the well-being of single women in the church. However, very few dared to pursue the discussion as it was glossed over and there was call to move to the next presentation. I also observed that the issue was glossed over again at the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians (Circle) conference in 2013 in Kempton Park, South Africa. Most papers that were presented castigated single women and the dominant accusation was that they snatch other women's husbands and that they are after the material wealth of married men. Hence, they cause untold suffering to families through an unethical conduct of "husband snatching". The researcher noticed most presenters and critics at the conference were Pentecostals. Could this be revealing the background of these scholars since it is generally assumed that our socio-cultural backgrounds shape our perceptions of realities? The subject was not concluded, and emotions rose as some single women in counter-defence sought to engage the subject deeper. Coming from within the Pentecostal family the researcher sought to pursue and establish the discourse of singlehood at a deeper level.

The above two conferences are crucial and significant in this study. The ATISCA represents an amalgamation of theological institutes in the region that have the mandate to reflect on theological issues. The Circle is the highest body of female theologians that is oriented to deal and theologise on issues pertaining to women on the African continent. What then is at stake in relation to the plight of single women in these two dominant institutions? Do they uphold society's general view that single women are "husband snatchers" and all the negative images that accompany their personhood? Below, I examine in detail the attitudes and perceptions that are sourced from the Pentecostal discourses and the deployment of biblical scriptures.

I have stated above that the focus of this study is on single women because while there are single men, a Shona man is seen like a bull (Shoko 2007). He can prey over as many women as he can, and society seems not to be worried about them. In fact, the man's sexual prowess is a mark of manhood in Shona traditional religion and culture. This seems

to have been inherited by Pentecostalism in Zimbabwe. The theology of deliverance, emphasis to pursue morality and to shun sexual immorality is not balanced. Churches like ZAOGA and AFM have good ministries for men but unfortunately do not make practical follow up to restrain men (Chitando and Biri 2013). However, this is the opposite with women. Bourdillon (1976) notes that among the Shona people of Zimbabwe, women are the dignity of the home (*mutsigo wemusha*). Therefore, any misbehaviour pertaining to issues of sex by a woman is tantamount to destroying the whole village. It appears this is the background that has in/directly influenced the discourse of singlehood in Pentecostalism, for the critical eyes tend to focus more on women and not men. Thus, it reveals the patriarchal nature of both the traditional Shona society and the Pentecostal churches that seem to have uncritically upheld the perceptions and attitudes from the traditional religion and culture.

Methodologically material was gathered through participant observation. The researcher attended several gatherings and fellowships of the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), which is the umbrella body of the Pentecostals and Evangelicals. Sermonic discourses were gathered and critiqued with the aid of published material on African Traditional Religions and Pentecostalism.¹ The study also adopts an African Womanist perspective, as opposed to radical Western feminism. While African womanism acknowledges that the plight of women is dominantly that of suffering because of patriarchy, it acknowledges and maintains the quest to partner with men to establish stable relationships that promote mutual co-existence.

The Status and Role of Women

John Simon Mbiti (1991) wrote that an unmarried woman has no significance in African traditional society. She has nothing to contribute to society. Mercy Amba Oduyoye (1995) has similar observations on single women and their plight in society. She adds that

A free woman (single) conjures up negative images and she is an affront to society, she spells disaster particularly when she manages her affairs very well.

¹ Names of the preachers have been withheld for ethical considerations.

These observations are significant because the question that corresponds to the above two observations is; is there dignity outside marriage? Yet, James Amanze (1998) points out that it is African Independent Churches (AICs) that opened space for women as opposed to the mainline mission churches that were perceived as patriarchal and denying space to women even if they were gifted. Pentecostalism falls within the rubric of African Independent Churches. The categorisation is a highly contested but beyond the scope of this paper. However, it suffices to say most Pentecostal churches in Africa (Zimbabwe respectively) fall within the rubric of AICS by virtue of being initiated by African men and women who broke away from either AICs or mission churches. The opening of space should be treated with caution as women in general remain under the grip of patriarchal reading of the biblical scriptures. This means a double bow for single women who are generally marginalised. It appears that in Pentecostalism, opening space for women relates to the more visibility of women in many ministries as compared to their role in Western missionary churches. This study is therefore set to investigate if Pentecostalism has practically opened space for single women. The insights of Amanze are significant. Although different churches or denominations vary in their theology and praxis in relation to women in general, the observation points to increased space of participation which should not be construed as total liberation and freedom for all women.

Kalu (2008) has categorised different women in Pentecostal churches and this is useful to this study. These are the “first ladies”, the wives of the founders of ministries who deploy evangelical power. The “sisters” are those women with charismatic gifts that are trusted by first ladies and often carry out duties assigned to them. The other category is that of the “Jezebels” (see below on the biblical background of this figure) who are viewed with suspicion. These are mostly single women who are perceived to have the agenda of seducing men. Therefore, there are those who should closely watch their movement lest they can seduce the men of God or faithful followers. This categorisation and the call to monitor the vicious “Jezebels” bring out the theme of surveillance that is dominant in most Pentecostal churches on single women. The forms of surveillance are a result of mistrust that translates to policing of the welfare of single women because they are perceived as having an evil agenda.

Biri (2013) has categories of single women that include; the ‘hit and run’ who were impregnated and deserted by their men, widows, the never married but past the age of marriage according to societal standards, the

divorced and those who have reached marriage age but not yet married. These categories are important because they point to the diversities within the class of single women that defy generalisations. It is therefore important to investigate whether or not Pentecostal discourses on singlehood are sensitive to these categories. Important questions underlay this study. What difference has Pentecostalism made in the attitudes and perspectives towards single women? The sections below unravel attitudes and perspectives towards the single women through an analysis of the sermonic discourses and teachings in different Pentecostal platforms.

Navigating the Discourses of Singlehood

In 2013 at the Evangelical fellowship of Zimbabwe Women’s Conference at Harare International Conference Centre (HICC), one of the pastors’ wives declared:

You are a single lady, but you sleep until your ribs are sore because you want to snatch other people’s husbands. You cause a lot of pain to families, while others call them “small houses”, my husband calls them “smell houses”. Their deeds are stinking...

This is from where I adopted the title of my paper; “Smell houses”. What good can come out of “smelling houses”? “Small house” is the common name that is given to women who are deemed to have affairs with married men. “Small house” is used in contrast to the official wife and home of the officially married women. It is important to note that while there is general bunching of women who are in relationships with married men as “small/smell houses”, the phenomenon has become diverse and complex. For example, some women are married as second wives by the married men which becomes a polygamous marriage. Yet, initially this term applied to single women (often prostitutes) in their categories who were perceived as having the intention of sexual pleasures and getting material benefits from the married men. It is the contention of this study that the designation; “small houses” is a generalisation that does not really capture the on-going complex realities in relationships and marriages in contemporary Zimbabwe.

The above sermon by the pastor raises important ethical and theological questions. First, the failure to differentiate categories of the single women appears to be a gross error in the sermon that also appears unethical, given the weight of the castigation. All single women regardless of status

are categorised as lazy and after married men. The sermon ignores the reality of independent single women that Oduyoye (1997) classifies as managers of their lives, and they are an affront to the patriarchal society because they deviate from the societal norm that is used to see women depending on men. Biri (2016) notes that single women are encouraged to work more than married women as described in Proverbs 31. The idea is that if the married woman is a hard worker as depicted in Prov 31 then the single woman should go beyond that as a woman without a husband. Reference to single women who go after married men and who are after material benefits are referred also as “gold diggers”. “Gold diggers” is a designation for both illegal and legal gold panners who embark on informal business of panning gold in search of wealth for survival. Thus, the label implies that single women tirelessly eye and go for married men for material benefits.

Ezekiel Guti of Zimbabwe Assemblies of God Africa (ZAOGA) is the nodal power point in Zimbabwean Pentecostalism, father of the EFZ and founder of ZAOGA’s Gracious Woman’s ministry which has given birth to many women’s ministries directly or indirectly. In one of ZAOGA single women’s annual gatherings at Africa Multi-Nation for Christ College (AMFCC) in October 2012 he said:

...my children, some of your prayers are not heard because old women are praying for grandchildren and young women are praying for husbands. There are no men in the world, where can I get them? Work hard and enjoy with your children.

The above words from Guti are significant. First, they capture reality of the central concerns of different categories of women. Second, they bring to light the reality of the gender imbalance between men and women in Zimbabwe which is estimated as half a million women more than men in 2016 statistics. It also raises questions on the popular deliverance sermons in most Pentecostal churches like Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries of Walter and Tendai Magaya, United Families International Church of Emmanuel and Ruth Makandiwa among others. They insist on altar calls for prayers of deliverance for single women to get husbands. Yet the number of women outnumbers that of men.

At the same single women conference, a single lady sitting close to the researcher grumbled, in response to Guti’s words:

Ahh, it is not about numbers but need...all these years I was fasting and praying for a husband and *baba* (father) tells us that there are no men in the world.

The protest by the single woman has a twofold significance. First, it brings out the contradictions within different Pentecostal churches. Some insist that every single woman should be married, and others acknowledge the numerical gap between men and women, thus placing single women in a dilemma. Second, it brings out the earnest desire of some single women who are desperate for marriage. Guti has also taught that single women should work hard all day long so that when they go to bed tired they do not think about having sex with men. One questions, is this a practical solution? The protest and response from one of the single women above shows the irony, while leaders like Guti admit that there is no balancing ratio in terms of gender that warrants monogamous marriage, one questions the calls for deliverance from demonic oppression in order to get a husband and also the insistence on monogamous marriages in the Pentecostal churches.

Most female leaders are brutal to single women in their sermons. Other popular statements in sermons of denouncing bad character of single women include; *vakamirira kumora hupfumi hwedu!* (they are after reaping our richness). But is this a true picture of all the single women? Some single women have denounced and rejected the “sympathy model”. They are independent and do not solicit sympathy from the society and as it stands, some single women are better than married women and better positioned on their own to negotiate their issues of life. It is therefore questionable to claim that single women wait to reap wealth from married men. Further, one should not overlook the shifting paradigms in the Zimbabwean society where most men have lost their jobs and rely on single women whom they have extra marital affairs with and are entrepreneurs. This then shows that these single women are not after money only but desire sexual partners.

While encouraging single women to work is noble the study queries the spirit behind such an encouragement. Jane Soothill (2010) noted that Pentecostalism has offered space for women. It teaches that the sky is the limit and that the women should strive to do the best in all facets of life. It is within the deployment of biblical scriptures and the sermonic discourses that mostly militate against the welfare of single women that the study critiques. The sermons are blind to the fact that there are hardworking rich single women going for lazy poor husbands. I argue

that the focus should not be on absolute claims on the need for wealth by single women, at times there is genuine quest for either marriage or sexual pleasures.

On another incident in the women's fellowships in 2016 in Harare, one lady emphasised:

Don't carry your stress *yekushaya murume* (of having no husband), *shandira mwari* (work for God). Don't allow all the people to know that you don't have a husband, you are just angry with all the people.

In the above sermon, anger and stress are regarded as the hall marks of having no husband. Having a husband or being in marriage appears to be glorified in most Pentecostal sermons as the basis of having a stress-free life. Having a husband appears to be a great achievement and it probably explains why being a single woman is accompanied with a lot of derogatory unkind words leaving the single women without any dignity. I also asked the question at the beginning: Is there dignity outside marriage? While responses might differ, in light of the above discussion and cases, it appears that in practice Pentecostalism does not affirm the worthiness of single women. Therefore, are contradictory postures whereby in some instances the humanity of single women is acknowledged as they make contributions in the church and at other times there are vicious attacks on them. For example, in ZAOGA, they are constantly praised as the bedrock of the church in terms of their economic contributions and 24-hour intercessory prayer for ministries in the church. Yet, on the moral scale, it appears they are bunched as lacking a complete dignified life through allegations of snatching and seducing married men.

Some of the generalised sermons focus on department. In one of the fellowships that the researcher attended, the speaker focussed on the need to be smart and presentable because men are attracted by beauty. She said:

Hamugeze that's why *vamwe vasingaonekwe vamwe vachionekwa* (You do not bath properly, that is why others get husbands and you do not), if you are smart somebody will definitely ask your hand in marriage, if you bath even *vakashata munoonekerawo* (even if you are ugly you will attract a man).

After this service, the researcher sought to engage some single women in order to hear their responses. One of the single women quoted some messages that were circulating on the social media:

Even baboons and gorillas attract tourists, it is not about beauty or bathing but is it about destiny.

Such responses are important because they show the underlying protests and defence mechanisms that single women employ as survival strategies in these churches when their social status is attacked or demonised. The response dismisses the issue of deportment or beauty. Rather, individual women have their destinies set by God.

Biri 2013 has also pointed how in ZAOGA the label “single ladies” is commonly translated and shortened to “*mu/vasinguru*” which carries derogatory remarks. Yet ZAOGA has economically empowered single women, probably more than many Pentecostal denominations in the country through its focus on entrepreneurship projects called Talents. Kalu (2008) captures the plight of single women in Nigeria that is generalizable and applicable to the Zimbabwean context. They are referred to as “Jezebels”. The deployment of the biblical Jezebel (1 Kings 16, 18-21; 2 Kings 9) who was evil unravels the vicious attacks and negative perceptions that people have about single women. In the book of Kings, Jezebel was married to King Ahab. Jezebel is regarded as having a seducing spirit. Single women are thus viewed as seducing men particularly the man of God. One of the single women interviewed by the researcher argued that the figure of Jezebel fits well in critiquing married women and not single women because Jezebel was not a single woman. As such, the interviewee believed that the deployment of Jezebel in discourses on singlehood has lot of cultural bias.

Encouraging single women to participate actively in the church appears to present a dilemma to them as noted by Kalu (2008). They are accused of having the intention to be seen by men and attracting married men. Yet if they do not participate in the church, they are castigated for laziness and failing to participate in the body of Christ. The categorization by Kalu above show that while other women and the first ladies occupy positions of integrity, single women are not because they are viewed with suspicion and having an evil agenda of snatching husbands. Most of the criticisms on single woman are however silent on the role that the men or the men of God play in such relationships. It is the contention of this study that this attitude is sourced from the traditional paradigm, condoning male promiscuity and blaming the woman for the fall of man. Also, the discourses are silent on married women who engage on extra-marital relationships with other men which has become one of the issues that the churches are struggling with.

The “small houses” phenomena are an eruption of what is suppressed. The introduction of Christianity saw the demonization of polygamy and

the call for monogamous marriages. It is the eruption of the “small house” phenomenon that the study argues that Christianity failed to negotiate African traditional customs that are deeply embedded in people hearts and central in their worldview. The interaction between Christianity and African traditional customs need a re-negotiation in the light of the discourses on singlehood.² As captured below from a single woman:

I endured my marriage for eight years, I could not conceive for that whole period until my husband left me and went away to marry another wife. Do they know that some of us did not choose to be single?

The significance of the plurality of voices from single women is that they converge on one point; there is no attention or serious engagement given to single women except to demonise them. They all show that there is need to undertake a task of re-theologising the plight of single women.

Following 1 Tim 5:11-12 single women also are referred to as “Jesus’ wives”. As pointed out by Biri (2013), this appears a noble designation as it places single women on a moral pedestal, given their questioned dignity in society. However, the label is an imposition from without and bunches single women. Yet, do all single women subscribe to the designation? Apart from the label, “Jesus’ wives”, the exegesis of scriptures appears lagging behind the socio-economic and cultural realities of the time. For example, 1 Cor 11:3 (cf. the contributions of J. Kügler and of D. Aryeh in this volume) is popular on teachings on the family in Pentecostal churches. It is emphasised that the head of woman is the man and the head of Christ is man.

The contention of the study is that Pentecostalism has failed to re-read the scriptures in the light of existing reality of their congregants. The above scripture needs contextual reading because the single women as heads of houses apart from child headed homes that have become common are marginalised. Certain issues need to be brought to light. First, are these families unfit to be called families? Second, marriage is sacralised and it is regarded as a symbol of God’s church. How then do

² This became very clear in the discussion at the BiAS conference in Harare 2016, when a greater number of male participants argued vividly against monogamy – most of them being Christian theologians and/or pastors. The cultural and religious hybridity revealed in their contributions made some of these men interpret monogamy as “Western church ideology” while the Gospels depict it as teaching of Jesus himself.

single women participate in the body of Christ fully and what is their position if God is central and honoured in the marriage institution? These are crucial questions that need to be re-visited and require re-reading and re-interpretation of the scriptures in Pentecostalism in order to give life affirming and all-embracing theologies that refrain from attacking and marginalising single women.

Problems and Challenges of the Sermons

Most of the sermons and teachings on single women are taught by married women, in particular the “first ladies”. This study argues that this is one of the errors in Pentecostalism. The man of God and the ‘first lady’ are regarded as people who are inspired to teach in all matters of life, yet sermons show a great deal of injustices and deficient deployment of scriptures to authenticate prevailing ideologies and perceptions about single women. The remedies imposed on single women such as the need to work hard to forget about men and sex, show how leaders prescribe and impose to single women from without. It appears that single women are more qualified to teach other single women rather than married men and women to encourage single women to endure, to be resolute, when they go back to their husbands and wives at home. The founders (mostly male like Guti) claim to understand women and teach that it is possible for single women and not for men to stay without a sexual partner. The claim by such men to understand a woman’s ego and aspirations is problematic since they are ‘outsiders’. They also justify men’s sexual prowess as natural because of their ‘biological set up’. This has opened avenues of abuse of women particularly the single women in some Pentecostal churches.

I argue that there are challenges and there is need to deal precisely with the subject of singlehood because scriptures deployed are very deficient. Sweeping under the carpet and glossing over issues on singlehood is basically because the subject presents theological dilemmas and challenges that Pentecostal theologians grapple with. This attempt to create “paradise on earth” for single women by encouraging them to work hard and enjoy so that they forget about sex (such as Guti’s teachings) and glossing over their concerns is questionable. It requires an in-depth critique. Greater task lies with the “first ladies”, whom Biri (2013) argues that they should be called to account because they run and pass on the button stick of patriarchy. These women are largely and strategically

positioned to transform the negative perceptions about singlehood in their churches. The power that they hold in ministries can be channelled towards partnering with men and all other women in dealing with issues rather than name calling, as in the case with single women.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pentecostalism seeks to empower women and has indeed empowered single women economically. However, the discourses on marital status have reinforced or foisted the traditional stereotypes of the unworthiness of a single woman, yet Pentecostalism also depends on the resources of the single women in these ministries. The study has argued that Pentecostalism does not offer completely safe space for single women in terms of theologies that militate against their well-being. Pentecostal theologians therefore need to re-theologise the discourse of singlehood in order to give life affirming theologies that also include both single men and single women.

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a woman without a man is like a  without a 

The Bible and the Place of Widows in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

Francis Machingura & Ngoni Chikwanha

Abstract

The paper examines the experiences of widows and the general attitudes, beliefs and practices in as far as the place of widows in the church is concerned. We analyse how the widows are biblically portrayed and how the contemporary church has relegated widows to the periphery. Selected biblical texts on widows have been evoked to enrich the discourse. The study makes use of both qualitative and quantitative empirical approaches. The following biblical texts will guide the discourse: Ruth 1:20-21; Ex 22:21-27; Deut 24:17-18, 27:19; 1 Tim 5:3-16 and Acts 6:1-5.

Introduction

Recent studies conducted on Apostolic Faith Mission (AFM) in Zimbabwe have focused mainly on history and doctrine, leadership succession and other related issues (Togarasei 2005, 2016; Machingura 2011, 2016; Chandomba 2007; Hwata 2005; Chamburuka 2014; Madziyire and Risinamhodzi 2015; Murefu 2015, and Nhumburudzi 2016); little or no published literature exists on the place of widows in the AFM in Zimbabwe. Yet widows constitute a significant percentage in the church at large as they feel shunned and excluded.

The modern discourse in both private and public spheres focuses much on the rights of every human being. Institutions are expected to promote the respect of every human being's right. Churches are not an exception to the human rights discourses. Manyonganise (2016) argues that the church is not a safe place for women. She further postulates that in a world where abuse against women generally has received condemnation from all quarters, it means the church is yet to align, correct and transform herself so that she becomes relevant and habitable to female members let alone widows. Samson O. Olanisebe and Olusegun A. Oladosu (2014) conclude their study by asking very important questions such as: How effective is the welfare scheme that is put in place for widows by

the church? Is the occasional extension of a good-will gift by the church really addressing the needs of the widows?

The larger percentage of the widows in Africa is experiencing harrowing effects of widowhood such as dehumanisation, deprivation, dispossession and disempowerment. It then becomes a clarion call to the church to revisit her welfare and empowerment programmes for widows in Africa. In 2012, Zimbabwe is believed to have had 600 000 widows. By widows, we imply those who lost their husbands. The widows include the young and old, with or without children. Whilst not demeaning the efforts of the church and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in battling with the eradication of the dehumanising widowhood rites in many of the African countries (Adamu *et al.* 2011), it is the church that is best positioned to help fight the various degrees of injustice meted out against widows.

Chitando (2007) rightly posits that there is a culture of silence, secrecy, and shame in the church regarding sexuality. As a result, women are the worst victims of negative cultures. Nhumburudzi (2016) adds that Pentecostal churches such as the AFM in Zimbabwe church governance system propagates the discrimination of women in the church. Manala (<http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/>) laments that the challenge presented by neglect and maltreatment of widows does not receive sufficient attention as contemporary scholars seems reluctant to reflect on African widowhood rites and their consequences. This is further complicated by shortage of scholarly research on global and African widowhood rites and practices despite the fact that widows make up a large part of the female population in all societies. Sossou posits that although widows make up the bulk of the female population in all societies, research concerning their plight and status in developing countries is lacking. Consequently, widows are silent victims suffering cruel and dehumanizing cultural and ritual practices such as mourning rites after the passing on of their spouses. Sossou (www.researchgate.net/publication/) rightly concludes that the situation of widows in Africa and other developing countries is strongly influenced by socio-economic, political and religious beliefs derived from the patriarchal cultures revolving around unequal power distribution and domination by men.

In the same vein, Jessie-Fubala Manuel (2016) contends that the church has consistently used its theology backed by patriarchal tradition to support the marginalization and silencing (abuse) of women. It is a cause for great concern that the scriptures (Ps 94:6; Jer 49:11; Ex 22:22; Isa

1:17; Mk 12:41-44; Lk 18:1-5, 21:1-4) have been used by the church to keep women and women's issues on the margins (Nalwamba 2016). Nalwamba concludes that by denigrating and marginalizing women, the church has deviated from Jesus Christ's basic tenet and attitude of respecting, listening and attending to the needs of women as espoused in his ministry. Mapuranga laments that the church is encouraged to be a community that loves and provides space for all. Hallonstein notes that theology may promote justice and equality, building on the conviction that all people are created equal with dignity to live their lives in abundance (Chitando and N Njoroge 2016). So, the marginalization of widows in churches is a cause for concern. It is the role of church leaders to move away from condoning traditional oppressive gender attitudes and move the church along the Christ-like understanding of the role and value of men and women (Mildred and Hahn 2012). As a result of these concerns, this chapter has sought to engage and interrogate the place and status of widows in the AFM in Zimbabwe.

Brief History of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

The AFM in Zimbabwe quickly became the region's largest Pentecostal church and a major catalyst for Pentecostal advance into Zimbabwe. The AFM in Zimbabwe is the mother of Zimbabwean Pentecostalism or Pentecostal movements in Zimbabwe (Maxwell 2006; Machingura 2011; Togarasei 2005). Machingura (2011; 2011b) adds that AFM in Zimbabwe is one of the largest Pentecostal denominations or churches in Zimbabwe. Our interest on AFM is not misplaced and cannot be overlooked considering the number of followers that the church commands, yet surprisingly not much has been done by scholars in terms of research save to mention in passing its existence as one of the biggest Pentecostal churches. Machingura (2011) further posits that the AFM movement has managed to rid itself of the dominance of the male adults and the floodgates were opened to young men and women, who are the victims of traditional patriarchy. AFM is not yet out of the woods gender wise. Chitando and Njoroge (2016) opine that many churches are open to change and transformation within their institutions and communities. We do not agree with Chitando and Njoroge's observations as church leaders are sometimes rigid in their ways. Church leaders are quite capable of transforming harmful cultural practices, death dealing theologies and oppressive systems into helpful practices, life-giving theologies and lib-

erative systems. It takes a lot of persuasion and convincing for the Church to adopt new ways and strategies in order for transformation to take place. This is predominantly due to the emotions around human rights amongst the African political and religious elite. It is not a walk in the path for transformation to take place in most of the Pentecostal churches. The socialisation process in the AFM in Zimbabwe is gendered and it is not surprising that the spiritual public sphere is exclusivist and closed to women let alone widows.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the post-colonial feminist approach following two theoretical frameworks aimed at the elimination of women's subordination and marginalization (Dube 2012). This theory emerged in a struggle against all forms of oppression such as patriarchy. The theory is committed to interrogate the subjugation of both male and female but problematise all gendered discourses on women (Dube 2001). The method helps us to analyse the Bible and modern-day churches. The study makes use of qualitative approach. A sample of 50 people (pastors, overseers, elders, deacons, laypeople and widows) were interviewed and given questionnaires to complete. Discussions also took place on WhatsApp group chats on the challenges and opportunities of widows in the AFM in Zimbabwe. Several biblical texts (Ruth 1:20-21; Ex 22:21-27; Deut 24:17-18, 27:19; 1 Tim 5:3-16 and Acts 6:1-5) will guide the discourse.

The Old Testament and the Status of Widows

The Old and New Testaments make it very clear that both God and Jesus Christ value widows. Consequently, widows are in the class of vulnerable people, which include sojourners, orphans, slaves and hired servants. However, biblical laws stipulate how vulnerable people ought to be treated with justice and fairness. There are laws on how they should be cared for, for instance, the condemnation of the oppression of widows and orphans in Exodus 22 which states that:

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them and they cry to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless (Ex 22:22-24; cf. Olanisebe and Oladosu 2014).

Consequently, the church that takes its biblical responsibility for the care and support of widows seriously, in obedience to the Lord and love for people, ought to plan and prepare widows after their bereavement. Widows, like orphans and foreigners normally did not have protections afforded to other classes of the society. Stuart writes that widows lack direct legal participatory rights (since women were represented by their husbands in legal matters) and could not own land in their own right under many conditions. Yahweh warned Israel that if they did not obey the commands regarding the care of widows, orphans, and foreigners, He would allow them to be destroyed as a people in Ex 22:22-24. The text makes it an offense to Yahweh if one mistreats the poor, the orphan, the alien, the widow or anyone else who has no advocate (22:21-27) (House 1998). The description of God himself includes his great protection of the widow as raised in Deut 10:17-18:

For the Lord your God is the God of gods and Lord of Lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe. He executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing (RSV).

For the Deuteronomistic historian makes the righteous treatment of the widow so important to God that injustice done to a widow is included in the covenant curses, for example, in Deut 27:19 that

Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow. And all the people shall say 'Amen'.

Priests, prophets, and kings were expected to observe respect for the disadvantaged. The ideal position being that kings of Israel establish justice to care for the weak such as widows in the land (Carroll 2003). The historical underpinning for the just treatment of widows is linked to God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt as raised in Deut 24:17-18 that

You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there; therefore, I command you to do this.

The garment was a piece of clothing that was used as a blanket at night. In fact, Deut 24:12-13 commands the borrower not to sleep with it and to return it at sundown (Craigie 2009). According to Christensen (2002), it was Yahweh's concern that the widow who had her garment taken from her would lead to unchastity or to rumors harmful to her reputation. Yahweh gave specific instructions regarding provision for the needs of

the widow. At the end of the third year the people were to bring their tithe, a tenth of their produce, to the Levites, and the widow directly benefited from the Levites' obedience. Though the text is abused today mostly in Pentecostal churches where tithes never reach or meet the needs of widows save pastors who erroneously out of context consider themselves as modern Levites. The Levite had no portion or inheritance just as sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who were within towns were expected to come and eat, and be filled, that the Lord their God may bless them in all the work of their hands that they did (Deut 14:29).

Peter T. Vogt (2008) explains that for this reason, the Levites, aliens, orphans, and widows were not to be considered poor. Sharing with these groups was not only meritorious but was expected behavior on the part of the community as a whole. Yahweh would richly bless his people, who would out of devotion to him share their bounty with everyone in the community. An additional provision was the gleaning of the fields at harvest time. The widows gathered what was left behind to help feed their families. This provision for the widow provided the background for the infamous story of Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz. The overlooked fruit of the olive tree and the grapes left on the vine were to be harvested by widows and other less fortunate members of the Jewish society. Bennett argues that the common characteristic that the widow, orphan, and stranger had in common was the absence of a strong male protector. This absence limited the access of these persons to commodities in the Israelite communities, and it undermined their changes for emancipation from debt slavery and for exculpation in litigation. A woman's honor was found in having a husband and her shame was when she was without one. Dille (2012) writes that the formerly married woman get into the position of social shame (Isa 47:8-9; 54:4) due to vulnerability and lack of access to the social position that a husband would provide. In fact Yahweh becomes the defender or judge of widows (Baker and Carpenter 2003). It is evident by this verse and others throughout the Bible that widows are portrayed as "near and dear" to the heart of Yahweh. And this is further confirmed in the New Testament.

The New Testament and the Status of Widows

Mark and Luke record the contrast made by Jesus between people of power and the powerless when he said:

Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and who like greetings in the marketplaces, and have the best seats in the synagogues, and the places of honor at feasts that devour widows' houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive greater condemnation. (Mk 12:38-40)

Thurston (2002) writes that in the Hebrew tradition, widowhood was a misfortune and even disgraceful (Ruth 1:20-21). A widow could return to her family only if her bride price was repaid. She was expected to await levirate marriage or public refusal (Deut 25:5-10). Women's status was lower than men's and widows were the lowest. Luke describes how the growing church in Jerusalem addressed the problem of the Hellenists complaints' that their widows were not being fed adequately (Acts 6:1-6). 1 Tim 5:3-16, the longest text on widows in the New Testament addresses the necessity of the church to minister to widows. The writer defines who is a "real widow," the kind of widow not to be enrolled, and the requirements of a widow who could be enrolled by the church. Kügler (2017:212) points out that this text is part of a broader gender-political movement towards the end of the 1st century CE. This movement managed to reduce the importance of women believers in Christian communities and to re-establish a patriarchal order in the Church. In Pauline communities this meant also minimizing the importance of the "widow", which had become a powerful pastoral office attracting young women who never had been married but wanted to avoid patriarchal marriage by taking Jesus Christ himself as their spiritual spouse. Therefore 1 Tim 5:3-16 intends to eliminate the widow office again by defining widowhood again as the status of helpless women who had lost their husband and have nobody to care for them. If these women did something for the congregation the Church will do something for them.

McKnight (1976) further explains that widows too were a special concern of Jesus and of the early messianic community, and this concern extended into the first few centuries (James 2:8-11). Spiritual transformation regarding the importance of widows needs to take place in the leadership. Cheryl Jean Erwin (2015) concludes that widows are to be cared for. It is the church's responsibility to provide that care to whatever level. To do less is to be less than what the Lord Jesus Christ would have wanted his church to be. The widows within communities never should have reason to feel inferior or invisible or invaluable. The way they are treated by the Church should give them reason to feel as the unique persons cherished and honored by the church family. For Kaveny (2005),

widowhood in the Jewish culture was a fate most feared and bemoaned by women whereas in the early church there was an established order of widows who served in various ministries of prayer, praying for the sick, visitations, teaching the young women and so on. Additionally, the disciples of Jesus Christ met the widows' material needs and assimilated them into the community and honored their contribution to the common good. Kaveny (2005) laments that; there is no Order of Widows in the contemporary Church, as many of the widows' functions have been assumed by deaconesses. The New Testament texts give a useful picture of how widows were positively regarded and respected. Do we find the same treatment and attitude on widows in ATR?

The Status of Widows in other African Traditions

Traditional widowhood rites are seen as hostile, inhuman and consequently ought to be eliminated. There are of course a few scholars – including Tasie (2013) – who argue that not all is bad in the widowhood rites. Nalwamba (2016) argues that a woman who has been widowed in many African cultures is required to adopt a dress code that will make her look shabby, unappealing and unadorned. It seems as if the intention is to de-sex the woman. Scholars like Okorie (http://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ajet/pdf_p84) maintain that in widowhood practices, it is 'only' the mourning experiences that are dehumanizing, discriminatory against women, antisocial, unlawful, oppressive and pagan. Among the Owerri people of Iboland, the widow's hair is shaved; she is painted with black dye. Her belongings including her hut may be burnt to ward off bad luck. During this period, she should not take her bath. Most widows, whose husbands die, live in abject penury because their in-laws, who are supposed to cushion the effect of the loss, often deprive them of their husband's properties and subject them to a lot of dehumanizing treatments (Olukayode 2015). Manala postulates that widows continue to be neglected and even oppressed hence the need to urgently address the plight. Manala (<http://www.scielo.org.za/.pdf>) concludes that it is pathetic that even African Christians have been influenced by the traditional African widowhood rites that discriminate and violate widows' human rights. Idialu (2012) agrees that widows in Africa have often been faced with traumatic experiences in African communities soon after losing their husbands. The living conditions of the majority of the widows in Africa are pathetic and failure to address the widows' welfare in many

different cultures and countries is a cause for great concern. Empirical evidence indicates that widows of all ages from different backgrounds and cultures, are likely to be subjected to multiple forms of discrimination, neglect, cultural and psychological oppression and abuse (www.researchgate.net/publication/230002044). It is possible for a widow to be intimidated and insulted by relatives or in-laws. In some cases, loosing properties or losing everything. As a result, widows suffer a number of challenges especially those without access to lawyers and courts. Traditions and traditional leaders in some cases become agents or accomplices in the oppression and traumatization of widows.

The General Status of Widows in Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe has a hybrid legal system comprised of statutory and customary law. The law recognizes three types of marriage: civil, registered customary and unregistered customary marriages. The predominance of registered and unregistered customary marriages contributes to the vulnerability of women within the family. Under the rules of customary marriage, widows cannot inherit their husband's property. Daughters can inherit from their father only if there are no sons (www.africa4womensrights.org/public). In Zimbabwe just like other countries, the well-being of a woman continues to be tied to her marital status whether she is single, divorced or widowed (<http://pdfproc.lib.msu.edu/?file=/DMC/>). There is widespread discrimination against women in Zimbabwe, especially in rural areas where customarily chiefs allocate land to male heads of households, but women do not automatically inherit this upon their husband's death (<http://pdfproc.lib.msu.edu/?file=/DMC/African%>). Widows may be evicted from the land when widowed regardless of the years they spent married especially childless widows. Many who remain on the land do so at the goodwill of their in-laws or traditional leaders. In some cases, childless widows are often evicted as are young widows who refuse to be physically 'inherited' by a male relative of their late husband (www.gov.uk/government/uploads/). However, the widow can also make a report to the police because the Zimbabwean law that makes it criminal to forcibly take property from a surviving spouse and her children (<http://www.ipsn/>). Due to cultural influences, a number of women are not comfortable approaching the courts for protection or guidance. African culture, African traditional

religious beliefs and practices, Christianity has had an impact on the role and status of women in the AFM in Zimbabwe.

Widows in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe

The AFM in Zimbabwe has an organ or department known as the Ladies department. According to the official website of the AFM, the church's Ladies Department houses the Widows and Single Mothers (WISMO) which is a department that was created in response to the needs of the growing number of widows and single mothers in the church. The WISMO was initially established at provincial level, in 1997 in Harare by Rev. T I Murefu. The department supports and sustains families and has been instrumental in the financing of a number of church projects in support of the vision set by the church leadership. Unfortunately, the Ladies Department is there to support the vision set by men who constitute the leadership. Nhumburudzi (2016) notes that the AFM in Zimbabwe church governance system discriminates against women when it comes to leadership positions. Nalwamba (2016) laments that we need rather to examine and appreciate how the church and society are poorer due to the exclusion of women's fullest expression and participation. The idea to come up with the widows and single mothers' department did not come from a woman or a widow. Given the historical origin of the department it is not clearly known what motivated Rev. T.I Murefu to come up with this department. It could have been an idea copied from other churches like Seventh Day Adventist and Baptists whose widows' associations really played a role in addressing the needs of widows. It could also be because the clergyman was genuinely touched by the plight of the widows in his province and consequently saw it imperative to create a platform where they would freely participate away from married women. The fact that the initiative to start this department came from a man reinforces our argument that AFM is still very patriarchal, and women cannot speak for themselves. While there is nothing bad for one who is not a widow herself to be at the helm of the widows' department, the challenge is how one would empathize the experiences of widows. Pastor B (not her real name, interviewed, 20 September 2017) in AFM argues that widows have a number of problems that need a female pastor who can possibly feel for them. She added that

Women generally do not have a real platform that has an influence on church's policies and decisions. How much more with widows? There

are no platforms or structures created to address their problems and challenges. It depends on the leadership of the church whether they are compassionate or not to come up with programmes that empower widows. If our society excludes women with husbands, what happens when the husband is not there? The gap becomes big. What is interesting is that there are storehouses for widows and orphans in most Pentecostal churches but most of the widows do not benefit as the pastor (and the majority are men) takes all that comes. Instead of widows benefiting, it is the pastor who is expecting to be fed by widows.

Pastor B (interviewed, 10 September 2017) is of the idea that a platform for widows must be created at every level of the church. And widows must be led by a widow or female pastor who is a widow. The emotive issue of widows emanates from the fact that women let alone widows culturally do not have the space or platform to speak out. The voices of widows are rarely heard yet a number of the households in Zimbabwe are headed by widows. The fact AFM as a church does not have a welfare department that looks after the needs of widows says a lot and this has caused a number of them to feel neglected soon after losing their husbands.

Elder B (not his real name, interviewed, 20 August 2017) notes that there is confusion as to who should be considered as a widow if we go by 1 Tim 5:3 that “Honor widows that are widows indeed.” How do we tell who is a widow indeed and who is not? 1 Tim 5:11 says “But the younger widow refuse; for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry.” For Elder B (interviewed, 27 August 2017),

For us, widows who aspire to get married are wax wantoning against Christ. It creates some suspicion for some in the church to see widows who still aspire to get married again. I also take it negatively because widows must think about serving God and not marriage. Jesus becomes their lifetime husband. It’s not surprising that a number of Pentecostal Christians find widows who still look for second marriages as loose and lacking morals. People want to see widows raising their children if they have ones and serving God. However, as a people we forget that widows have sexual needs like any other person. It is such negative attitude towards widows on their sexual needs that they get stereotyped.

According to one Pastor F (not her real name but is a former pastor in AFM interviewed, 20 September 2017), participation of widows in the AFM breeds conflicts. Pastor F cited the case of a widow (a nurse by profession) whom he asked to teach on health and sexual education. The widow faced opposition from married church women who thought the participation and knowledge displayed by the widow would make their

husbands think that widows are better wives than them. According to Widow D (who is a pastor, interviewed, 24 September 2017),

As widows we face a number of challenges that include rentals, bills, fees, health insurances for our children. The moment you lose your husband, you get stigmatized and become a social outcast. Even when you are working, whatever your achievement; people mockingly become suspicious. They always suspect that we sell our bodies to make a living. As a result we suffer intimidations, verbal, sexual (in some cases rape) and emotional abuses. We cannot even freely socialize with people as we are suspected of looking for men. In some cases, our properties are forcibly grabbed or taken away from us. Culture and religion play the brotherhood relationship against widows. The majority of us are legally ignorant. The Church must cease being an accomplice to negative stereotypes that terrorize widows and empower us biblically as done by our national constitution that protects women. We do not find that protection in Church. Was the Bible written to make women and widows' lives miserable? Is God against women?

Sentiments raised by widows are an eye opener to the challenges which they face in society. Unfortunately, the Church is an accomplice to the negative stereotyping of women let alone widows and single mothers. The AFM system does not cater for widowers which make married women become more suspicious and cautious. Pastor H (not her real name, interviewed, 26 September 2017) notes that

It is the young widows who are mostly stigmatized because they are considered threats to those in marriage. As a result, widows become withdrawn and not free to share their experiences with anybody including pastors. The only participation they can get is that of being ushers, being involved in hospitality and decoration, teaching of Sunday school and interceding in prayers for the Church. However, widows are not allowed to hold any leadership positions.

For Pastor Gwauya (not her real name, interviewed, 06 October 2017), widows are not allowed to hold any leadership positions because of assumptions that they are morally not strong and are still mourning. One pastor listed the number of pastors and church leaders who morally did not make it because of sexual misconduct with widows. The assumption by this pastor is that widows are a problem. Yet its two adults who agreed but because of patriarchy; widows are unfairly blamed.

The church's patriarchal nature is not only exposed by the topical issue of widowhood that is under discussion, but it also manifests heavily in the manner in which the church conducts its decision-making processes. The church board leadership elections triennially right from the as-

sembly to the national level among a host of other issues. Widows are excluded from the election processes and they are consequently not taken seriously at all the levels of the church, from the sub-assembly to the national level. Men constitute the bulk of all the key decision-making board committee members of the church. The church is run by men such that the effect of widowhood for women makes them to be relegated to the background (Manuel 2016). The plight triples if one is a woman, widow and disabled. It does not matter whether the space is religious or not, Christian or not. While the church uses the election system to elect its leaders, Schwab (2001) argues that elections are merely one indicator of the democratic process. The AFM's electoral system is undemocratic as it excludes women let alone widows in leadership positions that come through elections. The national constitution of Zimbabwe talks about gender equity in leadership positions yet the church is silent on that. Women constitute a greater percentage of the church membership but do not participate in most crucial church elections because of their disadvantaged marital and financial position, for example, regular faithful payment of tithes is a prerequisite for one to assume leadership in the church.

Most of the widows are not gainfully employed which makes it difficult to be able to pay tithes. The fact that pastors are aware of who is tithing and who is not causes them to relegate widows. If the arrangement was made to be such that the pastor is not aware who has tithed and not, this would have helped all church members including widows to be treated equally. So, when leadership elections are held in AFM, it is usually the norm rather than the exception that the wives of the men who would have made it into the male dominated church board committee are the ones who are also elected and become office bearers in the ladies committee of the church. The numerous privileges and opportunities that one is entitled to are mainly accessed by virtue of being married. This possibly explains why one is eventually traumatized when they eventually lose their husband. In some cases, women stop going to church or avoid the roles they used to play in church with the passing on of their spouses. Most women lose leadership positions the moment the husband passes on. So, it can be argued that women virtually assume leadership Church positions on the ticket of marriage.

The relegation of widows in AFM does not spare late Pastors' wives. Widow S (not her real name, interviewed, 06 October 2017) had the following to say,

My late husband was a pastor in AFM. The Church authorities just came to bury my husband who had spent over twenty years in ministry and that was that. They never came back to check on us after the burial and neither did we get any help from the church. After three months, we were evicted from the parsonage and luckily, we had bought our personal residential stand built a cottage that was still incomplete. After eviction, none gives a damn how you are surviving with the kids of the late man of God that people or saints used to bother for prayers and counselling. The pension and outstanding salaries of the departed pastor are never fulfilled by the Church's administration. And the pastor's kids are forced to unfairly suffer.

Widow G (not her real name, late pastor's wife, interviewed, 06 October 2017) was evicted from the posh church rented house and went to stay in the newly resettled farming area. She was literally relegated to the church's periphery following the death of her husband. Therefore, it's not surprising that some of the widows end up engaging in unplanned second marriages thereby creating further problems for them and their children. Neglect and abandonment play a part and can often leave women vulnerable and desperate (Nalwamba 2016). For C Murefu, the challenges faced by widows go back to the Jewish and African cultures that put women at a disadvantage. He notes that

Both Jewish and African cultural positions are that the girl child belongs to the father, at marriage she is handed over to the husband who is the breadwinner, when he dies, she is in limbo. Hence, she becomes vulnerable, gullible and exposed. This is where the original Old Testament position on tithes comes in handy. Tithes were used for priests, widows, orphans, strangers or wayfarers. Today we are faced with the plight of single mothers.

The loss of a bread winner results in financial challenges for the widow. Priscilla Misihairambwi-Mushonga, Zimbabwean female legislator, adds that the woman's security, dignity, support system and the way people look at her go away (www.youtube?). Widows look up to the church for solace and love. Yet the church at large concentrates much on the pastor and ignores people who are really in need of help. Widows expect the church, government and organisations to come up with projects, platforms and ideas that empower them (www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUnijZeMeaA).

The relegation of widows in AFM is also displayed in the insensitivity of most of the sermons preached in the church. The bulk of these sermons tend to prescriptively unleash scriptures on widows, for example, scriptures talking about how the widow at Zarephath took care of Elijah are

applied literally to mean widows ought to look after the pastors in order for them to be blessed and not the other way as advocated by James that true religion involves looking after widows. Consequently, such teachings lead to injustice in as far as helping widows and orphans are concerned. So even if one has lost her husband who was their only source of livelihood, the church authorities expect to see her continuing to come to church and financially participating in church activities. So, the relegation of widows in most churches knows no rank, background or status. Widows get relegated to the periphery at the death of their husbands.

The pastors' wife who used to hold leadership positions in the church are forced to stop exercising leadership in the church no matter how gifted, experienced, qualified or passionate they are. The death of the husband deploys them to the back seat. All their achievements and expertise are no longer counted. Losing one's husband is synonymous with losing one's life and gainful church leadership positions. It heralds the end of all privileges that they are used to. And for the female pastors who lose their husbands find their acceptance in the church affected. Therefore, female pastors are not spared from being neglected the moment they lose their husbands. In most cases certain taboos, beliefs and practices discourage them from remarrying. There are mixed feelings in the church as to whether the pastor's widow can remarry. In AFM, widows are urged to maintain a level of sexual purity. It does not matter the age, background, status and education. However, this might not be very practical especially for the sexually active widows. It exposes widows to HIV/AIDS in cases where they are not sexually empowered. The empowerment of widows must help them in making decisions about their lives.

Nalwamba (2016) posits that the earning power of females tends to be lower and, in many cases, nonexistent. Women depend on their husbands or male partners for financial security. This is true with most AFM pastors' wives who are not salaried. Yet, they are required and expected to spend most of their time doing church work alongside their husbands. Pastors' wives are not allowed to be employed elsewhere. This explains why the majority of them are unemployed and some even go to the extent of abandoning their jobs so that they give all to the work to God where they also risk losing all in the event that the husband dies. Children look up to them as the surviving parent. Some pastors' wives even stop pursuing secular training, education and choose to support their husbands' full-time ministry. Of late we have had numerous cases

of late pastors' wives who go to the Bible College following the death of their spouse. For critics this is due to the fact that some will be hoping to genuinely continue with the pastoral work and consequently to continue to enjoy the flamboyant lifestyle they used to enjoy as pastors' wives. It might be that they do not have any other world they know outside the church's ministry. AFM in Zimbabwe church rarely ordains and appoints female pastors. Female widow pastors rarely get the platform to preach at public gatherings of the church. Widows' conferences in AFM are poorly attended due to the stigma associated with widowhood by both clergy and laity. Nalwamba (2016) was therefore spot on when he concludes that

As long as we think of gender parity in reductionist terms as intended to benefit women, we risk reducing our discourse to a battle of the sexes for the top echelons of power and privilege. We need, rather to examine and appreciate how the church and society are poorer for lacking women's fullest expression and participation. The church needs to celebrate God's gift of womanhood.

So, although the biblical emphasis is on the care of widows, in the AFM the emphasis is on the financial contributions that must be made by the widows to the church especially towards the upkeep of the pastor.

The above challenges are however not meant to eclipse some noble efforts that are done especially by the national chairlady and selected provincial leadership and assemblies' efforts to plough back by giving some handouts to the widows, mostly in the form of food hampers. However, the Church cannot continue to give widows food but must devise ways and strategies that empower widows to be productive and self-sustaining. For critics, food hampers promote dependency instead of independence. As a result, conference meetings just afford widows an opportunity to lick their wounds as the majority does not have much good news to share or celebrate.

Conclusion

So, if the prevalent deplorable situation of widows obtaining in AFM is anything to go by, it means AFM is not yet out of the woods when it comes to gender discrimination. AFM needs to take seriously the covenant of God and the teachings of Jesus Christ that advocates for love as the guiding principle. Emphasis should not be on what widows should do for the church as the norm now but on what the church ought to do

for the widows in line with God's commandments. It is a cause for great concern that the AFM church has relegated widows to the periphery. AFM in Zimbabwe ought to do more than simply hosting annual widows' conferences where experience has shown that it is the leaders who will benefit from such conferences more than the widows themselves. In most of the conferences (provincial and national conferences), there is no monetary support for widows. Even widows' leaders do not get an allowance to attend such conferences. If widows have a provincial conference, it is ironically the wife of the overseer that gets annual financial appreciation and not the reverse. There is also a need for the church to do more in terms of supporting and integrating widows in mainstream church leadership and in key decision-making processes of the church. It will help the church to come up with programmes and decisions that are inclusive as well as catering for the needs of the disadvantaged. The emphasis of the church must not only be on widows being prayerful but economically empower them. The church's teachings and policies must not be gendered but holistic and inclusive thereby giving hope, courage, resilience, optimism and innovation to everybody.

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Questionnaire/Interview Questions

Names of Researchers:

Francis Machingura and Ngoni Chikwanha

Research Topic:

The Church and the Place of Widows in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM)

We kindly request you to help us fill this questionnaire. Confidentiality is going to be highly maintained. We are both Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe pastors, one is based at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare and the other one is based at Africa University in Mutare.

N.B. May you please answer the following questions as fully as you are able.

1. Name, Profession or means of survival, Age, Gender, Education
2. What role do you play in Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe?
3. How long have you been a member of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe and what have been your experiences as far as widowhood is concerned?
4. What is your understanding of the care of widows as related to the church? To what extent does the church support widows?
5. How do the local assemblies, province and national support widows and how does the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe leadership relate with widows?
6. What is your role as widows and how important is it in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe?
7. How can the care of widows be enhanced in the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe and who can do this?

there is
no longer male and female
for



Gal 3:28

Paul and the Prophetic Christian Women of Corinth

A reconstruction of the apostle's gender politics as documented in 1 Cor 11:2-16 (and Gal 3:26-28) *

Joachim Kügler

Summary

Early Christianity's basic assumption on gender is that it does not play any role in relation to redemption. The central performative sign of being redeemed through Christ is the gender-neutral ritual of baptism and gender-neutral community structures are a result of this. Paul is part of this gender-neutral movement, as can be seen in Gal 3:26-28. He shares in the general "dogma" that sex and gender are of no importance once a person is a new creation "in Christ". However, in 1 Cor 11:2-16 Paul is giving another impression of his position towards the relevance of sex and gender for the Christian way of life. He seems to claim a subordination of women and men, even speaking about a second-class "image of God" status for female believers. This contribution is inviting to read Paul's misogynist statements in 1 Cor 11 critically from the perspective of Gal 3, thus declaring gender-neutrality as an early Christian "dogma" while 1 Cor 11 is just a document of the cultural irritation of a Hellenistic Jewish man. Yet, even 1 Cor 11:2-16 can be seen as kind of "good news" for female Christians today, telling them that once you are equal to men there is no need to turn to man-like appearance.

Introduction

Paul was probably not a very even-tempered person. And even-tempered persons are most likely not apostle material in general, at least not in antiquity. Apostles like Paul had visions and obsessively travelled through the Mediterranean world to spread the message of a crucified Messiah, a message that appeared rather strange to the mainstream culture of the time. People who are at rest in themselves do not take such tasks upon themselves; doing so requires a good measure of eccentricity and fierceness. And yet, Paul's fierceness is not exclusively posi-

* This article is the extended English version of a German publication (Kügler 2018). I am most grateful to Michaela Castellanos and Johanna Stiebert for helping me with the English translation. The responsibility for mistakes, of course, is mine.

tive, but also problematic in nature. For, it seems that he became so enraged at times as to momentarily forget his own theology, when faced with a concrete problem to solve. One such problem, which is now (in)famous, was the question if and how the women of Corinth were to cover their heads. Whereas the problem Paul tried to solve in this specific case has been tossed into the dustbin of history long ago, Paul's theological strategy for solving said problem has unfortunately not been forgotten – and this has devastating consequences for the gender politics pursued by Christian churches as well as for Paul's reputation. The cliché that Paul was a misogynist persists, and it is, among other things, based on the following segment in the first letter to the Corinthians.

The Text

² Ἐπαινῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς ὅτι πάντα μου μέμνησθε καί, καθὼς παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, τὰς παραδόσεις κατέχετε.

³ Θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς εἰδέναι ὅτι παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἡ κεφαλὴ ὁ Χριστὸς ἐστίν, κεφαλὴ δὲ γυναικὸς ὁ ἀνὴρ, κεφαλὴ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ ὁ θεός.

⁴ πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ.

⁵ πᾶσα δὲ γυνὴ προσευχομένη ἢ προφητεύουσα ἀκατακαλύπτω τῇ κεφαλῇ καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτῆς· ἐν γὰρ ἐστίν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ τῇ ἐξυρμημένῃ.

⁶ εἰ γὰρ οὐ κατακαλύπτεται γυνὴ, καὶ κειράσθω· εἰ δὲ αἰσχρὸν γυναικὶ τὸ κείρασθαι ἢ ξυρᾶσθαι, κατακαλυπτέσθω.

⁷ Ἄνὴρ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ὀφείλει κατακαλύπτεσθαι τὴν κεφαλὴν εἰκὼν καὶ δόξα θεοῦ ὑπάρχων· ἡ γυνὴ δὲ δόξα ἀνδρὸς ἐστίν.

⁸ οὐ γὰρ ἐστίν ἀνὴρ ἐκ γυναικὸς ἀλλὰ γυνὴ ἐξ ἀνδρός·

⁹ καὶ γὰρ οὐκ ἐκτίσθη ἀνὴρ διὰ τὴν γυναῖκα ἀλλὰ γυνὴ διὰ τὸν ἀνδρα.

¹⁰ διὰ τοῦτο ὀφείλει ἡ γυνὴ ἐξουσίαν ἔχειν

² I praise you, though, for remembering me in everything, and for keeping the traditions the way I passed them onto you.

³ Yet I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is the man, but the head of Christ is God.

⁴ Every man who, praying or prophesying, has anything from his head defiles his head.

⁵ But every woman praying or prophesying with uncovered head defiles her head; for she is one and the same with the shorn one.

⁶ For if a woman does not cover herself, she shall be shaven also; but if it defiles a woman to be shorn or shaven, then she shall cover herself.

⁷ For a man must not cover his head, for he is image and reflection of God; the woman, though, is the reflection of the man.

⁸ For the man is not from the woman but the woman from the man;

⁹ for neither was the man created for the woman but the woman for the man.

¹⁰ Therefore the woman has to have

<p>ἐπὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς διὰ τοὺς ἀγγέλους.</p> <p>¹¹ πλὴν οὕτε γυνὴ χωρὶς ἀνδρὸς οὕτε ἀνὴρ χωρὶς γυναικὸς ἐν κυρίῳ·</p> <p>¹² ὡςπερ γὰρ ἡ γυνὴ ἐκ τοῦ ἀνδρός, οὕτως καὶ ὁ ἀνὴρ διὰ τῆς γυναικός· τὰ δὲ πάντα ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ.</p> <p>¹³ Ἐν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς κρίνατε· πρέπον ἐστὶν γυναῖκα ἀκατακάλυπτον τῷ θεῷ προ- σεύχεσθαι;</p> <p>¹⁴ οὐδὲ ἡ φύσις αὐτῆ διδάσκει ὑμᾶς ὅτι ἀνὴρ μὲν ἐὰν κομᾷ ἀτιμία αὐτῷ ἐστίν,</p> <p>¹⁵ γυνὴ δὲ ἐὰν κομᾷ δόξα αὐτῇ ἐστίν; ὅτι ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ περιβολαίου δέδοται [αὐτῇ].</p> <p>¹⁶ Εἰ δὲ τις δοκεῖ φιλόνηκος εἶναι, ἡμεῖς τοιαύτην συνήθειαν οὐκ ἔχομεν οὐδὲ αἱ ἐκκλησίαι τοῦ θεοῦ.</p>	<p>full authority of the head because of the angels.</p> <p>¹¹ However, neither the woman with- out the man, nor the man without the woman, in the Lord;</p> <p>¹² for like the woman from the man, so the man through the woman; but all from God.</p> <p>¹³ Judge for yourselves: Is it suitable for a woman to pray to God uncov- ered?</p> <p>¹⁴ And does not nature herself teach you that a man, if wearing long hair, is a shame for him,</p> <p>¹⁵ a woman, however, if wearing long hair, is an honour for her, because long hair is given [to her] instead of a cover?</p> <p>¹⁶ But if one is inclined to be conten- tious, we have no such custom, neither the congregations of God.</p>
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The problem in Corinth: No veil, loose hair, or “bob cut”?

Quite obviously, the issue at stake is that there should be a visible difference between men and women, when they pray in the congregation and actively prophesy. The man is not allowed to “have” anything “from the head” while the woman is supposed to be “covered”. Apparently in Corinth, some women decided to be active in the Christian congregation without “covering” themselves, and this bothers Paul immensely.

Unfortunately, the text does not mention any details about how, specifically, the women were “uncovered.” Therefore, it comes as no surprise that scholars have vastly different opinions about what exactly constituted the problem. In the older research literature, they assume that the women took off their customary veils and revealed their hair, possibly by wearing it loose entirely, in order to emphasize their femininity. This understanding – still powerful in many churches (cf. the article of Aryeh in this volume) – is flawed, of course, because Paul emphasizes specifically that there ought to be a visible difference between men and women. Insisting on such a visible difference between the genders would not make sense if the women criticized would have stressed their femininity

by displaying their long hair. This gives us more reason to believe that the women intended to hide their femininity and to appear more similar to men. Marlis Gielen, in this vein, considers this passage a dispute about the hairstyle worn by women in Corinth (cf. Gielen 2009; Friesen 2018). After providing a very careful evaluation of all textual details and of the cultural context, she claims that the women in Corinth chose to wear short haircuts, approximating the physical appearance of men. It is this optical masculinization that Paul so vehemently rejected.

The best argument to support Gielen's thesis is the fact that verses 4-5 and 14-15 correspond. By repeating the expression "from the head" (11:4), Paul himself decodes it as a reference to "long hair" (11:14) in men, and it can be deduced from the parallel structure of the verses that the long, honour-related hair, which "nature" has bestowed onto woman as a cover (11:15), is the opposite of what is denoted by the expression "uncovered" in verse 5. Consequently, Paul's use of the term "uncovered" marks a concrete criticism of short haircuts that no longer function adequately as a "cover" of women's heads. Paul deems such haircuts just as dishonourable as shaving or shearing for women.

The question, however, is what kind of idea might have inspired Christ-believing women in Corinth to turn against the gender stereotype "man = short hair" and "woman = long hair." What made them violate the norm of visible gender difference, valid in the Jewish minority culture and the Hellenistic-Roman mainline culture alike, by getting a "typically masculine" short haircut?

What motivated the women of Corinth: "All are one in Christ"

Paul himself provides a hidden clue to what may have moved Christian women in Corinth to make their appearance resemble men by getting a bobbed cut¹. In his *Captatio benevolentiae* at the beginning of the para-

¹ One variant of the bob cut, a short hairstyle worn by women, is the "Bubikopf." This German expression for a short haircut worn by a woman was commonly used during my childhood. "Bubikopf" literally translates to "little boy's head", and I use the terms "bob cut" here (and "Bubikopf" in the original German text) to point out that a short hairstyle was deemed masculine even in the second half of the last century. Dating back to the 1920s, this hairstyle was certainly permissible for women in the 1960s, but in rural Franconia where I grew up, it was still considered a slightly frivolous fashion due to the playful masculinization of women involved, thus being equivalent to wom-

graph, Paul praises the congregation for keeping the tradition exactly as he passed it on (11:2). This insinuates that the problem he discusses in the passage that follows arose from the congregation's interpretation of Paul's own preaching. If we were to ask which element of his preaching might be at stake here, we would have to look for a tradition that Paul has himself received and consequently passed on to the congregation. Neither the tradition of the last supper (1 Cor 11:23-25) nor the resurrection kerygma (1 Cor 15:3-5) comes to mind. What does come to mind is the baptismal creed (below in |frames|), which Paul cites in Gal 3:26-28:

²⁶ Πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

²⁶ For you are all sons of God through your faith in Jesus Christ:

²⁷ ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε,

²⁷ for whosoever you were baptized in Christ,

Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε.

You put on Christ;

²⁸ οὐκ ἐνὶ Ἰουδαίῳ οὐδὲ Ἑλλήνι,

²⁸ There is neither Jew nor Hellene,

οὐκ ἐνὶ δοῦλῳ οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερῳ,

There is not slave and free,

οὐκ ἐνὶ ἄρσεν καὶ θήλῃ.

There is not male and female;

πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

for you are all one in Jesus Christ.²

This early Christian baptismal text most probably derives from the Syrian (nowadays Turkish) city of Antiochia where Paul's Christian mother congregation was located. As can be assumed the new members put off their clothes (symbolizing their old, pagan identity) before entering the water naked. When leaving the water, they put on new, most probably white, clothes (symbolizing their new identity "in Christ"). So, one may think that the baptismal text, quoted in Gal 3:27-28, was spoken (or sung) to the newly baptized Christians when leaving the water of baptism. In this *Sitz im Leben*, the central message of the hymn would con-

en wearing trousers and smoking. Cf. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bob_cut and [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bubikopf_\(Frisur\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bubikopf_(Frisur)).

² It is widely accepted that Paul uses an ancient credo, which was likely spoken in conjunction with the baptism, in this passage. Cf. Schnelle 2003: 316-318. The precise differentiation between the pre-Pauline credo and the Pauline frame text is of course disputed. I take my bearings from Bormann 2008: 110.

sist in relating their new dress to their new status as a representation or personification of the Messiah.

It can be gleaned from 1 Cor 12:13 (cf. also 1 Cor 7:21-22) that this early Christian baptismal text was part of what Paul preached initially in Corinth when founding the Christian congregation there. Obviously, he alludes to it in 1 Cor 12 (and most probably in 1 Cor 7) without, however, repeating the statements regarding gender. This explains itself if we assume that the conflict about crew cuts arose from those very statements. It also means that we have to assume that Paul brought this text to Corinth, along with the idea that the congregation should have a gender-neutral structure. This interpretation is furthermore supported by the fact that Paul in 1 Cor 11 never denies women's right to play an active role in the congregation. He never questions that women are entitled to pray and prophesy in the same manner as men (11:4-5)³. He "only" wants them not to look like men as they do so. However, if Paul brought a gender-neutral ecclesiology based on the Antiochian baptismal creed to Corinth, then he also opened his teaching up to be understood precisely how the women who sported bobbed cuts understood him. This becomes rather clear when we take a closer look at the baptismal creed and the way in which Paul frames it in Gal 3 (cf. Kügler 2014; Leutzsch 2004:607). The baptismal creed annihilates the basic status differences of antique society and associates this annihilation with the baptism, which is interpreted as "putting on Christ."

Within the cultural symbolism of clothing, common in ancient societies, such putting on is not understood as a gesture that is merely external. Rather, clothing expresses the role and the status of a person in society. It is, in a sense, an integral part of the person, and the antique notion of personhood as it is, focuses on the role of the individual in society, that is to say on the individual's status and impact. For the High Priest at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, priestly garments are of such great importance that he is not even able to perform the duties of his office without this special clothing. This is why the Romans (following King Herod's example) lock it away to keep him from exercising his office independently (cf. Schäfer 2010:113 f., referring to Joseph, Ant. 15,11,4, 403 f.). The clothing of the king, too, is integral to his role and makes his roy-

³ For this reason (among others), 1 Cor 14:33b-36 cannot come directly from Paul. Cf. the accessible summary of all of the arguments given by Gielen (2017: 12 f.) Her conclusion: "The passage is a post-Pauline insertion, which was done under the influence of the pastoral letters" (ibid. 13).

al position of power visible. When a king wears golden or silver clothing, he expresses that he is assigned divine quality in his royal office. Emperor Nero, for example, “dressed in purple robes and a Greek coat embroidered with golden stars” (Suetonius, Nero 25,1) to assert and display his position as divine ruler with cosmic power. For Jewish kings, however, it is somewhat precarious to claim royal divinity, due to the monotheistic dogma of Jewish religion. As Jewish historian Josephus recounts, God punishes King Agrippa I with death because the latter does not reject the flatteries offered to him by his entourage. They called him God when he wore silver robes in public, signalling claims to divine dignity (Jos. Ant. 19,8,1).⁴ This motive can moreover be found in the Jesus-tradition, for example in the miracle story of the healing of the bleeding woman. She is not only healed right away when she secretly touches the saviour’s clothing but Jesus also *feels* powerful energy flowing from it (Mk 5:27-30)⁵. When, in popular (rather magical) conception such power is attributed to Jesus’s clothing what must it be like to put on the Messiah himself!

Whoever wears Christ like clothing transforms into Christ in terms of status, role and function and participates in his divine dignity and power. Paul holds this view, too, and this is why he emphasizes that all believers are “sons of God in Christ” in his introduction of the citation (Gal 3:26). It is not a coincidence that Paul does not use the gender-neutral term “children of God” here. For one, the Messiah is a male figure and all who put him on are consequently *sons* of God “in Christ”. Secondly, a son had a completely different status in ancient society than a daughter. Only the son was considered the reflection or replication of the father; usually, only the son had the right to inherit property; and only he (as deputy of the father) had oversight of his sisters. In most Greek city-states, a daughter had no fortune and was not entitled to inherit property. If the daughter was not yet married when her father died, she was part of the estate and was passed on to the closest male relative as part of the inheritance. A woman was not an autonomous person in legal affairs. She could therefore not engage in business transactions, could not testify as a witness in court, or start legal proceedings of her own. All of her life, she was *de facto* subjected to a lord’s (κύριος) power of disposition. A lord of this sort was the father, the husband, or some

⁴ The story, which appears in different form in Acts 12:21-23, simultaneously demonstrates how difficult it was for Jewish kings to escape the dominant ideology of the rulers’ divinity.

⁵ Cf. also the healing power of the tassels in Jesus’s clothes in Mt 14:36.

other male relative (cf. Reinsberg 1989:36-37). While the weakening of patriarchal structures in Hellenistic times eased these constraints, it cannot be said that the perception of women as inferior beings was ever completely overcome. There were indeed female philosophers, public benefactors, entrepreneurs, authors, and ship owners later on, but these women remained the exception confirming the rule. One also can sum up the situation in Roman time in similar ways: while some few individual women held their own alongside men, this was in contravention with expectation and convention.

In this cultural context, it would not have profited women to be called “daughters of God”. As daughters, they would have been subordinated to their “brothers” in the congregation, and they would have shared in the divine character of their heavenly “father” only indirectly. By declaring all believers *sons* of God, however, Paul attributes the same status held by men to the women in the congregation. Hence, he concludes his citation of the Antiochian baptismal text with “you are all one (εἶς).” By using the *masculine* singular instead of the neuter singular εἷς, Paul expresses that the unity of the Christians is not an abstract one. As all Christians, even female believers, are “in Christ”, i.e. in the messianic *son* of God, their unity is that of a (masculine) body. As the Christian congregation is the living “body” of the Messiah (1 Cor 12:27) the believers are a *masculine* one/εἶς and not only a *neutral* one/εἷς.

For modern readers, this soteriological “trans-gendering” may appear as something rather strange. However, under the historical conditions given at Paul’s time, the soteriological change of women’s gender is not motivated by misogynistic ideology, widespread in antiquity, but rather by early Christian ideas of gender-equality. Thus it is the attempt to start something new under the conditions of the “old, unredeemed world”. When women, too, are “sons of God”, it affects their status within the church in a positive way.

That the apostle is serious about masculinizing women soteriologically can be gleaned from his consistent support of a gender-neutral ecclesiology, which results in a congregational practice that in principle allows any person to take on any role in the congregation without regard for social status, ethnic-religious origin, and gender. The one and only criterion is ability, which, for Paul, is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12). This gender neutrality already belonged to the central claims of the baptismal tradition that Paul has received. Interestingly, when the category of gender is at stake, it is never claimed that there no longer are men and

women. Instead, the terms “male” and “female” are employed by the Antiochian creed. This suggests that the Syrian tradition was not concerned with eliminating the gender assignment of individuals but with dissolving the gender aspect of roles within the congregation. In practice, this means: prophesying is neither male/masculine nor female/feminine; leading the congregation is not female/feminine and not male/masculine; speaking in tongues is neither male/masculine nor female/feminine; inviting to the Eucharist is neither female/feminine nor male/masculine; being sent out as a missionary by Christ is neither male/masculine nor female/feminine; preaching is not male/masculine and serving is not female/feminine, etc. For this reason, early Christian congregations had female deacons like Phoebe (Rom 16:1), female apostles like Junia (Rom 16:7), female hosts (cf. Pihlava 2017) etc. The congregation in Rome illustrates furthermore that the early Christian non-gender-ecclesiology was not limited to the area under Antiochian-Pauline influence. This congregation arose independently of Paul, and a women’s council obviously played a prominent role in it. Paul mentions Mary (Rom 16:6), Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis (Rom 16:12) by name.⁶

Why “sons of God” ought to look like men

If Paul has now announced the salvation-related “masculinity” of Christian women along with a non-gender-ecclesiology in Corinth, then this is an evidently emancipatory impulse in front of the backdrop of the patriarchal culture of his time. It gave women access to unaccustomed areas for self-realization and participation within the framework of the congregation and enabled them to experience the “body of Christ” as a real space of freedom. Of course, there is one problem the early Christian movement could not solve: Their internal gender politics always stood

⁶ Schreiber 2000 argues that the expression κοπιᾶω ἐν κυρίῳ / working hard in the Lord (Rom 16:12) is a technical term which Paul uses to mean ‘to lead the congregation’. This claim has recently been criticized by Scherer 2016. In her contribution, she emphasizes that the concrete position held by the women in question cannot be gleaned from Paul’s statement. However, she also emphasizes that gender was not a relevant criterion when it comes to access to the roles, duties, and positions within Roman congregations. In Paul’s time, the Roman congregation was thus part of the broad stream of early Christian non-gender-ecclesiology. Imagine if Rome had remained faithful to its apostolic origins in this point!

out from the cultural background of a differently oriented dominant culture; it was forced to interact with the latter without, however, being able to actually reshape it.⁷

And this cultural context was shaped by an ideal that sweepingly subordinates women to men, based on a deep-seated contempt for women, and for everything conceived as being feminine. One example from an area that was culturally close to the Hellenistic Jew Paul and his urban public shall suffice here.

To Philo of Alexandria, the most important Hellenistic-Jewish philosopher and interpreter of the Bible, it is self-evident that masculinization is the way to salvific enlightenment for women (and men). If women want to become fully human in this sense, they have to masculinize themselves. *De Cherubim 41* is particularly salient in this regard, because Philo asserts in this text that “woman is to be symbolically understood as sensuality, but knowledge consists of alienation from sensuality and from the body.” This assessment of womanhood appears within a more general conceptualization of gender roles, which defines the relation of the sexes/genders as a qualitative hierarchy. Woman is weak and therefore has to submit to man, whose leadership she cannot exist without. Along with the majority of his contemporaries, Philo is convinced that men are qualitatively superior to women. Philo’s hierarchical conceptualization of the sexes/genders can be illustrated, woodcut-style, in the following chart:

<i>female/feminine = negative</i>	<i>male/masculine = positive</i>
passive	active
receiving	giving
serving	ruling
weak	strong
sensuality	rationality
physical	spiritual

Since sexuality belongs to the realm of earthly passions and desires of which one is to rid oneself, and women are perceived as sexual beings, it follows logically that they, the weak sex, are assigned a position below

⁷ A miniscule alternative group lacked the agency required for effecting the societal change necessary to accomplish this. The bitter irony, of course, is that the antique church obtained the power to shape society only by abandoning its goal of fundamentally changing the world and assimilating, for the most part, to the values of the dominant culture. Cf. eg. Plümacher 1987 on this process, which began as early as the first century and implied the end of alternative gender politics.

men. This conceptualization affects Philo's soteriology in different ways. On the one hand, Philo uses gender metaphors very frequently to express his thoughts; on the other hand, this use of metaphors becomes desexualized in peculiar ways. Because of the negative connotations associated with womanhood, Philo cannot conceive of the human soul striving for virtues, as female/feminine, even though the soul is in a role he should see as typically female. The soul is subordinated to God, is controlled by him, and receives his *logos*. To work out this problem, Philo conceptualizes a "masculine" woman, the "virgin"⁸ who is untouched by what Philo considers the most severe defect of womanhood, namely menstruation. The virgin as a "non-woman" can be understood, and accepted, to be nearly masculine. Consequently, not the woman but only the virgin, as a trans-gender entity, meets the requirements of Philo's Platonizing allegorical concept. The human soul as a virgin is in keeping with the common gender-hierarchy – the more masculine someone or something is, the higher their value.

The perception of women as inferior, together with all things seen as feminine, did not only regulate the realm of philosophical theory, of course. Philo also extols the lifestyle of the virgin as the way of life that amounts to the perfect form of an existence liberated from earthly defilement. Virginity as concrete way of life thus also constitutes a moral and religious ideal. In *contempl.* 68, Philo reports on the virgins in the congregation of the *Therapeutae*⁹, who deny bodily pleasures and do not aspire to produce corporeal progeny. They are blessed by God with the divine gifts of wisdom as the immortal progeny of the soul. As "non-women" these female members of Philo's ideal Jewish congregation can reach the masculine domains of philosophy that can lead near to God, the perfection of masculinity. Just how extremely far, in Philo's thinking, woman is removed from being equal to man also becomes clear when he speaks about specific real women. Let his reference to Livia, the wife of Augustus and First Lady of the entire Roman Empire in *Legatio ad Gaium* 319*f.* serve as an example here. To Philo, women's discernment is categorically weaker than men's. Yet this is different in Livia's case. Her perfect, masculine education sets her apart from regular women, and she generally deserves praise for her masculinity, which all other women are lacking. He writes that Livia "was rather like a man in her rational thinking, which was so discerning that she comprehended concepts of thought better than objects of perception and deemed the latter shadows of the former" (*Gai.* 320). In general, one has to conclude that the best thing Philo can say about a woman is precisely that she isn't one.

⁸ In Philo, "virgin" denotes not only a young woman before the onset of menstruation but also an older woman after menopause.

⁹ It is doubtful that the ideal Jewish congregation of the *Therapeutae* described by Philo actually existed. If it did, it did not leave any historical traces except in Philo's book.

Philo's misogyny is an extreme example but Hellenistic Roman culture in general must be understood as a patriarchal one, which in theory and practice put women and everything conceived as feminine in second place. On the other hand, the first place always was reserved for men and everything conceived as masculine.¹⁰ If we imagine for only a moment that the young congregation in Corinth hears the message that all believers are *sons of God in Christ*, that all are *one*, in the context of such massive, culturally dominant misogyny, it immediately becomes clear why women might interpret the teaching that in the Christian community there is *not male and not female* not only as a programme of gender-neutrality but as an indiscriminate masculinization of all believers. And if all things material-corporeal are deemed feminine (= inferior), the body of a woman has to be considered doubly inferior – being a *female* body and being a *body*! What response could be more plausible than to assimilate such an inferior body to the higher state of masculinity a believer reached “in Christ”? Creating a kind of man-like physical appearance seems a response of high plausibility – at least under the condition of a patriarchal cultural system. And, one must even say that a short haircut constitutes a quite moderate body modification that could be hidden easily when moving outside the Christian assembly. Men seem to have forgone such procedures in Corinth. That they, too, understood their being “in Christ” as a masculinization, however, can be gleaned from the debate about sexual ethics Paul introduces in his first letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthian slogan “It is good for a man (= human being, Greek: ἀνθρώπου!) not to touch a woman”, which is quoted by Paul (1 Cor 7:1), without rendering his own opinion (cf. Merklein 1983; vs. Leutzsch 2004:603 f.), reveals on the one hand that being male was equated with being fully human; on the other hand, it reveals that Christian men, too, considered it a Christian ideal to pursue full masculinity by overcoming the corporeal-sensual aspects of human life. Dominating

¹⁰ It must be clear that the gender hierarchy was not the only hierarchy in the Roman world. As the Empire, since Augustus' time, was a *de facto* monarchy with an old-fashioned republican façade, there was need of a strict hierarchy among men too. The more powerful a man was the more masculine. The most masculine man was the emperor on top of the social pyramid. In some cases the hierarchy among men also was expressed by sexual power. As long as the social hierarchy was reproduced in homosexual acts there was no major problem. That is why cases where the social hierarchy was denied in sexual acts are better documented (cf. Kügler 2016: 164).

sexual desire and all other kind of lust proves the man to be a real man. If the *nous*, the intellectual (= masculine) part of human mind is ruling like a king the inner life of a person, controlling everything like a sovereign, the person is fully masculine, a real man according to cultural concepts of Paul's time. Due to the positive bias towards masculinity it was less likely that men had the idea of modifying their body, already conceived as male/masculine. De-sexualizing actions similar to the self-castration of Origen later on, are not reported for Pauline congregations.

If “sons of God” are women, they ought to look like women

To be sure, it is easy to suspect that Paul, too, believes that to be properly human is to be male. After all, he is part of the same Jewish-Hellenic culture as his contemporary Philo. Yet it is important to beware of such cultural “co-optation.” For unlike Philo, Paul is more of a Pharisaic Jew and less of a Platonizing Hellenist, and he therefore does not share Philo's alienation from the body. This becomes particularly evident in several passages in the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul declares the body “the temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19) and preaches the Pharisaic concept of bodily resurrection. Even if he narrows his concept of the eschatological body to the Hellenistic concepts prevalent among the Corinthian Christians by speaking of a “spiritual body” (15:35 ff.), he fundamentally abides by holistic Jewish anthropology which does not categorically devalue the human body. Likewise, his preference for celibacy in 1 Cor 7 is grounded in pragmatics and eschatology rather than in Platonic anthropology.

Paul subscribes neither to contempt for the body nor to contempt for women or the categorical devaluation of the feminine, and this emerges even from his emotional reaction to the attempts of masculinization exhibited by Christian women in Corinth. With utter vehemence, Paul fights for maintaining visible gender characteristics and thereby makes clear that masculinity on the soteriological level ought not result in denying the female body. Even though female Christians are sons of God on the spiritual level, they ought to remain what they are, namely women, in their physical appearance. If “sons of God in Christ” happen to be women according to sex and gender, then they ought to look like women, too. Being “in Christ” as a woman does not entail masculinizing oneself and denying one's own body. Christian women, being *sons* of God, have the same rights in church that men have (e.g. the right to pray

and prophesy publicly in the congregation) and need not masculinize themselves in order to exercise those rights.

Wouldn't this be a wonderful message today as well? Women may do anything in Christian communities that men do, and they need not deny their femininity in any way to do so! Unfortunately, this is a two-fold *irrealis*, because the patriarchal reality in many Christian churches looks very different for one, and secondly, because Paul in fact does not tell the Christian women in Corinth that they *may* remain women in Christ but that they *must* do so! What is more, he justifies this in a highly problematic way. In order to fight against the dissolution of visible gender difference, Paul resorts to a theological model that assumes the subordination of women to men based on the divine order of creation. According to this pattern of thought, which corresponds to a widespread early Jewish interpretation of the second creation story in Gen 2:4b-25 (cf. Küchler 1986), the chronological order of creation is a hierarchical order, and the creation of woman from the rib of man along with her designation as "helper" (understood as "servant") is interpreted as a God-willed subordination of women. This type of argumentation is theologically untenable¹¹, because Paul ignores not only the declarations made in the first creation story (compare 1 Cor 11:7 to Gen 1:27) but also his own soteriology, which he adopted from Antiochia, brought to the attention of the Galatian congregation, and proclaimed to the believers in Corinth during his initial preaching (as made plausible above). Moreover, the text also reveals that Paul himself realizes that his argumentation has gone awry. The verses 11:11 f. emphasize the mutual relationship and interdependence of man and woman and their origin in one another, which actually suspends Paul's earlier interpretation of the creation story. In what follows, Paul abandons theology altogether and makes recourse to categories like "suitability", "nature" and "custom". And it is highly probable that with these non-theological categories, he ends precisely at the point where the fierceness of his reaction originated. Women who quit wearing customary hairstyles that signal femininity according to the common cultural gender order disturb Paul deeply, make him suffer from a cultural shock. On the human level, this bewilderment may be understandable or even excusable.

¹¹ For once, I would not go along with my friend and colleague Marlis Gielen's attempt to exonerate Paul (Gielen 2009: 175-186).



However, when it comes to discussions about Christian concepts of redemption and of gender justice in the church and society nowadays, one should not grant more theological relevance to Paul's emotional reaction in terms of his cultural shock than to my poor grandmother's shock and disorientation upon seeing Marlene Dietrich in a trouser suit for the first time.

Paul and the gender politics of today's churches

Any Roman Catholic exegete suggesting that Paul's argumentation in 1 Cor 11:2-16 is best ignored in favour of his message that Christian women are entitled to do the same things as men without denying their femininity may run into trouble, mostly for two reasons:

Firstly, the Catholic exegesis exists in a framework of church-power that has over the past decades increasingly resorted to prohibiting discussions about the lack of gender equity in the church. The problems that might result from this context, however, simply must be endured in prophetic service to the church's faith – in keeping with Friedrich Dürrenmatt's motto "to look at things fearlessly and to fearlessly do

right" (*Romulus the Great*, 1950). The situation recently has somewhat eased anyway, although even under Pope Francis no official change of gender doctrine has taken place.

Secondly, from a scholarly perspective, a serious problem is raised by a question concerning the hermeneutic principles that allow us to criticize

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¹² Fig. Marlene Dietrich (in the public domain), source: <http://www.vavoomvintage.net/2012/01/friday-fashionistas-marlene-dietrich.html>.

a specific theological line of thought pursued by Paul without simultaneously abandoning Paul's letters as authoritative texts on the whole. Three reflections in particular allow for, even demand, a criticism of Paul's creation-theological lines of thought.

1. The interpretation of the second creation myth by Paul ignores the fundamental declaration (Gen 1:27) in the first narration of the creation of humankind, which is of at least equal theological weight, and he also does not realize the woman-friendly aspects inherent in the second creation story itself. Therefore, Paul's gender-hierarchical interpretation is open to inner-biblical criticism that departs from the Old Testament.
2. Paul's concept of gender-hierarchy in 1 Cor 11 contradicts his own teaching of the redeemed as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). While the order of redemption does not simply suspend the order of creation in Paul's theology, it is otherwise obvious that the new order "in Christ" (and therefore also the behaviour of believers in the new world of the congregation) cannot be conceived as a simple restitution of the original order of creation. Therefore, the gender hierarchy in 1 Cor 11:3-10 is also open to inner-Pauline criticism that departs from his own soteriology.
3. The Antiochian baptismal text, which Paul cites in Gal 3, is a dogmatically higher-ranking text. It proclaims the absolute gender neutrality of roles and duties within the church and connects these to the nature of the baptism, i.e. with the essence of Christian existence as "being in Christ." This renders any idea of a continued "God-willed" subordination of women to men obsolete. For this reason, the gender hierarchy designed by Paul in 1 Cor 11 warrants clear criticism that departs from the Antiochian baptismal text, which is not only older but demands higher doctrinal authority due to its text genre.

Alternatively, we could of course disregard such hermeneutic principles, simply read the first letter to the Corinthians as literature (cf. Kügler 2013) instead, and smirk with serenity and nonchalance as Paul uses a sledge hammer to crack open a nut and haphazardly demolishes his own doctrine of salvation in the process – all because cultural reasons compel him to consider women who sport bobbed haircuts an anathema. However, in light of the fatal consequences brought about by this interpretation of the second creation story – particularly in its deutero-Pauline intensification in 1 Tim 2:11-15 – in the history of Christianity, such nonchalance is difficult to muster. After all, in the Roman Catholic

Church (as well as in many other churches), we find ourselves in a realm in which gender equity is bitterly lacking and misogyny is unfortunately all too familiar.

Even Pope Francis does not consider the customary opinion that women by their sex and gender are incapable of functioning as sacramental representation of Christ an erroneous one that needs to be corrected. This most probably owes to the fact that he grants this opinion the doctrinal authority of a binding tradition. Taking the first Christian generation's time into account, however, one must conclude that this custom rather is a sinful error, which has led the church away from the apostolic gospel.

This error cannot be justified by the customary separation of the grace of baptism from the grace of ordination. This argument, often used as a theological method of excluding women from ordination while at the same time ascribing equal dignity to all baptized Christians regardless of their sex¹³, misses the fundamental character of baptismal grace, which precedes and defines every structural formation of the church. Such a separation either denies the effect of salvation and baptism ("All baptized Christians are equal, but this must not affect gender differences when it comes to holding an office!") or it separates ordination from salvation and alleges an additional, independent appointment by Jesus. As is well known, there is no historical proof for the latter. Uncoupled from baptism, the fundamental sacrament of salvation, ordination exists in suspended state, and consequently men would not be able to bestow it either. Of course, one could take the position that doing away with ordination altogether would be a way of achieving gender equity within the church, but it is my hope as a basically conservative priest that there are other means for remedying clericalism and misogyny within my church. Paul and the doctrine that precedes him, at any rate, regard the baptism and salvation as the fundamental transformation of all believers that must lead to a gender-neutral church structure. Since all who have been baptized are transformed into Christ, women, too, are "sons of God" and consequently equal to men in all aspects of Christian life. They are children of Abraham with the right to inherit, able to personally represent

¹³ Cf. Francis 2013. Francis adopted this argumentative strategy from John Paul II. For a criticism of the respective statements cf. Merklein 1997, and in the same volume: Dassmann 1997. Cf. also the recent critique of Lüke 2018.

Christ because they have been transformed into the body of Christ. Anyone who claims that one half of the church is unable to sacramentally represent Christ because of their sex, however, must be told – in keeping with the apostolic tradition – that (s)he *de facto* denies salvation and takes biology to be more important than what occurs during baptism. This amounts to nothing less than the complete self-abandonment of the Christian message of salvation. If gender-neutral salvation does not even bring about an effect on office structures within the church, how could it ever bring about salvation in the world? Without effect, however, it is mere fiction – not grace, but only a *fata morgana* of grace.

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πάντες γὰρ
ὕμεις ἐστὲ
ἐν Ἰησοῦ
Χριστῷ

οὐκ ἔστι
ἄρσεν καὶ θήλυς.

οὐκ ἔστι

Ἰουδαίος

οὐδὲ

Ἕλληνας,

οὐκ ἔστι

δούλος

οὐδὲ

ἐλεύθερος,

1 Corinthians 11:2-16 and Charismatic Women's Head Covering in Ghana

A Way Forward Through Contextual Exegesis

Daniel Nii Aboagye Aryeh

Summary

This essay seeks to explain 1 Cor 11:2-16, apply it to the charismatic activities of women in the African context, and show how the text can be appropriated in the Church in Ghana. The text under discussion has been interpreted in varied forms. It has been interpreted to mean that Paul was encouraging cultural elements in the Church in order to maintain unity and orderliness in the congregation. Others argue that Paul was emphasizing the privileged position of men in the creation story, which was disregarded by Corinthian Christian women. Others again argue that Paul was barring women from holding leadership positions in the Church. This paper argues that one of the reasons for Paul's exposé on women's head covering in the Church was to allow women to exercise spiritual gifts in a culturally conducive atmosphere.

Introduction:

The Origin of the Text and its Application in Ghanaian Church

In 1 Corinthians, Paul dedicated a considerable space and attention to the activities of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Paul was the founder of the congregation in Corinth (Acts 18:1-4) and therefore has oversight responsibility over their activities and liturgy. He presented himself as the spiritual overlord of the Church when he argued that he could speak in tongues more than all the Corinthian Christians combined (1 Cor 14:18); and also, someone (in the community at Corinth) who thought he/she was a prophet or spiritual must have acknowledged his writings as emanating from God. It was only then that he/she could also be recognized as a prophet (1 Cor 14:37-38). Christopher Mount (2005:315) states that "Paul's understanding of authority and identity for individuals within the community is determined by spirit possession". The manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is an identity maker of Pauline communities. In other words, Pauline churches were charismatic com-

munities of individuals expected to use their endowments to edify each other when they come together as “the body of Christ”.

The text of 1 Cor 11:2-16 has been considered by scholars as: (i) a Pauline interpolation; (ii) a non-Pauline interpolation; and (iii) Paul’s original writings to the Corinthians.

Mount (2005:314) posits that the passage is an interruption in Pauline thought, therefore it cannot be accepted as an original composition by Paul. W. O. Walker and G. W. Trompf argue that the text is a non-Pauline interpolation. Their assertion was informed by the ease of flow of thought that exists between 1 Cor 11:1 and 11:17 when 1 Cor 11:2-16 is taken out of the book (in Murphy-O’Connor 2000:808). This view suggests that the passage was later written by Paul or was a margin note that eventually found its way into the main body of the letter.

William J. Martin (1970:231) supported the view of Walker and Trompf when he states that “the passage (11:2-16) occurs within a framework of a discussion on the significance and observance of the Lord’s Supper and its place as the central theme in the act of worship.” Consequently, it is a non-Pauline interpolation.

Conversely, Richard A. Horsley (1998:142-153) articulates that the text is not an interpolation either by Paul or someone else but is an original composition by Paul. He explains that the framework of the passage, which also addresses issues concerning the regulation of the Lord’s Supper, agree at the point of dealing with issues when the Church meets; and the issues of men and women, and spiritual gifts can be found in the Corinthian letter of complaint to Paul (1 Cor 7:1-40; 8:1-11:1; 12-14). Hence, it is an original writing by Paul fixed at its current position in the letter. I argue that the assertions that the passage is either a Pauline or non-Pauline interpolation are not convincing enough. What Paul discussed in the passage can be found in the letter, subsequently, the pericope is an authentic writing by Paul. In view of Paul’s discourse concerning women, dress code, gender roles, and charisma in his letters, there is no doubt that 1 Corinthian 11:2-16 was written by himself (Murphy-O’Connor 1986:86). The manifestations of the gifts of the Holy Spirit ought to be governed by rules that do not contradict gender issues and creation order.

In giving instruction for the exercise of the gifts of the Spirit by women in the church, Paul argued on gender lines which have engineered some appropriation of the text in the church in Africa. In Ghana, women play pivotal roles as a priestess/prophetess/herbalist to mention but a few.

Although traditional women generally cover their head there was no condition that a priestess/prophetess/herbalist should have covered her head before she operates in a religious capacity. This challenge continues if they became Christians. Since no one knows when a woman wants to prophesy or pray, some churches in Ghana compel women to cover their heads before entering the church auditorium. This has created undesired dress codes for Christian women. The Church of Pentecost has been able to deal with this issue by democratizing head covering in the Church. Simply put, head covering is a matter of choice not a council decision of the Church.

I proceed within the framework that 1 Cor 11:2-16 was authentically written by Paul and fixed at its current position in the letter. Head covering by charismatic women is not universal but situational to the Corinthians and some churches within Greco-Roman settings. My procedure is to discuss the problem that the text has been used to cause; examine head covering in the Ghanaian socio-cultural context; review some relevant literature concerning the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16; undertake a concise contextual exegesis; appropriate the text in the Ghanaian charismatic context; and then draw conclusion. Above all, it is hoped that this work will help clarify issues surround the exercise of charisma by women and head covering, and cultural observance of head covering in the African context.

The Problem

The pericope under discussion has been interpreted by many scholars and church leaders to forbid women from actively participating in public worship services. In addition, it has been used to prevent women from being ordained into official positions in the church. Again, it has been used to subjugate women by demanding that they cover their head with a scarf before entering the church auditorium. In the African Initiated Churches (AICs), all females were required to put on a scarf before they enter the church assembly. In the Celestial Church of Ghana located at Asylum Down in Accra, females who do not cover their head before entering the auditorium experience severe critique by the community at the end of the service. Although many of the members of the AICs are women, they subjugated themselves to head covering due to the exercise of charisma; probably because of the presence of angels (1 Cor 11:10) in the service.

Until 2010, all women members of the Church of Pentecost were to cover their head before entering the church auditorium. Often, elderly women were positioned at the entrance with scarfs to cover the heads of women who may have forgotten to cover their head. This created a lot of embarrassment for women who did not intend to cover their head. It has the potential of discouraging Christians from participating in church activities. Many women of the historic mission churches such as the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Methodist Church, Ghana, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana also put on a scarf or head covering in church. Some of them restrict women ordination based on a certain interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16 and other Pauline passages.

However, the newer charismatic churches do not insist on head covering by women. Head covering is determined by ones' dressing (outfit). Charismatic women such as Christiana Doe Tetteh, founder of Solid Rock Chapel, located at Kwabenya in Accra; Prophetess Selina Boachie Marfo, founder of Faithway International Church, located at Alajo in Accra; Joice Aryee, founder of Salt and Light Ministry; and wives of charismatic pastors and ministers do not often cover their head with a scarf. This suggests that their understanding of 1 Cor 11:2-16 is different from the AICs. The phenomenon of insisting that women should constantly cover their head in church has created confusion in the mind of some Christians, as if the text has been interpreted based on ones' convenience. In the wake of increased charismatic christianity in Ghana and the active involvement of women in church activities, this study seeks to reinterpret the text and show how it can be appropriated in charismatic christianity in Ghana.

Head Covering of Women in Ghana

Women in Africa traditionally cover their head with a veil or a scarf around their head. The practise is popular among elderly women in rural areas where traditional cultural norms are held in high esteem. African women do not consider wearing of caps as head covering. Similar fabrics used for general clothing purposes are also used as a veil or scarf for head covering. It is both a cultural and a religious issue. An elderly woman attending a traditional public function without head covering is considered inappropriately dressed. During puberty rites, candidates were taught how to put on head coverings as a cultural identity

marker. Head covering has been given several names: *gele* “fashioned after Nigerian clothing style” (Kwakye-Opong 2011:91); and *wodasobo* (fashion according to *Akan*¹ culture in Ghana, which means a lasting scarf made from good quality nylon and cotton textile). There are individuals in the textile industry who have specialized in forming these scarf styles for sale. Many textile retailers in the Mokola market in Accra Central display some of these scarfs in their shops for sale.

However, there are exceptions to head covering of women in Ghana. Queen mothers in *Akan* traditional areas trim their hair short and dye it black for traditional public functions. This is called *dansinkran* in *Akan*. The term is an *Akan* corrupted version of the English phrase “dancing crown”. The hair is meticulously trimmed and generally used in dancing *kete* or *adowa* (traditional *Akan* dance) which appeared to the colonial government as a traditional crown, hence the phrase.

Some Scholarly Interpretation of the Text

There have been various scholarly translations and interpretations of the text arriving at varying meanings and understandings.

(i) Gender role definition and distinction

Benjamin L. Merkle (2006:534) argues that the text is an attempt by Paul to outline gender roles, which were discarded by Christian women, by arguing from creation, nature, and socio-cultural practices in the Corinthian context. This was aimed at installing gender distinctions during public worship services. Preston T. Massey (2013:255-256) postulates that in view of the fact that the Church in Corinth met in either a Roman atrium house or villa or a Hellenistic hybrid house with courtyard (which could not accommodate more than 90 persons at a time), women seems to consider it as their domestic house, and would behave as if they were in their own house. Therefore, Paul was defining gender roles and behavior during worship service.

¹ The *Akan* ethnic group is the largest in Ghana. The *Akan* language is spoken by about 42% of Ghanaians as their first language and 28 % as their second language. See Yankah 2006.

(ii) Regulations for Spirit possession in the Church

Pauline churches are charismatic communities where members were expected to use their giftings to edify each other in public worship services. Hence, the passage gives instructions for the behavior of both sexes when under possession. The stipulations concerning head covering is for possessed persons to respect the leadership of the Church and uphold cultural and gender issues in society (Mount 2005:339). The behavior of women under possession can be described thus:

Prophetic inspiration was regarded in Greek culture as madness or as possession by a deity. A typical manifestation among women was tossing the head and the hair in disarray. To the male heads of society, however, the women's loose hair symbolized that the women themselves were loosed from social constraints. This male anxiety was surely well-grounded. Many women must have been attracted to ecstatic forms of religion because of their confinement within the highly authoritarian patriarchal Greco-Roman social order. Possession by a god provided a certain legitimation for their rebellious behavior (Horsley 1998:157).

Horsley's comment suggests that Paul was placing a distinction between possession of women in non-Christian religion and possession of women in the Church. However, this is not to subordinate the charismatic activities of women in the church or not to admit women into ecclesiastical positions in the church (Murphy-O'Connor 1988:274). "Paul...stresses even more directly the essential partnership of man and woman. Neither can live without the other. If there is subordination, it is in order that the partnership may be more fruitful and more lovely for both" (Barclay 2009:117). John David Kwamena Ekem (2005:108) states that "...it is likely that Paul is ...addressing 'pneumatic women worshippers' who together with their male counterparts, were taking certain liberties and thereby disrupting the normal order of worship". He further argues that

1 Cor 11:2-16 is a profound thought that there is no discrimination between the sexes in regard to active participation in public worship. But a sense of propriety must be cultivated by the worshipping community, mindful of divine-human relations as well as cultural sensibilities concerning male-female relations. (Ekem 2005:118)

The position of Merkle and Massey in (i) points to orderliness in public worship service by men and women. However, they did not tackle the issue of the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit in relation to head covering of women. Nevertheless, their views help this essay in tracing

the background of the pericope, and religious and cultural norms of both sexes in first century Corinth. The second school of thought concerning the interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16, which relates Spirit possession and head covering of women in the church is probably right also. However, they did not consider the African and Ghanaian context of appropriating the text in the church. Although Ekem attempted it, he mainly concentrated on cultural issues for the development of Bible study for the *Akans* in Ghana. The opinions of this group of scholars help to appreciate possession activities of women in the Church at Corinth.

In view of the overwhelming presence of Pentecostal and Charismatic christianity in Ghana where women are allowed to prophesy and lead during prayer meetings, there is the need to study the passage in the context of charismatic women in the African context. AICs emphasize head covering for all women who come to worship, contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic ministries do not emphasize head covering for charismatic women who prophesy or lead during prayer meetings. All these choices were being informed by a certain interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16. P. V. Palmer (2016:89) rightly states that

...whatever principles are applied from the passage are best applied consistently..., if it is the policy of a church to allow sisters to prophesy and pray without some kind of 'covering', then brothers should not be censured for wearing caps or the like during worship.... No discrimination should mar our attempt at proper application.

This study attempts to interpret the passage in relation to head covering of charismatic women in African traditional religio-cultural milieu and to show how the passage can be applied to African charismatic women in the church without subordinating their God given potential or feeling superior to men when under possession.

Concise Exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11:2-16

Verse 2

The pericope opens with a commendation to the Corinthian Christians. Paul is commending them for remembering him in every matter, which has become a tradition. Horsley (1998:152) postulates that the observance of the "Lord's Supper" is the tradition that Paul was referring to. The tradition, which Paul was recommending them for, is the issue of verse 23-25 of which verse 17-22 is an exception and verse 2-16 does not call for any commendation. However, it is more probable that Paul is

referring here to a baptismal creed, which he mentioned in Galatian 3:28 as it brings the gender topic to the fore which is essential in 11:2-16 but is missing in 11:17 ff.

C. K. Barrett (1971:147) argues that “tradition” here refers to the central issues of the Christian faith, which was delivered orally concerning conversion of non-Christians.

Verse 3

The verse begins with θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς (but I wish) indicating a switch from the commendation in verse 2 to polemical discussions. The verse is heavily emphatic and shows paronomasia of Χριστός and κεφαλή (Christ and headship). It describes the relationship and interdependence between Christ, humans, and God in relation to Christ. The dominance of κεφαλή in the verse gives a lead in thinking that the Corinthian Church had issues with leadership during moments of possession or manifestation of charisma by women. Repetition and reoccurrence of words is a rhetorical device to indicate emphasis on an important aspect of literary work. It is obvious that Paul was drawing on the creation of male and female to make his argument (Gen 1:27; 2:7,18).

There have been two opinions concerning the meaning of κεφαλή as “source” or “authority over” (Wayne Grudem 2001:25-65). Verbrusse states that “the hierarchy of the order is God-Christ-man-woman, in which each of the first three members is the head of the following one. Here κεφαλή should probably be understood not as ruler but as source or origin”. (Verbrusse 2000:303). It gives credence to God as the source of all creatures. Similarly, by nature and ontology, the existence and livelihood of woman is heavily dependent of man. Hence κεφαλή in the text should be understood as source. Paul used it in relation to the LXX translation of the Hebrew *rosh* (head), which he is familiar with (Schlier 1987:81,679). Conversely, κεφαλή “must be taken in a metaphorical sense such as ‘head of the house’ or ‘head of the firm’” (Ruef 1977:109). Ekem (2005:112) likewise argues that just as men have to succumb to Christ, κεφαλή should be understood as authority.

In order to understand the meaning of κεφαλή, it is important to examine its occurrence in the verse in the context of the Jewish and Hellenistic composition of the Church in Corinth. The term was used three times in the verse: It was used to indicate the relationship between Christ and ἀνδρὸς. Simply put, Christ is the head (source) of the new covenant or of all Christians. The second use was in respect to the rela-

tionship between a man and a woman (γυναικός). In this case κεφαλή refers to authority. This is emphasized by the use of ἐξουσία (authority) in verse 10. It is not different from the third usage indicating the relationship between God and Christ. Since there were divisions in the Church (1 Cor 3), it is not likely that Paul would use κεφαλή solely in the Jewish sense or solely in the context of the Hellenistic κεφαλή-σῶμα concept, which emphasizes superiority over others (Verbrusse 2000:302-304). A kind of “guru know-it-all”² (Aryeh 2018:66) would not fit to the congregation's situation, because it has the potential of deepening the existing divisions. I posit that Paul used κεφαλή nine times in the pericope to rhetorically and progressively convey to the audience that it is a key issue around which his argument evolves. A κεφαλή that is the amalgamation of source, authority, and leadership that does not discriminate between gender roles and charisma of women. Interdependence of the maleness and femaleness to be appreciated by all (Witherington 1995:236-238) is the message intended.

Verses 4-6

This section is the heart of Paul's communication with the Corinthians in the pericope. Πᾶς ἀνὴρ προσευχόμενος ἢ προφητεύων (any man praying or prophesying). The use of ἀνὴρ limits the discussion to men, in agreement to its use in verse 3. Κατὰ κεφαλῆς ἔχων καταισχύνει τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ (having his head covering disgraces himself). Κεφαλή here refers to the whole being of the man (Murphy-O'Connor 2000:809). In other words, he is not upholding the dignity ascribed to him by God and his culture. This statement of Paul goes against some cultural norms in both Jewish and Hellenistic societies where some men cover their head during worship services (Ekem 2005:103). In effect, Paul was instilling a point of dichotomy between Christian pneumatic men's manifestation of gifts and that of Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures.

However, women were to cover their head if they want to pray or prophesy in public worship service. In Jewish tradition, married women generally cover their head as a sign of respect and “loyalty for their husbands” (Ekem 2005:104). This is not so in Greco-Roman culture. Upwardly mobile women of good economic standing and appreciable social status do not often cover their heads. Is Paul recommending Jewish

² The notion that a superior person is a repository of all knowledge while others are tabula rasa.

women head covering for all women who want to pray or prophesy in the Church? It is also not clear what kind of covering Paul was talking about.

Paul is addressing ‘pneumatic women worshippers’ who have assumed a sort of liberty that was disrupting worship service (Ekem 2005:108). Similarly, Robin Dowling states that

“Paul’s real concern was certain women who were *not* covering their heads in worship. While Christians are to recognize their present fullness in Christ, they must not regard themselves as having ‘arrived’... They regarded themselves as being like angels” (1994:37).

Paul is arguing that being possessed by the Spirit does not allow one to neglect mutual cultural norms. The neglect of which is tantamount to disgracing oneself, not respecting gender order, which is considered as being like “an adulteress or as a widow” (Beduhn 1999:299) or being shaved. Paul’s specific instruction to women when possessed points to the essential role of women in worship services. They can be equally used by the Spirit of Christ just as their male counterparts.

In first century religious milieu of Roman Corinth, there were three kinds of covering:

- (i) the normal veiling by draping some cloth around the head;
- (ii) the covering of the head that flow onto the shoulder; and
- (iii) the use of a hood as covering (Theissen 1987:159-160).

Any of these coverings is possible in this context. Paul’s argument for men not to cover their head during pneumatic moment in public worship service was to disassociate Jewish and Roman liturgical vestments in which men may cover their head during prayer. His depiction in verse 6 that women should cover their head strongly seems to contradict verse 15 where he argues that the woman’s hair is given to her for a covering. It implies that when a woman has long hair covering her head, there is no need to use any fabric to cover her hair. Hence, *κατακαλυπτομαι* should be interpreted as a covering that flows from the top of the head down to/towards the shoulder of a woman (Ekem 2000:171-174), be it her hair or a textile. It is not binding that women must cover their head with a fabric when they have long hair covering their head. *Ἡ κόμη ἀντὶ* serves as substitute/equivalent of covering with a fabric; which is also the *δόξα* (glory) of the woman (verse 15).

Verses 7-10

Paul here gave reasons for his statements in verse 4-6; because a man is the image and reflection of God whilst a woman depicts the glory of the man. Man, as the image and reflection of God alludes to the meaning of Adam in Gen 1:27, which does not connote a gendered being, and the meaning of Adam in Gen 2:20-25, which connotes gendered being. The woman as the glory of the man signifies the actions and inactions of the woman giving honor to the man. This is given further voice in verse 8 when Paul borrowed Gen 2:20-25 that woman was made from man not vice versa. The context of the Genesis story of creation is not the same as the Corinthian context. It is a reconfiguration of an old tradition in a new situation (Robbins 1996:50). Paul's reference may be out of context, but it is an appeal to a well-established narrative to give authority to his writings: that woman was created for man to live in unity and mutual respect. It is significant to observe that a woman as the glory of a man has substitute in verse 15 when Paul argues that a long hair of a woman is her glory. Therefore, the authority that a woman ought to have over her head is either a long hair or a cover with fabric (verse 10).

There were two reasons for women to cover their heads during worship service.

- (i) Woman was derived from man; the covering of her head serves as authority for her during moments of possession in worship service; and
- (ii) because of the presence of angels in the service.

The mention of supernatural beings in the pericope has been seen by some scholars as making the text difficult to understand. There is an ancient Jewish belief in the presence of angels in worship services (Lk. 1:5-25). Three possible meanings have been enumerated: (i) "Good angels responsible for ensuring order in worship"; (ii) "Evil/fallen angels who are attracted to women"; and (iii) "human messengers from other churches" (Ekem 2005:109).

Ekem favours position (iii) being the reason why pneumatic women should cover their heads if they want to pray or prophesy. Ruef (1977:110) and Murphy-O'Connor (2000:809) conversely argue that angels in the text should be understood as human leaders of the Church. In view of the charismatic context of 1 Corinthians and the specific instruction of Paul concerning pneumatic women, and the Jewish background of Paul, it is probable that 'angels' in this context refers to supernatural beings considered as messengers of God or it is used as a euphemism for the presence of God during times of Spirit possession

(Beduhn 1999:306). It is not clear in the text what the danger is for non-covering by women during moments of prayer or prophesying. Is it that angels could not differentiate between males and females, or the angels come to take women as wives (Gen 6)?

Verses 11-12

Paul then speaks out for mutual interdependence between man and woman because they were both created by God (Gal 3:28). Paul seems to be softening his earlier distinctive and priority stand between man and woman probably to please the Hellenistic women in the congregation or – more probably – because he remembered the equality of all believers as “sons of God in Christ” (Gal 3:26).

Verse 13-16

Paul then rhetorically throws the issue back to the Corinthian Christians to judge or decide for themselves whether it is acceptable for women to pray to God without head covering. This is likely to engineer further dispute, because the Jewish and the Hellenistic constituencies of the Church would take decisions based on their cultural worldviews. Does it mean that Paul was defeating his earlier proposition concerning head covering by charismatic women who want to pray or prophesy? Or was he asking them to observe individual cultural norms? He then appealed to nature as being against long hair for men.

The use of κομῆ (long hair) creates confusion as to whether Paul was against the long hair of the Greco-Roman philosophers, barbarians, and peasants who could be members of the Church (Horsley 1998:156). Φύσις (nature) here refers to general cultural consensus concerning men hair styles. However, we do not know what constituted long and short hair. The Greek term περιβολαῖον (cloak, cover) is what is used to cover one’s whole body from being naked. Hence, it is an admonition of women not to expose their nakedness just as he emphasizes head covering or long hair for them during moments of possession. The reference to nature suggests that Paul is pointing the Corinthians to socio-cultural practices within one’s geographical location to be observed.

Paul further watered down his admonitions when he said in verse 16, δοκεῖ φιλόνοικος (if someone thinks otherwise). This emphasizes the situational nature of Paul’s epistles. The stipulations concerning head covering or having uncovered long hair for charismatic women during times of prayer and prophecy was hinged on charismatic endowment of the Church at Corinth (1 Cor 1:7). Although it is a tradition in some

churches, probably, within a particular region for women to cover their head, it is not a universal proviso.

Discussion of Findings: A Way Forward for Head Covering of Charismatic Women in Ghana

Deducing from the exegetical work, it is clear that Paul did not instruct women in the Church to cover their head when entering the Church assembly. Paul gave equal opportunity to both men and women to minister in the Church without neglecting cultural norms that do not conflict the gospel. It is significant to state that Paul was careful not to harm either the Jewish or Greco-Roman constituencies in the Church by his epistle.

The use of the Bible to restrain women from exhibiting their God given abilities found fertile land in how Ghanaians regard the Bible as the pure “Word of God” and the homage given to so-called men or women of God. “African Christians hold the Bible in high esteem. It is considered unquestionably as the ‘Word of God.’ Simply put, the Bible is not a book, on the same level with books on the economy, geography, or agriculture, but a divine book, which can be used to cause desirable change by those who subscribe to its tenets” (Aryeh 2016:141). This perception about the Bible and the desire to be referred to as being biblical (observing biblical precepts) have allowed for a wholesale acceptance of anything that is alleged to having been derived from the Bible. Persons who ask too many questions concerning the interpretation of the Bible by pastor/ministers were labeled hypocrites or ‘too known’. It has made the interpretation of the Bible by church leaders sacrosanct.

The challenge is that many of the church leaders do not have the requisite training in scripture interpretation and therefore interpret the Bible on popular acclimated opinions such as head covering of women that easily resonates with the traditional cultural norms of Ghana. There is the need to rightly interpret the Bible not to enslave women. Interpretation must transform cultural norms that prevents women to express their God given abilities.

It is apparent that head covering by women as posited by Paul in the pericope is culturally conditioned. In verse 16 Paul made it obvious that head covering is practised in other churches. Unfortunately, he did not mention a particular church, which could be studied in conjunction with 1 Cor 11:2-16. Ghanaian culture generally upholds head covering for

women particularly in rural settings and women of low economic status. Nonetheless, the case is not the same for urban dwellers and women of good economic standing. Examination of the demand by some churches in Ghana for women to cover their head before entering the church auditorium is largely motivated by cultural norms where women were expected to cover their head with a scarf in public gatherings.

It is the enforcement of cultural norms through the conduit of a certain interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16 by some church leaders. In other words, the text is used/interpreted through a cultural norm of head covering by women. Neglecting the fact that Paul gave options to either cover with a fabric or long hair. And it is not binding. There exists a general presupposition that many issues expressed through the medium of religion are largely accepted by Africans, because they are 'a people who in all things are religious' (Opoku 1978:1). Issues of culture and religion are intertwined and difficult to differentiate. However, it is dangerous to enforce cultural norms through certain interpretation of scripture without giving the Bible the chance of transforming the culture.

Paul vividly instructs that where head covering is applicable, it concerns women who want to pray or prophesy. This means that women can enter church auditoria with uncovered head or long hair. They may only cover when they want to pray or prophesy, after which they may remove it. Prayer and prophecy is not an ascetic (a spiritual lifestyle) phenomenon but activities where the human input cannot be avoided. The charismatic women of Ghana must control themselves even in moments of Spirit possession or manifestations so as not to assume that they are better than others who do not prophesy.

Charismatic women in Ghana belong to the socially and economically endowed strata of the Ghanaian society who do not usually cover their head with a scarf. Their choice of dress does not necessitate covering the head with a scarf but sometimes with a ladies' cap or having a long flowing hair. The non-covering by Ghanaian charismatic women cannot be argued to reach the conclusion that they are violating Paul's instruction. After all, there is no indication that non-covering hinders answer to pray or wanes the Spirit of prophecy. Young ladies from economically and educationally endowed backgrounds also do not wear dresses that demand for a scarf. It is the poor who are often in a scarf, probably due to their dress code, which is not a legislation by the church.

The use of the passage to restrict women from ordination is completely absurd. There is no evidence in the passage to that effect. In verse 11-12,

Paul emphasized the mutual role of both sexes in the Church. However, the restriction of women in 1 Cor 14:33-36 which has been argued as an interpolation with the intention to control women from bringing up trivial marital issues in worship service, and not ministration under Spirit possession. Churches who use this passage to stop women from the pastorate are only implementing the patriarchal cultural values of Ghana, which regard women as inferior to men. Nonetheless, if the Spirit of God decides to engage a woman for service, cultural norms should not be activated to stop her.

Conclusion

In this essay, I attempted to exegete 1 Cor 11:2-16 and comparatively engage it with restriction of women in the church in Ghana. The passage is often used to subjugate women from exhibiting their God given potentials. However, the text shows that Paul outlined a road map for harnessing and unleashing the gifts of women in the church during moments of Spirit possession or the manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit. Paul's teaching concerning head covering is purely situational for the Corinthian Church. Long hair is equivalent to covering the head with a fabric. Head covering by women is not to be regarded as universal for the church in all geographical locations and cultures. Therefore, it is ridiculous to enforce first century Corinthian culture on 21st century Ghanaian Christian women.

I encourage all charismatic Christian women to continue the good work and not to allow any subjugation and restriction from certain interpretation of 1 Cor 11:2-16. Women who cover their head may continue to do so if it does not hinder the growth of the church or their God given potentials. However, the situation calls for training in biblical interpretation and the attempt to be critical but not hyper-critical of biblical passages and the interpretations given by church leaders.

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Gen 2:18 אֵשֶׁת-לּוֹ
 Deut 33:7 מִצָּרָיו תִּהְיֶה: כְּנִגְדּוֹ:
 Ex 18:4 י וַיֹּצִלֵנִי מִחֶרֶב פְּרָעָה:
 helper helper ! helper
 אֱלֹהֵי אָבִי בְּ

פֶּן-אֶעֱבֹד אֹתְךָ, כִּי
 EX 18:4 תִּהְיֶה
 אֱלֹהֵי

The Bible, Women and Ordination in two African Initiated Churches in Zimbabwe

Excellent Chireshe & Calisto Chimoyi

Abstract

The topic of the ordination of women in the church is controversial. This chapter focuses on the Bible and the ordination of women in relation to two African Initiated Churches (AICs), a Zionist and an Apostolic church in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe. In discussing the issue, the chapter highlights views from some influential historical male theologians and some liberal Christian feminist theologians before presenting findings from the field. The fieldwork involved interviewing members of the two churches under consideration. The study revealed that the Apostolic church has opened its doors for the ordination of women while the Zionist church has not. It also emerged that the way the Bible is interpreted influences the treatment of women in the church, particularly on ordination. If churches could read the Bible in an inclusive way, both men and women who feel they have been called to ministry would realise their potential.

Introduction

The position and role of women is a disputed and controversial issue particularly in contemporary theological and social discourses. The issue has attracted the attention of scholars of various persuasions, especially with respect to women's leadership. Various church denominations maintain diverse doctrinal and structural positions on the issue of women's ordination (Owanikin 2006). Conservatives tenaciously reject the ordination of women. Both proponents and critics of women's ministerial leadership appeal to the Bible to support their positions. The Bible itself is ambivalent and this raises questions on what the Bible is really saying about women's ministry (Huyen 2014). This chapter looks at the Bible and the ordination of women in relation to two AICs, a Zionist Church and an Apostolic Church in Masvingo Province, Zimbabwe.

Influential historical interpretations on women and leadership

For many years, the Bible has been interpreted by male theologians who have tended to make women invisible or present them negatively (Phiri 1997:75). The interpretation has for the most part been androcentric (male-centred) (Ruether 1985); thus, rendering the Bible an instrument to subject women to male rule. The church theologians such as Tertullian, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth promulgated theological teachings that were set to influence Christian belief and practice (Chireshe 2012). The teachings entailed a dehumanisation of women. The church theologians based their thinking on some biblical texts presumed to sanctify male dominance and female subordination.

The creation story in Gen 2, depicting that the man was created first, was taken to imply the leadership of the male and the subservient role of the female. Paul's letters were, and still are, interpreted by many as stating that women are to be subordinate to men. As Essien and Ukpong (2012:288) assert, "Paul has some discriminatory messages in the scripture which served as the oil and grease of patriarchal theology and the fulcrum of discrimination against women." 1 Cor 14:34-35 states that women should not speak in church, as in all the churches of the saints. The passage considers it shameful for women to speak in church. This text parallels 1 Tim 2:11-15 which also bars women from speaking in church and calls upon them to be silent followers, to learn in silence and submissiveness. The women-silencing passage in 1 Tim 2 gives two reasons why women should not teach or have authority over men. The first is that the woman, Eve, was created after the man (based on the creation story in Gen 2:18-24), Adam, and the second one (based on what is commonly referred to as the account of the Fall in Gen 3) is that Eve was the first one to desert the divine commandment. Since the Pauline passages referred to do not allow women to speak in church or to preach, they have been used to deny women religious leadership. While 1 Cor 14:35-36 and 1 Tim nowadays are seen as post-Pauline products (cf. the chapters of Machingura and Kügler in this volume), 1 Cor 11:2-16, another passage that has for centuries been used to justify exclusion of women from spiritual leadership incontestably is of Pauline origin. It is Paul himself who states that the "man is the head of woman" (11:3), thus showing a rather ambivalent stance on gender issues as can be seen from the contrast between 1 Cor 11:3 and Gal 3:28.

Under the influence of such texts as Gen 3 and 1 Tim 2:11-15, Tertullian suggested that women should not be entrusted with church leadership

as they are easily tempted and referred to them as ‘the Devil’s Gateway’ (Vorster 1984:68). He wrote words which epitomise the philosophies concerning women during the Middle Ages. He wrote:

The sentence of God on this sex of yours lives on. ...*You* are one who opened the door to the devil, *you* are the one who plucked the fruit of the forbidden tree, *you* are the one who deserted the Divine Law. All too easily you destroyed the image of God, man. ...Because of *your* desertion...even the son of God had to die (Quotation according to Greyvenstein 1996:77).

Thus, religious thought and teachings have evidently affected the position of women, with women being identified more often with evil than with good in religious writings (Chireshe 2012).

Augustine saw women as obstacles to Christian spirituality when he insisted that he could not see the glory of God because of women (Vorster 1984:69). Augustine also argued that women themselves do not possess the image of God (*imago Dei*) like men. The implication is that men, being more theomorphic (God-like), were better placed to represent God as his priests. Furthermore, Augustine associated men with leadership and women with domesticity. In his lectures on Gen 2:23 and 3:16 Augustine, quoted by Ruether (1989:33) says, “The man rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions, tills the soil ... The woman sits at home”.

Themes on the subordination of women were taken up by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* (Chireshe 2012). Aquinas agreed with Aristotle on the misogynist view that the female is a misbegotten male, a defective being (Mudimeli 2011). In so doing, Aquinas depicted the male as normative humanity (the standard human being) and the female as not fully human (Ruether 1993). Thomas Aquinas, as cited in Nasimiyu-Wasike (1991:76), said:

“Woman is an occasional and incomplete being ... a misbegotten male. It is unchallengeable that woman is destined to live under man’s influence and has no authority from her Lord”.

This suggests that women have no mandate from God to take on ordained ministry. Aquinas saw women as subject to male power on account of sin and only useful to men primarily for procreation (Nienhuis 2009:50). Thus, as Kasomo (2010) asserts, he viewed a woman primarily as a necessary helpmate in procreation.

Martin Luther perpetuated the pre-reformation teachings on female subordination and male dominance. He maintained that women are inferior to men, basing this on Gen 3:16 which states that the man shall

rule the woman. For him, males were the ideal leaders in both church and society. He saw women's role as primarily that of procreation. In this regard, he shut women out of ordained ministry.

Like Luther, Calvin held to the doctrine of female subordination, not only in marriage but in all things, especially in the oversight of the church (Jewett 1983). Calvin's teaching implied that the woman was designed to be a supporter of male activities and therefore subordinate (Chireshe 2012). Thus, in church women would be expected to play supportive roles while men lead. This corresponds with the teaching in 1 Tim 2:11-15 which forbids women to preach or to have authority over men.

Karl Barth, following the footsteps of his predecessors, saw the man, the superordinate, as responsible for giving orders while the woman, the subordinate, listens (Kasomo 2010). This conceptualisation of the role of man and woman is based on the order of creation (Ruether 2002): Adam was created first and then Eve. This alludes to the Gen 2 creation story and its interpretation in 1 Tim 2:11-15. Thus, women's subordination is sanctified on two grounds, namely creation and sin; woman was created second (Gen 2) and sinned first (Gen 3). As Ruether (2002:198) articulates, "Christian theological misogyny (hatred for women) through the centuries has been mainly an elaboration on two assertions: that woman is intrinsically subordinate in the order of creation, and that she was the cause of sin." Eve's sin is considered as representing that females are gullible; they are vulnerable and as such cannot be entrusted with church leadership.

Ruether (1993:139) succinctly summarises the perceptions of the historical male theologians on women when she asserts, "The whole patristic and medieval tradition rejected the possibility that women were equally theomorphic (God-like)". This is despite the fact that Gen 1:26-28 states that both male and female are created in the image of God. Women's subordinate status has historically been taken as divinely decreed; as "willed in heaven and profitable on earth" (de Beauvoir 1949/2009:30). This is related to Chakkalal's (2007) argument that the misinterpretation of texts including 1 Cor 11:2-16; Col 3:18 and Eph 5:22-23, from the patristic era even to this day, has helped in the downgrading of women and their exclusion from ordained ministry. In view of influential historical interpretations of Scripture cited, it can be noted that the Christian tradition has encouraged the subordination of women through its theologies and interpretation of biblical texts (Chireshe 2012). Such interpre-

tations have had the effect of promoting the exclusion of women from ministry. Misogynist theologies gave rise to the development of feminist theology which sought to challenge androcentric theology.

Feminist perspectives on the Bible and women's religious leadership

Feminist scholarship in religion is diverse but regardless of the diversity, it is concerned with justice for women. It is against structures of injustice and exploitation (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995, 1998, 2002, 2014; Ruether 1985; Oduyoye 1986, 1995). While radical feminists like Mary Daly call for the abandonment of religion, reform or liberal feminists, who are in the majority, argue that they want to maintain the biblical faith because in it they find their being.

Liberal biblical feminists have debated the issue of women's leadership in the Church (Mudimeli 2011). They use the Bible to show that the ordination of women is right and just, and their exclusion is unjust (Banana 1993; Njoroge 2005; Oduyoye 1995). For example, Schüssler Fiorenza argues that the women who followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem are apostolic witnesses and that the gospels accord women apostolic and ministerial leadership (Schüssler Fiorenza 1983:1995). Furthermore, she asserts that a discipleship of equals is noticeable in the history of the church and cites Romans 16 as "giving us a glimpse of women's contribution to early Christian life and mission" (1993:71). Similarly, Njoroge (1997:82) argues that preventing women from participating in all ministries of the church is unjust and contrary to the gospel message. In the story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42), for example, it can be noted that Jesus challenged the traditional concept of women's inferior place in favour of equality (Chung 2008), by allowing Mary to sit at his feet learning. The great news of the resurrection was revealed to the faithful women, with Mary Magdalene being the first woman to see the risen Christ (Banana 1993). The cited passages suggest that women are fit to be included in ordained ministry and for this reason some churches in Zimbabwe today ordain women as ministers of religion.

Feminists challenge male monopoly on leadership in church and society, seeing this as an impediment to "women's full vision of redemption in Christ" (Ruether 2002:179). They see the Bible as a feminist resource and heritage, notwithstanding that it contains passages that have been and are still being used to halt the emancipation of women or women's

realisation of their full potential including leadership potential (Hidayatullah 2009). Feminists view the Bible as contradictory, liberating and oppressing, including and excluding (Mudimeli 2011). For example, Gen 1:26-28 dignifies women as an important factor in the creation, equal in power and glory with man while Gen 2 makes her a mere afterthought (Cady Stanton, as cited by Mace 2009). In view of the contradictory nature of biblical texts, feminist scholars of religion such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Mercy Amba Oduyoye apply hermeneutics of suspicion when approaching biblical texts. This is an approach to the Bible which takes into consideration that biblical texts and their interpretations are androcentric and so largely serve the interests of men in positions of power. The approach attaches a 'warning label' on biblical texts, given that the Bible has been and still is being used to prevent women from serving as ordained ministers of religion (Mudimeli 2011).

Liberal feminists call for reform, demanding for the right to participate fully in the religious community (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995; Harrison 2007; Russell 1985). The reform entails a reinterpretation of biblical texts and traditions. The goal of reinterpretation is for women and other marginalised groups to fully participate in religion, gaining full access to decision-making powers in religious communities (Schüssler Fiorenza 2014). "While androcentric scholarship takes man as the paradigmatic human being, feminist scholarship challenges male symbolic representations" (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995:2). In view of this, feminist interpretation does not consider dehumanising, oppressive texts and interpretations as normative. In this regard, 1 Cor 13:34 and 1 Tim 2:11-15, which forbid women to preach during assembly, are among biblical texts that come under the spotlight. As Tamez (1994:195) asserts, "A time has come to acknowledge that those biblical texts that reflect patriarchal culture and proclaim women's inferiority and their submission to men are not normative." The basis of such an assertion seems to be that God views humanity as equal in worth and dignity since he created them in his own image (see Gen 1:26). On the basis of this, 'Godly' texts are not discriminatory. Feminist interpretation does not accept interpretation of authority that reinforces patriarchal structures of domination (Russell 1985). Instead, it upholds those texts, traditions and interpretations that affirm the full humanity of women and accord them dignity. This perception of the Bible may not be acceptable to many Christians who consider the Bible infallible. For reform feminists, a number of whom are in the Catholic tradition, not every biblical text is acceptable but those that

affirm the worth of all, without discriminating. It is no wonder that feminist biblical interpretations, particularly those that consider some biblical texts as unacceptable, are regarded as subversive by conservative Christians who take the Bible as the voice of God.

Having related influential historical interpretations and feminist perspectives in relation to women's religious leadership, the next task is to consider women in relation to ordained ministry in two AICs in Zimbabwe, namely, a Zionist Church and an Apostolic Church. Literature on the status and role of women in the church abounds (for example, Chireshe 2012; Daly 1973; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983, 1995, 2002, 2011, 2014; Oduyoye 1986, 1995; Phiri 1997; Russell 1985; Reuther 1985, 1993, 2002). However, much of this focuses on the Roman Catholic Church and other mainline churches as well as Pentecostal churches. Not much has been researched and documented in relation to the two churches under consideration in this chapter. It is for this reason that we had a keen interest on the subject matter so as to fill that gap. The two churches share some common features: the centrality of the Holy Spirit, faith-healing, prophesying and traditional leadership when it comes to the highest church office.

The Churches under Consideration

Before engaging in further discussion of the two churches, a short portrait of each of them would be in order.

The **Zionist Church** under consideration is one of the oldest and largest AICs in Zimbabwe. We refer to the church as Zionist because it has Zion as part of its nomenclature. Its headquarters is in Masvingo Province. The church was formed in the 1920s. It has several branches outside Zimbabwe, for example South Africa, Botswana, and Malawi. The Church follows the traditional type of leadership wherein headship of the Church is hereditary and patriarchal. The current Bishop of the Church is a descendent of the founder who is now late. Women are not ordained in this Church but may assume leadership roles in women's fellowship groups.

The **Apostolic Church** is also an AIC in Zimbabwe. The name of the Church includes the term apostolic. It was formed in the 1950s as a breakaway movement from another Apostolic Church. It has its headquarters in Manicaland Province. Like the Zionist Church, the Apostolic Church also follows a traditional leadership style when it comes to top

management, that is, the positions of Archbishop and Bishop. However, unlike the Zionist, this church ordains women as ministers of religion. The church has branches outside Zimbabwe.

Method

Data for this study was obtained, by means of interviews, from a sample of twenty-four participants belonging to a Zionist church and an Apostolic church; twelve from each of the two churches. These included church leaders and lay persons, both male and female. Two church leaders from each of the two churches participated in the study. Five female lay persons and five male lay persons from each of the two churches took part in the study. The information obtained was discussed in the context of relevant literature.

Women and ordination in the Zionist Church

The Zionist Church exhibits a pyramidal structure in which those at the helm are men. Participants from the church indicated that women cannot lead in mixed congregations because the Bible teaches women to be silent in church and not lead men. The other reason for the exclusion of women from ordination is that they are defiled by menstruation and childbirth which render them unfit for God's service, thus putting them on the periphery. As one female elderly participant (aged 60) said, "It is difficult for a woman to be ordained as a minister (*mufundisi*) because she will have to break from serving God whenever she is menstruating or when she has just given birth." Menstruating women are supposed to sit on the margins of the church assembly. This teaching is not questioned by a majority of the church members. The exclusion of women from ordained leadership as a result of the flow of menstruation or childbirth blood confirms Owanikin's (2006) assertion that women are sometimes seen as ritually unclean on the basis of the flow of blood. Since "officiating at worship and church administration are usually the exclusive prerogative of 'holy people'" (Owanikin 2006:211), women are excluded from these responsibilities. Phiri (1997) is critical of the exclusion of women based on menstruation arguing that blood is linked to life, so it cannot epitomise defilement.

The leadership of women is confined to women's fellowship groups (*Ruwadzano*) where women are expected to lead each other and manage their (women's) affairs. As one 44-year-old male prophet said:

Although women are not allowed to preach at mixed gatherings on Sunday, they are allowed to fellowship among themselves especially at women gatherings such as on Thursdays. This is when they teach each other the social and religious life based on biblical principles.

Oduyoye (1995) challenges this confinement of women's leadership to women's affairs, suggesting that it is not sufficient since women also desire to be actively involved in decision-making on matters that affect the whole church. Her conviction is that women, like their male counterparts, are the church and not clients of the church so men and women should work as partners in the ministry. Underscoring the notion that women should take on ecclesiastical roles since they played a key role in the development of the church, Schüssler Fiorenza (2002) insists that women are church and have always been church. She finds it absurd that women are denied leadership on the basis of their biological makeup (Schüssler Fiorenza 1995).

In the Zionist Church women cannot occupy ordained ministerial offices in the church because this opportunity is perceived, in the church, as having been denied them in the Bible. This is despite women's numerical majority. The often-cited texts are the creation stories and Pauline epistles. 1 Cor 14:34 and 1 Tim 2:8-15 are taken as having closed doors for women's leadership in both the church and society. The texts sanction an exclusively male church leadership. In 1 Tim 2:11-15, Paul says "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent." The denial of leadership to women is taken as God-ordained such that those women who aspire to take on leadership roles are labelled deviants. Most members of the church, male and female alike, are comfortable with the arrangement. The following quotations from married female members of the church illustrate this point:

Even at home we listen to our husbands as heads of families. So, what is peculiar when it comes to church ministry? Who am I to question the Bible's commandment that women must obey men as leaders of women? (woman aged 53)

We are not worried that we are not allowed to preach because we draw a good example from Sarah the wife of Abraham who listened to her husband and was obedient to him. So as women we need to obey males as authority (woman aged 36).

The above quotations show the acceptance of male leadership as normative, challenging of which is tantamount to challenging God who has set the order. As de Beauvoir (1949/2009:727) asserts, “Women are socialized to accept masculine authority”, which is taken for granted. They (women) have been oriented to accept the meaning of helper as subordinate (Oduyoye 1995). The following quotation from a male member (aged 40) consolidate the views expressed by female members on male authority and female subservience:

For men to lead women is a divine order. A woman was created from the rib of a man so that she can serve the man as a helper. Since she is meant to help the man, she cannot lead the man. I am surprised that some people, especially women, call for equality between men and women. God never created men and women to be equal. The man leads, and the woman follows.

The quotation is patriarchal. The woman cannot be a leader in church since she is meant to serve as a helper. The role of a woman as helper is derived from Gen 2:18 which refers to a woman as a helper of a man who must be obedient and submissive (Musopole 2006). Wives of ordained ministers (*vafundisi*) are given the responsibility of supporting their husbands by serving as leaders of women’s fellowship groups (*Ruwadzano*). In the Church, women are expected to play supportive roles such as fundraising and singing. The Zionist Church subscribes to the doctrine of female subordination in both church and family. Desire for equality on the part of women is, therefore, frowned upon as deviance.

While women are allowed to prophecy upon the written recommendation of the Bishop of the Church, they are not allowed to stand in front of men preaching during Sunday services. 1 Corinthians was cited as instructing women to keep quiet as they listen to male preachers. It is clear that verse 14:34 was being referred to.

It also emerged from the study that some participants, saw women as both unfit and incapable of exercising leadership. As one religious leader said, “Women cannot be leaders because naturally they do not have the capacity to lead.” This perception was based on both the Bible and African culture. Biblically, women are viewed as people who can easily be swayed and culturally women have traditionally not been seen as normative leaders. Thus, cultural influences on biblical interpretation can be noted. Related to this is Schüssler Fiorenza’s (2011:104) contention that “women’s inability to set themselves as authoritative figures is not a personal failure but socially conditioned.”

The androcentric interpretation of gender relations in the Zionist Church echoes the views of prominent historical interpretations, articulated by male theologians such as Tertullian, Augustine, and Aquinas. The theologians depicted women as somehow defective and falling short of God's image. As can be noted from the findings, both male and female congregants subscribed to what Nadar and Potgieter (2010:141) refer to as *formenism*, a belief in the inherent superiority of men over women, which entrenches patriarchy. The belief is largely propagated by women who have been socially conditioned to accept their subordination. That women have internalised the prejudice against them is articulated by a number of other scholars as well including, among others, Hendriks and Rutoro (2008), Monyatsi (2008), Oduyoye (1995), Ruether (2002), and Schüssler Fiorenza (1995).

While the majority of participants from the Zionist Church sanitised the exclusion of women from church leadership, two female members of the church pointed out that the exclusion of women is not fair since there is evidence in the Bible that Jesus did not discriminate against women and since males and females were created in the image of God. The following quotations illustrate the perception:

I personally am against the idea of excluding us women in some church activities. We are equal to men. The difference is only biological and nothing else. Even during Jesus' ministry women assisted him in one way or the other (female youth aged 23).

I am not happy with the way we are treated as women when it comes to church activities such as preaching. At times I think of quitting this church but I was healed in this church, so this is the only reason that prevents me from quitting (single mother aged 36).

This confirms Oduyoye's (1995) argument that to deny women leadership in the church is to declare that Gen 1:26, which affirms that male and female possess the image of God, is a lie. A related argument is put forward by LenkaBula (2008:295) when she says that excluding women from ordained ministry and limiting their full participation in the church contradicts the positive values of Jesus' ministry and the egalitarian experience of Pentecost.

It can be noted that women in the Zionist Church lived on the margin of the masculine world, given that ordination in the church is a gendered space with male occupants. Since the doctrine of female exclusion on matters of ordination seems normative, it can be inferred that egalitarian teachings are sidelined in favour of a patriarchal ethos. This is reminis-

cent of Njoroge's (1997:83) assertion that "The good news rarely heard from the pulpit is that women too were disciples of Jesus."

The Zionist Church seems to be largely influenced by androcentric texts as well as patriarchal interpretations of biblical texts. That the Bible supports patriarchy (male dominance) is not surprising given that the Bible developed in a patriarchal milieu and that early interpreters were also influenced by such a milieu (Schüssler Fiorenza 1985, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2014; Ruether 1985, 2002).

Women and ordination in the Apostolic Church

The Apostolic Church seems more egalitarian than the Zionist Church. The Apostolic church's practice of involving women in leadership roles, except that of archbishop and bishop, has a biblical basis as well. There are biblical passages that are invoked to justify women's ordination, backed by the belief that both men and women can be channels of God's communication as both can be prophets who can direct religious communities under the direction of God. The following quotations illustrate the view that women can occupy ordained leadership positions in the church:

In our church women can be senior ministers, ministers and leaders of prophets. Even in the Bible we have examples of women who were leaders such as Deborah. Since God's spirit can be in a man or a woman, this means that women can lead the church under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (male congregant aged 48).

As women we can occupy any church position except that of the archbishop and bishop. These positions are reserved for the male members of the family of the founder. I am a senior minister and I have been promoted to this level after years of serving as a minister of religion. Prior to being minister I was a leader of prophets in the church (female senior minister, aged 56).

In our church, leadership is not limited to men as in some apostolic churches. The leader of our congregation is a woman and she is gifted in that. Women are included because they can also prophesy under the influence of the spirit of God. Our founder allowed women to lead congregations before he died. The Bible teaches that men and women are equal since they all possess the image of God (male minister, aged 59).

The statements by members of the Apostolic Church show that the leadership of women is accepted as normative in the church. Leadership and initiative are perceived as being in line with the spirit that God gives to

whoever he chooses regardless of sex. The Bible is seen in the church as supporting the ordained ministry of women. For example, Acts 2:17-18, which describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on men and women at Pentecost, is viewed as empowering women to prophecy and so lead in church. The creation story in Gen 1 is also perceived as backing partnership between men and women in ministry. Women are thus included in almost all leadership structures of the church. The use of the Bible in the Apostolic Church to support the ordination of women supports the view held by liberal feminist theologians such as Schüssler Fiorenza (1995), Oduyoye (1995), and Russell (1985) that the Bible can be used to empower women and promote gender equality.

While women can occupy any position in the church, the two top most positions, that of archbishop and bishop, are reserved for men only. These men have to be of the lineage of the founder of the church. This suggests that to some extent the church adopts the traditional leadership style. Women can occupy any position from senior minister, which is the highest position in the church that can be occupied by a person who is not a member of the family of the founder. It seems the philosophy behind the appointment of the bishop and archbishop only from the family line of the founder is that the church belongs to the family of the founder and therefore at the helm of the church there must always be a member of the family who inherits the position. That these top positions are occupied by males only shows that despite being for the most part gender sensitive, the church continues to subscribe to the traditional perception that leadership is the domain of males. Thus, to some extent, women continue to face discrimination in the church (Monyatsi 2008).

Apart from serving as leaders at various levels in the church, women can also occupy advisory roles. At the time of the study, there were two women who were appointed by the archbishop of the church to be among his advisors and to occasionally participate in the council of the church headed by the archbishop. This inclusion of women affirms their full humanity and is, to use Ruether's (1985) terminology, redemptive.

While the Apostolic Church is an AIC that has adopted some African cultural practices such as polygamy and traditional leadership in selecting the top echelons of the church, it has not adopted the total exclusion of women from ordained leadership. In the African (Shona) traditional set up most decisions are made at a men's forum (*dare*) where women are excluded. However, decision-making in the Apostolic Church is largely inclusive of women. This is in line with the feminist view that

prioritises partnership in leadership; what Schüssler Fiorenza (1998) refers to as a ‘discipleship of equals’. What the church does seems to indicate that the church has a gender-responsive culture. This seems to address the feminist concern, as articulated by Oduyoye (1995:6), that

The church in Africa needs to empower women not only to speak for themselves and manage their ‘women’s affairs,’ but to be fully present in decisions and operations that affect the whole church.

The Apostolic church accepts the discipleship and apostleship of women. The role of women in the church seems to vindicate the view that the wind of change in the church is blowing in the direction of gender equality and that women in some churches have achieved an important degree of church participation. The church seems to have been largely influenced by egalitarian interpretations of biblical texts, contrary to the Zionist church which seems largely influenced by androcentric interpretations.

Conclusion

The empirical study conducted among members of the two churches under consideration revealed that the situation obtaining is a function of biblical teachings and their interpretations. The study reveals that the Bible can be used to support the exclusion of women from ordained ministry or their inclusion. While in one church women are to be silent in church, in the other one they are given a voice, not only to speak for themselves, but to speak for the church. It is our hope that where women’s leadership is currently not recognised, this shall be so at some point in future with gender awareness beginning from early childhood education. However, as Njoroge (1997) notes, it is a great challenge to unlearn internalised sexist practices, attitudes, beliefs and patterns. Notwithstanding the aforementioned challenge, there is hope of change since, as Daly (1973:13) notes, ideologies can die though they die hard. The process of changing ideologies, which Daly (1973:29) refers to as “exorcising internalised images of male superiority”, thus requires years of socialisation. This socialisation is likely to result in women’s ability to demystify the dominant structures of knowledge, culminating in their resistance to dehumanisation.

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Women, Marginality and the Bible in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

*Gift Masengwe, Francesca Hildegardis Chimhanda & Rejoice Hove**

Abstract

The COCZ is a missionary church of the 19th Century that came to Zimbabwe through New Zealand missionaries. Its establishment was linked with the coming of Garfield and Grace Todd. This study purposes at identifying trends in missionary practices that can be supported by biblical examples. This study engages Grace Todd as trendsetter in COCZ history and Deborah, mentioned in the book of Judges, as a biblical figure who challenged Jewish patriarchy. Indications from interviews are that Grace Todd was not regarded as a female role model in her time. Similarly, some scholars do not regard Deborah as a female role model in Israel. However, these examples inspire us to rethink about female distinction, skill, and expertise. Early versions of missionary policy and practice appraise cultural and biblical trends that both liberate and marginalise women in church. The paper will interrogate these examples to recommend a way forward for the COCZ on women leadership.

Introduction

This paper discusses women, gender and sex marginality in the context of the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ). Inspiration for this paper came from discussions on women and sexism with COCZ seminarians and students (Jonathan Jack, Shelton Mafohla, Blessing Ropafadzo Tembo, Cletus Makadho, Loice Mudhosi, Chipo Katsande and Tawanda Sibanda) who were at Zimbabwe Open University, the University of Zimbabwe, Midlands State University and the Ecumenical Training Institute (ETI) of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC). Women subordination has remained unaddressed in the COCZ today, against the missionary foundation that saw women promotion by white missionaries in school and the workplace. Personal interviews, recorded

* This paper is the work of all three authors. All three collected data and reviewed the relevant secondary literature. Hove collected legal documents. While Masengwe wrote the initial draft, the paper was reviewed and approved by all three authors.

minutes, conference reports and secondary publications on COCZ missionaries were useful for determining gender discrimination as a recent development in the COCZ, probably after the departure of white missionaries. For this reason, women can be empowered to occupy leadership positions as pastors, elders, deacons and board members, in contrast to current experiences.

Researchers feel that respondents view bad cultural and biblical hermeneutics as fueling gender inequality in the COCZ, especially the bride-price and marriage, the proverbial failure of Eve and stipulations against female dominance in the home and society. Grace Todd and Deborah (Judg 4:4) are going to be discussed as good examples of women who defied gender stereotyping in the quest to liberate women from male domination. Grace Todd was a wife of the famous New Zealand born missionary, Garfield Todd who once became a prime minister in Zimbabwe [then Southern Rhodesia]. Grace Todd was a trained primary school teacher upon whom Garfield's missionary career was built (Savage 1983). The Todd family was taken as missionaries on the basis of Grace Todd's teaching profession. While African culture and the Bible cannot be solely held responsible for women marginalisation in the COCZ, which is also evident in much of Western history, they however play a significant part in Africa. There being little, and therefore inadequate literature, this paper, as part of Gift Masengwe's PhD study, initiates a serious review of gender relations in the COCZ.

Qualitative Empirical Study of Women in the COCZ

The study was carried out using the qualitative empirical study in Gift Masengwe's PhD work on: "The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe: Identity- and Mission-Continuity [in Diversity] – A Transforming Church". Data collection was done through interviews and observations – using the structured story telling approach. Minimum ethical requirements were observed during the study. Ethical clearance was obtained from the COCZ leadership and the UNISA. Interviewees were asked to consent for both the PhD study and journal article research. All respondents were members of the COCZ and agreed that their responses should be used for academic and scholarly work only. Also, archival material was obtained from missionary diaries and monographs.

White Missionaries and Gender Justice in the COCZ

White women, especially wives and relatives of missionaries, participated in schools and clinics as leaders and practitioners [especially at Dadaya and Mashoko Missions] (Savage 1983). A similar trend was noted in the *Minute Book [1948-1965] of the Colen Brander Avenue Church of Christ* in the Bulawayo North End Suburb (CBACC 1948-1965). The written records by missionaries (CBACC 1948-1965) reveal that women were not discriminated at the inception of the church in Zimbabwe. Early missionaries did not cite African and Jewish cultures and traditions in reference to women leadership in the COCZ. However, they both propagate women oppression and liberation. Key to this trend were Grace and Garfield Todd who came from New Zealand in the early 1930s. They preoccupied themselves with equality among races, genders and labourers – gender advocacy and gender balance in African education, voting enfranchises, labour policy, land and agrarian justice (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). This probably came from their experiences of treating women with respect that began in 1893 in New Zealand where the Todd family originated. Women there were allowed to vote in 1893, although gender justice cannot be claimed to have been fully attained in the country. In the Lundi (Runde) Conservancy, where Dadaya Mission was located, it was worse as very few girls attended the village school. In fact, it is stated that “The Todds were shocked to find that most African parents [including some teachers] regarded education as something for boys only” (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). Thus, Grace and Garfield Todd began to admit girls to the central boarding school, and by 1935 started on the ambitious project of constructing girls’ clay and dagga dormitories. Proudly, “The girls quickly proved themselves, and for several years two exceptionally bright ones topped their year, much to the chagrin of boys” (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). Below, we examine ways in which the family dealt with women and girls.

African Primary Education System Curriculum

Grace Todd developed the Zimbabwean primary school education system that was used during the colonial period until independence in 1980. Improvements to scheming and planning were done after independence, but the practice has largely remained the same up-to-date. ‘The Dadaya Schemes’ as they were known, were handwritten notes for teachers’ lessons, which were done by one person, a woman, Grace

Todd. “They [The Dadaya Schemes] comprised the content of every class in every subject up to Standard 4 (six years of education)” (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). For this reason, Dr. Aeneas Chigwedere revealed that:

Grace Todd’s African Primary Education System remained intact with very minor cosmetic changes right up to 1980 [...] all the Africans here who did primary education before 1980 are children or grandchildren of the Grace Todd Education System [...] education schemes throughout the world are products of Education Commissions and Education Task Forces. The Southern Rhodesian African Education system was the product of one person (Chigwedere 2002).

Grace Todd lived her Christian life as an educator but did not know that she was setting a pace for the country’s primary school education system. This significant contribution contrasts the refusal by men to allow women to take up church leadership posts when a woman brought up reknown preachers, politicians, educationists, civil servants and legislators through the church (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). Insistence on Pauline teachings to the Corinthian women who were of a different social sophistication to contemporary women begs the question. In fact, Grace Todd worked with an American Education Inspector Mr A.R. Mather, who told the family not to lower their standards on African education because African people could rise to any level, even beyond the European education standards (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). Results of her work are testimony to her capability.

Further, Garfield Todd was recruited as a missionary on the basis of Grace Todd’s teaching qualification, not on the basis of the holy orders he took at Glen Leith Theological College in 1931. It is stated: “But the Todds had been selected in New Zealand to go to Dadaya because Grace [Todd] was a qualified teacher” (Paul & Grundy 2011:630). The young couple, on the basis of Grace Todd’s qualification earned a missionary job to equip locals on secular and spiritual roles in an African country. One interviewee commented that Zimbabwe’s education system was built on a strong foundation, otherwise we would be a nation in perpetual civil wars due to lack of understanding (Dube, Interview 11 June 2018). Interestingly, Garfield Todd dropped theological work for education, a new spiritual call to fulfil the first. The couple began to train preachers and teachers in mission work, for they “discovered that without the active cooperation and unstinting help of their African teachers and preachers in the multifarious labours of the mission, their work would have collapsed” (Paul & Grundy 2011:630). These opportunities

were opened by Grace Todd's profession, which became the couple's highest priority in the country. Sundkler & Steed (2000:640-641) state:

“In Africa all the great political leaders had begun their careers as school teachers. The teacher was the factor of change in the village. The Christian village school teacher built modern Africa”.

Grace produced teachers and preachers for the Zimbabwean church. In the missionary reports, it is stated that her teachers and preachers were enthusiastic and devout men they later trained. The couple's thrust influenced the kind of leaders the nation, and the church was going to have, and a woman was behind the project.

At Dadaya, Grace Todd trained African teachers and evangelists, who all engaged in weekend preaching in local churches. The teachers and early evangelists sat at Grace's feet to drink from her knowledge of the Word before they were released to preach in local churches communities. She produced one of Dadaya's wisest teachers, Mr Samuel Mutomba. Grace played a central role of raising teachers and preachers, and thus was involved in pedagogical and sacramental activities of the COCZ. This surely was acceptable in the COCZ, and the American conduit also brought, later, female missionaries.¹ Another missionary's wife, Mrs Chapman is said to have organised the first women's only conference at Dadaya Mission in 1959 to which eighty-five women attended (Savage 1983:47). Women thus were not forbidden from preaching, and the question is on when African women became discriminated in the COCZ.

Girls' Education and Women's Rights

African parents considered education to be a fitting privilege for boys only because it was believed that sending a girl to school would enrich the in-laws. Some teachers also held this view, and very few girls attended village schools (Paul & Grundy 2011:631-632). New Zealand, where Dadaya missionaries came from, was the first country to give women the right to vote in 1893. It is true that injustices persisted in New Zealand, but in 1935 Dadaya accommodated 12 girls into the central boarding

¹ Female missionaries mentioned by respondents include Marcia Kay Thompson; Kathy McKathy; Gladys Jongling; Jayne Linda Free; Mildred Goldwaithe; Jill Shaw; Dr Cobbs; Merrylin Richards, among others.

school. Two of the girls were exceptionally bright and topped their class yearly. Dadaya became satisfied with this and allowed girls to reach the highest level of education then. Girls also led as drill instructors and gave orders to boys in extra-curricular activities (Paul & Grundy 2011:631-632). In his missionary reports, Garfield Todd recorded that boys' heads "humbly bowed" to the girls' clear instructive commands across the drill-ground. Girls' capacity on public speaking and classroom performance improved tremendously. Girls topped in extracurricular activities like speech, drama, debate, reading and leadership; above and beyond women-related activities like basketry, cooking, nursing, jersey-making and knitting among many. A story is told of Garfield Todd going to villages on horseback encouraging chiefs, headmen and parents to allow girls to come to school. The release of girls made Dadaya the first and largest school that began as a core-educational institution during the colonial era (Nyoni 2018). This gives us insight into the early approach of the missionaries on girls.

Dadaya also engaged in health-care for members of the community. Soon after arrival, Garfield Todd was called to deliver a baby several miles from the mission centre. The couple had no midwifery training but managed to deliver the baby under squalid conditions. Without access to hospital services, the missionaries delivered hundreds of babies, attended to child burns using motor oil to successfully heal wounds, and treating malaria. "Garfield's medical work ensured his unique place in the hearts of the people" (Paul & Grundy 2011:632), and thus was determined to carry on with the work of physical healing. Todd wrote a report to New Zealand saying: "Through this [medical] service we have come very near to the life of the people and have grown to know and understand them more fully than we might otherwise have done" (Todd 1941). Garfield Todd's sister Stella, a nurse, came in 1936, and assisted in treating patients and delivering babies. They did everything from child delivery, basic dentistry like teeth removal, and healing burns among many (Todd 1974–2002). Stella taught four senior students on how to help the overworked Todd, and all students in first aid classes, later on becoming part of the Dadaya curriculum. "The schoolgirls learned home nursing on Todd's cases, and baby care on the babies born at the Todds' house" (Paul & Grundy 2011:631-632). This experience tells us how the Todd family dealt justly with devoted and enthusiastic women.

However, missionary women did not acquire church offices as ministers, elders or deacons. Garfield Todd himself was once accused of paternalism by his subordinates as his own wife never occupied a renowned position in the church board, or in the schools under Dadaya (Casey 2007:13). Grace Todd, even though she led the school, could not become the mission superintendent as it was believed that she could not be involved in spiritual roles fit for male clergy only (Savage 1983). Women therefore were allowed to carry out the work of the laity, which seemed to tally with the Christian women's auxiliary and Sunday school in New Zealand who gave aid to Zimbabwe in the form of mission boxes – medical supplies, school requisites and clothing (Savage 1983:33).

Woman in the Bible and Jewish Patriarchy

Traditional interpretation of the Bible mainly ignored positive contributions of women for negative ones. Thus, Deborah gives us a few things to discuss in this context. Several women in the Old Testament defied their cultural definitions of gender, and Deborah is one of them (Park 2010). The book of Judges calls Deborah the wife of Lapidoth, referring her by her husband's name, as if she was nameless (Judg 4:4). Her act of judging Israelites while she sat under her tree (Judg 4:5) is not representative of women in Israel. Judging cases is not clear whether it was a legal (justice) platform or royal authority. It is in the uniqueness of the responsibility that finally makes her call the army commander, Barak son of Abinoam to go and attack Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, an army that had oppressed and enslaved Israel for many years. Her authority seems to supersede that of a prophet but royalty, as Barak, the army commander bowed down to a woman, as if to a commander-in-chief, insisting her to go with him to the battle front (Judg 4:8). Deborah assured Barak that she was going to go with him, but Barak was not going to kill Sisera and get the honour but a woman (Judg 4:9). Surely Sisera was killed by Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, who tricked Sisera by hiding him in her house and gave him milk, so he can sleep rather than revived by water (Judg 4:17-21). She used her tent's nail to pin Sisera to the ground while in deep sleep, and this story offers us with a few lessons for this study.

Use of the story of Deborah to talk about women leadership in church faces many challenges. This story is unique and not replicated anywhere in the Old Testament. And even modern scholarship tends to minimize

her role. For example Chavalas (et. al. 2000:250) denies the prophetic role of Deborah, and Hubner (2013:396) proposes for the rewriting of Old Testament prophetesses' history. Hurley (1981:47) further says there is no evidence that Deborah was a prophetess or judge in Scripture; for "[t]here is no indication that the men were slothful in Deborah's or Huldah's time" (Foh 1979:84-85).

Rather, Webb argues that Deborah held a position of power and authority in Israel for it seems that she held the position of chief justice in the country's justice system and presided over cases that would have failed to receive justice in lower courts. Deborah presided; it seems, in the court of appeal. Ability to resolve difficult cases ultimately gave her executive powers to rule the nation; as such wisdom could be associated with divine favour. Webb (2010:84-85) further argues that

"there is no hint in the narrative or elsewhere in Scripture that her exercise of such a role is contrary to God's purposes; or a breach of his declared will in the way that the irregular worship practices of the period were".

When the Bible talks about sitting under a palm tree, it "is probably meant to be understood in the formal sense of presiding, in her case as a judge". Webb further argues that, as a leader, she took an initiative to attack and defeat an enemy army ahead of available men in Israel. She acted as a war prophet; she called and commissioned the army commander to lead in a battle they were going to win. She gave instructions on the time to attack and the war was won (Webb 2010:184-189).

Webb's straightforward interpretation of the narrative has been misconstrued by some scholars. One scholar, Schreiner supposes that Deborah was not a public prophet for she sat down under a tree, depicting that she privately judged cases. This means she did not publicly proclaim what the Lord said, "Instead, individuals came to her in private for a word from the Lord". This also means she did not exercise leadership over men in comparison to other male judges (Schreiner 2006:216). This understanding confirms preconceived patterns of male dominance, and do not acknowledge that there were a few more Old Testament female prophets, Huldah, Noadiah, possibly the wife of Isaiah, making it irrational to undermine the story of Deborah.

Further, other scholars present incompatible arguments. Grudem says Deborah was never a leader, but she was meant to shame the men of Israel. He says, "Something is abnormal, something is wrong—there are no men to function as judges! (...) There is an absence of male leadership in Israel" (Grudem 2004:134-135). But she did not exercise any

sacramental or pedagogical roles as a priest and teacher in Israel. He believes that Deborah invited Barak to lead in battle because she did not have kingly or queenly powers to command the army of Israel. He believes that, “Deborah encouraged the male leadership of Barak” (Grudem 2004:133-134) because she could not lead. In this, Grudem presents an inconsistent argument for Barak could not insist on being accompanied by a novice into an army that had oppressed them for many years. This suggests that Deborah clearly is portrayed by the text as a significant figure in Israelite history.

The song in Judg 5 has been questioned by Mieke Bal (1988) whether it is a woman's song or man's epic as she deconstructs the murder of the general Sisera by Jael as interpreted by use of traditional interpretive codes devoid of historical, anthropological, theological and literary understanding of the story. In this narrative, Deborah is an Israelite leader worthy to be recorded in the Jewish canon. Recent studies on biblical figures have occasioned the thinking that Song of Songs and other poetic literature in biblical scholarship reveal fascinating involvement of women in Israelite history (Klein 2003). The book of Judges, especially chapters 4 & 5, is written in different genres. Chapter 4 follows the prose writing (masculine) while chapter 5 follows poetic writing – a song (feminine). This story gives us the idea that women have skills and expertise they can display to benefit society, but Bal (1988) argues that difference need to be used in interpreting the Bible due to ethnocentric and androcentric biases in traditional codes. This eventually puts them in the limelight, and therefore leadership in society. At least one can say that in Deborah and others, women in Zimbabwe, and especially in the COCZ, have good examples of women, who, in a patriarchal Israelite society, prophesied, acted as judges, commanded the army and instructed army commanders to engage in battle. Zimbabwe has vast opportunities for women leaders, and this story encourages us.

The Context of Gender Equity and Equality in the COCZ

Women in Zimbabwe enjoy the protection of the law through the national constitution, Acts of Parliament and women's action groups. The national laws demand every institution in Zimbabwe to be gender balanced at its top management. The Constitution of Zimbabwe (CoZ 2013), Section 17, 80 and 245-247, explicates that women are to be represented in every institution's leadership and top management. In fact, the

constitution clearly stipulates that the state will promote full gender balance in society. Firstly Amendment No. 20 of 2013, Chap. 2, Sec. 17(1) (a) & 17(2), states:

“the State must promote the full participation of women in all spheres of Zimbabwean society on the basis of equality with men ... The State must take positive measures to rectify gender discrimination and imbalances resulting from past practices and policies” (CoZ 2013:19-20).

Secondly Chapter 4, Part 3, Section 80 (3) states:

“All laws, customs, traditions and cultural practices that infringe the rights of women conferred by this Constitution are void to the extent of the infringement” (CoZ 2013:38).

Finally, in Chapter 12, Part 4, Section 246(a-i) details on the functions of the Gender Commission, which among other things monitors, investigates, researches, advises, recommends and secures appropriate redress to gender rights abuse in order to promote gender equality (CoZ 2013:97). Women can organise gender sensitive activities through the Gender Commission, Ministry of Women’s Affairs and Pressure Groups to educate women on their rights in Zimbabwe. This study however, is not going to focus on national laws and developments but appeals to how the church can benefit from such contributions beyond our biblical and ecclesial examples.

The COCZ is a member of the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), one of the progressive ecumenical bodies in the country. The ZCC expressed its support for women in its 2007 blue-print, The National Vision Discussion Document (NVDD), also called The Zimbabwe We Want Document (Masengwe 2010). The document affirms that the church is committed at dealing with systematic oppression of women in terms of status, power and resources. The major resource for the ZCC is the Bible. The COCZ being a member of the ZCC is expected to affirm ZCC’s commitment to gender equity, the teaching of the Bible, and thus eradicate the oppression and marginalisation of women based on sexism (NVDD 2007:22). The document uses the Bible to capture the relationships between men and women. It outlines that women are forced into subservient male-female relationships because of systematic oppression. ZCC ultimately shows that women’s marginalisation “is not prescribed by God”, and in that way, states:

We acknowledge that women and men are of equal value before God, both created in the image of the one God (Gen 1:26). Therefore, we stand by the principles of inclusiveness and interdependence between men and wom-

en. All limitations to the fullness of life envisaged in Christ must be completely uprooted, (...) We advocate gender equity, by which we mean that women must fully participate in decisions and operations that affect the *Church*, politics, economics and society as a whole. We assert that social roles of men and women can be reconstructed and transformed by society; since they are culturally constructed, they can also be socially deconstructed (NVDD 2007:23).

Finally, the COCZ has a new constitution that was endorsed at a referendum in September 2015 (COCZ 2015). Women therefore need to use other resources to critically look at it, and to commend on its sensitivity to women. The constitution was developed in line with the traditions and cultures operative in the church at the time, meaning that the constitution does not make reference to gender representation in the National Conference Council (NCC), the highest decision-making board of the church. It is in this view that women can fight their cause from the apex of the organisation by demanding for the review, enforcement and monitoring of the church's constitutionalism in ensuring gender equality. Some churches in the country such as the Methodist Church in Zimbabwe; the Uniting Presbyterian Church of Southern Africa; the United Methodist Church in Zimbabwe; the United COCZ and the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe have better informed policies on dealing with women compared to the COCZ. This means COCZ leadership needs to consider mainstreaming gender in its governance structures.

Contemporary Trends of Women in the COCZ

Respondents to this study argued in favour of competence and capability, and a former female youth secretary, Memory Longoni (18 August 2018) said "positions in the church should rather be on merit and not on biological chance". This was supported by Katsande (2018), who argued: "In current trends, we [women] are told to learn in silence and not to instruct men". Peter Nyoni-Baka (PNB 2018) said:

"It is unfortunate that we are comfortable with women in secular leadership and we [men] are threatened by their [women] leadership in church. My question is why?"

This, according to Machingura & Nyakuwa (2015) in their first article on gender in the COCZ, was rather unfortunate. They wrote on hermeneutical interrogation of Gal 3:28 stating that women are "to sing, dance and lead praise and worship but only told to be quiet when it comes to preaching and occupying leadership positions like pastoral posts or el-

dership in the Church of Christ” (Machingura & Nyakuwa 2015:92). Thus

Women in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe [COCZ] have been forced to play a second fiddle because of the set conditions that make men become automatic leaders and pillars of the Church who are believed to carry on with the tradition of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ (Machingura & Nyakuwa 2015:98).

Pauline theology on egalitarianism (Gal 3:28) can be questioned for some people view it as an entry qualification into the church but once admitted actual positions are maintained (Gono, Interview 16 June 2018). Women thus can be given pastoral charge because they went through training, inclusive of wives of ministers, elders and deacons. If Gal 3:28 does not promise women’s status-change in their faith-journeys, unity of faith and moral interactions after accepting newness of life in Christ (Machingura & Nyakuwa 2015:99), offices remain gendered.

Publications on gender in Southern Africa by other churches were identified; especially the injustices and inequalities experienced by Zionist and Apostolic churches (Maseko 2015). Also “[s]ome mainline Traditional Orthodox churches do not support equal participation of women in church leadership”; and “in some Traditional Protestants and Charismatic Protestant churches, the Bible is selectively applied when dealing with issues of gender and thus religion acts as a weapon in causing gender inequalities” (Maseko 2015:iv). Due to this, Maseko (2015) recommended government to monitor and enforce church constitutionalism to reduce doctrinal extremism, as well as propagating pressure groups to run programmes for church members concerning women’s rights and mainstreaming of women into regular church leadership positions.

Depicting current trends in the COCZ, at the August 2018 Ministers’ Fraternity Business Meeting, Chipso Katsande (14 August 2018) asked:

Why is it that females who received the same training with their male counterparts at Zimbabwe Christian College cannot be appointed as church ministers and yet are entrusted with bringing up the church of tomorrow [children’s ministry].

Several historical and biblical figures were mentioned in the COCZ ministers’ August 2018 business meeting that concluded by asking its national executive to investigate alleged gender discrimination among COCZ ministerial appointments. One attendee also mentioned that the Todd family was preoccupied with education until their deaths, yet

teaching was Grace's profession and not Garfield's (Paul & Grundy 2011:631). Others also mentioned that men were not fully responsible for female ministers' marginalisation as churches have one-fifth male to four-fifths women. Gender empowerment rather should begin with the majority of members in the church [women], who are not willing to prove that ministry is not gender or sex blind. Rather than blame everything on men, women have good examples of female leaders in Christian history and the Bible. Scholars have written a lot on the influence of the Bible to gender discrimination, especially the Jewish patriarchal family (Ruether 1993:63).

Women in contemporary society are supported by many institutions and laws designed by the state, para-church organisations, churches and activist organisations. These organisations use progressive methodologies to deal with any form of male domination in society. While this study is not going to discuss blue-prints such as the national constitution (CoZ 2013) and religious/ecumenical policies (NVVD 2007), it challenges the ab/use of the Bible to achieve male ideological ends (Ruether & McLaughlin 1979:334). Machingura & Nyakuwa 2015:95 condemn female marginalisation and exploitation using the Bible. Good examples of women from the Bible like Deborah, Ester, Ruth, Naomi and others in the Old Testament and Lydia, Dorcas, Priscilla and others in the New Testament are not mentioned to encourage women participation in the church. It is from a host of the African people's cultural, spiritual, religious, political and biblical backgrounds women remain marginalised. For this reason, even during the July 2018 harmonised elections in Zimbabwe, sentiments were echoed that Zimbabwe was not ready for a woman president, despite that the national constitution allows it. Thus, marginalisation of women in a particular church like the COCZ cannot be highly sensationalised. The COCZ's normative documents (the Bible and the national church constitution) recognise the place of women in the church, yet women are not allowed to compete for key leadership posts of pastors, elders and deacons.

In indigenous spirit-controlled churches, women can only participate in marginal roles of wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts and spirit mediums (Machingura & Nyakuwa 2015:94). Similarly, missionary churches accepted African cultural socialisation, oppressive tendencies in paying dowry (roora) at marriage and other male-prescribed definitions of fem-

inity. Pauline (or more probably post-Pauline)² theology that church should “not permit a women to teach or have authority over a man” (1 Tim 2:12-13), and that “woman should learn in quietness and full submission” (1 Tim 2:11) have received criticism as gendered politics in public space and masculine readings of the Bible (Machingura 2011:119-154; 2013:234-251). One interviewee lamented:

Marginalisation of women in the COCZ is based on two ideas: one, the identity, and two, the character, of the church. The COCZ believes in biblical command, precedence or inference, and thus uses Pauline teachings and Jewish practices to support conservative African cultural beliefs and practices as biblical teachings on women’s positions in the church. This has supported absurd conservatism in the church. (Nyoni 2016)

Further, F. Machingura & G. Masengwe (2013), argue that women are blamed for popular disabilities in the lives of their children. They are seen as agents of family misfortune.³ This did not spare virgins forced to marry invariably older persons who are not of their choice, if they fail to satisfy the needs of their husbands and to have children (Oduyoye & Kanyoro 1997:89). This is what Kambarami (2006) views as interplay between culture, femininity and sexuality in subjecting women to male domination and definition. Culture is here referring to people’s customs and values, institutions and technologies, achievements and failures, in the history of a people and community. It is understood that:

“Custom in Africa is stronger than domination, stronger than the law, stronger even than religion. Over the years, customary practices have been incorporated into religion, and ultimately have come to be believed by their practitioners to be demanded by their adopted gods, whoever they may be”. (Lightfoot-Klein 1989:47 cited by Okome 2003:71)

To this reason, the Bible and African culture are both mutually inclusive and exclusive thus neither identical nor interchangeable. They contrib-

² Many biblical scholars are convinced that the Pastoral letter (1 Tim, 2 Tim, Tit) are not stemming from Paul but from a post-Pauline author who is also responsible for the interpolation of 1 Cor 14:33b-36. He and the group behind him intend to eliminate women from church functions “in the name of Paul”. Cf. the chapters of Machingura and Kügler in this volume).

³ Women have been implicated for failing to get pregnant, bearing albinos, differentially able, hard of hearing and talk, the blind and children with poor upper and lower limb use. Traditional values and colonial laws in Zimbabwe did not allow women to own property, and that when their husbands died; they lost it to male members of the extended family. These laws have since been revised, but past attitudes persist.

ute towards gender relations in both positive and negative ways. Early missionaries adopted a lot from the history, artefacts and practices of local people including separation of women from men. Missionaries did not separate or subordinate their women to men. Contemporary gender relations are supported by state laws, action groups and progressive religious institutions, which give the church very little legitimacy to subordinate women. Women's rights are achievable when men and women work alongside each other to achieve gender equity and equality (Lieb 2011:151). Advocacy for this in the COCZ began in 1997 when Gift Masengwe, doing second year Theology at Africa University, discovered that women were appointed to full-time ministry in the United Methodist Church. This was condemned as unbiblical, un-Christian, syncretism and unspiritual, reminiscent of people who criss-cross denominations without an identity of their own (Masengwe & Chimhanda 2018). COCZ women were the first and key to shoot down the initiative. Women have been blamed for hindering their own emancipation in society. While it is justifiable to engage both men and women in initiating gender equality, the absence of women in the process poses a big challenge. In the COCZ, women are considered when it leads to foreseeable benefits to men in the church (Hadebe 2007; Cousar 2012:87). The Shona Bantu culture in which the COCZ became established need theoretical and practical approaches that confront oppressive tendencies of *roora* (bride prize).

Understanding Women and Sexism in the COCZ

Early missionaries did not discriminate against women participation in church even though there is no evidence of a female pastor who led a COCZ congregation during their time. Women participated in the lay ministry. Similarly, the Bible was used to allow women to work in schools, hospitals and community projects. Growing up in the church, we have learned the story of a brave woman, Deborah who shamed all men in the nation against an enemy army. The COCZ's approach to the Bible, with its Calvinistic belief in the principle of *Sola Scriptura* (Latin for "the Bible only"), believes that the Bible can be used to interpret the Bible. Dissonance in the teachings of the Bible and the practices in the COCZ call for a post mortem on what happened between the end of the missionary era and the inception of the black leadership in the church. This calls for a reading of the church's practices and beliefs in view of

the positive examples of women leaders in the Bible such as Deborah and others.

Further, Chimhanda argues that the Gospel needs to be contextualised, inculturated and incarnated into the identity, dignity and vocation of the African women (Chimhanda 2008). In this way, she argues, “women can be empowered by reading the Bible with women’s eyes” (Chimhanda 2013:14), as they have a “symmetry of responsibility” with men to remove the “shackles of patriarchy” (Chimhanda 2013:14). Challenges to women in the church can be related to the colonial education system, African and Western culture that influenced how the Bible became interpreted. This view denies a treatment of women based on human selfishness but justified by Scripture. Scripture indicates that there are adequate examples of women who acted positively as leaders. In order to emancipate women in the COCZ, the Bible, missionary history, ecumenical bodies and national developments can be useful in dealing with the plight of African women among the Shona people. Also, the COCZ constitution can be amended to affirm the centrality of gender equality and equity in the COCZ. It is in the context of these affirmations and opportunities that the study is going to be concluded, and that gender challenge in the COCZ today has many ways to address. A deliberate approach to spur women into leadership, therefore prepares people to believe in gender equality and equity (Nyoni 2018).

Conclusion

Basing the oppression of women in the COCZ on Scripture begs the question as a variety of colonial, missionary, African and Western culture are at play. It can be proposed that national laws, missionary examples, the Bible, ecumenical initiatives, and the COCZ laws and policies, can help address the challenges of marginality and sexism in the COCZ. The COCZ needs to create a gender desk at various levels of its structures, and to review its gender policies, especially on women leadership in the ministry. This calls pastors to abandon protectionist policies, of “our church” and “our traditions”, which left the church divided along missionaries and sponsors. To this end, women can claim their space in the leadership of the church as pastors, elders and deacons, if we open up doors for them to show men what they can offer (Nyoni 2018).

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The Whore of Babylon

Gender Metaphors in the Revelation of John and the Use of Apocalyptic Language in Response to Changing Gender Roles in Zimbabwe

Blessing Nyahuma

Abstract

The deployment of apocalyptic language in the book of Revelation has seen the book being classified as a misogynistic text. This article surveys that assessment, in the light of the conscription of women stereotypes in the form of apocalyptic symbols, signs and metaphors. Focusing on the Whore of Rev 17, it analyses the gender stereotypes utilised to critique the diabolic socio-economic and religio-political nature of the imperial Roman Empire. I further survey the usage of selected apocalyptic-eschatological phrases and metaphors used to critique women empowerment and gender role changes in Zimbabwe. I conclude by critiquing the critique of gender stereotypes in the Apocalypse of John, proposing that any critique of diabolical systems or persons must never utilise gender stereotypes.

Apocalyptic Language¹

The apocalyptic genre has a preponderated peculiar language, style, vocabulary, and distinctive syntax. John Collins defines the genre as “revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (Collins 1979:9). This revelatory literature is communicated through apocalyptic language, which is the conscription of ordinary language, constructed in Image-imagery, symbols and signs in the service of religious propaganda, mostly protesting against severe socio-economic and religio-political deprivation.

¹ For a thorough discussion on Apocalyptic language see Stanley Porter, “The Language of the Apocalypse in Recent Discussion,” NTS 35 (1989) 582.

Paul Ricoeur distinguishes symbols and signs asserting that, “signs point beyond themselves representationally and “say only what they want to say” (Ricoeur 1967:15). In contrast, symbols are opaque and carry double intentionality. Their function is to spark a thought. Although not every sign is a symbol, every symbol is a sign (cf. Ricoeur 1967:348) Apocalyptic language is made up of “The intermingling of symbolism, *signs, metaphors, imagery* and apocalyptic thought” (Eliade 1969:12). These embrace three quintessential qualities, which are “*ancestral vitality*” – perpetuating the symbols by passing it to the next generation. Secondly they enact “*significance for an entire cultural group* – its meaning to a greater number of people especially those who share the same identity and finally they must be “*archetypal*” (Wheelwright 1962:98-99).

In the Apocalypse of John symbols, images and signs utilised speak beyond themselves, a hybrid transcript, “an official transcript which is performance enacted for self-protection” (James Scott 1999:18,68). More so Revelation's readers in the great cities of the province of Asia were confronted continuously with powerful images of the Roman vision of the world (Bauckham, 1993:17). The symbolism of the Apocalypse is a counter transcript with a profusion of visual imagery with the capacity to create a symbolic world which its readers can enter and thereby have their perception of the world in which they lived transformed. John's audience was surrounded by “civic and religious architecture, iconography, statues, rituals and festivals, even the visual wonder of cleverly engineered miracles Rev 13:13-14 in the temples ... all provided powerful visual impressions of Roman imperial power and the splendour of pagan religion” (Botha 1988:87). As such the Apocalypse's pictorial imagery should be viewed as protest counter imagery to that which was readily provided by the Empire.

Women of the Apocalypse

The Revelation of John utilises women as symbols, signs and images in an ambivalent way, utilising conventional apocalyptic language, through a “complex network of literary cross-references, parallels, contrasts, which inform the meaning of the parts and the whole. (Bauckham 1993:17) It depicts apostacy and idolatry, vulnerability and purity, virtue, and beauty through symbols and imagery. Through the deployment of female imagery – Jezebel (2:20), the pregnant woman clothed with the

sun (12:1-2), the bride of Christ (19:7), and the Whore of Babylon (17:1-18) and the corrupting women of Rev 14, John metaphorically castigates the diabolical Imperial Roman Empire. “ Juxtaposed symmetrically and linguistically "the four passages are linked together through the same “imagery, words, phrases, and ideas (Duff 2001:83) The negative historical person "Jezebel" and the positive metaphorical bride frame virtually the whole of the work appearing in chapters 2 and 21-22, respectively, whereas the women of chapters 12 positive and 17 negative appear toward the centre of the work.

Of the four women in the Apocalypse, the dominant figure is the woman of chapter 17. The rest of the female figures ...are designed to compare and contrast with her. (Duff 2001:84) Tina Pippin (1992), Marja Selvidge (1992,96), Yabro Collins, (1981,87) Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza (1985), Rosemary Ruether (2014), and recently David Barr (2018) have deliberately focused on the women of the Apocalypse each focusing on a different aspect of the women symbols. Tina Pippin suggests that all representations of women in Revelation are deficient in that the females function as victims in one form or another. (Johnson 1990:166) She finds that women in Revelation are used or abused and disempowered in every way, thus leading to her assessment that the book of Revelation is not a safe place for women (Pippin 1992:105). In her view, Revelation is not only misogynist itself, but also provides the roots of misogyny in the history of the Christian church (Barr 2006:214).

The Woman of Chapter 12 and the New Jerusalem

Rev 12 depicts a pregnant woman wearing the sun, with a crown of twelve stars and the moon under her feet. This spectacle is followed by another wonder, a fiery dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, seeking to destroy the woman and her offspring. At a time of her vulnerability – about to give birth she is attacked by the satanic beast. Barnett examines Rev 12 as history cast in apocalyptic form (Barnett 2004: 300) as it illustrates the persecution of Christians connected with the arrival of the imperial temple in Ephesus under Domitian. The weakness and vulnerability of the early Christian church is depicted in misogynistic terms.

The imagery of Rev 12, although not displaying evidence of a direct connection with Roman emperor worship, has often been seen as part of a response to broader imperial ideology. (Naylor 2010:222) Due to the prevalence of the Apollo- Leto-Python form of the combat myth (general-

ly taken to be the form lying behind Rev 12 and the frequent association of the emperor with Apollo, scholars have often seen Rev 12 as anti-imperial in its orientation. Yarbro Collins (1976) discusses the various options related to the combat myth background of Rev 12. Van Henten (2006) also highlights the connections between imperial ideology and the imagery of chapters twelve and thirteen.

The splendour and beauty of the New Jerusalem is also vividly portrayed as a woman prepared for her husband. The beauty of the New Jerusalem and the persecution of Christians using positive feminine qualities is half the story of the symbolic portrayal of women. In an ambivalent manner, the negative grotesque depiction of Jezebel, women of Rev 14 and the whore Rev 17 are misogynistic and the other half of the story.

Women of Chapter 14

Revelation 14 gives a short misogynistic paragraph which symbolically portray women as corrupting sexual agents. They are stumbling blocks between 144000- not defiled by women and those who fail to be part of the exclusive 144000 group of men. This reduplication of ancient Hebrew purity code whereby sexual relationships with women resulted in contamination (Selvidge 1987:35-38) This pericope reinforces the misogynistic perception which transfixes women in the realm of sexually corrupting agents.

Jezebel

The misogynists vitriol prevalent remarkably in the depiction of “Jezebel, and the Whore involves a distinguished descriptive and evocative language” through a voice claiming divine right (2:18), John, indicts a fashionable woman who wields both persona and intellectual power over the people. Viciously, he labels his opponent Jezebel. She is a teacher and a prophetess, in the community of Thyatira Rev 2:20 (Selvidge 157,159, 164) the prophet castigates her in vain. She is just too powerful to be intimidated, she has her subjects under total control, teaches them cultic prostitution and eating food sacrificed to idols.

Critique of Roman Imperialism Using Misogynistic Stereotypes

At the centre of the four women of the Revelation is the great whore (τῆς πόρνῆς τῆς μεγάλης; 17:1). She is depicted on Rev 17:3b–6, as a prostitute in a purple and scarlet attire, ornamented with affluent luxurious jewellery and seated on a scarlet beast which is also festooned and engraved with blasphemous names and has seven heads and ten horns. The whore holds a golden cup and has a mysterious name written on her forehead: “Babylon the great, mother of whores and earthly abominations.” The interpretation provided by the angelic interpreter follows in (v 6b–18.)

Pippin and Selvidge highlighted the grotesque inherent misogynistic attitude not just against women but also against prostitutes in this passage. John’s vicious attack on her sorcery, cultic prostitution, her reign, power over the kings and her intoxication of the whole world rises to the culmination of the whore’s cathartic doom. In a typical misogynistic manner, there is a litany of her heinous sins, her extravagance Rev 17:4, sexual practices 17:4, her grotesque drinking of the blood of the saints 17:6 precipitate the vitriol from John. The feminine symbols used by John are heightened in chapter 18, the whore is called a widow, queen, (18:7) a prostitute 18:3, unclean monstrous woman 18:24, demon-possessed 18:2, vile and corrupt (18:8) inside her is the prison of every unclean, corrupt and hated spirits and birds (18:2) The warning to come out of her is distinct, (18:4)

Rev 17:1–18, equitably is an independent textual entity, which was integrated into a more significant segment addressing the fall of Babylon/Rome (17:1–19:10). “The greater unit, comprising of 17:1–19:10, has a form extremely corresponding to the form of Rev 21:9–22:9” The bigger textual unit encompasses smaller units that are primarily unique textual units. Charles assumes that Rev 17:1–3a should be understood as an introduction not to the vision of Rev 17 only but rather to the entire unit of text from 17:3b to 19:10” (Cf. Charles 1997). Rev 17:1 is a forerunner of the pronounced coming judgment on the prostitute, which is paused until Rev 18. In Rev 19:2 there is a backdated remark of the executed judgment – “he has judged the great whore who corrupted the earth with her fornication” – referring to Rev 18 while reflecting the vocabulary of Rev 17:1. The intense pictorial imagery presented by the apocalyptic Rev 17:1–6 occurs in double parts. The opening, Rev 17:1- 2), an overview to the larger textual unit comprising of 17:3–19:10, the invitation by the angel, the pronouncement and interpretation by the angel are all

included in the vision theme of “the judgment of the great prostitute as a result of her two prevailing iniquities. The kings of the earth have had sexual relations with her, and she has intoxicated the inhabitants of the earth by the wine of her fornication (17:2b).

Rev 17 depicts the vision of a woman, at first glance, she might seem to be the goddess Roma, in all her glory, a stunning personification of the civilisation of Rome. She was worshipped in many temples in Asia. It echoed the myth which pictured the emperor Nero, remembered by some as a villainous tyrant, on the other hand some remembered the transfigured Nero as a saviour-figure returning one day at the head of the Parthian hordes to conquer the Roman Empire (cf. Bauckham 1998).

“In ways such as these, John's images echo and play on the facts, the fears, the hopes, the imaginings and the myths of his contemporaries, in order to transmute them into elements of his own Christian prophetic meaning” (Bauckham 1993:19).

This is counter-norms symbolism, symbolism with images that contradict prevailing norms. The symbolic description contradicts the conceptual framework, in this case, women are represented as powerful, self-sufficient and governing. This was the opposite of the prevailing socio-cultural and religio-political perceptions of women.

The number of elements in the text, comprising the name Babylon” located around the city of seven hills suggest that the figure is Rome. “Some argue that the identification of Babylon with Rome is neither as clear nor as simple as it initially appears” (Duff 2001:84). Nevertheless, when John referred to Rome as Babylon, he tapped into a vein of bitterness that ran deep in Jewish consciousness. An interpretation of the vision, in the course of which the older materials of the source are recast with additions in order to depict the expectation of *Nero Redivivus*, the “Neronic antichrist who was to come up from the abyss” (Charles 1920:67).

Jewish apocalyptic literature from the first and second centuries channels a torrent of outrage against oppressors, often directed against Rome. The same Jewish milieu that shaped these works also left its imprint on John. “References to wealth, trade, and idolatry in other apocalyptic works give clues to the social and theological setting of the polemic in Revelation” ... “Revelation stands within this apocalyptic tradition of bitter accusation against Rome, and it touches on themes that seem to reflect the frustration of marginalised people” (Fuchs 1964:60-83). Hermann Gunkel (1895:336) and Wilhelm Bousset (1906: 358-65) identified

the first beast of Revelation (13:1-10) as the Roman Empire and 'Babylon' (18:1-24) as ancient Rome. The interwoven attack is on the Roman empire as a system of governance, the city of Rome, the emperor of Rome and the imperial theology.

Rome's empire and its capital city are repeatedly called "Babylon" because, just as the Babylonian Empire had destroyed Jerusalem's first temple in 596 BCE. The Roman Empire destroyed the second temple in 70 AD. The imminent destruction of "Babylon" intends the imminent destruction of Rome, from 14:8 through 16:19 to 18:2,10,21, and that event is signalled through the use of two kinds of language (cf. Crossan 2009:219). In them, the seer removes the veil, which hides the real character of the Roman state; so that his readers may see the situation for themselves. "To those who are tempted to regard the Roman state and its emperors as an innocent institution ordained by God, John discloses their true diabolical character" (Rowland 2002:433).

Parallels and contrasts between Babylon the prostitute, in this passage, and the new Jerusalem, the bride of Christ, in chapter 21, is a familiar practice in apocalyptic literature of contrasting the righteous and the wicked. The historical assumption is that the prophecies of Babylon apply only to Rome; other evil empires have also come and gone. Rome was the Babylon of John's day. However, it supplies the images for John's original audience in the seven churches. (Keener 2014:762) Joerg Rieger (2007), (Portier-Young 2011) and Horsley (2010), see the empire not just as Babylon/Rome but a system of governance in every generation.

A Critique of the Roman Imperialism as Diabolic Power

Utilising misogynistic terms, the Apocalypse offers a sharp critique on the socio-economic and the religio-political policies of the Roman Empire as a diabolical system. The woman of Revelation 17 is a personification of the Roman imperial system, Schüssler Fiorenza suggests that the personification of Rome in Rev 17 is only a metaphor/ trope (1991:96) Rossing suggest this imagery as that of a city (1999:88). Ipsen (2004) explores the whore metaphor from the social reality of prostitution but recognises that Rev 17-18 is a critique of Roman imperialism as a demon, which causes severe deprivation. Through its economic policies and military conquest – slaughtering of men, debt and war bounty, it left many women desperate and venturing into prostitution. Ipsen (2004)

also suggests “the critique of Rome as a prostitute can also be understood as, Rome as the bigger prostitute because she caused literal prostitution”.

Through the Roman, policies of social ordering Christians were relationally deprived. Living in under the Roman Empire was traumatic for the Christians. Collins cites five socially traumatic experiences that deprived Christians. The destruction of Jerusalem – the loss of the centre of worship – arrest, conviction, torture and execution of Christians by Nero (Rev 17:6), the banishment of Christian leaders like John (Rev 1:9), withdrawal of religious liberty policies which was followed by banning of prophecy, astrology, and divination and any prediction of the future was treasonous as it had the potential to disrupt the empire (cf. Collins 1984).

The empire’s resentment towards new religions activated hostility from Jews who did not want to be associated with Christians even though the first Christians were Jews (Rev 2:9-10). The collapse in the Jewish-Christian affair precipitated further hostility and antagonism between Christians and Gentiles (Acts 19). The alliance of Jews, Gentiles and Roman authorities brought about social injustice against Christians. (Rev 2:6,15,17) The social deprivation of the first Christians was communicated between them through “*Geistige Widerstand*”, the oppositional mindset (cf. Fuchs 1968).

Economic Critique

The Apocalypse further portrays both the idolatrous and economic exploitative nature of the imperial cult using misogynistic terms. Rev 17-18 and Rev 13 are a radical socio-economic critique of the imperial economy. It depicts the extreme deprivation brought about by the prescriptive social ordering through Imperial policies. The imperial empire enabled few Christians and Jews especially women and those in places like Laodicea to be wealthy. John criticises them not to depend on their wealth and attacks the Roman Empire, the source of their wealth (Rev 18). The majority of Christians and Jews experienced the effects of colonisation, loss of land, wealth, and impact of urbanisation. It is in this view that the Revelation is “a hidden transcript of the consciousness of oppressed people.” (James Scott 1999:18)

The social unrest that was between the rich and the poor, slavery, greediness, robberies, murder, theft and prostitution made Rome “the cage of

every unclean bird.” The critique offers the inevitable terrible judgement of the Roman Empire. Lament over Babylon’s fall that includes its client kings (18:9), merchants and traders (18:11), sea merchants (18:17), entertainers, and artisans (18:22).

Considered against the OT background, the metaphor of sexual immorality appears at first sight to have little to do with the author’s condemnation of Babylon-Rome. In a very few places in the OT, however, there are instances in which the commercial trade of a city is described with the metaphor of prostitution doubtless because economic relationships frequently led to the exchange of religious practices (Mic 1:7; Nah 3:4; 2 Kings 9:22). In Isa 23:17, Tyre’s commercial contacts are called “prostitution,” and the profits of such trade are called “the price of a prostitute” (similar language is used of Nineveh in Nah 3:4). However, the historical context of both Isa 23:17 and Nah 3:4 suggests that neither prophet is interested in Tyre or Nineveh in themselves; instead the prophets condemn the negative influences the cities have exerted on the Near East, particularly on Israel. The same allusion is carried between Rome and Christians.

The Diabolical Religio-Political Nature of the Empire

While the symbols utilised to depict the diabolic nature of the Roman imperialism are feminine, but the meaning refers to the different bodies of the statecraft of Roman imperialism. Rossing propose that Rev 17 language is a language and imagery of siege warfare (Rossing 1999), the city falling - language goes up to chapter 18:2, words of utter ruin like desolate are familiar with siege Eze 16:23, Judg 5:30, Isa 13:16, Zech 14:2 Lam 5:11. The Military might of the Roman Empire utilising maximum force to disseminate a weak, vulnerable Christian group at its most vulnerable moment in history is depicted on Rev 12 in the imagery of a woman and the dragon.

Critique of the Religion of Empire

The overarching theme of worship dominates the Apocalypse; It is at the beginning, centre and end. It is the yardstick of quality it separates those who follow God, and his Messiah and those who follow the evil powers. The dual identity markers on the foreheads of those who worship God and the mark of the beast are correlated to worship. At the centre of the

Apocalyptic conflict and identity is again the critical issue of worship. There is worship for God's creative works (Rev 4:11) for Christ's redemptive activity (Rev 5:9; 7:14,15), for God's righteous judgment (Rev 14:7; 15:4; 16:5; 19:2), and for the marriage of the Lamb with His bride (Rev 19:7-9). The worship of God in heaven through praise and thanksgiving (Rev 4:6-11; 5:1-14; 7:12; 11:17; 19:1), songs (Rev 5:9,10; 14:3; 15:3; cf. 4:8, 11; 5:11, 12; 7:10, 12; 12:10-12; 16:5-7; 19:2, 3), prayers (Rev 5:8; 6:10; 8:3-5), offering of gifts (Rev 4:10; cf. 4:11; 5:12, 13; 7:12), response to God's revelation (Rev 5:8-14), anticipatory silence for divine intervention (Rev 8:1, 2), and festive celebration of God's goodness (Rev 7:9, 10; 12:12; 18:20; 19:7).

The Apocalypse most severe attack on Rome is on its worship system in the practice of Emperor cult. The political reality in John's day...was the indomitable and divine emperors. The quagmire of how Christians, who gave their highest loyalty to Jesus, should conduct themselves in a world where economic and political structures assumed that everyone would worship the emperor. (Kraybill 2010:15) Imperial cult nuances are dotted throughout the Revelation. (Rev 13:1-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2, 12-14; 17:3, 7-14, 16-17; 19:19-20; 20:4, 10; 16:14; 17:8, 12-14; 19:19-20). Highlighted in these texts Jews and Christians reject the gods of the nations they also objected to the growing practice of emperor worship. Emperor worship gained momentum throughout the first century AD becoming prominent especially in the reign of Caligula (AD 37-41), Nero (AD 54-68) and Domitian (AD 81-96) The spread of emperor worship coincided with the birth and growth of the Christian church. The entire Mediterranean world-except the obstinate Jews and Christians - worshipped at the feet of the emperor (Kraybill 2010:20).

The parallelism between Caesar-cult and Christ-cult, Deissmann remarked that "the use of terms and images in Christian literature paralleled certain elements found in the Imperial Cult (Deissmann 1923:224). The Influence of the Roman Imperial Court ceremony resembles the imperial court imagery in Rev 4-5 and sets up the contrast between the authority of Jesus and the emperor. Barr observing these similarities counsels caution lest John's confrontation of Roman power be allowed to transform his portrait of Jesus to look more like the dragon than a lamb (Barr 2006: 217-18,220).

The Seven Churches and Emperor Cult

Emperor cult together with idolatry is castigated in the rhetoric of rebuke of the Seven Churches. The “*Against You*” rebuke is coupled to the issue of cultic worship (2:4, 14, 20) John commends the Ephesian congregation for hating “the works of the Nicolaitans (2:6) though he goes on to suggest that they have not hated enough. His rhetoric targets a group of characters, “Nicolaitans,” “Balaamites,” and “Jezebel.” It draws these figures together by using their names synonymously (2:6, 14–15) and by linking them with the same activities of “eating idol-food,” and “fornication,” the latter probably a metaphor for participating in the ways of Gentile cultures, including idolatry (2:14–15, 20; cf. Rev 17:2; 18:3, 9; Ps 106:34–39). John’s condemnation of Jezebel’s promotion of cultural and cultic participation is evident in the four identities ascribed to “Jezebel” in 2:20: a woman, prophet, teacher, 17 and deceiver/beguiler who leads “my servants” astray into “fornication” (idolatry) and eating “food sacrificed to idols.”

Chapter 13 - Imperial Cult and Worship in the Apocalypse

The two beasts of chapter 13 are the agents of the dragon, “the Devil and Satan” in 12:9. The empire is presented as being in the power of the devil and embodies that power, and a claim also made by Matthew (Matt 4:8–9) and Luke (Lk 4:5–7). The first beast that the “whole earth” follows and worships (13:3–4) is often deciphered as Nero. The second beast who promotes both worship and economic activity (13:12, 16) is variously interpreted as provincial governors or imperial priesthoods or, perhaps more likely and inclusively, as local elites who actively promoted and financed imperial cult celebrations in local communities. (Naylor 2010:18) Deceiver of the whole earth” (12:9; cf. 20:3, 10); the second beast who “deceives the inhabitants of earth telling them to make an image for the beast...” (13:14; cf. 19:20); and Babylon/Rome itself, whose “merchants were the magnates of the earth, and all nations were deceived by your sorcery” (Rev 18:23). She is identified with the Devil, the imperial cult and its advocates, and Rome, intertwined.

In condemning the religious aspects of the empire, John uses misogynist symbols, to rebukes the imperial empire socially, economically, politically and religiously by consistently juggling different feminine qualities. Symbolism herein is a survival mechanism to avoid punishment. This is the genius of apocalyptic language in its functional form:

its flexibility “as a hybrid discourse” (Collins 1984:47). In the hybrid language one “can always claim something else... which is not a direct challenge to the domination system”.

Use of Apocalyptic Language in Castigating Gender Changes in Zimbabwe

Mbiti’s truism that “Africans are notoriously religious” (Mbiti 2000:1) and Idowu’s reiteration that Africans are incurable religious (Idowu 1999:1) comes alive amongst Shona masculinities in their denunciation of gender changes. Shona men utilise apocalyptic eschatological language which evokes apocalyptic terror. The Shona are generally notoriously eschatological and incurably apocalyptic, as such utilising religious language in expressing shock, in reprimanding the disrespect to standing taboos or in expressing displeasure is a common practice. In the book of Revelation and amongst the Shona, apocalyptic language functions as an expression of shock in response to perceived social chaos, manifestations regarding upturned social, economic, and religious norms.

Rev 17 and Gender and Power issues in Zimbabwe

The description of the Roman imperialism/whore in 17v1-6 read from a gendered Zimbabwean perspective coincides with aspects of gender role dispute. The whore of the Apocalypse is located in the wilderness *{gendered place}* she is wearing purple and scarlet *{power –dress and adornment}* she is riding a beast *{independence, authority and control}* and has a name on her forehead *{independence - status}*. Women in the workplace, women and dress, women power and wealth are the very issues in the current gender debate.

Power relations and transactions in the Shona culture is traded in gendered spaces/locations. This phenomenon is observable in social interactions, norms, dress and status. Any transaction of power outside the power locations/ territory is tantamount to destructive witchcraft, capable of obliterating the whole clan and village. The *dare*, hunting grounds and caves are masculine spaces while river banks, water wells/ boreholes and home – especially the kitchen are feminine places. Duties performed in these power spaces/ locations are also gendered.

While genitalia are used to distinguish sex, the foundation of gender conceptualisation in Zimbabwe is performance, especially performance in gendered spaces. *Ita semunhu wemurume* – behave like a man or a girl climbing trees can be castigated “*uri mukomana here anokwira muti*” are you a boy who climbs trees, even duties that require physical strength find women lamenting *pave kuda vanhu vechirume apa* On this task we need to call men. Genitalia – identity reflected in dress, gendered spaces and gendered performance are harmonious elements that construct the concept of gender amongst the Shona.

In Zimbabwe as elsewhere, changes in gender roles and perceptions are confronting long-held conventions. Not only are many societies witnessing changes – such as men staying at home and tending in the domestic sphere while women go out to work. This change is a necessary part of life, but it does not affirm or deny that it is a painful change. The experience of change, when it is drastic and sudden, can be difficult, even frightening. The vivid and bizarre imagery associated with the apocalyptic mode is widely associated with radical social change and upheaval undoubtedly tricky and scary.

In Zimbabwe, change in gender roles and values have undergone rapid transformation, this too, has been met with anxiety and with recourse to the apocalyptic mode. Some perceive gender changes as a catastrophic cultural apocalypse, which will usher in the apparent end of the world. Others see this change as the final nail on the coffin of cultural identity and the crowning act of neo-colonisation. Despite the gender role overlaps, women partaking duties that were identified as men’s tasks is a direct assault at the heart of masculinity. Furthermore, gender roles were traditionally defined as identity markers and women partaking roles that will see them identified as man is another siege on patriarchy.

In castigating gender changes and women empowerment, Shona masculinities have used the bible and conscripted homogeneous misogynistic apocalyptic phrases to deter and discourage these changes. Earlier to colonisation, society was maintained by a perfect and harmonious balance of power patterns and relationship with clearly defined duty-based roles (cf. Shoko 2016:19).

The appreciation of the status of every member of the group led to a well-disciplined unit and ensured that friction was avoided, the husband and the wife knew what was expected of them as do brothers, sisters and other relatives, in this way village affairs were expected to run smoothly (Gelfand 1973: 29,31).

The woman in Shona culture and tradition is critical, a piece that perfects the puzzle of family, clan, village and society at large, she is both a friend and a foe. As a mother, she is a friend, but she can also be a foe as a witch and prostitute. Her ancestral spirit as “both protective and destructive” they are so powerful that in moments of crisis both old and young moan by saying “*maiwe zvangu*” “commonly uttered in distress” (Bourdillon 1976:32) and in delight, perhaps denoting to the spiritual causer and protector. The position of women then was that of equal coordination and subordination. Women have more influence in the homestead than they are in the dare ... their attitudes were more influential in bringing about changes in medical practices, hygiene and even in agriculture than those of their husbands (cf. Bourdillon 1976:53).

The Sayings and Their Meaning

Beijing our Babylon / Madzimai eBeijing – Women of Beijing

John’s usage of Babylon to symbolise the lethal nature of imperial Roman Empire, using a city, as a metaphor and symbol of destruction is reduplicated in Zimbabwe on the metaphorical use of the city of Beijing in gender discourse. This symbolic denigrating stigmatisation of the women empowerment movement in the mid-’90s was a robust societal scourge, and its impacts still reverberate today.

This labelling was a desperate determination to muffle feminist opinions in Zimbabwe, the labelling and stigma were named after the “international women human rights instruments and national framework” (Essof 2013:77). This was held in Beijing; hence “Beijing” became the symbol of the terrifying other – women activist who disturbed the status quo. The word Beijing was apocalypticised and symbolised, as was done to the name Babylon. In Zimbabwe gender discourse “Beijing” is synonymous with the apocalyptic city of Babylon. “Beijing” became Zimbabwean Babylon a metaphor of a destructive force which sought to annihilate socio-cultural norms and values.

The profoundly apocalyptic stigmatising language was used to denigrate women rights and gender disparity “*Vakadzi ve Beijing Havana hunhu*” this simply highlighted a lack of morality. “Beijing” in Zimbabwean gender discourse is still a label of scorn and stigma, highlighting immorality “*kushaya hunhu*” hence participants and those who shared the same ideology were publicised as morally bankrupt. The term “*Vakadzi*

VeBejing” had a disclaimer “*Havana Hunhu*” The whole women empowerment movement was identified with disgraceful divorced women, if the women were married, then it only meant that they had debilitated their husbands by bewitching them.

Women empowerment is viewed as an impediment to structured status quo of masculine authority and a movement of disempowering men. Apocalyptic phrases like “*Nyika Yawora*” The world/Earth is now rotten expressed the decayed state of the earth, activating apocalyptic censure which would usher in an apocalyptic annihilation of life as an act of vengeance by the ancestors in collaboration with Mwari God. Deadly aftermaths like pestilence, famine and drought and many other terrible impending deadly events are viewed as punishment by the ancestors and God. As such women prescribing into the “Beijing” ideology became local rascals, they became enemies of society as they were agents of apocalyptic doom caused by diversion from both the divine and ancestral structured gender roles.

Jesu/Mwari huyai vanhu vaye vatanga – Jesus/God come the people have started mischief

The current cliché *Jesu/Mwari huyai vanhu vaye vatanga Jesus/God come the people have started mischief* like many other social cliches was extracted from a song about moral decay. Among other things, the song highlights the moral decay seen in women raping men, a castigation of the female pole dancer, Beverly Sibanda the general decay in morals exhibited in juvenile delinquency and women becoming morally loose. Commentaries on women debaucheries, unholy shenanigans in baby showers and kitchen parties summarised in the cliché “girls used to cook like their mothers now they dress and drink beer like their fathers.” The moral disintegration seen in juvenile delinquency- is said to be a failure of mothers. In the Shona culture, the burden of child discipline is shoved to women, whose role as childminders is to foster acceptable behavioural norms and values.

The women cross-border traders sexual promiscuity has been the subject of discussion on media platforms- some are reported to be in polyandrous relationships in and out of Zimbabwe. The call for Jesus to come is a desire that seeks the annihilation of these women who have diverted from both culturally prescribed norms and moral deviants. In this call,

for Jesus to hasten his coming is a pronouncement of doom, judgment and a desperate call to end the world.

The Shona people do not want the world to end, even death is not the end of a person's life. Death is a "change of state... it is a journey to a better world where one would live forever (Mwandayi 2011:222-223). For them to seek Jesus to hasten his coming is a desperate call for judgment. At the epicentre of moral decay and juvenile delinquency is the absence of women in the home environment, the proverb *musha mukadzi* highlights that it is women who turn houses to homes, without women homes are deserted villages.

Nyika Yave Kuguma Vakadzi vave kupfeka ma Trousers- The world is now coming to end women are putting on trousers

The *nyika yave kuguma* – *The world is coming to an end* coupled together with the "*Jesu huyai vanhu vaye vatanga*" and the earlier *pasi rarohwa nenyundo* a hammer has stricken the world were apocalyptic armoury commissioned against women empowerment and gender role changes. While these apocalyptic phrases have been used in general castigations towards deviance, they have been used to precisely censure gender role changes. *Nyika yave kuguma* – *the world is now coming to an end*, was repeatedly used in reference to the performance of women roles by men – *Nyika yave kuguma manje munhu wemurume kubereka mwana/ the world is coming to an end man are now carrying babies on their backs*. These apocalyptic censures were also used inversely castigating women who ventured into masculine locations/spaces and work environment. These changes were all signs of times heralding the end of the world. The saying proclaimed the apocalyptic time frame, for both the time of the end and the end of time. Perhaps the most significant sign that signifies the end of time is the change in dress and fashion for women observed primarily in the wearing of trousers.

Dress is an essential fabric of Shona society, and it signifies social status. Until recently, widows in the first year of their husband's death wore a black dress, headgear and shoes to signify their status of sorrow and mourning. As dressing became more western, women started wearing trousers. Contrary to cultural and traditional patterns, since a woman's status, character, and dignity is reflected on her attire, wearing trousers was a strange phenomenon and was awarded prostitute status. "There is a belief that only prostitutes wear trousers and miniskirts" (Lyons

2004:128). It is in this context that women empowerment and gender role changes have been synonymously coupled with dressing.

The wearing of trousers became more common, a status of new identity and empowerment. This was perceived as a challenge to men, as women were pushing to become men. Not only was this met with apocalyptic scourge but it was also followed by dress-based violence. The wearing of trousers by women was apocalypticised as a precursor and harbinger of the end of the world. The apocalyptic language, metaphors of shock and censure were utilised “*Nyika yawora/yavekuguma vakadzi vave kupfeka ma trousers*” “The world is now morally corrupt-rotten/its now coming to an end” was an anti-western cultural hegemony truism in Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Malawi, Zambia, and South Africa. Tanzanian Youth League humiliated women wearing miniskirts, wigs, skin-lightening creams, tight pants, dresses or shorts” (Ivaska 2002). The late president of Malawi, Kamuzu Banda referred to the wearing of mini-skirt as ‘diabolic fashion’, and this gave rise to the harassment of women (Wipper 1972:332; cf. Jean 1995). In South Africa, and Zimbabwe dress-based violence against women who put on mini-skirts is still “very common at taxi ranks” (cf. Vincent 2009). Online newspapers and YouTube are littered with horrific graphic videos of attire-based violence towards women. Nehanda TV has such a video of a young woman who was shamefully humiliated by touts at a taxi rank in Harare.²

The evolution of modern women and the new gender roles paves the bad way that leads to the undesired end of the world. Its effects had already been witnessed in droughts and famines, which are the signs of the anger of the ancestors and God. In righteous indignation, challenged masculinities to humiliate and in some cases to destroy agents of cultural dilution and catalysts of the end – in this case, deviant women whose dressing did not reflect culture, tradition and agreeable women's status.

The Critique of Misogynistic Terms

The use of feminine symbols, signs and images in the Revelation has received a wide range of criticism. The bitterest criticism comes from feminist bible scholars like Pippin, Garrett and Selvidge to name just a few. In the Apocalypse symbols reflecting domination derived from

² Cf. <http://nehandatv.com/2014/12/18/sick-touts-undress-woman-mini-skirt>.

patriarchal slaveocracies, provided the symbols depicting Imperial Roman oppression and the social system.

The New Testament is politically constructed in the context of this struggle, it directly attacks the religio-political and economic hegemony; hence it becomes the primary source used in canonising religious and social sexism. Collins suggest that “the particular forms of the feminine symbols in Revelation are limited and limiting for women... Women are defined in terms of their sexual and reproductive roles” (Cf. Collins 306). Selvidge, criticizes the use of feminine symbols as violent images of destruction of women not just by John in the Apocalypse but all Hebrew prophets who “objectify women as the enemy” she criticizes the imagery in Revelation as filled with images of women that seem to display a consistent debauched and violent misogyny which is shrouded in pornographic images.

Pippin, utilising methods appropriated from analysing fantasy literature asserts that the apocalyptic description of women as good and evil has a common factor, in all the cases all the women are inferior to men, 19:6-10; 21:1-2, 12:1-17. The role of the female is clearly subordinate to males in the Revelation. Pippin calls these stereotypical images “blurred absent and displaced” (Pippin 2005:126-129). The symbolism is further accused of misogyny in that it displaces women from both the political and religious sphere. The political and religious *status quo* of women in the Imperial Roman Empire subjugated them as such the Apocalypse subverts Rome without subverting, changing, or challenging the typical gender relations in the church and culture. The conspicuous marginalisation of women and their absence from the 144000 who stand with Christ is a case in point. Pippin further critiques the functional form of women symbols in the Apocalypse by highlighting that the apocalyptic imagery and symbolism of subverting reality regarding the religious and political domination of the Jews by the Roman Empire. The symbols and images are mimetic and not fantastic. They merely perpetuate the way things are in the dominant society...the images of the female archetypes are presented in reverse that is to say what Rome considers to be evil (Christians) the Revelation presents as good (the heroine) And what Rome considers to be right the Roman Empire the Apocalypse considers it to be evil (whore)... while the political realities represented by these images are subverted and reversed the stereotypes of female figures in themselves remain unchanged and unchallenged. The whore and Jezebel act on their own power independent of God and the Lamb and are de-

stroyed... the autonomous females used symbolically by the author are scapegoats for all the evil in society.

The critique by some feminist bible scholars is also on “the way in which the image of a prostitute is portrayed and used as a female symbol” (Pippin 2005:136).

“Each of these symbols reflects the male-centered view of the first century: women are caricatured as virgins, whores or mothers. . . The stereotyped feminine images in the book do not represent the full spectrum of authentic womanhood, either in John’s day or in our own. Exploring the cultural roots of John’s metaphoric language about women will enable us to understand what he was trying to say at those points, but the dehumanising way in which he phrased his message will remain deeply troubling” (Newsom & Ringe 1992:377).

Ruether’s criticism is not on the symbols *per se*, but in their significance across time. She criticises the hermeneutics of oppression and exegesis that perpetuates superiority in gender and race. She starts from ancient Greek philosophy as the bedrock that gave Christianity a gendered, classist and racist hermeneutics. She criticises the hermeneutics of gender oppression from Paul, Aquinas, Augustine, Luther and Calvin. Ruether’s criticism is not on the symbols but in their usage – significance in the here and now. “The oppressive patterns in Christianity toward women and other subjugated people do not come from specific doctrines, but from a patriarchal and hierarchical reading of the system of Christian symbols as a whole. These same symbols can be read from a prophetic and liberating perspective” (Ruether 2014:83)

Christianity is envisioned on an anti-empire circuit while constructed on a callous outlook against women and slavery. While the imageries, metaphors, signs and symbols in the Apocalypse are engraved on a male chauvinistic viewpoint, they signify the imperial Roman Empire and Emperor cult. Their significance, however, does not obliterate the inherent imbedded misogynistic tendencies. The literal usage of the misogynistic symbol, images and metaphor from a narrative reading perpetuates sexism. Disenchanted masculinities can abuse these images as a biblical foundation for their extreme misogynistic views. On the other hand, the significance of the anti-empire critique, symbolised in the women of the Revelation can be employed against oppressive systems like patriarchy. Utilising religious language and monopolising god and the ancestors to further masculine agenda of maintaining the status quo and to massage masculine ego is abusing religion, apocalyptic language and eschatological terror.

A Critique of a Critique

The use and abuse of the Bible in gender castigation follows a pedigree of general abuse of the bible to justify desired ends. As was the case with slavery and currently in Zimbabwean politics, the Bible is being used to maintain political players in power and traditional gender roles at play. Gunda's observation that "while there was a time when these two [scil. bible and culture] were mutually exclusive, now they are mutually inclusive, culture is reinforced by the Bible, and the Bible is reinforced by culture" (Gunda 2015:53). As such the bible is being used to maintain gender stereotypes. This is being achieved by the literal-verbal reading and misapplication which ignores the historical and cultural meaning. Texts like Deut 22:5 (*A woman shall not wear man's clothing, nor shall a man put on a woman's clothing ...*) are used to regulate dress.

Not only are biblical texts taken outside their socio-economic, religious and spiritual context, but a buffet hermeneutics *pick and choose*, selective reading of the bible also misconstrues the texts. Buffet hermeneutics perpetuates negative stereotypes not just against women but, also sustain slavery and anti-Semitism. Hermeneutics that foster Identity politics have a pedigree of maintaining heinous ideologies like the apartheid. History has enough evidence of how unsustainable such oppressive methods of biblical hermeneutics are.

Using biblical text embedded with misogynistic overtones in the contemporary situation is an abuse of the Bible, the Bible cannot be applied verbally in the modern situation. In many cases when the bible is used verbally, and literally it tends to be used oppressively. Misogynistic hermeneutics and oppressive exegesis are the major problem on the religious suppression of women. The text is gendered to the service of oppressive masculinities who use the bible in the same way they abuse apocalyptic language.

Ruether posits that "The oppressive patterns in Christianity toward women and other subjugated people do not come from specific doctrines but from a patriarchal and hierarchical reading of the system of Christian symbols as a whole. These same symbols can be read from a prophetic and liberating perspective," therefore, Bible scholars can use the very same seeming oppressive symbols as liberating symbols. Rev 17 In the gender discourse in Zimbabwe can be read in a liberating way, which acknowledges the reference of the symbols to the Roman Empire, the ancient city of Rome and Emperor of Rome. Using Collins' (1996) exegetical method of moving from meaning to significance, the whore of

Rev 17 controlling the blasphemous beast, can be used to signify the reality of women competency when there are available equal opportunities. The whore in the wilderness – can be read as signifying the ability of women in the workplace- since the wilderness is a gendered place. Her ornamentation with precious jewels, scarlet and purple can be used as signifying, wealth, power, freedom of choice in dress. Oppressive masculinities In Zimbabwe have denied women these among other things.

The criticism of misogynistic terms in the book of Revelation by Pippin, Selvidge, Garrett and others has its foundation on a literal reading of the symbols which reads gender captions within the text. The first drawback of this reading is in its failure to separate symbolic language and literal meaning of the text. This reading fails to collapse the wall between the symbolic and the literal. Taking the apocalyptic symbols as a real/actual depiction of literal women is reading the message of the Apocalypse amiss.

Barr observes three errors in this reading “it literalizes the images rather than grappling with their ambiguity, it minimises the role of the feminine in the story, and it misconstrues the relationship between the violence and the final resolution.” John depicts women in a larger than life manner. “They no longer appear to be mortals. Either conceived of as Queen Mother (Jezebel), or Queen Consort (The Bride of the Lamb), Queen Ruler (Whore of Babylon), or Queen of Heaven (Woman Clothed with Sun) or re-enacting myths, they are generic symbolic constructs” (Barr 2009:55-68). The women of the Apocalypse are dressed in the mythic garb and covered by symbolism.

Schüssler Fiorenza (1998:219,309-310) suggests that

“the female imagery of the Book of Revelation would be completely misconstrued if it were understood as referring to the actual behaviour of individual women ... The images of women used by Revelation were not intended to, nor should they ever legitimate violence against women of any kind [...] any effort to associate them with actual ... people represent a gross misuse of the text...”

The danger of understanding this feminine symbolization in a literalist fashion is acute if readers do not critically distance themselves from John’s vitriolic polemics against a leading woman prophet but instead naturalise the feminine figuration of the opposition between Rome’s and God’s power. Babylon is figured as an elite woman, the rhetorical-symbolic discourse of Revelation clearly understands it as an imperial

city and not as an actual woman. Just as the figure of “beast” does not connote “animal” or that of the “ten horns” an animal’s “bony outgrowth,” neither does “harlot” in the rhetorics of Revelation connote “woman”. The rhetorical markers in the text, again and again, refer the reader to a certain “city” and not to an actual woman (Schüssler Fiorenza 1998:219).

However, criticism of a person, power players or institutions by Christians must never utilise perpetuating misogynist clinches. Moreover, criticism by Christians must never be on the foundation of identity politics, especially gendered castigation and race-based denigration. In the gender discourse the recommendation by Ruether that “The spiritual nature of women’s souls is made in the image of God equally with males. The inner soul in both men and women is nongendered and is the basis for their capacity for redemption and eternal life” (Ruether 2014:85) is a fact not only in gender discourse but in all matters of identity politics.

The violence in the Apocalypse and the symbolic gender stereotypes are regrettable in their capacity to be abused as texts that bolster patriarchal superiority. However, their necessity highlighting the immorality of domination, God overcoming evil by the superior power and the morality of justice must not be obscured by gendered castigation.

Conclusion

The Bible, at least in some parts, can be viewed as a misogynistic text, especially the Revelation of John, which utilises symbolic grotesque, gendered misogynistic images, and metaphors to criticise the diabolic Roman Empire. The gender change in Zimbabwe has seen the conscription of the same apocalyptic language to castigate women empowerment, especially in gender role changes, vehemently. As is reflected in the Apocalypse of John, especially in the portrayal of the whore of Rev 17 a barrage of misogynistic terms is used to castigate the whore who represents the imperial Roman Empire symbolically. Rev 17:1-6 highlights aspects that have been a bone of contentions in the gender narrative in Zimbabwe. However misogynistic tendencies in the Bible and especially in the book of Revelation cannot be perpetuated in the castigation of women. Gender stereotypes cannot be applied in modern situations as this will be collapsing the difference between the social, economic, political and religious context in which the Apocalypse was written. Criticism

by Christians should be far removed from perpetuating misogynistic clinches. Conscripting apocalyptic language to the service of gender discrimination is tantamount to religious terrorism.

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The Ass Load: A Symbolic Re-Appraisal of the Bible and Gender Troubles in Africa

Edmore Dube

Abstract

The ass (or donkey) is the quintessential beast of burden. It features in the biblical record and the ass carrying its load is also a common sight in many parts of the world including in rural African contexts. This chapter argues that the 'ass load' serves as an apt symbol for visualizing and, consequently, understanding gender roles in both the Bible and in Africa. This symbol shows how considerable and burdensome the load is, but also, because both halves are balanced by opposing each other, how that which seems near-to impossible can be achieved. The burdensome balance, moreover, results through the actions of a third-party: namely, the one who imposes and balances the load. As an analogy, Pauline and post-Pauline theologies have been used by both conservative and radical scholars (i.e. by scholars of opposing views) to perpetuate as well as critique gender roles in Africa. While the two groups depend on the same Bible for their arguments their positions have remained in opposition like the two halves of the ass load. So, one must ask who the culprit in the creation of both biblical narratives and African cultural texts is.

Introduction

This chapter starts with a description of donkeys and their loads in the Bible. Although the Bible is replete with images of asses as patient beasts of burden, the chapter incorporates only two stories, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament. The Balaam story in Num 22:21-30 and the Triumphal Entry (Mt 21:1-11, Mk 11:1-10, Lk 19:28-44) suffice as good examples. The description pays particular attention to sex of the loader, the actual load and how it stays secure on the ass. From there the chapter translocates the metaphor to Africa, with a similar exploration of the role of asses in the transportation of safely saddled loads, with equal weights of the same load on either side of the ass depending on same donkey spine as fulcrum.

Once the metaphor has been sufficiently explained the chapter moves to the third level where the metaphor is now combined with conservative female gender voice, as comprising one side of the firm ass load. Level

four brings in the second half of the ass load as comprising radical feminism, perpetually pulling in the opposite direction with the conservative side; as two irreconcilable load ends.

Methodology

The study partly relies on the desk-top approach. This means the argument is partly created out of a body of knowledge already in the public domain. Such knowledge is accessed from books, journals, the internet and non-governmental organisations' policy and operations documents. Of particular importance is Remina Dube's (2014) Bachelor of Arts dissertation entitled, *Scoring Own Goals?* Dube (2014) concludes that guild women carry their roles as *tete* (paternal aunts) from the traditional setting to the Church where they advise each other to be resilient in times of marriage difficulties. Traditional aunts are empowered by Shona tradition to teach their nieces lessons on resilience in marriage. Dube (2014) maintains that instead of liberating each other, they actually score own goals by encouraging each other to be patient and forgiving, instead of taking action against their problems. She made her research among guild women of St Luke's Parish without considering level of education or profession, both of which are important in the present case.

The current researcher interviewed sixteen graduate teachers of Religious Studies from two different denominations to find out their perceptions of the creation, Pauline and post Pauline narratives dealing with male-female gender roles. In addition to their level of education they also had to have leadership positions in their congregations' female guilds. The participants fulfilling both conditions were selected in the ration 4:12 (1:3) from the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe and Roman Catholic Church respectively. One member of the Roman Catholic group had previously left the Catholic Church to join the Apostolic Faith Mission, before reverting back to the Catholic fold. Thirdly all the members had attended at least one workshop by a non-governmental organization championing rights of women, including one by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) focusing on the social teachings of the church. The researcher made use of a Religious Studies teachers' panel meeting and a CCJP attendance register to select most of the respondents. The respondents were assured that the information was for academic purposes only and that their participation was volun-

tary. Those who volunteered to participate in the survey were satisfied with the confidential nature of their actual identities.

The Ass in Biblical and African Settings

The Balaam Story (Num 22:21-30)

The Balaam story is found in the book of Numbers, one of the five books of the Torah traditionally attributed to the authorship of Moses (male author). Balaam, a male diviner, is invited by Balak the king of Moab to come and curse the Israelites encamped in the plain of Moab, so that they may be driven out through the power of God. Balaam uses a female ass as transport for the journey. He sits astride the ass' spine, with a leg dangling on either side for balance. On the way the ass discovers an obstacle on the road – an angel of God – and tries to avoid the angel by turning onto the field but is struck by Balaam who remains balanced on its back. The ass complies with Balaam's prodding without complaint though it is gifted with human speech, but the road becomes narrower, with a wall on either side. The angel's obstruction occurs for the second time, and the ass tries to get rid of the load (Balaam) by pressing one of his legs, forming one side of the load, against one wall, but the load remains intact, spurring the ass on. The road becomes even narrower leaving the ass with no space to turn either left or right. The angel appears for the third time obstructing the ass, leaving it with only one option- to lie down with its load intact on its back. The load (Balaam) even becomes more vociferous in spurring the ass on. Only then does the ass open its mouth to plead its case for having served him faithfully all his life, which Balaam accepts as factual. After this short altercation the angel gives way and the ass continues with its load to the final destination, where Balak receives the load without minding its transporter (the ass).

This brief description presents the ass as a beast of burden which suffers under the weight of a well-balanced load which it cannot get rid of. It tries turning sideways, pressing the load against the wall, sleeping and verbally complaining, all to no avail. The ass also suffers from opposing currents, with the human being striking it so that it proceeds, while the angel obstructs the way so that it stops. The problem is compounded by the fact that the man (Balaam) who spurs the ass on, is oblivious of the presence of the angel obstructing the donkey's movement until the very last moment. Even then the man does not dismount from the ass but

completes the last lap of his journey on animal's back. This means there is no meaningful reprieve for the ass, even though the angel finally gives way. The genesis of the problem comes from the fact that Balaam undertakes a journey opposed by God who wants the Israelites blessed and not cursed, but it is the innocent ass which suffers the consequences of man's disobedience to God.

The Triumphal entry (Mt 21:1-11, Mk 11:1-10, Lk 19:28-44)

Jesus directs his disciples to go and untie a colt and bring it to him. The disciples do as directed. They bring the ass, put their garments on it and saddle Jesus on it. Although this is a new experience for the colt, it undertakes the responsibility with humility. Some of the disciples spread their garments on the road in honour of the peaceful messiah and not the colt carrying him, yet it is the colt that signifies that he comes in peace. The people celebrate the ass load and not the ass itself. The Pharisees oppose the celebration, but the colt completes its mission with its load intact.

Like in the Balaam story, the colt accomplishes its mission with great humility. It does not resist its untying or even the first riding experience. It walks unperturbed through the storm of opposing currents of jubilating disciples and the Pharisees reprimanding them.

The Use of the Ass in Zimbabwe

As in the biblical times the ass has been used in rural Zimbabwe as a beast of burden. Although Zimbabweans ride donkeys, donkeys are mainly used to transport goods in folded bags. During famine men travel long distances in search of food. Once they have found the food (especially maize or millet) they use donkeys to transport the food back home. To create a stable load for a donkey one folds the sack into two halves before loading it onto the animal. The two halves depending on the same creature's spine as fulcrum pull in different directions to retain equilibrium. The two halves in effect depend on each other for continued elevation; remove one half and the other one falls off.

The Analogue

This chapter uses the patient ass to represent the African woman who it argues has equally been used as a beast of burden. Patience in the face

of harrowing vicissitudes has been taken as a likable attribute of a woman among the Shona of Zimbabwe (Dube 2014, Chireshe 2015:262). The three stories with asses above have shown that the ass is a very patient tame animal, an attribute that has left it the preferred load carrier among domestic animals. The stories have generally portrayed man as the origin of the burden. The two biblical stories have been authored by men and have men as donkey riders. The African story has man as the author of the long journey and the creator of the balanced load that stays comfortably on the ass. In all these stories we have absence of female heroes, actively fashioning their destiny. Though the Balaam ass has the gift of speech, it waits until the very last moment to speak out. Even then it only appeals to its track record dominated by full compliance and is willing to continue in labour. It is clear that the ass has seen the truth, in the presence of the angel, but it labours on ...

The analogue here is that although women have discovered the burden of gender roles as socially constructed by men, they are not agreed on severing themselves from the male dominated culture. Excellent Chireshe & Regis Chireshe (2010) administered a questionnaire to forty-five Great Zimbabwe University students (including 29 females) studying Women and Religion, on their perception of *lobola* (dowry), which 76% of the respondents condemned as promoting gender inequality. But to the surprise of the researchers, the students still recommended that the custom of *lobola* should not be discontinued. The researchers share their surprise thus:

‘It was expected that the educated university students, (most of whom were female) exposed to gender studies, would overwhelmingly call for the abolishment of *Lobola*, a practice which is largely viewed as an impediment to gender equality by those of a feminist orientation’.

(Chireshe & Chireshe 2010:218)

This result shows that while the researchers formed the abolitionist side of the ass load, the respondents formed the opposing side of the same ass load. In this way the acquired knowledge of feminist nature did not assist female respondents to call for the abolition of *lobola* to achieve equality. For that reason, like the Balaam ass they continued to endure their load despite illumination.

Thus, like the ass, some females are still willing to patiently labour on, willingly accepting male gender formulations which create traditions and customs that disadvantage females. The three stories show that the ass load is securely saddled, and the ass finds it difficult to rid itself of

the load. In the case of the research by Chireshe & Chireshe (2010) female respondents actually joined their male counterparts to defend *lobola*, a custom that promoted male superiority. The chapter takes the two load-overlaps as two groups of women opposing each other on how to deal with gender socialization in Africa. Just as the balancing load-overlaps in the three stories depend on the same ass spine as fulcrum, the two groups of women depend on the same Bible to go their different ways. Like the ass, we are using here as an analogue, they find their load in a nauseating balance but enduring the journey unperturbed. Praxes among Christians and gender scholars have generally taken two broad positions on gender troubles in Africa, namely the conservative or the radical view.

Gender Perceptions

Nontondo Hadebe (2009:2) maintains that gender roles refer to the construction of identity by our society, even though the roles are generally ‘thought to be set by God and that fulfilling these assigned roles is a proof that one is a good Christian’ (Hadebe 2009:2). Christians who subscribe to this view of gender roles being God-given find it sacrilegious to challenge them and therefore accept gender roles as sacrosanct. Excellent Chireshe (2015:263) acknowledges spiritualization of gender roles by conservatives, who resist any new formulations. This means that while scholars see the need to refashion current gender roles by offering new hermeneutics, those who spiritualize gender roles fight to keep them intact. To gauge the extent to which educated women and religious practitioners spiritualize gender roles the researcher made use of in-depth interviews centred on the creation narratives (Gen 1:26-28, 2:18-24), the Pauline binary position, leashing and unleashing women (cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35¹ versus Gal 3:28; Rom 16:1-3, 6, 12) and the deutero-Pauline letters (Eph 5:21-32 and Col 3:18-19) which are products of their own *Sitz im Leben*. The results of the interviews below show that the consensus on reforming the current gender roles is still a long way off,

¹ Even if one admits that these verses are a post-Pauline interpolation – as many Western scholars do – the stance of Paul on gender issues remains rather ambivalent as can be seen from 1 Cor 11:2-16. Cf. Kügler’s article on Paul’s gender politics (see above in this volume).

as guild women are still prepared to live up to such contextual roles despite their university and non-governmental workshop exposures to gender issues.

The conservative approach

Conservatives use the 'hermeneutics of the status quo' deeply influenced by the Pauline, post-Pauline and the creation narratives. They deliberately read the Bible in such a way that it authenticates the existing social structures, thus maChiera (2017: interview), a graduate teacher of Religious Studies and a leader within the Reformed Church in Zimbabwe's women guild, does not want her husband to venture into female territory with regards to food preparation. This is because she judges her self-worth to be intrinsic to the fulfilment of such gender roles. She categorically stated in an interview that gender roles are religious values matched by biblical texts like Gen 2:18-24 and Eph 5:21-32, and therefore inviolable. Like her colleagues on the far right, she reads the Bible without paying particular attention to the various milieus signified by the numerous texts and their writers. She sees each biblical text as trans-contextual and therefore not bound by culture or time. The text therefore speaks a universal message to all readers of all times. Thus, like the ass, maChiera and other conservatives patiently hold onto their gender roles without worrying about altering them.

The post-colonial challenges within the Shona society of southern Zimbabwe are associated with the location of the woman's place within the kitchen (Dube 2014). Though the kitchen is an important place where food is prepared and consumed, where visitors are received, as well as the place where people grieve or console each other in times of grief, the woman's role there is now generally regarded as less superior to that of the decision-making man. This is because the food prepared and kept there has already been sourced from outside by the man. This ranking of roles is a digression from the mutual respect of sexes in pre-colonial Africa, when the male-female roles were different but mutually supportive in peaceful coexistence (Ani 2011:45). At that time there was a cooperative value system rather than dissentious Western feminism, where there was gain in different roles and therefore vociferous wars over gender equality (Ani et al 2014:168). The coming of the Bible and Westernization to Africa supplanted the mutuality of gender roles with competition and gain, making women gap-fillers. The gender troubles that fol-

lowed pressed hard on the woman who was home bound for domestic chores while her male counterpart was out bound for money generating jobs. Colonialism therefore reconstructed gender roles, redefining the woman's place in the kitchen as burdensome courting the ire of radical feminists.

MaChiera, however, notes that this is not a misnomer because the woman was created to assist the man, and in this case in the kitchen. Although no interview text referred to the kitchen, she latched on to the phrase 'be subordinate, as even the law says' (1 Cor 14:35 RSV). By 'law' she referred to the Shona traditional custom of valuing the woman according to her kitchen roles. MaChiera was therefore prepared to carry the gender burden with patience and satisfaction. Of the sixteen respondents, twelve took the similar views about their places in the kitchen. Even the remaining four respondents did not reject their place in the kitchen, but said that they welcomed assistance from their husbands, since they too were gainfully employed. This lack of fighting spirit means that the ass load hangs on.

Excellent Chireshe notes that the role of the Shona woman (whom maChiera here interprets as happy) is unfortunately governed by 'the cultural tradition of silence and preserving family secrets [is] unchallenged' (Chireshe 2015:262). Sadunhu Matilda (2017: interview), a graduate Catholic teacher of Religious Studies and a leader within the guild of St Anne, says that since a woman has to be subordinate as taught by Paul (1 Cor 14:34-35) then she has to bear her cross with contentment and to readily forgive her husband for whatever. For that reason, it is shameful to bring domestic issues, including gender violence to the attention of the police or open courts. This is a loathsome act equivalent to washing dirty linen in public. For instance, Matilda, though educated, does not want to challenge Shona cultural practices using the Bible, instead she reads the Bible in a manner that bolsters gender inequality. In this regard she is in agreement with Auxillia (2017: interview), who re-joined the Roman Catholic Church from the Apostolic Faith Mission, teaching Religious studies at a local secondary school as a graduate teacher. Auxillia also believes it is essential to follow the well-trodden path, because the new ways resemble straining the hide in the air which is impossible, for hide-straining needs a solid surface for holding the strainers. She notes that it is better to follow the clear guidelines for relationships than to grope in the dark after throwing out the long established and tried rules. She fails to see any burden in fulfilling current

gender roles as a Christian woman, and therefore trudges on, still loaded with her roles.

The guild women refuse to embrace radical views. For example, the radical Mercy Oduyoye (1995) notes that the church domain is male dominated; men serve on the 'spiritual table' while females serve at the 'material table' at home (Oduyoye 1995:5). which is true within the local community. According to Mbuya Muchigere (2017: interview), a middle aged Catholic Religious Studies teacher of the guild of St Anne, it is better to follow a well-trodden path. She is content that the Catholic Church does not ordain women but allows them to retain their customary place in the kitchen where she decides what goes onto the table. She says that 'there is no mouse without a well-trodden path, just as there is no religious tradition without well-defined roles' (Muchigere 2017: interview). By accepting her current role in the Catholic Church Muchigere symbolically agrees to retain her load. As a woman of high standing she is particularly more worried about their place in the community to avoid exposing herself to public ridicule.

Nason-Clark (1999:40) satirizes this idea of suppressing problems, as expressed by the guild women here, which she refers to as 'holy hush.' In fact, her position is that there is nothing holy about suffering in silence, which means the idea of well-trodden paths which bolster gender inequalities needs revisiting. This puts Nason-Clark and Muchigere on either side of the ass load, which keeps the load in place for as long as there are two interpretations to the same issue. Mbuya Mahiya (2016: interview), a sixty-two-year-old Religious Studies teacher and helper in the catechism department of the Catholic Church, says that one does not need a clerical collar to deal with counselling. She says that the Roman Catholic Church allows enculturation and therefore, guild women can utilize the *tete* concept which is already used in the children guilds in the Church.

It is customary among the Shona people that the father's sister is responsible for inculcating good morals among her brother's daughters. Any marriage failure is blamed on the *tete*, and therefore to retain her worthy she preaches the virtue of endurance and the sacrosanctity of marriage as the paragon of success. In the local church elderly women of the guild of St Anne are seconded to advise girls of the guild of Mary. Such guild advisers are called *tete* in the local language. Mahiya therefore says just as such counselling has been allowed by the church in such contexts, it should also be tenable among adult guilds. In this case the

socializing institution among the traditional Shona has been adopted by the church with clear support of the catechism department. In this case it becomes difficult to shoot down such an institution socializing both traditionalists and Church goes into gender inequalities. It is further complicated by such readings as they would dismiss such texts as: ‘There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal 3:28 RSV). Gogo Matayaya (2017: interview), a middle-aged graduate teacher of Religious Studies belonging to the guild of St Anne sees a mere play with words in the Galatians text. She argues that once the same language has different names for objects such as ‘Jew, Greek, slave, free, male or female,’ it denotes clear differences between them. The text therefore is simply calling for moderation and not elimination of differences.

Researching on a non-African context Rebecca Kim noted that conservative women believe that the Bible teaches them to be able to ‘obey, endure, suffer and forgive’ (Kim 2011:597). This is supported by Chireshe who discovered that some Shona Christians believe resilience may force husbands into reformation (Chireshe 2015:263). Thus this ‘right’ side of the ass load endures based on supportive biblical texts, cultural structures and the love for male-female rapport creation.

The radical view

Within the church there are radical scholars and practitioners who we analogize here as the ‘left’ side of the ass load. The term ‘radical’ here is used to denote those scholars and practitioners who require significant changes to the current biblical hermeneutics. Such scholars and practitioners form a continuum in their array of positional interpretations. They include those who reject the myth that Christianity brought liberation to African women because in reality the church accepts the material services of women but negates their voices (Oduyoye 1995:1). Oduyoye (1995:8) notes the need to address the patriarchal superstructure dominating both the church and the communal space, which the conservative side tends to accept wholesale. This superstructure is solidified by the trio: religion, culture and gender socialization. The gender troubles in Africa are worsened by the fact that biblical misinterpretation is matched by a hybrid of African mores and traditions whose final outcomes are actually recasts of Western gender tensions (Hudson-Weems 1993). The

argument here is that gender troubles are a historical phenomenon that resulted from the infusion of African patriarchal structures and Western patriarchal perceptions brought by the Western missionary church. In other words, the missionary church sustained the African patriarchal structures infused with a new inhibitive gender incompatibility of the European origin. The old mutual roles of males and females in Africa were turned into competing roles. Competition resulted in ranking of roles which saw male roles being ranked superior to those of females. Eventually females were viewed as second class citizens, meant to 'fill in the blanks' and complementing men by doing 'the rest' after males have made their 'choices' (Oduyoye 1995:5). Since the feminists refuse to be gap fillers, while conservatives discussed above find it better to follow 'the well-trodden path', the two groups cannot be reconciled. By analogue the two groups form the two sides of the ass load – the right and left sides.

Casimir Ani et al (2014:176) blame the whole problem of gender troubles in Africa on distorted male cultural and biblical hermeneutics, which they say must be reformed. They argue that male interpretations of the Bible mistake the Bible for a prescriptive text, while in reality the Bible is descriptive within the writer's milieu. In that case they say that the Pauline and post-Pauline family codes must be taken in their context, rather than being universalized without reference to the changing contexts. Consequently, the women who were supposed to keep quiet in public were those of the churches referred to in Bible, for the reasons known to those communities. This reading of the texts contrasts well with the reading of the literalist conservatives, which keeps the ass load firmly in its place.

Ani et al (2014:167) insist on the gender neutrality of the Pauline and post-Pauline texts, with a clear emphasis on mutuality. They point out that even Pope John Paul II has confirmed the gender neutrality of the texts opening the door for the demythologization of the oppressive interpretation of these biblical texts. In *Mulieris Dignitatem* (1988:6-7, 24) Pope John Paul II notes the church's hermeneutical misinterpretation of Col 3:18-23 and Eph 5:21-33, as these texts were cultural bonds in Asia and Europe but cited as albatross on women in Africa. For centuries the church misinterpreted (Eph 5:22-24) as a submissive clause. This new approach to the texts affirming equity and equality between the sexes forms a theological basis for fighting cultural and theological oppression in Africa. Emphasis is placed on Eph 5:21 which says, 'Be subject to one

another out of reverence for Christ' (RSV). Isabel Apawo Phiri (2001:98) proposes that as a starting point feminist may shift from controversial female representations and put emphasis on such verses as Gal 3:28 and Eph 5:21 which stress equality and mutuality between sexes. We have seen in the earlier section that educated senior members of the church guilds still stick to the traditional version of interpreting the texts, which reinforces inequality between males and females. This keeps the burdensome load firmly intact.

Phiri also insists on the liberative biblical interpretation, to eliminate the notion that God intends men to dominate submissive women, a position nurtured by patriarchy through social organization and sets of beliefs (Phiri 2001:98). She is joined by other feminists in objecting to the reading of the creation stories and the Pauline texts which leaves the woman as a mere submissive helper (Ani et al 2014:170). Ani et al (2014:166) argue that since it is slowly becoming clear that dogma was created by mortals who not infallible, then it must be challenged and corrected. This attempt to introduce a paradigm shift in the reading of the texts has to contend with practice which largely maintains the reading feminists are disputing. Without success on the praxis level, both the conservative practitioners and the radical feminists will continue to move with their burden firmly installed.

Rosemary R. Ruether (1988:58) goes to the extremes where African feminists seldom venture. She actually proposes that 'women-church groups' can form as separate church from men if they unite. Unfortunately, as we have already noted, conservatives claiming 'orthodoxy' will not allow it to happen. We have already seen in the foregoing that Catholic guild women are at home with the infusion of the *tete* concept into the Church. This as we have seen, combines culture, religion and gender socialization to the satisfaction of conservatives, which creates an enduring contradiction with radicals who question the system.

Though Tinyiko Samuel Maluleke and Sarojini Nadar do not propose church schism to correct gender imbalances, they reject the silence model advocated by the conservatives as a 'covenant of death' which consoles the aggrieved by saying 'marriage is *like that*' (Maluleke & Nadar 2002:7). They want the load brought by gender socialization to be set aside to free women, though the majority of the women interviewees were oblivious of such a load. The women selected for the interviews fell into the category of leadership blamed by Maluleke & Nadar (2002) for

nurturing and defending patriarchy. Perhaps this is why they generally stood by the status quo responsible for loading it on women.

It is difficult to close the gap and move together as women, because the clergy refuse to unequivocally condemn gender violence from the pulpit in order to provide outlets for fellow male perpetrators (Nason-Clark 1999:45). If the clergy who have the respect of the conservative section were to take an active role in narrowing gender disparity the women would gradually speak with one voice, but at the moment this is still farfetched. Ramsay (1999:29) is also of the view that if progress has to be made, clergy have to make informed responses to congregants who include perpetrators of gender imbalances. Until the clergy make use of the pulpit to deal with gender disparities, there is no end in sight for the inter-women tag of war. Harawa-Katumbi (2011:3) proposes that since male members of the clergy are reluctant to challenge gender inequalities, then more women must have theological training. This is particularly important because 'women are their own worst enemies,' for despite their numerical advantage 'it is women who vote for men' into dominant positions (Oduyoye 2010:2). Theological training for women is however not a panacea to the problems of gender problems because women are often shunned out of ordination. Even in churches which ordain them their prominence is suppressed compared to men, leading to a dearth of gender equality in aspects of church life including doctrine, practice and leadership (Hadebe 2009:2).

Ezra Chitando (2004:151) supports the feminist cause. He dismisses the use of scripture to justify the marginalization of women or keeping them in labour. He notes that unless women are at par with their male counterparts, they will not be able to negotiate safe sex which is dangerous in this period of the AIDS scourge. This issue of health seems to have been overlooked by the conservatives, who continue to pull towards the far right, in opposition to the radicals pulling towards the far left.

Conclusion

Two important outcomes have emerged from this chapter. The first is that female theologians and practitioners can generally be placed in two groups representing radical and conservative views. In short, one group

includes Afro-cultural critics who maintain that women are treated like second-class citizens in Africa ... The second group of Afro-cultural apologists hold that what is regarded as injustice by the first group lies at the

core of African culture so that women's subordination is indigenous to African social morality ... and they argue that these inequalities are positive discrimination and benefit women (Olatunji 2013:4).

These female views are contradictory as they both challenge and reinforce patriarchy (Sparrow 2006:IV). They are non-reconcilable views like two halves of an ass load pulling at tangent to each other.

The second observation is that the greatest culprit is man, who has created both the Bible and African culture to his advantage. Therefore, man keeps the 'ass load' in balance by utilizing both biblical and cultural hermeneutics. One particular notable on the biblical side is Apostle Paul who has entrenched two opposing views (cf. 1 Cor 14:34-35 versus Gal 3:28). The women folk have seized on the opposing views, affording themselves ceaseless burdens like the ass presented here as a patient beast of burden. This means by failing to reconcile, the two groups of women continue to carry their burdens here symbolised as the ass load.

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On the Editors and Contributors

Mark S. **AIDOO** (ThM; PhD) is a senior lecturer and the Director of Graduate Programmes at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana. His research fields are Old Testament interpretation, Hebrew Poetry and Wisdom Literature. He is the author of *Shame in the Individual Lament Psalms and African Spirituality* (2017). E-mail: macsaidoo@gmail.com

Daniel Nii Aboagyee **ARYEH** (MTh; PhD Cand.) is a lecturer of biblical studies at Perez University College, Winneba Ghana. He is the Dean of the School of Theology. Aryeh is also a PhD candidate at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana. He is the author of *Urban Public Space Evangelism: Evangelism in Market Places in Ghana*. 2015; *Give What Belongs to Caesar to Caesar? Taxation, Civic Responsibility and Social Contract in the Gospels: Lessons for Contemporary Christian Society*, 2016. His research interests include biblical studies, Contextual biblical interpretation, Missions, Gender, and Pentecostalism. E-mail: danielniiaboagyeyeah@gmail.com

Kudzai **BIRI** (PhD) is an Associate Professor at the University of Zimbabwe in Harare. She is currently doing research as an Alexander von Humboldt Fellow (Post-doc) at the the University of Bamberg, hosted by the Chair of New Testament Studies (BiAS). She specialises in African Traditional Religions and Pentecostalism. She has published widely on religion and gender and religion and politics. E-mail: kudzibiri@gmail.com

Ngoni **CHIKWANHA** is an ordained pastor of the Apostolic Faith Mission in Zimbabwe (AFM). He is a former Campus Coordinator of Living Waters Theological Seminary Tynwald Campus which is AFM in Zimbabwe's main theological training college. He has held various key leadership portfolios at various levels in the AFM. He is currently a Part-Time Lecturer at three colleges of Africa University. He holds a Bachelor of Divinity Honours Degree (AU) and a Masters in Peace and Governance Degree (AU). He is a registered PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. E-mail: chikwanhan@africau.edu

Francisca Hildegardis **CHIMHANDA** is a Professor (emerita) in the discipline of Systematic Theology. She is a holder of BA (UZ), MA, PhD (UNISA). Her career spans over 15 years of publications, teaching and community service. She is interested in contextual theology and gender and has extensively researched on women in the Roman Catholic Church. E-mail: chimhfh@unisa.ac.za

Calisto **CHIMOYI** is a teacher at Masekai High School in Bikita District, Masvingo. He teaches Religious Studies at different levels. He holds a BA Honours Degree in Religious Studies and is currently pursuing studies in MA in Religious Studies at Great Zimbabwe University. His area of research is phenomenology of religion. E-mail: calistochimoysi1@gmail.com

Excellent **CHIRESHE** (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies at Great Zimbabwe University, Zimbabwe. She holds a Doctor of Literature & Philosophy Degree in Religious Studies from UNISA. Her research interests include issues of religion and gender (including gender-based violence), sociology of religion, religion and ethics, and religious education. She has published several articles on domestic violence, sexual harassment, the teaching of Religious Studies, and marriage. Email: echireshe@gmail.com

Ezra **CHITANDO** (PhD) is Theology Consultant on HIV and AIDS for the World Council of Churches and Professor in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics & Philosophy at the University of Zimbabwe. He received the high-ranking Georg Forster Research Award by Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, Germany for his research on Masculinities and Religion in Africa. E-mail: chitsa21@yahoo.com

Edmore **DUBE** (PhD) is a lecturer in Biblical Studies, Department of Philosophy & Religious Studies, Great Zimbabwe University, Mashava Campus, Masvingo, Zimbabwe. He has a passion for religion and ethics, particularly how religious institutions can impact positively on public health, business and human rights. He has special concern for the interrogation of theological positions with the intention of envisioning a better world order informed by interreligious dialogue. E-mail: samatawanana@gmail.com

Theophilus Ugbedeajo **EJEH** (Dr. theol.) is a Catholic priest (Diocese of Idah, Nigeria). He studied and worked in Germany for several years. He holds a doctorate in Old Testament studies from the Theological Faculty Paderborn (Germany) and is presently teaching OT in St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary Makurdi, Nigeria. His area of research is OT hermeneutics in African perspective, with the special focus on theodicy in Scripture. E-mail: ugbedeajo@web.de

Rosinah **GABAITSE** (PhD) is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Botswana, Department of Theology and Religious Studies. She holds a doctorate from the University of Kwazulu-Natal, South Africa. She focuses on the Bible/ biblical interpretation in specific African contexts such as HIV and AIDS, poverty, violence against women, and social constructions of femininities and masculinities. In 2017-2018 she worked at Bamberg University as a postdoctoral fellow of the Humboldt Foundation. Since 2018 she is a member of the editorial board of BiAS series. E-mail: rosegabaitse@yahoo.com

Masiwa Ragies **GUNDA** (PhD) is an Old Testament scholar and founding co-editor of the BiAS book series. Alexander von Humboldt Foundation repeatedly granted him research stays at University of Bamberg. His research interests are on the intersection of the Bible and Justice for the marginalized peoples of the world. His research focuses much on the multiple key populations on the African continent. Gunda is a Consultant on Religion, Gender and Sexuality in Africa. Among his recent publications is *At the Crossroads: A Call for Christians to Act in Faith for an Alternative Zimbabwe* (BiAS 21, 2018). E-mail: mrgunda75@gmail.com

Joyline **GWARA** (PhD) is a lecturer in African Philosophy in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy at UZ and her interests are African ethics, African metaphysics, African epistemology and African Religions. She holds a doctorate from the University of Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa. Her major interests lie in issues in Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Mind. E-mail: jgwara@arts.uz.ac.zw

Rejoice **HOVE** holds an LLB (Hons.) (Fort Hare), Master of International Affairs (MSU, Zimbabwe). She has a working career of ten years (since 2009) as an attorney with the Civil Division of the Attorney General's Office. She currently focusses on women and law. E-mail: reehove@gmail.com

Ucheawaji Godfrey **JOSIAH** (PhD), Religious Studies Department, Babcock University. His main research field: Old Testament Studies: Bible & Ecology/ Religion & Society. Publications: "Hosea's Perspective on the 'Knowledge of God' and its Relevance to Rivers State, Nigeria", *Doon Theological Journal*, 11.1 (2014): 5-15; "Exploring the Ecological Implications of the Imagery of Hosea 5:4 for Nigeria", *Valley View University Journal of Theology*, 3 (2014): 33-45. E-mail: Josiahu@babcock.edu.ng or uchegod2015@gmail.com

Joachim **KÜGLER** (Dr. theol. habil.) is a Professor for New Testament Studies at Otto-Friedrich-University Bamberg (Germany) since 2008. Before that he was Professor at Bayreuth University (1999-2008). He is one of the founding editors of "Bible in Africa Studies" (BiAS) series. His research focusses on the Gospel of John but comprises also pagan religions as context of the NT, theory of exegesis, and applied biblical studies. Kügler has published some monographs and a huge number of short articles, mainly for the non-academic public. E-mail: joachim.kuegler@online.de

Francis **MACHINGURA** (PhD) holds a doctorate from Bayreuth University (Germany) and is an Associate Professor of Religious Education & Biblical Studies at the University of Zimbabwe. He is the Chairperson of Curriculum & Arts Education department. His publications focus on the Bible and politics, gender, disability, environment and music. E-mail: fmachingura@yahoo.com

Molly **MANYONGANISE** (PhD) is a lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies and Theology at the Zimbabwe Open University. She can be contacted at: mollymanyonganise@yahoo.com

Gift **MASENGWE** is a PhD candidate with the University of South Africa pursuing the topic: The Church of Christ in Zimbabwe: Identity- and Mission-Continuity [in Diversity] – A Transforming Church. He lectures at Zimbabwe Open University in Theology, Ethics, Women, HIV & AIDS and religious courses. He has a Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theological Studies (Africa University), Master of Theology (UKZN) and Master of Arts in Bioethics (Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Radboud University Nijmegen and University of Padua). His research interests span over ten years and his focus is on church transformation. E-mail: 58527494@mylife.unisa.ac.za

Mavis **MUGUTI** teaches Ethics, Philosophy & Religious Studies in the Department of Human Sciences at the University of Namibia as a part time lecturer. She holds an M.A and a B.A in Philosophy, both from the University of Zimbabwe. Her work experience spans for a decade in the fields of Ethics, Philosophy & Religious Studies. Her research interests are in critical theory, gender and politics.
E-mail: *mugutimavis@gmail.com*.

Menard **MUSENDEKWA** is a pastor and PhD candidate (Old Testament) at the University of South Africa. He is also a Research Associate, Department of Old & New Testament Stellenbosch University, and a Lecturer, Reformed Church University and Murray Theological College (Zimbabwe). His research interests include Feminist Hermeneutics, Socio-rhetorical reading and Apocalyptic literature.
E-mail: *revmusendekwa@yahoo.co.uk*

Blessing **NYAHUMA** is a PhD-candidate (New Testament Studies) with the University of Bamberg (funded through a DAAD scholarship). He holds BA from Solusi University (Hons) and MA from the University of Zimbabwe. He is an ordained pastor in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. His research interests include Gender Studies, Socio-historical exegesis and Apocalypticism.
E-mail: *psnyahuma@gmail.com*

Nomatter **SANDE** holds a PhD in Religion and Social Transformation from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa). He is a Minister of Religion at the Apostolic Faith Mission International Ministries UK. Before that he was the Academic Dean of Living Waters Theological Seminary. His research interests include disabilities studies, Pentecostal theology, religious violence, peace and gender.
E-mail: *pastornomsande@yahoo.com*

Johanna **STIEBERT** (PhD) is a Professor of Hebrew Bible at the University of Leeds (UK). She has taught Hebrew language, Hebrew Bible and Judaism courses at several universities. In September of 2009 she joined Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds. Her academic interests include gender- and queer-critical interpretation, and contemporary African-centred readings of Hebrew Bible texts. She was awarded the Humboldt Foundation's Friedrich Wilhelm Bessel Research Award and spent one year from August 2017 at the University of Bamberg. Since 2018 she is a member of the editorial board of BiAS series.
Email: *J.Stiebert@leeds.ac.uk*

Clive Tendai **ZIMUNYA** (PhD) is a Philosophy lecturer at the University of Zimbabwe in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics and Philosophy. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Research interests include: Logic, Epistemology, Philosophy of Religion and Ethics.
Email: *ctzimunya@gmail.com*

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Rosinah GABAITSE (University of Botswana) she worked at Bamberg University (2017-2018) as a Humboldt postdoctoral fellow. Since 2018 she is a member of the editorial board of BiAS series.

Joachim KÜGLER is a Professor for New Testament Studies at the University of Bamberg since 2008. He is one of the founding editors of BiAS.

Johanna STIEBERT (University of Leeds) worked at the University of Bamberg (2017-2018) as a Humboldt Awardee. Since 2018 she is a member of the editorial board of BiAS series.



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